NOTIONS, STRUCTURES & PRACTICES OF SOCIAL HELPING: THE TIBETAN DIASPORA AS KINSHIP

by

TSERING DOLKAR WATERMEYER

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

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submitted by Tsering Dolkar Watermeyer in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Examining Committee:

Miu Chung Yan, Professor, Social Work, UBC

Supervisor

Renisa Mawani, Professor, Sociology, UBC

Supervisory Committee Member

Sara Shneiderman, Associate Professor, Anthropology, UBC

Supervisory Committee Member

Tsering Shakya, Associate Professor, Department of Asian Studies, UBC

University Examiner

Nora Angeles, Associate Professor, School of Community and Regional Planning, UBC

University Examiner

Emily Yeh, Professor, Department of Geography, University of Colorado Boulder

External Examiner

Abstract

Perennially in process, diaspora dabbles with questions of homeland, displacement and identity, for how it emerges cannot be bridged without traveling at least in part through these conceptual waters. As a form of group kinship, diaspora is tied by mutuality of experiences, trajectories and networks. Grounded in transdisciplinary scholarship, this dissertation explores the development and evolution of Tibetan diasporic social helping practices and organizations.

Focusing on Tibetan communities in the metropolitan areas of Vancouver and Toronto, the key ethnographic questions foreshadowing the research are: What purposes do the ethnocultural organizations and the traditional social help systems known as *kyidu* (*skyid sdug*) serve Tibetans in the Canadian multicultural state? How do members perceive the role and scope of these organizations? What do the organizational activities reveal about the cultural practices of Tibetan social helping? The fieldwork conducted between March 2019 and June 2022 includes 50 virtual and in-person key informant interviews, 50 informal interviews, document analysis and field notes. Data analysis was conducted using NVIVO qualitative software including domain and thematic analysis.

Findings reveal how Tibetan social helping is shaped by group kinship notions, formations and organizing including the political task of cultural continuity. Contrary to the Canadian organizational perspective where the cultural and the political are seen as distinct spheres, in the realm of Tibetan social help organizations, the lines between the two are not simply blurred but in fact inalienable, for the cultural is political. Examining both the resiliency and liminality of the grassroots organizations, the study discusses ways forward including a formative theorizing on Tibetan social helping and the role of 'diaspora social work'.

Lay Summary

In Canada, there are many diverse cultural groups who have formed their own cultural organizations. This study is interested in learning about Tibetan social organizations in Toronto and Vancouver. It examines the different kinds of services the organizations provide and the ways in which community members respond to them. The study focuses on two main types of Tibetan social organizations - the Tibetan cultural association and traditional organizations known as '*kyidu'* (pronounced kee-du). The study was conducted between March 2019 and June 2022. The information sources are online and in-person interviews, events, document analysis, and field observations. Findings discuss the differences and similarities between the two organizational types and how they have evolved over time. It also shows that the organizations' activities are highly cultural and such activities are viewed as 'social helping' since it plays a key role in connecting the community internally and externally to the Tibetan social and political organizations around the world.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, T. D. Watermeyer.

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Above all, I thank my husband Matt Watermeyer whose love, encouragement and boundless patience makes everything possible.

Dedication

For my sons, Namkha and Mila

In anticipation of your curiosity.

Chapter One: Introduction

> When I married roughly 900 people came to our ceremony. During this gathering, I shared with the crowd what our agreement was; I told my wife that if you really love me, you will understand my passion to volunteer for the community because I know it long before I met you. Therefore, every weekend I will go to the community centre, and I don't want to hear any complaints. If you don't want me to, I am the wrong guy for you. And she agreed. That's how much I love my community.
>
> (A Tibetan Community Volunteer)

This dissertation is an initial foray into exploring Tibetan diasporic notions, activities and acts of social help organizing, with a focus on ethnocultural Tibetans in Canada, particularly those living in the metropolitan areas of Vancouver and Toronto. The central research questions guiding this ethnography are: how did the Tibetan ethnocultural organizations develop and evolve over the years in Canada? Why are there a growing number of social help organizations known as *kyidu* (*skyid sdug*) in Canada alongside the main Tibetan cultural associations in the locality? What purpose do these organizations serve and how do Tibetan community members perceive their distinct role and scope? What kinds of social helping activities do these organization perform and in what ways do they differ from the mainstream, professionalized social care delivery? What can these roles and services tell us about ethnic conceptualizations on the culture of social helping? What is (or is there) a place for diasporic social work within the larger professional practice and academic discipline of social work?

To elaborate, the study examines the notion and role of social helping within Tibetan communities including their ethno-cultural organizations - the Tibetan Associations that act as the 'representative' of the community and *kyidu*– traditional kinship-based social help

organizations that have developmental roots in Tibet. These inquiries are driven by questions related to notions, culture formation and evolution of social helping in the Tibetan diaspora from community members' perspectives and experiences. Cross cutting these areas of interest, how minority groups such as Tibetans relate to their new identity as Canadian within the context of their experiences of colonization and displacement(s), and to what extent such experiences impact their views on social organizing and group mobilization is of thematic significance. In essence, the study seeks to deconstruct the formulation, development and state of organized social helping amongst diasporic Tibetans in Vancouver and Toronto. Before proceeding further, here I will attempt to address the difficult question of the ethnographic voice. Self-narratives are a tricky enterprise under any circumstances, and I especially find myself fumbling between the differing cultural aesthetics and the politics of narrating the self in the Tibetan and the western literary traditions.

Neither a Namthar nor a Tökjo: Ethnographic Voice and Positionality

Reflecting upon the delicate, confessional art of revealing one's positionality, and how I may approach the question of voice, I am reminded of some of the cultural incommensurability surrounding Tibetan and western approaches on the subject. Writing ethnographic research requires disclosure of one's positionality as a barometer to assay trustworthiness, bias, and as an interpretive exercise, an indicator towards gauging association and by extension scholarly authority. From a cultural standpoint, traditionally in the Tibetan genre of *namthar (rnam thar)* which deals with biographies of religious figures and their extraordinary lives or *tökjo (rtogs brjod)* the biographies of 'secular, prominent national figures' (see Ramble, 2020; Jabb, 2015), by and large the medium remains a shadowy figure, their personal experiences and voice dimmed for the purpose of the greater good. Thus, except in the instances of a few exceptional

outliers, the voice is devoid of individuality, an egoless organism simply there to serve a higher function and purpose beyond (it)self. Moreover, being a Tibetan woman of no religious or political pedigree, I am accustomed to and even like the anonymity of being a part of the nameless, collective mass.

Dwelling on the required turn against this tradition, in writing about positionality, the cognitive dissonance caused by differing demands between the internal and external worlds makes one unable to separate history from positionality. For I have not simply come through its vantage, to quote Fannon (1963) "by way of cultural achievements" which is "often no more than a stock of particularisms catching hold of the outer garments of the people" (p. 223) but as an unwitting subaltern. Understanding that objectivity is a continuum shaped by both historical and current immersion in the field and the researcher's positionality cannot be severed from life events and experiences, here I have selectively outlined the *apriori* events and experiences, that have led to this study.

As one of the many Tibetan children born in Tibet and 'offered' (*phul*) to the Dalai Lama by their biological parents and raised in the exilic school system, separated by international borders, early on my life was detached from immediate familial influence. Therefore, the years of exilic institutional conditioning as well as my newer identity as a Canadian Tibetan, subconsciously shape the material of the larger field. But if I must dwell on what separated my path from most diasporic Tibetans, is the fact that after my years in India, I returned to Tibet, due to familial and political circumstances. Briefly, in the 1990s, like other cadres in Lhasa, my family too felt the tightening pressure at work from party superiors to bring their children (who were being brainwashed by the Dalai clique institutions) home or risk losing the stability of their 'iron bowl' (*lchags pho*) job. Simultaneously, the western tourist boom that had erupted

with the opening of Tibetan borders in the 80s had created a lucrative market for anyone with basic English language skills to work in the burgeoning tourism industry. For many families, the knowledge that tourism afforded an economic opportunity may have blunted the ethical dilemma of their choice. Thus in 1998, I returned to Lhasa, having not set foot in Tibet since the time I first 'left' as a child. From an attachment theory standpoint, one can imagine the harsh aftermath of such a return; the tumultuous integration into family and local life on the psyche of a young adult completely schooled in diasporic ways.

Nonetheless, moving forward, in 2001 I found my foothold working as a local interpreter in the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded bilateral poverty alleviation project in the TAR. Over time I received on the job training as an interpreter, community health worker and primarily worked with county and township health bureau officials and village health care workers, many of whom belonged to families that practiced traditional medicine for generations. Towards the end of my time in Tibet, in 2005, I worked as the health sector coordinator for the project and as the local consultant for an American NGO named Circle of Health International to help develop their maternal child health program in the remote nomadic communities of Nagchu prefecture. The prolonged field exposure working in diverse and highly remote communities within the TAR enabled a close understanding of grassroots social issues affecting Tibetans and these experiences also led to later interest in the discipline of social work with its emphasis on understanding and working with marginalized individuals and groups.

It was also during this period in Tibet that I completed my B.A. (English Hons.) degree as a correspondence course student which necessitated yearly trips to India to write the annual exams at the School of Open Learning, Delhi University. Beyond the desire to get a college degree (an option not available to 'India returnees' in Tibet due to the political nature of our

exilic background), I did not anticipate that the decision would change the course of my life. When my annual trespasses to India came to light, the resultant entanglements with the public security bureau eventually culminated in my having to leave for Canada. With the support of former Canadian colleagues from the CIDA project, I completed my MSW degree at the University of Calgary. My thesis– a mixed method case study research, was based on the development work in Lhoka and Nagchu regions of the TAR.

What the years of living and working in Tibet helped teach is the literal and metaphorical distance between homeland and diaspora. The realization that propaganda and politicization of issues are inextricable elements of all vested sides of the larger political movement helped cure my own naivety. The homeland I encountered was not completely unrecognizable from diasporic lore, but it appeared deprived of the complex contours of everyday life on the plateau. While my personal and professional sympathies lay with the Tibetan cause, often the lack of émigré understanding of life in Tibet and the shrillness of political advocacy leaves room for pause. On the surface, returning to the fold of the diasporic embrace was an easier journey but my sense of place within seems neither settled nor without questions.

In 2009, I moved to Vancouver and occasionally continued to be involved in development projects in Tibet. In 2011, I began working as a registered social worker mostly in Mental Health and Addictions programs in various clinical settings. During this period, I maintained distance from engagement in local Tibetan communal life for the dream was still to engage in social development projects in Tibet particularly within the context of nomadic resettlement and emergent issues including addictions and mental health. However, in 2013, I was approached by the president of the Tibetan Cultural Society of British Columbia (henceforth

TCSBC) to assist with the resettlement of Tibetans from Arunachal Pradesh due to my disciplinary training and professional practice as a social worker. My involvement in the project landed me amidst community organizing work which led to the development of close contact with local Tibetans in the area. In 2015, I began the PhD program with the proposed plan of conducting research related to the state-led nomadic resettlement project in the Qinghai area. Unfortunately, the increasingly austere atmosphere of political orthodoxy in China curtailed any dreams of working or conducting collaborative research in the region. Further, it also precluded the prospect of ever being able to return to visit my family again. Attempts to procure a visa were rejected by the consulate officers who tersely commented on my 'past history' as reasons to decline entry to the region. When access to home receded beyond reach, in addition to the internal despair I experienced, it also necessitated reconfiguring nearly three years of study program preparation that I had invested in. Psychoanalyzing the long aftermath of this loss, revealed denial and self-censorship that operated not in linear progressions but in a back-andforth loop about questions of home and belonging.

In retrospect, I marvel at my own naivety to assume that so long as I was not actively involved in politics, I would be allowed to return home. The fact is that in the eyes of the larger geopolitical positioning of the Chinese state, as represented by the consulate officer, I am an exile Tibetan even though I lived and worked in Tibet. For it is not simply place, but location as consciousness and kinship affiliations with people and institutions that makes one diasporic. It is beside the point, that in the local Tibetan community, I am the *acha* (sister) 'from Lhasa' underlining my difference from 'them' who are overwhelmingly from India and Nepal. Such incommensurability between and within the insider-outsider worlds, the differing life experiences, and points of references across the spectrum of who and what constitutes 'Tibetan' leads me to position myself as a relational insider.

During the lengthy process of fieldwork, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown and in the post pandemic world, engagement with the larger community and my own approach to the 'work' ahead took a turn. The pandemic's major impact on the study is discussed in subsequent chapters but here I am referring to the changing dynamics with the field. In April 2023, more than a year after active field data collection concluded, nearing the end of the writing process, I was elected by the Tibetan community members in Vancouver as the president of the Tibetan Cultural Society of B.C. (the details of which I discuss in my 'Conclusions' chapter). Despite some hesitation as to how it might provoke the much maligned 'activist' research tag, undermining the scholarship, I stepped into this role. Ethically, it seems imperative that social research particularly of marginalized communities, should move beyond the call for research 'presentation' dissemination to real life practice-based engagement. This is not to say that the presentation of research findings is not valuable per se, but it should not be the end. For the scholar-practitioner ultimately the test of street credibility is the alignment between the task of knowledge production and a visceral commitment to the area through tangible immersion in the messiness of everyday work.

Conceptual Framework:

Located in the discipline of social work, I pursue the question of Tibetan ethnocultural social helping through this ethnography conducted between March 2019 and June 2022. At the same time, the work undertaken is by necessity and choice transdisciplinary in nature particularly in relation to its conceptual underpinnings. Its overall scope owes a scholarly debt to the large, often unwieldy area known as 'Tibetan area studies' spanning the disciplines of anthropology, human geography, literature, religious studies and sociology. In analyzing the field data, I therefore draw upon a variety of theoretical articulations within the above traditions. Deviating

from the established tradition within dominant social work of studying 'settlement and integration of refugees and immigrants' or their 'ethnocultural organizations' in Canada as is customary practice, in this study I opt for a diasporic gaze for the reasons outlined in the following sections.

Border, Integration, Social Work & Multiculturalism: Since Canada opened its borders in the late 1960s to various ethnocultural groups, particularly those belonging to non-white ethnicities, settlement and integration became key tasks of governance and the nation-making process (Schmidtke, 2007). Immigrants and refugees as identity markers are the main categories and integration defined as the "capacity to freely participate in all aspects of Canadian society including its economic, social, cultural and political life" (George and Tsang, 2000, p.38) is the dominant lens through which newer communities' successes and challenges are marked. Relatedly, if one examines the literature on ethnocultural organizations in Canada, there are sites filtered through their worth and relationship vis-à-vis integration (for example see Schmidtke, 2007; Jimeno, C., Kilito, M., & Urquhart, D., 2012; Jurkova, 2014; Couton, 2014). Within the discipline of social work, 'immigrants and refugees' are the primary identity markers used and settlement services as the higher purpose of integration - evidenced by both the number of social work programs taught on the subject in universities and the heft of social work literature on the topic (selected examples: Potocky-Tripodi, M., Naseh, M., 2019. Yan & Anucha 2017; Meinhard, A., Lo, L., Lo, L., & Hyman, I., 2016; Valtonen, K., 2016; Sakamoto, 2007). Alongside integration, liberal multiculturalism (see Kymlicka, 1995; 2011) features prominently in social work literature though the depth of engagement with the concept's ideology and philosophy as a highly complicated 'politics of difference' (see Taylor, C., Appiah, K. A., Habermas, J., Rockefeller, S. C., Walzer, M., & Wolf, S., 1994) fluctuates.

Thus invariably, the realm of newer settlers, particularly the experiences and trajectories of non-white ethnocultural groups are filtered, envisioned, and ascribed from a 'dominant statecentric view' tied to colonialisms (Bannerji, 2000). Such binaries (of the state and the subject) flatten, compartmentalize, and reduce complex bodies and local histories into narratives of homogeneity and 'otherness'. Therefore 'delinking western macro narratives' (Mignolo, 2011) to present other forms of narratives is a primary task of decolonization.

Diaspora & Indigeneity: Interfacing with displacement, migration, settlement, multiple homelands, indigeneity and transnationalism, diaspora is that theoretical nether region– woefully underused in social work in general and literally unapplied in the context of social work research in Canada. Yet it is diaspora's very unsettled nature; an underbelly connoting various sites and identities in process, that I find most apt through which to analyze the formulation, development and status of organized social help amongst ethnocultural Tibetans. Diaspora brings attention to the complexity of group histories, identities, cultures that are often distilled by the category

'immigrant and refugees' which primarily focuses on their status as a newcomer in a particular space and time. Reflexively, this reconfiguration reveals how state centric approaches grounded in legal status and previous citizenship (or lack thereof) shape notions of what settlement and settlement services mean, which in turn impact the types of services and programs funded and implemented. That such services are in turn tied to the overarching agenda of the state; the integration of newcomers as functioning, contributing members of a capitalist, neoliberal society is apparent. Studying social help from a diasporic standpoint is to unshackle that binary diktat, to unwind the central notion of 'help' from its utilitarian, protestant orthodoxy and rampant

‘methodological nationalism’ (Chernilo, 2011). It is to examine not just how and why diasporic communities construct and organize social helping or the *role* of culture in social helping but the notion of culture *as* social help for group survival.

Delving into the development and evolution of notions of social helping within Tibetan diaspora organizations meant that I needed to reach beyond the confines of my own disciplinary domain. Aside from a few descriptive reports issued by the Chinese government, the field population I study – Tibetans and relatedly the cultural ‘Tibetan’ Himalayan zone spread across modern day India, Nepal, and China – is hardly discussed in social work despite ‘indigenization’ in China being one of the major discourses within the discipline. This negation seems political as well as an example of how master narratives i.e., in this case ‘Han’ Chinese centric views blinds the imagination and scope of scholarship of otherwise well meaning, discriminating minds (see further critique on the topic in Watermeyer & Yan, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, outside of social work, I have drawn upon the Tibetan area studies to further enrich and contextualize the study. The foraging (outside my discipline) has both been a necessity given the lack of textual material related to Tibetans and a conscious alignment towards a transdisciplinary vantage point. It helps to see the relentless intersectionality between the various spheres of knowledge production which seems essential for any meaningful study of a ‘social’ phenomenon. Yet at the same time, its panoramic berth makes one cognizant of the impossibility of capturing all within its purview and as such I am acutely aware of the finiteness of my own time, resource, and knowledge. This endeavor is therefore an initial excursion into exploring Tibetan diasporic notions of social help and social helping organizations. To be clear, this is not to minimize the active role of the above scholarship in their contribution to

improvements in 'immigrant and refugee' resettlement and integration experiences but to point to the inherent homogeneity of gaze within. In fact, my own training as a social worker too made

me 'naturally' inclined towards adopting a similar position when I initially conceptualized the study. However, over the course of field immersion, my own theoretical perspective shifted. For while my informants were interested in the outcomes of a successful integration, interestingly it also unsettled them. Much like the scene in Paul Beatty's (2015) 'The Sellout' where the black narrator standing before the court to determine his innocence or guilt wonders, "if there was a state of being between guilty and innocent. Why were those my only alternatives?... Why couldn't I be "neither" or "both"? (p.15). My own experiences with the field informants too echo these fundamental questions in their own distinct ways. The contemporary subaltern's predominant plight beyond the question of 'speak' seems not so much a concern about whether one can (speak)- which Spivak (1994) too later amended but what is comprehended and sanctioned as 'proper' speech. With representation becoming a fashionable hallmark of institutions to mark progressiveness, worth and value appears to be sites where the subaltern who lives as '*both*' and '*neither*' now resides.

Summary of Chapters:

Grounded in the above conceptual framework, the findings of the study are compiled into seven chapters including this introductory chapter. The following are a summary of the individual chapters.

Chapter 2. Conceptualizing Tibet in Canada: Diaspora, Ideations of Homeland, and Indigeneity

The beginnings of the Tibetan diaspora and its status today reflect its shifting dynamic state. This chapter conceptually organizes and engages with the key theoretical writings and

ideas that have shaped the positionality of the study and help set its parameters in relation to the field. In doing so, it attempts to make sense of the larger undercurrents and evolution of what it means to be a diasporic Tibetan today. Further it provides a larger contextual background underpinning the development of the Tibetan diaspora including application of diaspora theorizing to the larger study population.

Chapter 3. The pandemic in and of diaspora

Drawing upon classical and contemporary theories on diaspora as 'in-process', this chapter moves forward from the initial exodus into exile and the emergence of its diasporic hubs in India, Nepal and later to the development of the field sites in Toronto and Vancouver. The chapter further examines the role of the global COVID-19 pandemic and its impact in the field sites of Vancouver and Toronto including responses of the Tibetan organizations as restricted not only within the bounds of Tibetan kinship but expanding to surrounding 'Canadian' neighborhoods. Lastly, incorporating field insights, I examine the internal and external barriers of the pandemic as a metaphor of political diasporas where displacement, constraints on movement, mobility and identity(s) heighten sense of longing not only for the tangible and the visceral 'home' but the sentiment of the 'pandemic of diaspora' as never ending.

Chapter 4. The mandala of the ethnographic field

Chapter three presents the fieldwork processes and methodologies through the lens of a relational insider cohabiting the field and being associated with its larger socio-political identity. This relationality carries its own set of cultural meanings, obligations, and relationships with the field shaping one's entry and exit from it. To navigate the intricacies and impact of such linkages (between the structural and 'micro' life phases and forces) during the study, the ethnographic

journey is situated in the uncovering of the 'native' in the field and the native within. Alongside data collection methods and analysis, processes of the study are presented, including a discussion of how the shift to 'online' communities presents methodological challenges and opportunities. They evoke (often simultaneously) a sense of spatial compression as well as accessibility of the field. Lastly the ethics of conducting research as a relational insider as well as limitations of the study are discussed.

Chapter 5. Imagining Relatedness: Kinship as Diaspora

Chapter five examines the dynamic condition of diasporic hybridity and how the Tibetan communities in Toronto and Vancouver articulate kinship affiliations embedded in group identity formations. These kinship notions are, for analytical purposes, grouped into three thematic domains. Firstly, the kinship-organizing notions based on a larger Tibetan exilic unity grounded in Tibetan national identity. Secondly, notions of kinship formation whose roots predate exilic life and are directly traced to the homeland which time, memory and loss has rendered sacred and spiritual. Where homeland as a sacred space has long been a 'nationalist' discourse and therefore not simply a diasporic 'creation' this chapter filters it through the fluidity of traditional cultural relations with the land and the motifs of loss and distance which renders associations with 'space as politically negotiated' (Massey, 2005) and poignant for diasporic bodies. Thirdly, kinship domain closely aligned in its tenet to place-based kinship organizing notions but born on diasporic shores and based on specificities of exilic communities with their own kindred network, language, and cultural references.

Chapter 6. Structuring Diasporic Kinships: Tibetan Social Help Organizing

Moving further into social help organizations, this chapter explores how Tibetan indigeneity and kinship formations, grounded in notions of space, time and place-based understandings, structurally manifest through communal social help organizing. The field data examines two main forms of Tibetan social organizations: *kyidu* (*skyid sdug*) as the traditional place-based kinship social help organizing including newer exilic iterations, as well as the local Tibetan Associations known as '*bhodrig chithun tsogpa*' *(bhod rig spyi mthun tshogspa)*. Incorporating both historical and contemporary theorizing on Tibetan kinship formations, the ethnography examines how these two forms of group kinship organizing, while molded anew by its existence in the Canadian milieu, evoke in their structural organizing, tangible and emotional kinship 'ties of mutuality' (Sahlins, 2013) to both exilic predecessors and historical Tibet.

Chapter 7. Practicing Relatedness: Tibetan Acts of Social Helping

Moving from abstractions on the kinship notions of mutuality and organizing, this chapter pragmatically examines 'practices of relatedness' through the various activities undertaken by the *kyidu*(s) and the Tibetan associations. Analyzing the myriad acts of Tibetan social helping, this chapter critically analyzes what they reveal about the group's conceptualization of help including its fluid linkage with the domains of the cultural and political. Further key understandings of folk terms such as *rokram (help), shabshu (service),* social help and social work as *'chod' (dharma)* are analyzed to see how there are shaped by both internal group dynamics as well as the larger Canadian framework of formalized social care delivery. Where formal training, state and provincial legalities unfold in the context of a larger secular national framework, such as the professional practice and discipline of Social Work, overall, this chapter indicates how praxis as a space has no rigid boundaries separating the inner and outer worlds of the practitioner.

Chapter 8. Concluding Thoughts: Tibetan Diaspora, Social Help & Social Work

The final chapter dwells on how social help organizations play a critical role in maintaining institutional memories and kinship bonds for the sustainability of the territorial-*less* diasporic nationhood. Unlike previous diasporic hubs, Tibetans' location within the Canadian framework presents unique challenges and questions regarding sustainability of group kinship identity and their social organizations. Reflecting upon the liminal status of the Tibetan social helping organizations in Canada and the type of niche services that they provide; the concluding chapter discusses potential routes through which they may be structurally supported. Additionally, the chapter discusses ways in which diaspora theorizing within the discipline of Social Work may contribute to the development of decolonial praxis.

Chapter Two

Constructing Tibet in Canada: Ideations of Homeland, Diaspora and Indigeneity

(Figure 1: Tibetans showcasing traditional attire)

> If true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has that loss so easily been transformed into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture? (Said, p.49, 1984).

Diaspora conceptually references questions of origin and belonging and is thematically tied to homeland, displacement, statelessness and questions of nationhood and colonization. While Cohen's historical approach (1977) classified several types of diasporas – victim (political), imperial, labour, trade and cultural - the beginnings of the Tibetan diaspora and its evolution today reflects the fluidity within these states. Surveying the sheer volume of

scholarship on diaspora, any attempt to review it in its entirety is quixotic and besides, such an attempt may be of little value. Rather my focus is to meaningfully organize and engage with the key theoretical writings and ideas that have shaped the positionality of the study and help set its parameters in relation to the field. In doing so, I attempt to make sense of the larger undercurrents and evolution of what it means to be a diasporic Tibetan today. This chapter deals with the larger contextual background underpinning dispersal and development of the Tibetan diaspora including conceptualization and application of diaspora theorizing to the larger study population. The next chapter focuses on the Tibetan diaspora in Canada and how the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the study including the field's construction, scope, and responses.

Exodus as Event:

In the late 1940s the People's Liberation Army (PLA) encroached upon the region known as Tibet (Shakya, 1999) which refers to all the Tibetan areas in China including the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan areas incorporated into provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan (Fischer, 2014). The ensuing geopolitical struggle between the PLA and Tibet's Buddhist government of Tibet under the Dalai Lamas known as 'Ganden Phodrang' from 1642-1959 (Travers & Venturi, 2018) culminated in the mass exodus of Tibetans from these regions into exile for the first time in their documented history (Richardson, 1962).

At Yatung, the border between Tibet and India, the Dalai Lama announced the formation of the Tibetan government-in-exile, which is officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in English (MacPherson et al., 2008). In 2012 the Dalai Lama made the decision to step away and devolve all political leadership of his office. Since then, a political leader '*sikyong*' (*srid-skyong*) is elected as head of the government in exile (Tibetan Review,

2012). The CTA has "an elected parliament and a court system and conducts censuses, collects taxes, runs schools, maintains hegemonic practices of belonging and is the sole representative of Tibetans who live in India and Nepal. Voluntary citizenship-style membership in the Tibetan refugee community is marked by paying annual taxes, which is noted in a passport-like document commonly known as the Green Book" (McGranahan, p.371, 2018). As such the Tibetan diaspora was birthed when the 'peripheral place' (to use Safran's 1991 classic analogy) that the Tibetans initially fled to await a safe return home, bestowed new identities of 'exile' and 'refugeehood'. Over time, the processes of gradual adaptation and development in foreign lands took deeper and more divergent roots leading to the present global spread of Tibetan communities around the world.

Most significantly, related to the context of this study, was the journeying from the initial diasporic spaces in India, Nepal and Bhutan into the United States and to Canada (Ahmad, 2012). The later 'travels' of the group into the 'western world' marks a significant change in that unlike their previous status as 'refugee' or 'stateless' people, such migrations are undertaken in search of permanent settlements and citizenships. Yet socio political ties continue to be formally maintained with the Office of Tibet, the formal representative of the Dalai Lama and the CTA mainly through the formation of local 'Tibetan associations', grassroots organization styled as Tibetan cultural organizations wherever pockets of Tibetans settle in an area (Wangdi, 2020). As outlined in the introductory chapter and to briefly revisit, this study focuses on the Tibetan diaspora communities in Canada within Toronto and Vancouver. Within the larger community, I examine two types of Tibetan social organizations- the local Tibetan Association (TA) and *kyidu* - that are involved in social helping activities within the community. The existing conceptualization regarding their difference is that the TAs are Tibetan organizations developed

in North America, Australia, and Europe, prevalent wherever groups of Tibetans have settled within a particular locality (Yosay Wangdi, 2020) whereas *kyidu(s)* are a much older, traditional type of formalized mutual help system that is historically indigenous to the Himalayan region (Miller, 1956). While details on the findings of the TAs and the *kyidu* as social help organizations are presented in subsequent chapters, to set the stage, here I will first explore the evolving discourse on Tibetan diaspora followed by the settlement of the communities in Canada. Further, given that the research commenced as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold and lasted well beyond the upheaval caused by it, the subsequent chapter focuses on the ways in which the pandemic shaped the course of the study including social help functioning in diaspora during the time.

On Diaspora Theorizing and its Application to the émigré Tibetans:

Etiologically, the term 'diaspora' and its roots are traced to Greek and Jewish antiquity. Cohen (1997) writes that the origin of the term dates to the Greek tradition of the Bible and was first used in the *Septuagint,* the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures intended for the Hellenic Jewish communities in Alexandria in the 3rd century BCE. He mentions that the Greeks used the expression to describe "the colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean in the Archaic period (800-600 BC)" (Cohen, p.2, 1997). According to Vertovec (2004), diaspora as a term is also linked with "the Hebrew verb *galah* and noun *galut,* each expressing deportation and exile as more apt descriptors for it presents 'the singular feature of Jewish experiences of the relationship between exile and consciousness of exile' that "kept the Jewish national consciousness alive" (p.276) over centuries of migration. In these historical works, diaspora describes the plight of Jews living "in exile from the homeland of Palestine" and is a derivative of the Greek word '*diasperien'– dia,* "across" and *sperien* "to sow or scatter seed" (Braziel &

Mannur, p.1, 2003; Vertovec, 2004). Aside from Greek and Jewish antecedents, historical reference to diaspora is also seen in connection with the displacement of Black Africans, due to the slave trade, from their native lands beginning in the sixteenth century to North America, South America, the Caribbean and other parts of the world (Brasiel & Mannur, 2003). In effect, diaspora essentially denotes people's dislocation from their origin/homeland to one or more countries or territories (Braziel & Mannur, 2003).

However, even within early works on 'diaspora', the term had a shifting 'referential point' that enabled continued 'conceptual muddiness' of its use in contemporary times (Vertovec, 2004). Post modernism's structural latitude starting in the 90's further exacerbated its use in that diaspora became a catch-all phrase for various experiences and communities of transnational movement that now shares meanings with "a larger semantic domain including words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest-worker, exile community, overseas community and ethnic community" (Tololian 1991). The critique of the conceptual co-opting of the term in various settings and the expansion of diaspora theorizing over the years raises questions regarding its definitional boundaries and functional use at least within its academic discourse. Inevitably, a question arises - what separates diaspora from other group categories if the term simply connotes every group who migrates or traverses outside their home? To create some delineation, Safran (1991) theorized that diaspora identity centers on a shared collective experiences of 'expatriate minority communities" that a) are dispersed from an original "center" to at least two "peripheral" places; b) maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland", c) "believe they are not – perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country";

d) see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; e) are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and f) whose consciousness and solidarity as a group are "importantly defined" by this continuing relationship with the homeland."

For Vertovec (2004), it was the term's usage that needed to be clarified in relation to three key areas. He writes, "when we say something has taken place "in the diaspora" we must clarify whether we refer to a) the *process* of becoming scattered, b) the *community* living in foreign parts, or c) the *place* or geographic *space* in which dispersed groups live (p. 276). Reflectively, one can see that the three areas he identifies – the process of becoming scattered, the community in 'foreign' land, the place and geographic space inhabited by the dispersed group - in fact cover the domains within which diaspora theorizing have traditionally occurred and continue to do so. In the case of the Tibetan diaspora, both Safran's (1991) outline of the characteristics of a diasporic community as well as Vertovec's (2004) key domains connoting a group's diasporic-*ness* aptly befits the Tibetan community. Here I want to note that the domains are not fashioned as an ideal type. As Clifford (1997) reminds us, "even the 'pure' forms (of diaspora) are ambivalent and embattled… (and) at different times in history, societies may wax and wane in diasporism, depending on changing possibilities –obstacles, openings, antagonisms, and connections – in their host countries and transnationally" (p.249). Therefore, rather than being sealed sites connoting what a 'true' diaspora is or should be, the boundaries of the three domains of diaspora are fluctuating and relational to time and space which determines its obstacles, openings, antagonisms, and connections.

Keeping with the above fluctuations, contemporary scholarship further problematizes the notion of a 'typical' or essentialized depiction of diaspora given varied historical and regional contexts. In more recent theorizing, an important articulation is of the distinct nature of

‘diasporic-*ness*’ across the globe, embracing diaspora as always ‘in process’ (Mavroudi, 2007; Arutiunov, 2002). The notion of fluidity and change reflected in theorizing ‘diaspora as a process’ resonates with my field experiences with participants who all identify as ‘Tibetan’ notwithstanding differences in organizational membership status and differing alliance(s) with Tibetan organizations over time. As such the fluctuating bounds of diaspora including its understanding as always in process underpins the gaze through which I engage with the field. Within the context of the study, I am specifically interested in exploring how the in -process nature of diasporas, in turn shape the formation, practices, and evolution of the Tibetan social help organizations. Towards that end, Vertovec’s (2004) three domains help anchor and operationalize the theoretical largesse of ‘diaspora as process’ (Mavroudi, 2007).

On the Nature of Tibetan Diasporic-*ness*:

Tibetans often use the term ‘exile’ and ‘refugee’ to describe their experiences and status in India (McGranahan, 2016). Etymologically, exile means “to leap out of” (ex salire), which suggests more of an urgent leaving than an arriving (Diehl, p.110, 2002). If we examine the literature on émigré Tibetans, in the initial decades of the Tibetans’ arrival in neighboring regions, academic discourse was conceptualized through the lens of exiles and refugees (for examples see Goldstein, 1975; De Voe, D.M, 1987; Arakeri, A.V. 1980). In the case of the Tibetans, the usage of the term ‘diaspora’ did not immediately follow Tibetans initial mass exodus into neighboring regions of India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Dibyesh Anand (2003) points out that ‘diaspora’ came to be used within Tibetan area studies only in the late 1980s. He contends that the term was appropriated rather than used with deeper groundings in its theorizing “since it is not just another word for exiles and refugees but a concept with its own history” (p. 211). While agreeing that the terms are not exchangeable, the underlying meanings of ‘seed’ and ‘to

sow'- connoting dispersion (primordial to the very act of creating 'diaspora') - is classically intertwined to being exiles and refugees in their mutual condition of displacement. In the case of diaspora, the act of dispersion into elsewhere, over time leads to the growth of the diasporic habitat.

Seen from this vantage point, classical diaspora is innately linked to the construct of refugeehood in that both speak of themes of displacement, resettlement, and non-belonging. For Tibetans living outside their homeland, it continues to be the primary lens through which they are viewed (see Vahali, 2020; Wangdi, 2020; Basu; 2018). In fact, Hess (2009) makes this connection explicit when she refers to the Tibetan diaspora as a "classic victim diaspora' for its salient themes of dispersal, loss, and longing for homeland as a reminder of the studies on Jewish diaspora which can further be traced to Cohen's historical classification of diaspora. These 'victim' characteristics are indeed true of the field though I want to interject that the Tibetan diaspora also speaks of relocation(s), survival, political resilience and a culture of defiance. Referring to the active use of diaspora theorizing in Tibetan context begins in the early 2000s (for example see – Vasantkumar, 2017; Ahmad, 2012; Hess 2009; Anand, 2003) which is a decade after the proliferation of diaspora theorizing in academia. In addition to the above works, other scholarship examining certain facets of the inner and outer spaces of the Tibetan community in exile such as Anand (2000; 2002;2004), Hess (2009), McConnell (2013; 2016) & Yeh (2007) also actively link larger diaspora theorizing into the field's discourse.

Incidentally, if one examines Safran's (1991) characteristics of diaspora that were discussed in the preceding section, they have all been explored in the context of Tibetans. For example, Ahmad (2012); Ardley (2002); Arakeri (1980); Frechette (2006); Goldstein (1978); McConnell, (2013); Yeh (2007) speak to the history of Tibetan dispersal and arrival in

India. Regarding myths and memories of the homeland, works such as Lopez, (1998); Snellgrove (1968); Wang Lixiong & Shakya (2009) focus on myriad Tibetan perceptions and perspectives on the subject including sacred cosmology, origin myths and divine imperial legacy as well as colonialist reactions to the land and its inhabitants. Studies such as Kleiger (1989) and Diehl (2002) point to Tibetans 'reserved' attitude toward mingling with Indian Society which takes shape in various ways as a sense of alienation in the host country. The desire for eventual return 'home' to an independent Tibet has been reflected through the voices, political participation, and aspiration of diasporic Tibetans in studies such as Anand (2002); Diehl (2002); McGranahan (2016). Further, 'ongoing support of the homeland' can be seen through publications that discuss development guidelines and human rights by various institutions and advocacy organizations such as the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights Development, the International Campaign for Tibet, Students for a Free Tibet and in narratives of exile Tibetans as 'ambassadors' of the Tibetan plight through political engagement (Bentz, 2021; Heiss, 2009; Yeh 2007). One can also see how 'a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship' – the construction of the pan Tibetan identity rooted in Buddhist ideals, Tibetans as 'Tsampa (barley) eater' has been the subject of scholarly discussion in works such as Barnett, (2001); Yeh (2002; 2007); Yeh & Lama (2006). Furthermore, each of these studied characteristics in turn can be categorized into Vertovec's (1997) meanings of diaspora as a social form, type of consciousness, and mode of cultural production.

Applying the notion of diaspora as always in process, I posit that the Tibetan diaspora as a social form, consciousness and mode of cultural production is always in flux and characteristics of its diasporic-*ness* fluctuate and differ based on spatial and temporal contexts. Due to its emergence and development because of geopolitical contestation, it is a political diaspora where

members identify themselves as '*thab tsod mi rig*' (*thab rstod mirigs*). To be a diasporic Tibetan is to believe in the struggle for either independent or genuine autonomy of Tibet, to (still) speak about homeland intrusion, flights, multiple belongings, and consciousness. Social help organizations, which the study focuses on, as an important part of the community mimic and present a partial reflection of these larger diasporic ebbs and flows. With these theoretical postulations in mind, I discuss the Tibetan diaspora first through the notion of homeland and subsequently using Vertovec's (2004) three major domains- the *process* of becoming scattered or dispersal, the *community* living in foreign parts and the *place* or geographic *space* in which dispersed groups live below.

Of Homeland & Antecedents:

Fundamentally, diaspora, whether it is the term's classical understanding (i.e. victim or forced diasporas) or its looser adoptions referring to any contemporary migrant group - to be defined as such attests to an *apriori* understanding of belonging and origin located elsewhere (Cohen, 2008; Clifford, 1994). Homeland therefore is an inalienable part of the diasporic narrative for how one came to be sown and scattered across - *diasperein* (Braziel & Mannur, p.1, 2003), cannot be made without reference to *apriori* antecedents. Memories of homeland in diaspora are the realm of the sacred, its sanctity maintained through collective tales of the unparalleled natural and spiritual beauty of the homeland until the polluting presence of foreigners usurped the sacred space. Barnett (2001) chooses "violated specialness' ' as a term to describe political representation of Tibet in western discourse and the term can also be used to signify how Tibetans in diaspora view Chinese presence in their homeland. In a sense, the very inaccessibility of their imagined nation and the continual rhetoric of 'return home' are elements that further add to the myth and mystique of the homeland. In addition, the maintenance of a

homeland ‘true’ to historical memory and evolving relationship with diasporic spaces form an interesting tension between what remains of the homeland and what dissipates and evolves.

Diaspora Tibetans trace their homeland to the region known as Tibet to outsiders, called böd (*bod*) by Tibetans. Drawing on historical perspectives, Van Schaik (2011) describes early Tibetans as a warrior clan that rose to prominence when they captured the Tang dynasty’s capital city Chang’an in 723. Doney (2021) notes that varying degrees of contact and relationship with neighboring regions, particularly present-day India and China existed over the centuries. Evidence of the extent of Tibetan religious, sociocultural, linguistic and political influences exist in textual memories recovered from the cave temple complex popularly known as the Dunhuang caves in Gansu province. Its scholarly study (Doney, 2021; Van Schaik, 2002) continues to play a key role in shaping Tibetan area studies. In sharp juxtaposition to these cosmopolitan linkages and sojourns of the past, projections of Tibetans, particularly in early modern western writings present a picture of devoted Buddhists, living in isolation for centuries behind the lofty Himalayas (Dodin, T., & Räther, H., 2001). Depending on their quest and/or relationship to the subject, Rabgey (1999) notes that these historical writings tend to either idealize or demonize Tibetans.

Speaking of native understandings of the conceptualization of homeland in diaspora, the Tibetan historian Shakabpa’s (1967) work, produced during the initial decade in exile, provides valuable insight into how the newly displaced Tibetans took up the task of memorializing the homeland. Produced during their initial dispersal into exile - in an emotionally charged environment where memories of loss had not yet been relegated to a distant past - Shakabpa’s

(1967) righteous narration of 'a *true* account of the homeland's history for posterity' discursively presents the tonality of early Tibetan diasporic identity and consciousness. He begins this task with the origin tale of Tibetans, presenting native and outside works that articulate a distinct Tibetan identity nearer in proximity to their Indian rather than Chinese neighbor. For example, while Shakabpa states that varying accounts exist regarding the history of the origin of Tibetans, he selectively presents an ancient Indian account, which traces the history of Tibetans back to the time of conflict between the five Pāṇḍava brothers dating it to "two thousand five hundred years before Jesus" (Shakabpa & Maher, 2010). Further, sourced from the 11th century 'Book of Kadam', he quotes the *Birth Stories of the Precious Jewel's Subjects* about the origins of the Tibetans–

In the region to the north of eastern Bodhgaya,
Is Tibet, the Kingdom of the Dead.
There is a high mountain, the pillar of the sky.
There is a turquoise maṇḍala, Mapo Lake.
There is a crystal stūpa, Kailash Mountain.
There is a hill of yellow and gold grasslands.
There is sweet smelling medicinal incense.
There are beautiful autumn flowers of gold.
There are beautiful summer flowers of turquoise.
Oh! The sphere of the protector of the snowy mountains, Avalokiteśvara, Is in that place.
His trainees are in that sphere. (p.3).

The evocation of the native stanza presents two core beliefs about Tibetans and their homeland that cements an important place in diasporic identity development. By eliciting Bodh Gaya (the place where the historical Buddha is said to have achieved enlightenment), considered the holiest of all Buddhist sites, it pays homage to Tibet as a Buddhist space with cultural and spiritual linkages to India. By evoking Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion as the "protector of the snowy mountains" which is another way of describing Tibet, the verses make explicit the special connection between the Bodhisattva (whose human emanations are believed to be the Dalai Lamas) as the rightful protector of Tibet and the Tibetans as his subject disciples.

As the overtly Buddhist imagery and themes suggest, these projections are to do with the latter period of Tibetan history, long after the adoption of Buddhism as the 'state religion'. Nonetheless, placing this old text within the contours of the diasporic space, its two themes have a lasting significance on Tibetans' sense of self, indebtedness to India as the source of high culture, spirituality (and later as actual place of refuge) and the moral legitimacy of the Dalai Lamas as the political and spiritual leader of Tibetans. One can see the absence of Chinese sources and theories in the text regarding who the early Tibetans were (see Van Schaik 2011) which may be a deliberate omission on the part of the author since such references have the potential to incentivize Chinese claims on Tibet and undermine the aim of maintaining a distinct Tibetan nationhood.

Stepping away from the text, such selective storytelling and remembering is, I posit, a hallmark of maintaining an 'authentic' connection to the 'pure' homeland for diversity is only an asset when group identity survival, be it cultural, religious, or political, is not at stake. Viewed from a macro perspective, these insecurities then point to the fragility of political diasporas and the need to fit the complex historical ethnoscapes of non-western regions into neatly packaged

narratives that mimic essences of western nation-state constructions. For the Tibetan diaspora too, balancing the unique histories and cultural mosaic of the various regions that collectively inform 'Tibet' and the need for a unified, Tibetan national identity and voice is an ongoing task.

Indigeneity in Diaspora: In more contemporary times, perceptions of Tibet have been shaped and evolved by expanding theorizing in settler and post colonialisms (example Shakya 2002; Dodin, T., & Räther, H., 2001). Of note, recent decades have seen increasing pollination of indigenous theorizing within western settler colonial states and application of these notions to the Tibetan context. In the early years of these connections, the Tibetan scholar Namkhai Norbu (1982) remarked on the phenotypical similarities between Tibetans and other indigenous peoples as evidence of the Tibetan race's antiquity. He stated that since 'Tibetans, Hopi people and some indigenous people in Latin America look alike', it can be assumed that Tibetans are from an ancient race'. Even earlier, Houston (1976) discusses the functional and ritualistic characteristics of the Tibetan mandala and discusses similarities in the spiritual world view with the indigenous medicine wheel. Huber's work (1999; 2001) also points out the parallels in indigenous notions of land guardianship and the Dalai Lama's call for environmental protection and activism. These occasional comparisons are now much more sustained in theorizing on Tibetans and popular discourse. For example, McGranahan's (2007; 2016) understanding of the historical and contemporary complexities of the field and the way in which she forges linkages between the Tibetan world and the works of indigenous scholars' such as Simpson (2014; 2018) have helped forge connections between diaspora, indigeneity, and settler colonialism.

Yet these connections are not without tensions of translations, differential histories and perceptions within the community. For example, according to CTA's (2008) initiative on standardization of English terminology into Tibetan, the term 'indigenous' is translated as "native

to the land, of this land and earth", (*yul dhe rang g isa skyes rdo skyes. Sa khul byje brdag pa dhe rang gi gdod m'i mi*). Yet the Tibetan term '*loba'* (*klo pa*) connoting tribe, is interchangeably used with 'indigenous' but has derogatory connotations of being backward and uncivilized. According to the Monlam (2018) Tibetan dictionary the term is a latter iteration that evolved from the original *lhoba* (*lho ba*) literally meaning 'Southerners' – used during the Yarlung dynasty to refer to groups such as Monpa (in current day Arunachal Pradesh, India) who were southern inhabitants of the imperial border. Preceding the strength of the indigenous movement worldwide today, such interpretations impeded popular acceptance of being categorized as indigenous not just amongst Tibetans but other Himalayan groups (see Shneiderman, 2015) especially during the formative years of indigenous resurgence.

During a research trip to Dharamsala, India in August 2017, I queried the noted Tibetan scholar Tashi Tsering Josayma as to whether he thinks Tibetans are 'indigenous people'. While acknowledging that there are certain similarities that gives rise to these comparisons, he problematized that since the indigenous construction today is influenced by understandings of indigeneity within North America and Australia, it doesn't quite fit the historical trajectory of the Tibetans particularly since Tibetans have a long empirical history including conquests of other territories. His observations are accurate in that the contexts under which the construct 'indigenous' was formed were highly influenced and shaped by notions of indigeneity and indigenous rights movements in the global North (see Watermeyer & Yan, 2021 for further discussion on this issue). Nonetheless, evolving habitus, circumstances, and time reshuffle one's identity in relationships to and by others. If we examine the contemporary situation in the autonomous regions of TAR, Qinghai, and Gansu (where majority of the Tibetan population live in the People's Republic of China), they are indigenous to the land in both UNDRIP criterial and

the rhizomic sense of the word (see Watermeyer & Yan, 2021). Further Tibetan area studies scholarship (discussed earlier) have examined the relationship through the lens of colonialism and likened Chinese settlement and policies in Tibetan areas as a form of settler colonialism (McGranahan, 2018) and the CTA as "similar to that of some indigenous groups in North America with "nested sovereignty" (Simpson 2014, p. 11), in which some jurisdictional and administrative rights are held by one sovereign within the territory of another" (p.371).

In fact, common sympathies, and linkages between the two groups are not onlyrestricted to academic discourse but seen in real life projects and initiatives. For example, Canadian indigenous activist publications such as Survival International (1999) sees commonality between their conditions in Canada and Tibetans in Tibet. The Canadian International Development Agency funded bilateral project (where I was involved as a cultural facilitator assisting indigenous education specialists at the University of Victoria visiting the TAR) share cross cultural experiences and knowledge on language revitalization work with Tibetan teachers and policy makers in the Tibet Autonomous Region (see Alinea International for further details https://www.alineainternational.com/north-asia/). Field informants also speak of relationship building through youth sports initiatives and cultural events with the Musqueam indigenous community in Vancouver. Yet complicating these contemporary acts of solidarity are Tibetans' conceptualization of nationhood, empire and centuries old inter-conquests between China and Tibet, constructs such as priest-patron relationships that muddies claims of 'indigenous' as a formal identity category for Tibetans in the present day.

Tracing the origins of Tibetan indigeneity further into history is a utopian task. As Gyatso (1987) reflectively states in her conceptual analysis of the sources of the feminine demoness '*Srin-mo*' in Tibet (borrowing Stein's words), such endeavors only lead to "that nameless

Tibetan religion" (p.49) before Buddhism and even predating Bon which is considered the 'indigenous' form of religion in Tibet. The point being, if one traces the roots of Tibetan 'indigenous' notions, far from a definite postmark heralding antiquity, it depicts a rhizomic patchwork that has no concrete beginnings or endings. In the manner of the Heart Sutra's urging that 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form' – indigenous as a construct seems true and not when tied to the dynamic conceptualization of the category 'Tibetan'. In effect, it seems one may be better served by asking how do/can North American and Australian settler colonial concepts of indigeneity (as the dominant form of theorizing in creating 'indigenous' identity today) align or contend with histories of indigenous groups in high Asia?

Most field informants, when reflecting on issues of indigenous peoples in Canada, comment on similarities in phenotypic characteristics, their plight and conditions being akin to 'us Tibetans'. They remain cautious, however, about accepting the designation upon themselves, with many openly disagreeing that Tibetans are 'indigenous' in a way the identity is categorized today. Paradoxically, as one will see in subsequent findings on *kyidu* formation, cross cultural linkages to localized notions of indigeneity abound when discussing historical antecedents and the rationale for the formation of traditional social help organizations with *kyidu* members, particularly amongst the youth and Tibetan professionals. These iterations of nativity and indigeneity may also be due to the increasing traction of indigenous revival within Canadian discourse and praxis enabling them to use similar languages in both political activism and constructions of their homeland in diaspora. Therefore, in the field today, expressions of indigeneity are often an inalienable part of diasporic life embedded in the ways my informants preserve and maintain notions and acts of nativity within and through social helping thus keeping the homeland alive.

Dispersal as Loss: Then and Now

Diaspora resulting from dispersal or becoming scattered (Vertovec, 2004) in the case of Tibetans can be traced to the historical Chinese takeover of the region beginning in the late 1940s by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Shakya 1999; Goldstein, 2007). Historical events and Tibetan resistance during this period have been covered in various news articles, journals, and books from a range of perspectives. An insightful work detailing the complexity of these years from a Tibetan perspective is McGranahan's (2010) 'arrested histories' centering on the hidden story of the Tibetan civilian armed resistance '*Chushi Gangdrug*' (*chu bzhi gangs drug*) who were covertly backed by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency from the 1950s to 1974. The conflict between the PLA and the Tibetan traditional government (details of which are outside the scope of this study) culminated in the crushing of the Tibetan uprising in 1959 and led to the Dalai Lama's escape to India. On 29 April 1960, the Dalai Lama established the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE) and its main objective was to restore freedom in Tibet and to rehabilitate the Tibetan refugees (McConnell, 2016) leading to the formation of the diaspora. Following Chinese control over Tibet, mass numbers of Tibetans began to flee into exile for the first time in their documented history. The neighboring regions of India, Nepal and Bhutan became their initial sites of refuge (Richardson, 1984). In diasporic discourse, the mass exodus of Tibetans outside their home is categorized into three phases (Ahmad 2012). The first phase began with the escape of the Dalai Lama who was followed by 80,000 Tibetans between 1959 – 1960. The second phase began in the early 1980's and continued till 1996. It was marked by the entry of 3,100 Tibetans who escaped into Bhutan being pressured to move to India when the Bhutanese government demanded that they adopt Bhutanese citizenship. In addition, approximately 25,000 other Tibetans left Tibet as trade and tourism forced borders open. 1996

onwards is categorized as the third phase with a steady trickle of Tibetans coming from Tibet (Ahmad 2012).

For diaspora Tibetans, the loss of homeland and their dispersal into exile continues to be a salient subject in both academic writings and popular parlance. The exile stories of hardship are a recurring theme in the Dalai Lama's public speeches to Tibetan audiences often as a reminder of collective plight and unity within. As one will uncover in later chapters, during this study as well, formal, and informal informants when discussing their family history, childhood, and individual trajectories, often recall at length how such difficulties impacted their life trajectories and perspectives. Tenzin Dorje (2022), a well-known Tibetan activist, while speaking to a Tibetan audience at the opening of the High Asia Research Institute in New York on 20th March 2022 captures how one's loss of homeland continues to be an endless subject of discussion–

> We Tibetans like to think a lot and discuss a lot about why we lost Tibet, there is endless discussions and has always been. Sometimes, more traditional, devoted peoples say we lost Tibet because we didn't pray enough and sometimes people say we didn't fight hard enough…

He moves on to mention that the latter is not true as evidenced by the number of publications on site that document Tibetans' struggle over the years. Additionally, the landscape of popular Tibetan websites and social forums present similar sentiments of loss, longing, and imaginings of a homeland. For example, sites such as Phayul, a Tibetan diasporic website in English (https://www.phayul.com/) and Jamyang Norbu's blog (for example Sept. 13, 2016), are popular sites where one can see arguments and counter arguments on the factors that led to loss of homeland.

Canadian Shugu (shog bu): Migration and mobility in the Tibetan diaspora continue to be both accessible and impenetrable. Dispersal and relationally accompanying movement, an age-old problem has taken on newer and far riskier meanings for individuals as diasporic horizons broaden into the erstwhile unfamiliar territories of the old and new world. During longer stays and travel in various parts of Tibetan diaspora, be it India, Nepal, the United States or Canada, '*shugu*' (*shog bu*) (literally 'paper'- connoting legal identity and immigration document i.e. green card, permanent residency, citizenship) are now salient fixtures in communal discourse. Particularly with Tibetan expansion into western Europe, North America and Australia, tales of *shugu*'s search, its elusiveness and associated status in the community have only grown leaving a plethora of stories that attest to the depth and degrees of human enterprise involved in its procurement for the hope of a better life. Narrated by field informants, I have taken care to omit any personal details to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

To contextualize, since the mid-1990s many Tibetans crossed the border from the United States into Canada as the latter is seen as a more progressive site for claiming asylum status (McGranahan, 2018). However, this situation has changed. Speaking with field informants who work in the community service centers in Toronto, there are 'a growing number of Tibetan refugee claimants' whose asylum claims have been rejected. They opine that it may be in part due to changes in Indian laws regarding Tibetans' claim to citizenship. *Shugu*'s (un)availability makes for treacherous journeys and increasing cases of rejected asylum claims. During my stay in Toronto, I met with three Tibetans whose asylum claims have been denied by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. Their accounts are similar in that they speak of how they undertook the perilous journey from India arranged by their local handlers who were paid large sums of money loaned by relatives. Traveling in unforgiving weather conditions, at times

sweltering, other times freezing, they voyaged for weeks in ships and cars, often scaling barbedwire fences at night when visibility was poor to escape the attention of border patrols. Two of them spoke of how they hid in 'strange hotels and places in Eastern Europe', surviving imprisonment in Greece and Mexico at the height of the pandemic. One, an only son, tearfully recalled when a relative informed him that his elderly mother had become gravely ill during the pandemic, but he was unable to visit her because he has no '*shugu*' to leave the country. Without access to governmental support, those without '*shugu*' work 'under the table' to make ends meet and send remittance to family and relatives living in India and Nepal.

Shugu's vicissitudes carry stories of even deeper tragedies but identifying details remain shrouded. For example, a community member in Toronto said they heard of the case of a young Tibetan woman who died, "because she became depressed after being gangraped by men somewhere in Russia or one of those strange countries while trying to come to Canada". These stories underline the fact that diasporic dispersal, far from being a single historical event, a thing of the past evidenced by an earlier generation, lives as an ever-present chain of group reality. As a continual process, the impact of dispersal's psychological and social affect lives in the subaltern flux of exilic bodies and its liminality pushes them to face the procedural scars, time and again, albeit in different settings.

Shugu evokes Gupta's (1995) observation of the omnipresence (yet intangibility) of the '*sarkar*' (state) in his study of rural India, where he notes the "striking degree to which the state is implicated in the minute textures of everyday life" (p. 375) in all its myriad forms (birth, marriage, immigration, trade, education, employment). For Tibetans too, *shugu* symbolizes the visual, tangible state presence bestowing legitimacy to citizens while its very elusiveness marks the realities of many in the study. Those who possess it are enabled the privileges of circular

migration patterns and for men and women to socially enhance their desirability and marry 'upward'. Growing up in the Tibetan refugee schools, a tongue-in-cheek way of commenting on someone's physical attractiveness was the descriptor 'Swiss export quality'. A compliment, the phrase is in reference to the select few who were married off into Tibetan families living in Switzerland (seen as a more desirable location than India), one of the earliest sites of Tibetan settlement in Europe. Anecdotally, such marital practices have increased significantly over the years since the expansion of Tibetan communities in North America.

Shugu is therefore an important factor in the makings of Tibetan diasporic class today. Over the years, it seems to have given rise to a new social class within diaspora and across the board field informants point to it as an important determinant as to who and why you marry and consequently your socio-economic prospects. A common exchange when newer Tibetans meet in North America or Europe is "Did you get *shugu*?" Strangely, or perhaps not, it is reminiscent of a parallel account in Lhasa. Following the period after the cultural revolution when food was a scarce commodity, it is popularly said that when one meets a good friend or a relative, the custom was to ask, "did you eat?" *Shugu*'s fundamental importance in individual lives and the lives of social organizations (as will be discussed in subsequent chapters) cannot be overemphasized.

<u>The Community Living in Foreign Space</u>:

Stuart Hall (1987) observes diaspora as "one is where one is to try and get away from somewhere else" (p. 44) which is reflective of how individuals in the study recount their and/or familial stories of 'escaping' Tibet. Yet trying to get away from 'somewhere else' is only a partial

story. Leaving Tibet makes it both magical and tragic, a real and a promised homeland while exile becomes a tangible, lived semblance of home without being homeland. For one realizes -

> … there is no home to go back to… the notion of displacement as a place of 'identity' is a concept you learn to live with, long before you are to spell it… living with, living through difference (Hall 1987, pp.44 - 45).

The experiences of 'living with and living through difference' (Hall, 1987) are most distinctively found in narratives of loss and suffering, as well as a renewed affirmation of group kinship, a purposeful sense of betterment. While wary of romanticization, nonetheless Said (1984) notes the 'redemptive view of exile', "where exile, then, is an experience to be endured so as to restore identity, or even life itself, to fuller, more meaningful status" (p.49). In the case of Tibetans too, life in exile was a period of intense reconfiguration of status quo and reform within the community, not the least of which was aimed at correcting historical flaws in anticipation of being ready for a new(er) Tibet in the future. While a detailed discussion of developments in the initial sites of Tibetan diaspora is outside the scope of this study, I have surmised some of the key developments as they form a backdrop of shared cultural knowledge of the diasporic landscape that the field informants often reference or assume one must know as a relational insider.

The history of the concrete establishment of a 'community' in exile can be traced to the land allotments for Tibetans by their neighboring region hosts India and Nepal, with whom they share centuries old historical linkages (Buffetrille, 2012). The largest hub of the Tibetan diaspora continues to be based in India. The Indian government under prime minister Pandit Nehru with the help of various state governments provided land for Tibetan refugees to form their settlements though India is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention. Various

studies, for example Anand (2003), Arakeri (1980) Kharat (2003), Hess (2009), Sloane (2014) as well as eyewitness accounts (Murphy, 1966) have documented the hardships faced by Tibetans in the early years of exile. These descriptions detail how in the 1960s and 1970s many Tibetans died, suffering from diseases and ill health as they struggled to acclimatize to the hot Indian weather, living in tents under trees and temporary shelters built from flattened tin cooking oil containers and stones. Many worked as 'coolies' (road construction workers) both for the Indian government-sponsored road improvement projects across northern India and for local building projects initiated by the newly established Tibetan government-in-exile. Overall, the loss of lives and hardships faced in attempting to survive the initial years in exile cannot be overstated.

In India, as the largest refugee group in the country, it is estimated that there are 150,000 Tibetans living in 37 diverse self-contained settlements and 70 scattered communities (Thapan 2016). Almost half of the Tibetans are engaged in agriculture, one-third in agro-industrial pursuits and one-fifth in handicraft businesses (Ahmad, 2012). In Nepal there are estimated to be around 20,000 Tibetans (Buffetrille, 2012). In Bhutan there were 3,100 Tibetans between 1980 and 1985 but due to the pressure from the local government to adopt Bhutanese culture and accept its citizenship, many of the Tibetans left for India (Ahmad, 2012). More recently, recognizing that these population estimates need to be updated, the elected head of the administration Penpa Tsering in 2022 publicly voiced the administration's intention to launch a population survey of its globally spread constituents (Tsering, 2022, 36:11).

With the structural formation and administration of the Tibetan government-in-exile under the leadership of the Dalai Lama whose global stature attracted international support, the decades following the escape into exile saw exponential growth and progress within the community (McConnell, 2013c; Heis, 2009; Gyalpo 2004). The diaspora Tibetans developed and

expanded through their key nucleus – the Tibetan government-in-exile– a comprehensive network of 'non-state state' departments and organizations which as an exilic political structure came to be "widely regarded as one of the best organized in the world" (McConnell, p.4. 2016). The development of diasporic Tibetan institutions and settlements in India and Nepal are also credited to the successful collaboration and engagement between western supporters and international aid organizations with Tibetans. Various international relief organizations and personnel played an important part in the progress of the Tibetan diaspora as well as reciprocal trust and respect between aid workers and Tibetans on the ground (see Devoe, 1983). In July 2017, during an initial research trip to Dharamsala the central hub of the Tibetan diaspora in India, I met the American trained social worker Neil Gudry, founder of the LHA Charitable Trust, one of the largest social work institutes in Dharamsala. He shared how his experiences of working with Tibetans in the early 1980's set him on the path of international social work, including collaborative field learning placements with graduate MSW students (N. Gudry personal communication July 28, 2017). These differential accounts of international aid and development experiences in exile and Yeh's (2013) critique of the Chinese 'gift of development' in Tibetan homeland makes for an interesting comparative study.

In terms of exilic milestones, a major political shift was formally announced on 15 June 1988 when the Dalai Lama forfeited the struggle for Tibetan independence and instead called for the 'middle way path' or genuine autonomy in Tibet at the European parliament in Strasbourg (Dhir, 1999). The change in political focus was followed by further democratic reforms within the TGiE in the 1990s including substantial reforms in the administration and the role of the Dalai Lama (McConnell, 2009). Today the 'Tibetan Government in Exile' is known as the 'Central Tibetan Administration' (henceforth CTA), and the role of political leadership is carried

out by the *sikyong* (*srid skyong*) – a democratically elected leader (Sangay, 2012). The relationship between the CTA and diasporic Tibetans is one of the key features of Tibetan diasporic life. Studies have illustrated how Tibetans have a citizenship-style relationship with the CTA (McConnell 2016) and how this affiliation shapes Tibetans' sense of self as 'immigrant ambassadors' (Hess, 2009) when their geographic space expands beyond Dharamsala. Transnationally, themes of Tibetan political mobilization are also reiterated in Bentz's (2021) observations of Tibetans in Toronto where she explores migrant political activism in local politics in the case of Bhutila Karpoche (the first Tibetan to be elected to public office in Canada) and Kalsang Dolma who also contested on the liberal ticket albeit unsuccessfully for public office. Elsewhere, for example in the United States and Australia, there is also an emerging trend of Tibetans running for public office. The success stories of individuals aside, structurally, maintaining connectivity over an expanding diasporic site present challenges to group cohesion.

The Tibetan migration to Europe and North America led to a significant reduction of the population in the initial exilic hubs of India and Nepal. Furthermore, in recent years there has also been a massive decline in the number of new arrivals from Tibet. According to the current *sikyong* Penpa Tsering (head of the CTA) in his speech to the Tibetan community in Washington, D.C. on May 3rd, 2022, the massive decline is due to tightening border surveillance and increased repression within the Tibetan regions that began in the lead up to the Beijing Summer Olympics. "Before 2008, annually we used to have around 2500-3000 Tibetans come to India…now last year there were 10 new arrivals and the year before only 5" (Tsering, 2022, 12:13). Measures to counter the diminishing Tibetan demographic in the initial diasporic sites and ways to incorporate and further cement newer Tibetan communities in North America and Europe into

CTA's fold are therefore important policy concerns of the Tibetan diaspora polity in recent years (SARD, 2020).

The notion of diasporic landscapes as foreign spaces in which the community live (Vertovec, 2004) continually evolves. As much as diasporas are defined by an understanding of borders, they are marked by the 'porousness' of its boundaries (Ong, 1999). Watson (2004), who studied kinship within the Chinese Man group also speaks of the diasporic condition as a dynamic state declaring that 'diasporics are moving targets for they will not be tomorrow what they are today" (para 3, Watson, 2004). For Tibetans, the 'foreign spaces' that were initially the neighboring regions of India, Nepal, and Bhutan in the immediate aftermath of fleeing their homeland and have since expanded to include western Europe, Australia, and North America. These changes have also brought shifts in diasporic relationship as what constitutes 'foreign space' is continually in negotiation. Vasantkumar (2017) insightfully captures the tension in defining 'home' when discussing his interaction with Tibetans who returned to Tibet after their sojourn in India. Reminiscent of Appadurai's critique of the centre-periphery narrative as too restrictive to capture the nuances of global cultural economy, the juxtaposition between 'homeland' and 'foreign space' is also overly simplistic particularly as diasporas age and get accustomed to new spaces. Within the study's context too, the mechanisms through which real and imagined connections to homeland (through social help organizations) are maintained in the Tibetan diaspora as well as evolving shapes of newer diasporic organizing has much to do with the development of such organizations.

Diasporic Political Consciousness:

Assaying the condition of the classical victim diaspora, Said (1984) points out that-

> To think of exile as beneficial, as a spur to humanism or to creativity, is to belittle its mutilations. Modern exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical. It is produced by human beings for other human beings; it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography (p.113).

Tied to the 'mutilations of exile', the Tibetans diaspora is a hyper political space. Its political narratives are associated with the construction and idealization of a utopian Tibetan past and the promotion of a homogenous Tibetan identity which has been the subject of much scholarly critique (Barnett, R. 2001; Yeh 2002; 2007; Yeh & Lama, K. 2006). Many have suggested that exile political 'propaganda' in fact does more harm than benefit to their struggle.

While these criticisms certainly hold 'true' in a sense that they exist and are solicited for political reasons, it seems pertinent to also view these responses as reactions to the group predicament. For the diasporic condition is "one without guarantee" (Hall, 1986), a state of limbo and ambivalence and within this liminal space narratives that provide some concrete assurances to one's sense of self and history understandably combats this untethering. Strategically too, the development of such rhetoric may even seem necessary. For "the development of nationalist consciousness as well as diaspora consciousness (which) may translate to activism…" (Hess, p.8, 2009) that can provide a 'nationalistic' allegiance and drive, critical for their sense of purpose and to distinguish their identity from other 'foreigners' and migrants whose homes are also elsewhere. At the other end, from the point of view of Chinese state authoritarianism, simply being born in or leaving the homeland for any diasporic space becomes a political act, for the Tibetan diaspora wherever it may be located across nation states, are affected by its affiliation to the original sin of revolting against the peaceful liberators of Mao's People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Within the context of this study, the regenerative spirit of exile coexists with various forms of its 'mutilations' in the need for and creation of social help organizations. Collectively they define and shape diasporic kinship dynamics and understandings of the very nature and scope of what it means to conduct social helping in diaspora. Extrapolating further, the exilic condition and its lacks create unique individual, and group needs currently unmet by mainstream forms of social helping that are stripped of cultural particulars and heavily focused on utilitarian notions of help. Thus, creation and maintenance of diasporic formalized social helping counter such lacks and tackles those dimensions of 'help' that are relegated to the realm of individual responsibility and at most extracurricular for the multicultural state but from the perspective of the group require critical collective intervention for their very survival. This then ties into the existing critique of liberal multiculturalism which assigns the responsibility of practicing 'culture' to individual rights and impetus overlooking the role of institutional and structural support critical for minority cultures to flourish. How the shifting characteristics of diasporas as continually 'in-process' shape local developments, imaginings and practices are explored through the specificity of the field sites below.

Tibetans In the Good Country of Canada:

The Tibetan diaspora have particularly expanded since the 1990s with the US Tibetan resettlement project (TUSRP) which significantly shaped communal out-migration patterns (Hess, 2009). Today the United States and Canada are the largest Tibetan diaspora sites outside of India and Nepal. Specifically in the study context, the Tibetans in Canada all of whom have a) personal and/or familial stories of how geopolitics shaped their trajectories, and b) directly traversed from exilic hubs in India and Nepal; are formally and informally linked through birth and ethnicity to the cluster of diasporas governed by the non-state state CTA. Like their

contemporaries elsewhere in the world, Tibetans in Canada, in addition to their participation in regional citizenship affairs, continue to identify as constituents of the CTA, physically located thousands of miles away in Dharamsala in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. A native place of Gaddis and other mountain tribal groups, it became a summer retreat site for British colonial officers and subsequently was offered by the post-independent Indian state to the Tibetan asylum seekers. In due course, the government-in-exile was established, at a site named by the Dalai Lama as Gangchen Kyishong which stoically translates as 'happy valley of snow'.

(Figure 2: Tibetans in Taber, Alberta circa mid 1970s)

Purveyed from a Canadian 'national' lens, Tibetans are a small ethnic group variously incorporated into its multiethnic fold through citizenship's identity portals as 'refugee' 'displaced person' or immigrant. Their presence acts as a testament to the progressive agenda and largesse of the Canadian multicultural state, adding to the folklore of what Benedict Anderson (2006) describes as the 'imagined community' of the nation state. The notion of 'imagined community' is also alluded to within works related to the Tibetan diaspora often to accentuate the constructivist reality of concepts such as community including the political community of the nation that is often uncritically seen as a 'natural' state. At the same time the

evocation of the word 'imagined' lends it a deceptively make-believe air that is at odds with the very real structural processes and differing consequences of living in such an 'imagined community' despite Anderson's (2006) emphasis to the contrary. In a parallel sense, it appears somewhat akin to the affliction sustained by 'postcolonialism' in that no matter how strongly postcolonialists emphasize the 'post' as not the end but the long-term consequences on society after colonization (Mongia,1996; 2021), the idea is nonetheless limited by the inherent power of (the word's) suggestion.

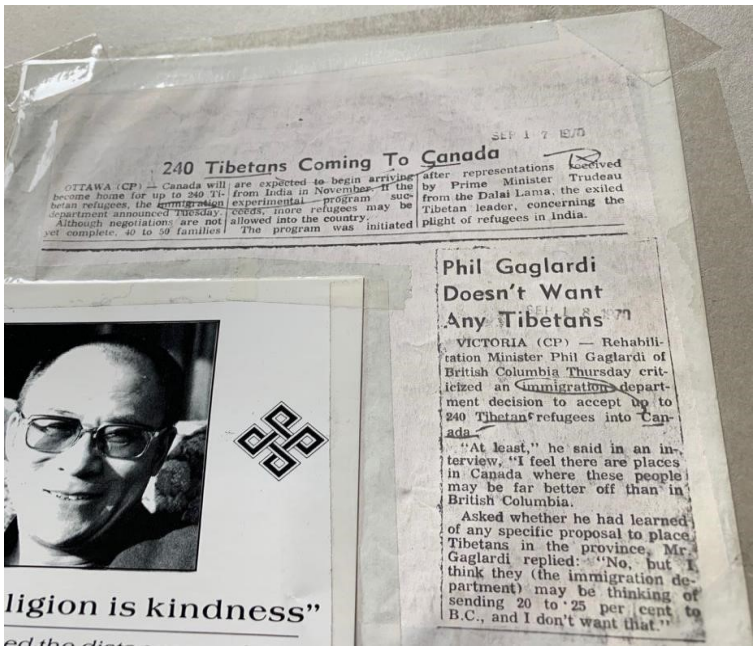
The 'imagined' nation of the Tibetan diaspora constructed in postcolonial India as an 'anticolonial response to PRC's occupation' and 'Chinese settler colonialism' in Tibet (Anand, 2019; McGranahan 2019) is a subaltern project. For territorial jurisprudence which is an important part of what Anderson (2006) characterizes as one of the features of the 'imagined community' of the state is at odds with its status as a diaspora. For Tibetans living in the limbo of statelessness in previous diasporas such as India and Nepal and who have a history of 'refusals of the gift of citizenships', immigrating to Canada is a seemingly permanent act (McGranahan, 2016; 2018) of settlement. At the same time, the adoption and participation in Canadian multicultural citizenship, in the words of a community member, is a way to "keep Tibet alive" and hence in the service of the imagined nation of their homeland for whom they are in Hess's words (2009) 'immigrant ambassadors'. The seemingly incongruent act of being in an ambassadorial role, with allegiance to the CTA while adopting permanent citizenship is a critical part of Tibetan diasporic consciousness.

Tibetans in Canada: From their initial base in south Asia, the Tibetan diaspora communities are now geographically spread across Europe, Australia and North America

(McConnell, 2016). Historically, Canada was the second 'western' country after Switzerland to approve group Tibetan resettlement outside of South Asia (Hess, 2006). The development and expansion of the Tibetan communities in the country can primarily be viewed through three main waves of Tibetan settlement – in the 1970s when the first 228 individual Tibetans were resettled in Canada (Raska 2016), followed by a steady influx of Tibetans in the 90's (McGranahan, 2018) and the settlement of 1000 Tibetans approved in 2010 (Canada Tibet Committee, August 2021). Here I will expand on the three waves of the Tibetans' arrival and settlement in Canada.

In 1968, a year after the Dalai Lama made a global appeal for assistance, the Canadian government under Pierre Trudeau approved the resettlement of 240 Tibetan refugees across various provinces. The first resettlement project began in 1970 with a total of 228 Tibetans moving to Canada (Chyssem Project, n.d.) which is considered the first phase of Tibetan settlement. Lobbied by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the first settlement wave occurred between 1970 and 1975 where an initial group of 228 Tibetans were dispersed across Canada's provinces after the early decades of their arrival into exile in India (Raska, 2016). Henceforth, I will refer to this initiative as the first Tibetan resettlement project.

The two main Tibetan social organizations in Toronto and Vancouver today- the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario (CTAO) including its affiliated Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre (TCCC) in Toronto and the Tibetan Cultural Society of B.C. (TCSBC) were formed within their localities by the first group of Tibetans to settle in the provinces. Despite its early beginnings, likely due to the diminutive size of the group, within the Tibetan diasporic discourse it is the 1990s and 2000s that are considered the period when Tibetan diasporic space expanded significantly beyond South Asia.



SEP 17 1970

240 Tibetans Coming To Canada

OTTAWA (CP) — Canada will become home for up to 240 Tibetan refugees, the immigration department announced Tuesday. Although negotiations are not yet complete, 40 to 50 families are expected to begin arriving from India in November if the experimental program succeeds, more refugees may be allowed into the country. The program was initiated after representations received by Prime Minister Trudeau from the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan leader, concerning the plight of refugees in India.

Phil Gaglardi Doesn't Want Any Tibetans

SEP 18 1970

VICTORIA (CP) — Rehabilitation Minister Phil Gaglardi of British Columbia Thursday criticized an immigration department decision to accept up to 240 Tibetan refugees into Canada.

"At least," he said in an interview, "I feel there are places in Canada where these people may be far better off than in British Columbia.

Asked whether he had learned of any specific proposal to place Tibetans in the province, Mr. Gaglardi replied: "No, but I think they (the immigration department) may be thinking of sending 20 to 25 per cent to B.C., and I don't want that."

ligion is kindness"

(Figure 3: Newspaper announcement of the first Tibetan resettlement in Canada and B.C. declining to participate in the resettlement project, 17th Sept 1970)

Alberta-bound Tibetans arrive in B.C. on Friday

MAR 5 1971

OTTAWA (CP) — Perhaps the most esoteric immigrants Canada has ever received begin arriving during the next week as 92 Tibetan refugees step off jet planes at Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

They are among tens of thousands who have been living for years in refugee camps in India, after being driven from their secluded Himalayan valleys by the Communist Chinese who began occupying the kingdom in the early 1950s.

Prime Minister Trudeau personally helped arrange a refugee program after the Dalai Lama, spiritual father of the Tibetans, appealed for help a couple of years ago. Poverty of the refugee camps is said to be appalling.

Last October, two young Tibetan men arrived in Canada and are now employed at the Bata Shoe factory in Battawa, Ont.

On Friday, 33 arrive in Vancouver, take the train to Calgary, then arrive in Lethbridge Saturday where another federal - provincial effort will be made to help them fit into the Canadian scene.

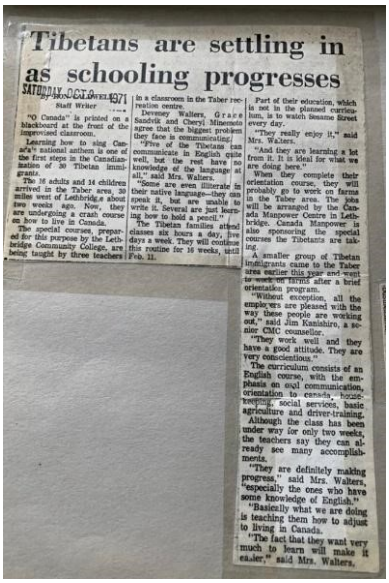
(Figure 4: News of the Tibetans' arrival in Canada, 5th March 1971)

The second wave of Tibetan settlement occurred in the 90s when multiple groups of Tibetans entered Canada from the US border due to its asylum policies (Hess, 2006). In particular, the second phase of the Tibetan exodus into Canada is tied to the major resettlement project of Tibetans in the United States known as the Tibetan U.S. Resettlement Project (TUSRP), a collaboration between the United States government and the CTA (at the time known as the Tibetan government in exile) in the 1990s (Wangdi, 2020). TUSRP resettled 1,000 Tibetans from India and Nepal to the United States and by the end of the project in 1998, because of family reunification schemes, a total of 5000 Tibetans had resettled in the States (Benz, 2021). The economic progress and remittance amounts sent home to India and Nepal by Tibetans, including educational opportunities and citizenship rights in the states led to a continuous uptick of Tibetans journeying to the United States in the early 2000s. However, the newcomers were external to TUSRP and they faced hurdles in getting legal documentation and other resettlement assistance in the United States. This led to their entry into Canada (Bentz, 2021) due to its comparatively progressive immigration and citizenship act. As a signatory to the 1951 and 1967 Refugee Conventions, in Canada, Tibetans asylum seekers were recognized under the category of convention refugees (McGranahan, 2018). These two waves were followed by the announcement of the most recent resettlement initiative in 2010 of 1000 Tibetans living in the border state of Arunachal Pradesh, India to Canada (Canada Tibet Committee, 2013). The initiative was federally approved as a temporary public policy under section 25.2 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) (Government of Canada, 2012). The community informants I interacted with in Vancouver and Toronto comprise a diverse mix from the three settlement phases and, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, their social helping activities, participation in organizations and concerns reflect their needs and aspirations.

Historically, Tibetans were mainly employed on farms, or in service and crafts industries although many of them now work in hospitals and senior care homes (Raska, 2016; 2013). As a relatively new and small group, Tibetan settlement is overlooked in Canadian Immigration history (Raska, 2013) and only a few studies discuss their settlement experiences (McGranahan, 2018; Raska, 2016; Logan & Murdie, 2014; Dargyay, 1988). Likely due to the lack of publications regarding the history of Tibetans in Canada, in June 2019 the Chyssem Project (https://www.thechyssemproject.com/) was launched as a "grassroots community effort to create a permanent archival record about the Tibetans who arrived in Canada in the early 1970s". The project is conducted in collaboration with the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 and the team consists of adult children of the first generation of Tibetans whose parents came to Canada in the 1970s. The site provides detailed information on the group trajectories of the early Tibetans and individual accounts of those who were part of the first phase of Tibetan resettlement including historical timelines capturing major milestones of the Canadian Tibetan community.

In more recent times, studies on Tibetan diaspora in Canada (for example Bentz, 2022; McGranahan 2018; Logan & Murdie, 2016; Raska 2016; Yamada, 2016) have mentioned how community members often surmise their decision to (im)migrate to the country based on Canada's image as a progressive, benevolent state. As McGranahan (2018) also found, in this study, '*lung pa yag po red*' (literal meaning) 'it is a good country' came up as a common field narrative (of those who moved in the late 90s onward). Community members believe that their move to Canada is premised on the decision that life in the 'good country' will present better socioeconomic opportunities including the political clout of citizenship to advance the Tibetan cause than if they were to remain in the diasporic hubs of India and Nepal. I posit that this conceptualization of an accessible, 'good country', took concrete shape in the Tibetan psyche

post the second Tibetan settlement in the late 1990s to early 2000s. For those who arrived in the 70s during the first resettlement project who are now elders of the community, they speak of being completely bewildered upon arrival, of "not knowing anything" except that the Canadian resettlement project staff told them during settlement orientations that they were in a "good country". The diminutive size (228 individuals) of the first Tibetan group to settle in Canada in the 70s (compared to the vast majority who continued to live in Nepal, India and Bhutan) including physical and virtual distance from exilic centers meant that despite the relatively early beginnings of this diaspora, the clusters of Tibetan families and the local organizations they created functioned in relative autonomy and obscurity.



Tibetans are settling in as schooling progresses

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1971

By SONDRA GOLDWELL
Staff Writer

"O Canada" is printed on a blackboard at the front of the improvised classroom.

Learning how to sing Canada's national anthem is one of the first steps in the Canadianization of 30 Tibetan immigrants.

The 16 adults and 14 children arrived in the Taber area, 30 miles west of Lethbridge about two weeks ago. Now, they are undergoing a crash course on how to live in Canada.

The special courses, prepared for this purpose by the Lethbridge Community College, are being taught by three teachers in a classroom in the Taber recreation centre.

Devenny Walters, Grace Sandvik and Cheryl Minemoto agree that the biggest problem they face is communicating.

"Five of the Tibetans can communicate in English quite well, but the rest have no knowledge of the language at all," said Mrs. Walters.

"Some are even illiterate in their native language—they can speak it, but are unable to write it. Several are just learning how to hold a pencil."

The Tibetan families attend classes six hours a day, five days a week. They will continue this routine for 16 weeks, until Feb. 11.

Part of their education, which is not in the planned curriculum, is to watch Sesame Street every day.

"They really enjoy it," said Mrs. Walters.

"And they are learning a lot from it. It is ideal for what we are doing here."

When they complete their orientation course, they will probably go to work on farms in the Taber area. The jobs will be arranged by the Canada Manpower Centre in Lethbridge. Canada Manpower is also sponsoring the special courses the Tibetans are taking.

A smaller group of Tibetan immigrants came to the Taber area earlier this year and went to work on farms after a brief orientation program.

"Without exception, all the employers are pleased with the way these people are working out," said Jim Kanishiro, a senior CMC counsellor.

"They work well and they have a good attitude. They are very conscientious."

The curriculum consists of an English course, with the emphasis on oral communication, orientation to canada, food-preparing, social services, basic agriculture and driver-training.

Although the class has been under way for only two weeks, the teachers say they can already see many accomplishments.

"They are definitely making progress," said Mrs. Walters, "especially the ones who have some knowledge of English."

"Basically what we are doing is teaching them how to adjust to living in Canada.

"The fact that they want very much to learn will make it easier," said Mrs. Walters.

(Figure 5: News report on the early Tibetan settlement program in Alberta, 9th October 1971)

Those who arrived in the 70s, now living in Toronto and Vancouver attest to the literal and metaphorical distance from their exilic 'centre' during this decade. Community elders recall that except on rare occasions during the Dalai Lama's visit to the west where he would grant audience to the local Tibetans, there was seldom any contact with the Office of Tibet based in the

United States. For the CTA too (then known as the Tibetan Government-in-Exile), the communities in Canada did not significantly feature in regular administrative and policy making processes. Viewed from this perspective, for the larger Tibetan diaspora, until the late 1990s to early 2000s, Canada was viewed as a distant diasporic frontier. Internally though, within this new space, the surviving elders who came during the first Tibetan resettlement group, recall how they mobilized community organizing initially through informal gatherings. According to community members, these grassroots initiatives in the 1980s gradually expanded and became more formalized leading to the establishment of the 'Tibetan cultural organizations' (TAs) that exist today. Observed from the geometry of 'space-time' connections, one can see the rising stature of the Dalai Lama globally, to the development of the Tibetan communities in Canada and elsewhere, and the proliferation of various Tibet support groups, networks around the world.

Much like other groups fleeing persecution, Tibetans' relationship with Canada are also bound in narratives of gratefulness for the provision of a safe haven, upward socioeconomic mobility, and access to previously unavailable citizenship opportunities (McGranahan, 2018). Yet new citizenships do not null the "presences' of other identities, multiple sense of belongings and affiliations" (Hall, 2015, p.395). Therefore, a continued sense of what Stuart Hall (2015) describes as 'diasporic-ness' prevails. Diasporic-ness is grounded in a "dialogic relationship between identity axes, one that is a source of grounding in some continuity with the past and the other a reminder that what we share is precisely the experience of profound discontinuity" (p. 395). Concepts such as 'immigrant ambassadors' of Tibet (Hess, 2009) or more recently Bentz's (2022) study of 'inward to an outward-looking type of mobilization' amongst Tibetans speaks to this characteristic of diasporic-ness and its evolving nature.

Demographics: Both for the CTA and the larger exilic community, Canada as a Tibetan diasporic space became increasingly significant when macro demographic shifts led to changes in the exile status quo due to large-scale migration of Tibetans to the 'west'. Beginning in the late 1990s Tibetans increasingly started sojourning to various parts of western Europe and North America. The largest group resettlement initiative, known as TUSRP (Tibetan United States Resettlement Project) occurred during that decade with the United States government's initiative to resettle 1000 Tibetan families in various parts of the country (Hess, 2009; Wangdi, 2008). At the same time, based on a public talk by the current *sikyong* of the CTA, increasing surveillance and closure of Tibetan borders by the PRC especially after the 2008 demonstrations in the TAR and other Tibetan regions have drastically reduced the inflow of refugees into Nepal and India. Where previously there was a continuous trickling of Tibetans into Nepal and India, in recent years that number is now negligible (Yarloong, 2022, 20:00).

The CTA as the 'non-state state' of Tibetan exiles (McConnell, 2016) is cognizant of the need to respond to the evolving shape of its constituency over the years and therefore conducts its own demographic survey. According to the 'Baseline Study of the Tibetan Diaspora Community Outside South Asia (CTA, 2021) conducted by the 'Social and Resource Development' office (SARD), the total number of Tibetans in North America is estimated to be 36098 out of which there are 9504 Tibetans who live in Canada. The survey data gathered directly from the Tibetan Associations (TAs) in North America, reported approximately 8064 Tibetans in Ontario, the majority of whom reside in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), 450 Tibetans in the lower mainland of BC and 100 on Vancouver Island based on information submitted by local Tibetan associations (TA) in the region. The majority of the Tibetans in

Canada are based in the urban centres of Calgary, Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. They have come to Canada from India and Nepal (some from Tibet) where they are categorized as 'stateless' or 'refugee' although in recent years some have taken on Indian and Nepali citizenship (McGranahan, 2018). At the time of this writing, the administration is planning to conduct a large-scale demographic survey with an objective to–

> …get a hold of number of Tibetans in the diaspora", to be "used as a standard measure for the implementation of political, administration, socio-economic and welfare schemes and most importantly, the same data will be adopted in the administration's endeavour towards e-governance. (Central Tibetan Administration, June 30th, 2022).

Comparatively, the most recent Canadian census states a total number of 9,345 respondents identified being Tibetan as their 'ethnic and cultural origin' in the country out of which single origin accounted for 8160 respondents and 1,190 as part of multiple ethnic or cultural origin (Statistics Canada, 2022). Within the provinces of the study sites, 'Tibetan' as an ethnic and cultural origin were reported by 485 respondents in British Columbia and 7,380 respondents in Ontario (Statistics Canada, Oct 2022). The 'cultural and ethnic origin' as explained in the guidelines regarding the Census (Statistics Canada, 2022) is a revised attempt by the agency to capture both respondents' variations in how they respond to the question regarding their background origin and the blurred lines between ethnicity and culture as in the case of the classic example of those who report as being Jewish. Related to the Canadian census and other formal documentations, community members speak of their conundrum when articulating their identity (Tibetan) as not simply an ethnic marker but signifying 'nationality' as people of an occupied country. Since 'Tibet' as a nation state entity is not on offer, many remark that in their country-of-origin detail they often note it as either in the 'other' category or in the 'comment'

section. Such details may seem benign but for diasporic Tibetans it cuts to the core of how they view themselves and Tibet's unsettled conflict with People's Republic of China. What Tibetans share about their reactions to completing the seemingly innocuous, bureaucratic form, belies how the census as a governance tool impacts self-representation, state agenda for policy development, social perception, and resource allocation. A topic which Bernard Cohn (1987) skillfully explores in the context of the census in British India where he asks, "how did the census operations influence the theoretical views" of the Indian social system for "both administrators and social scientists"? (p. 241). In the Canadian context, the question is, why the term 'Tibet' is no longer on offer when for Tibetans it conveys the totality of their historical, political and social identity as *bhodpa* (Tibetan)? Related to this issue is the larger erasure and replacement of the term 'Tibet' with terminologies such as 'Xizang' or the 'Tibet Autonomous Region' within academic discourse which far from connoting objectivity, undermines the larger Tibetan contestation for political sovereignty.

Beyond marginalization of 'Tibet' in statistical demographics and discourse, increasingly many Tibetans in Canada today have never lived or seen its physical landscape. Therefore, it is a truism that the "society of origin to which the vast majority of Tibetans have immediate ties is in South Asia, not in Tibet" (Yeh, 2007, p. 649). Furthermore, in recent decades connection with the homeland has been tenuous after the 2008 demonstrations and self-immolations across the Tibetan cultural regions, along with the rise of Xi Jinping's power and retrogression into zero tolerance for political dissent (Lam, 2015). Yet lack of physical connection or 'immediate ties' (Yeh, 2007) does not connote a lack in sociocultural and psychological embeddedness. In fact, as Baffelli & Schröer (2021) point out, absence can characterize belonging while inaccessibility and distance from the homeland elevates imaginings and longings precisely because of this lack. In

contemporary times, absence is further complicated by the reach of social media platforms through which one can in a way access presence. For the Tibetan diaspora too while the physical homeland particularly after the 2008 uprisings is increasingly out of bounds, its virtual presence and communication continues through social media platforms such as WECHAT, which even if heavily scrutinized by the Chinese state, nonetheless remains a way through which to access home.

Chapter Three

The Pandemic in and of Diaspora

In January 2020, a month before the celebration of the 2147 Tibetan year of the Iron Rat, I began my fieldwork in Toronto and Vancouver. Major news rumblings of the seriousness of COVID–19 infections in the Chinese city of Wuhan were on the rise but observing from a distant Canadian cocoon, the thought of a global pandemic while theoretically possible seemed unreal. However, in subsequent months, I had to cancel travel plans to Toronto as all research activities were suspended. Just over two months later, the World Health Organization (WHO) made the official announcement on March 11th 2020 of a global pandemic. By April 24th, 2022, there were more than 500 million confirmed cases and over six million deaths reported globally. Across the world people faced complex, interconnected threats to their health and well-being based on social, economic, political, and environmental determinants of health (WHO, 2021). For my own study, the pandemic is the character I never anticipated but whose entry invariably morphed the story. While I resumed traditional fieldwork (see chapter three) after the pandemic travel restrictions were lifted, in this chapter, I discuss how it shaped the study and the responses of the Tibetan communities, particularly their engagement with social helping interventions at the time.

Conducting an ethnography during the time of pandemic meant that the notion of the field, its accessibility, scope, duration, and overall experience underwent major adjustments. The unpredictability of how long the world might remain under lockdown for public safety and the impact of the restrictions on the scope and quality of the fieldwork were a constant source of concern. The shift to virtual space and the normalization of Zoom meetings, be it in the academic world or the clinical work setting, no longer seemed a temporary phenomenon but the new

reality. Considering the pragmatics of resource and time constraints of the study, in April 2020, I started online interviews with community members and leaders of the Tibetan Association (henceforth TA) and *kyidu(s)* in Toronto.

While the shift to online fieldwork began as a purely practical decision, it nonetheless drew me into the world of virtual ethnography, particularly the ways in which virtual ethnographers (for example Hine, 2015) conceptualized fieldwork. Addressing the critique of ethnography as a "methodology that privileges face-to-face contact and spatial proximity" (Gupta, 1995, p.375), the virtual space allows reimagining the very 'physics of presence'. For instance, initially the tendency was to evoke physical memories of the field site in Toronto, to think of the visits and connections with the site over the years before the pandemic began. While memories may serve as useful comparative background material, reconceptualization meant acceptance of the pandemic as part of the presenting field rather than attempting to externalize its phenomenon. As such the logistical challenges, the inability to undertake certain tasks and the diminished access are all part of how one finds the 'field' upon present encounter.

Partly reassured, I set about conducting virtual interviews with members of various community organizations, attending, and observing live community events and seminars via platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp between January 2020 and April 2022, followed by on-site, in-person conversations and discussions with community members during my monthlong trip in May 2022. The initial phase of the formal data collection was followed by further engagements including participant observation during community events, WhatsApp, and Facebook and in-person conversations with Tibetans in Vancouver and Toronto, monitoring of social media updates by both the TAs in Toronto and Vancouver as well as *kyidu* through January

2023. For the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, names of all field informants except those who requested to be identified, have been changed.

Tibetan Communities During the Time of COVID-19:

The SARS-CoV-2 highly affected the Tibetan community globally particularly in areas such as India and Nepal as well as the first US COVID-19 epicenter in Queens, New York, which is one of the densest Tibetan communities outside Tibet and India (Craig et al.,2021; Tidwell and Gyamtso, 2021). In 2020 there were, reportedly, 9148 cases of Tibetans who tested COVID positive in India, Nepal, and Bhutan with 167 reported deaths while there were 213 reported cases of COVID-19 amongst Tibetans living abroad with 9 deaths (Tibet Net, 2020). Amongst these 3 were Tibetan seniors in the United States and 1 in Canada (Montreal) who succumbed to the disease (Tibet Net, 2020).

The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) which plays the role of a home country for Tibetans (Bentz, 2021) took comprehensive measures to combat the disease's spread and treatment. These public health measures included the formation of COVID-19 emergency relief committees, sending Tibetan traditional medicine 'sacred pills', and other items developed by CTA's 'Men-Tsee-Khang' the Tibetan Medical and Astro Science Institute (based in Dharamsala, India). At the community level, transnational medical missions to India were conceptualized and undertaken by the Tibetan Nurses association of New York and New Jersey in collaboration with CTA. In North America, the Office of Tibet Washington DC, as the formal representative of the Dalai Lama and the CTA in the region, convened a meeting of all the TAs in North America (Tibet Net, May 18th, 2020) to provide pandemic directives to the organizations including the six based in Canada– Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria Island– to set up local emergency response teams to assist with pandemic related needs within their communities.

As described in the vignettes below on the pandemic initiatives of the Tibetan community in the field sites, the teams took up pandemic related initiatives at the ground level.

On March 20th, 2021, the University of British Columbia's Himalaya Program hosted a virtual platform entitled 'Responding with Care during the times of COVID' to discuss responses to the pandemic within Tibetan communities. It was attended by representatives from the Tibetan community in Toronto and a member representative from the Tibetan community in Vancouver. The community member representative (see Vignette 1) from the Tibetan Cultural Society of British Columbia (TCSBC) is a frontline health care worker who traces the initial hardships caused by the pandemic and discusses members' resiliency including finding new opportunities and avenues of employment. The representative from Toronto is a community leader (Vignette 2) whose presentation focuses on the scope and initiatives of the community's leadership during the pandemic which extends outside the Tibetan community. The presentations of community work at the time provide insight into the types of communal needs the initiatives sought to respond to and prioritize. Further, structurally these initiatives reflect larger projections of model refugee/immigrant behaviors beyond their kinship community. Note that the vignettes have been synthesized from their verbatim accounts and where needed clarifications are bracketed.

Vignette 1: Vancouver

> During the pandemic the Tibetan community organization was tireless and provided constant assistance with deliveries of meals and essential items, help with emergency funding and EI (employment insurance) applications. Most importantly, helped in understanding and keeping us updated on changing policies (of the provincial government). Many Tibetans who are newcomers and not acquainted with provincial

laws and don't understand the language are all very thankful to the organization. Our community faced many challenges during the pandemic but creatively overcame them …many families with children complained that they could not go to work as one of the parents have to stay with them, household income was badly hit and moreover even if they went to work, as many worked in healthcare, they faced dilemmas about putting their family's health at risk. Due to the new learning system during the lockdown, children couldn't go to school and all the classes were held online. I remember some of the newcomer families had a hard time getting familiarized with the computer as some of them had never used computers and were clueless as to what was going on with their kids' education. Gradually they began to understand the new system and came to enjoy spending time with the kids and learning with them. In the beginning, the youth in the community were not worried about their safety as they were young and healthy. However, they were overwhelmed and shocked in late April when schools were closed indefinitely. As more information surfaced about deaths and health risks related to seniors not only in Canada but around the world, they felt concerned about their older relatives, parents, grandparents. However, they shared that it was nice to have lots of free time with family, talk to each other and see the online space grow bigger with opportunities. Now they don't look at YouTube or Instagram as just entertainment but as alternative career paths. Few of them talk about stock markets and even bitcoin. Due to the shortage of healthcare workers especially care aides during the pandemic and in 2021 the BC government's waiver of tuition fee to study as health care workers, enabled many Tibetans in housekeeping service to get into the health care sector. Currently there are 10 Tibetans who are newly studying health care assistant programs. As a community we try to get through and transform collective challenges into opportunities.

Vignette 2: Toronto

Everything changed… All the programs were closed, and one of my main concerns was how we would sustain as our expenses depend so much on events and programs. Safety was the priority, so we closed the entire center in March …we formed a COVID task force, and any fear/concerns were addressed to this hotline. As requested by the CTA we had a prayer session to bring tranquility and community info sessions on public health guidelines. We have a lot of community members working in hospitals, risking their lives and of course frontline workers. Following the principle of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in partnership with a local restaurant we provided 150 hot meals to St. Joseph hospital. We then continued that work from April to October 2020, distributing hot meals to 20 plus organizations including hospitals, healthcare centers, community housing, shelters and encampments, partnering with local Tibetan restaurants. We partnered with 'Feed it Forward', an organization that rescues food rather than going to landfill. They would cook the food, freeze it and then distribute it, we provided them with our kitchen space and volunteers and distributed 12,000 frozen meals during the summer. During the holidays from November to December, 50,000 frozen meals across Ontario and 300 plus kids' hampers were distributed. With Tibetan Women's Association (TWA), we made around 8000 non-surgical hats and 17,000 masks and are still making and distributing them. For seniors we have streamed live mental health programs and provided them 500 Tibetan traditional food hampers through youth volunteers over five weeks. The community came together and worked well. From a spiritual and mental health perspective we would make sure the youths would help the parents log on and for 45 days, for 2 hours every evening (6 to 8 pm) *Geshe* Jampa Tsering la led the prayer sessions which the elders would look forward to. Our Tibetan *amchi* (traditional

medicine practitioner) Khenrab Gyamtso would provide e-consultations with COVID patients and till date has completed 260 consultations including dietary advice. Volunteers would make *momos* and fruits, drop them off for COVID patients because at times whole families had contracted COVID and couldn't come out (due to regulations regarding isolation). All Buddhist religious events were hosted virtually via Facebook or YouTube, and we provided drive-through '*Tsok*' (blessed food and drink offering) distribution. We also had e-*gorshey* like line dancing from May 21 to August onwards and online dance programs every Wednesday from 5-6 pm and over a 100 people would participate from their home and it would be broadcasted live. We have Tibetan Youth events including online Tibetan classes and Buddhist philosophy classes. Last year '*Trungkar*' (birthday of the Dalai Lama) July 6th, 2020, was also the 'gratitude year' (for the Dalai Lama) and so we distributed 1000 vegetarian hot meals and hosted a 6-hour live virtual concert with traditional and contemporary music performances from 13 Tibetan artists around the world. In September, when we had a little window of things opening up, we had a grant funding and organized camping for 50 children for a week and took them to central island. Across the world, Tibetans have (CTA) elections for the president (*sikyong*) and members of parliament in January. During the lockdown, the only option was drive-throughs which were very successful. Conducted over 3 days – January 1st to 3rd from 8am to 5pm, we distributed the voters equally into three days based on their registration. Some of the other ongoing initiatives are– we are the consortium member for COVID-19 vaccination engagement team for south Etobicoke cluster and trying to be a vaccination site. Delivering youth programs including book reading club, mentorship programs and Tibetan language programs. Overall, it was very tough and challenging, but I think we responded very well as a community.

The cadence of both the field narratives are similar in that they speak of the initial hardships caused by the pandemic, to overcoming these challenges, members' resiliency to finding new opportunities and avenues to support the community during this time. Yet there are differences in the overall scope of activities performed by the two communities. Speaking of the pandemic's impact on the community, one can see that the Vancouver Tibetan community geared their helping activities to concerns of the newer community members. Dwelling on the 'many' newcomers within the community, issues such as employment and systems navigation challenges are identified as barriers that the TA sought to assist with. For the families within, occupational risks bring added concerns about their own and familial wellbeing as well as safety of extended kin in India and Nepal. The upsurge in the use of social media platforms which for many adult community members posed transitional challenges (be it technological knowhow and/or psychological shift to the medium) was a lesser issue with the youth. In subsequent interviews with some of the younger members in the community, what they shared was anxiety about their future and their longing for in-person socialization with peers.

In comparison to the modest scope of the Vancouver TA's activities during the pandemic, the TA in Toronto in partnership with other groups in the locality embarked on a range of activities. As elaborated in the vignette, these activities notably include culture-based psychospiritual help, for example, Tibetan Buddhist teachings, prayer sessions and online circle dance. Further, more generally widespread helping activities during the pandemic such as groceries, meal support and personal protective equipment (PPE) deliveries were also conducted in collaboration with Tibetan as well as non-Tibetan organizations in the province. In particular, the ways in which the local TAs helped carry out the CTA's *sikyong* and members of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile (TPiE) elections locally, amidst the pandemic restrictions is significant. For

context, every five years, the CTA's 'Central Election Committee' oversees the democratic election for the post of *sikyong* (political leader) and a total number of 45 members of the TPiE (https://tibetanelection.net/en/composition-and-number-of-chithue/). Tibetans across the global diaspora with a valid 'Green Book' (evidenced by up-to-date payment of the annual voluntary tax contributions to the CTA) are allowed to participate in the election. How the local communities are transnationally linked to the CTA and the local leadership's roles in carrying out the administration's mandate, governance tasks are further discussed in subsequent chapters.
Here, the way in which the TA representative identifies the successful carrying out of the 'Tibetan elections' occurring "across the world' in their locality despite the pandemic restrictions is noteworthy of the event's importance to the community. In Vancouver too, the CTA elections were carried out in the open space of the public park in New Westminster, where many of the Tibetan newcomers are settled. While the vignettes speak of the impact and activities during the peak of the COVID-19's spread and severity, here I will discuss how the pandemic is an allegory for political diasporas.

Being a Bat:

On March 22nd, 2020, five days after the BC government declared emergency lockdown measures, I was introduced to Tenzin by one of my field contacts in Toronto through WhatsApp. A few weeks later he agreed to a Zoom interview with the condition that I would not videotape it. Tenzin is in his mid-forties, a member of the Tibetan political organization- the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) though by his own admission it is a membership that he 'carried on' because of historical involvement in India during his college days in Delhi rather than any current political involvement or support for the organization's vision for an independent Tibet. The pandemic seemed like an easy start to the conversation, and I commented on how it has affected everyone.

He said with a laugh that "for us it doesn't matter". Curious, I asked what he meant.

> As refugees we always ask permission from governments and when we show our '*shugu*' (popular Tibetan lingo connoting legal documents), they tell us to wait in a separate line. People are so upset about not being able to meet their family or travel but think of how many people, leave alone our parents or grandparents' time but in our generation who haven't been able to meet their parents, relatives or visit Tibet. You and I all know of someone. Now everyone knows a little bit of what it feels like to be us, but the difference is our pandemic never ends.

Tenzin's 'us' encapsulates the endemic restrictions experienced by him and other stateless, diasporic Tibetans' regarding their movement and mobility, struggles for familial reunion and the vulnerabilities of diasporic living to also include the heightened surveillance and restrictions on personal freedom within Tibet and their homeland's continued inaccessibility as a pandemic state of being. It is common knowledge amongst diasporic Tibetans that since the 2008 Tibetan uprising and self-immolations of more than 150 Tibetans in the last 15 years (Kaku, 2020), state surveillance and human rights violations have been on the rise in Tibet as reported by Tibetan news channels in the community and organizations such as the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD, 2020). Hence exilic life in the diaspora is a pandemic that is never ending.

Paralleling this outlook of the pandemic in and of political diaspora, Nagel's (1974) philosophical essay on 'What is it like to be a bat?' seemed unintentionally ironic since the viral origins of SARS-CoV-2 was linked to the nocturnal creature (Latinne, A., Hu, B., Olival, K.J. *et al.*, 2020). The theory that we encroached upon its territory, trafficked their bodies in Wuhan's

‘wet markets’ for human consumption which ultimately led to the virus within them colonizing the world – seemed like a macabre case of poetic justice. Beyond metaphors linking the nonconformist half-animal, half bird form of bats to the ambivalence of diasporic bodies and the pandemic, at its heart, what Nagel extrapolates below about the ‘incompletable’ knowing beyond a ‘schematic conception’ of what it is like to live as a bat unless you are a bat, is what Tenzin is alluding to:

> Even if I could by gradual degrees be transformed into a bat, nothing in my present constitution enables me to imagine what the experiences of such a future stage of myself thus metamorphosed would be like. The best evidence would come from the experiences of bats, if we only knew what they were like. So, if extrapolation from our own case is involved in the idea of what it is like to be a bat, the extrapolation must be incompletable. We cannot form more than a schematic conception of what it is like… And to deny the reality or logical significance of what we can never describe or understand is the crudest form of cognitive dissonance. *(*pp.439-441*).*

In essence, acting as the bridge between my informants and the reader, there will be, beyond theories and limits of the text, the embodied experiences of being a diasporic Tibetan which can ‘never be fully described and understood’. One can also imagine the ghost of Edward Said saying, how can you possibly know exile, ‘the mind of winter’ if you haven’t lived or inhabited it in some form?

For Tenzin, the pandemic then is an event where the world may experience (even if for a short time) those aspects of his life that speech adequately fails to articulate. In speaking of movements and mobility, whether it is to visit or reunite with family he gives voice to both old

and newer problems of an expanding diaspora. Appadurai (2003) states the earlier notions of 'centre-periphery' and 'push-pull' to explain human migration is too simplistic to explain the complex, overlapping and disjunctive 'global cultural economy' that we now live in. Migration– a key facet of diaspora, now requires the study of the "relationship between five dimensions of global cultural flow termed as ethnoscapes; mediascapes; technoscapes; financescapes; and ideoscapes" where the "suffix-scape points to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes…(that are) the foundation for "*imagined worlds,* that is the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (p.31). Appadurai's attention to the notion of the 'imagined worlds' is reminiscent of Anderson's (1983;1991) proposition of the nation state as an 'imagined community', which also serves as an important motif through which diasporic discourses including that of the Tibetan diaspora is viewed.

Returning to the subject of the 'never ending' pandemic of diaspora, the diminishing group of older generations of Tibetans who came to India in the sixties remember a different time and sentiment. Kalsang is in his eighties, a retiree living in Vancouver, who was amongst the first groups to come to Canada in the 1970s. We met at his home in a quiet neighborhood in Surrey. Over tea, the conversation flowed organically from youthful memories in Lhasa as a messenger boy in a Tibetan aristocrat's home to his escape to India, looking after refugee children and eventual settlement in Canada. I didn't need to use conversation prompters, he seemed ready. His circular narrative was reminiscent of many older Tibetans' flair for recollecting minute details of their past unrestrained by the chronological order of time.

Recalling the initial years of émigré life in India, he mentioned that "during the early days" many

Tibetans did not want to move to the settlements in South India and were not willing to go to Canada. “Everyone kept thinking we will go back (to Tibet) very soon, even when weeks become months and years. Some declined homes in the settlements as they felt we won’t need it for long”. Kalsang half smiled and shook his head at the naivety of past sentiments, having spent the better part of his life in exile.

In comparison to the buoyant hopes of imminent return ‘home’ during the early years, today separation from homeland is an endemic scar especially for those who have ongoing familial connections. For example, in April 2022, when I was in the field site in Toronto there was a spike in new COVID cases. I was unable to meet some of my field informants who were undergoing quarantine while there were others who did not feel safe or comfortable to meet in person. Unlike them, Diki was not perturbed and met me in Parkdale. Prior to the study, we had known each other for around five years and our connection was tied to us being born in Lhasa and becoming wards of the exile education system during childhood. Yet unlike my trajectory, Diki had never returned home. Referring to our common ‘school’ connection, she remarked that I would likely meet ‘old faces’ and that the neighborhood Tim Hortons was a good spot to hang out. Walking into the establishment, however, she seemed surprised to find that the seating area was permanently closed. We wandered over to the nearby Parkdale Collegiate, another popular place where Tibetans hang out and perform traditional circle dance ‘*gorshe*’ (*sgor gzhas*) every *Lhakar* (*lha dkar*) or ‘white Wednesday’ on the ‘soul day’ of the Dalai Lama as a ‘cultural protest event’ (McGranahan, 2018). Like many other Tibetans in Toronto, Diki works in healthcare as a personal support worker. Since leaving Tibet in the 1980s as a child, she has never been back or seen her family. Diki shared that her parents divorced after her mother sent her and her sister to

school in India. I asked if she was curious to see Tibet and she shook her head. “I think it will be tough”, she said.

> My *amala* (mother) and I seldom talk on WeChat because my oldest sister who looks after her works for the government and always seems nervous when I call. She is probably worried I’m going to say something stupid.
>
> Interviewer: Stupid?
>
> Like… stuff about ‘here’ (her index finger points at the table). I think she’s scared to even talk to me maybe because she thinks she might lose her job or get in trouble somehow.

‘Here’ is a diasporic metaphor. It connotes both the specificity of her as a person, of being a Tibetan in ‘foreign’ land and a meta inference for the entirety of the Tibetan diaspora. Both Tenzin and Diki’s reminisce have a strange parallel to the sentiments about pandemic. When the initial shock of the COVID-19 dissipated, social media platforms and TV networks hypothesized when the pandemic would end until multiple waves of it brought the notion of a ‘new’ normal. The new normal and the never-ending pandemic of political diasporas are both constructs borne out of changing realities. The pandemic of political diasporas lies in its unfulfilled dreams of returning home and the many crevices that withhold exilic bodies from the proverbial good life. To summarize, the pandemic in and of diaspora presents itself through active bonds of kinship nestled within narratives of blood, belonging, affiliations and nationhood with a shared historical past, undergoing similar conditions of (current) duress and framed by the struggle for a common future. Since the bonds of kinship extend between, across and beyond ‘land’ the classical image conjured by the term *diaspora (*of a distant land) is often a misnomer that evades fundamental linkages within identities, intertwined histories, lives, and livelihoods.

Chapter Four

The Mandala of the Field: A 'Relational' Insider's Ethnographic Data, Processes & Ethics

(Figure 6: Tibetan monks constructing a Mandala)

The Mandala of the Ethnographic Field:

As a research method, methodology and even a philosophical paradigm, ethnography has a very long tradition within social sciences (Atkinson & Hammmersley, 1998). In appraising the 'postmodern ethnography', Tyler (1986) discusses the hermeneutical processes underlying its creation, casting aside other forms of writing (for example, the newspaper) to declare that its model is "but that original ethnography– the Bible" (p. 127). His articulation centers around the role of evocation, so much so that evocation *is* ethnography–

> Evocation is neither presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented. It is thus beyond truth and… overcomes the separation of the sensible and the conceivable, of form and content, of self and other, of language and the world. Evocation, that is to say "ethnography" is the discourse of the postmodern world… (p.123).

The necessary conditions of immersion, analysis, and craft that evocation requires have been a salient theme of the ethnographic works that have shaped my own appreciation and understanding of the medium. Reflecting on Tyler's reference to the bible through my own cultural lens, ethnography's curated wholesome-ness evokes the quality of a mandala whose comprehensiveness, Guiseppe Tucci (1961) the Tibetologist, interpreted as a 'psychocosmogram'. As a Sanskrit word of a key Indian tantric Buddhist term, mandala has various definitions and meanings that are both functional and ritual and is used in various contexts (Rambelli, 1991). In its functional form, the mandala is–

> a sacred space endowed with the attribute of circularity (a symbol of perfection) …where rituals and religious practices are performed, i.e., the ritual platform and the temple…the archetype of this Buddhist sacred space is the area surrounding the pippalī tree, under which Śākyamuni entered nirvāṇa. (Rambelli, 1991, p.6).

As a symbolic pictorial representation of sacred texts, mandalas are also "soteriological devices symbolizing the paths to liberation or freedom from illness and suffering as well as the liberated state itself" (Samuels, 1995, p.113). The initiated 'travels' from the outside to the mandala's center symbolizing numerous stages and processes in attaining the enlightened state "where all distinctions between good and bad, peaceful and wrathful, nirvana and samsara are dissolved"

(Snellgrove, 1987 quoted in Samuels, 1995). The Tibetan practice of wearing mandalas as amulets and charms to ward off harmful influences, Samuels (1995) notes is strikingly similar to practices of other indigenous groups such as the Navajo Evilway ceremonies "primarily to excise evil spirits and the effects of sorcery" (p.114).

Much like the intricate webs of meanings, patterns and functions comprising the mandala, the field is also a cosmic bricolage whose multiple meanings and interpretations, entries and exits entwine in a cycle that seems to have no real beginning or end. What is narrative-*ly* constructed - as the 'psychocosmogram' of the field is filtered through the fieldworker's observations and ascribed meaning(s) which are in turn tethered to other forms of learning and lived experiences. A more succinct way to describe it may be the Tibetan Buddhist notion '*tendrel'* (*rten 'brel*) - of interconnectedness of all phenomena and this ethnography in essence acknowledges and situates its construction as part of and an outcome of the underlying field which is invariably felt. Akin to the mandala's cyclical nature, the ritual and functional mandala of the field produces questions and transmits meanings often cloaked in such patterns. This holistic cosmos of meanings, get irremediably sifted and removed through the act of writing itself and further the act of writing in a language, form and structure that is undeniably 'western'. To the 'native' fieldworker, these are familiar and uneasy territories. For as often as one traverses through myriad regions as a 'global nomad' (MacPherson et al., 2008), I am also conscious that the body, speech, and mind as sites of 'Tibetan-ness' can only be translated and never quite authenticated in its de facto state of being. Thus, marginally situated and often a complicit boundary crosser (Villenas,1996), the field contained in these pages is ultimately affected by these overarching superstructures.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the field, as Madden (2019) describes it, begins with the importance of 'place' for humans, in that humans are place makers as we assign meanings to

places and places in turn define us. The ethnographer turns that place into a 'field' where the latter becomes an "interrogative boundary map on to a geographical, social, and/or emotional landscape that is inhabited by a participant group (and) has an embedded question (or series of questions) that impels the ethnographer towards some form of resolution" (p.3).Therefore, like the multi-dimensional spheres of the mandala, the field is also not simply contained to its visceral site or geographic location but have mixtures of conceptual frames (Madden, 2019) from beyond.

Traveling through time, in the realm of the outer field are the linkages between colonialism and ethnography as a methodology– the fact that classical 'fieldwork' emerged from dispatches and studies of 'exotic', faraway lands that were places of colonial conquest and fantasy including conceptualizations on and of the great field of Tibet and Tibetans (Neuhaus, 2012; Anand, 2007; Lopez, 1999). As such 'the field' in a conceptual sense arises from the legacy of historical and contemporary writings that constitute the area known as 'Tibetology' straddling multiple disciplines. Ethnographically, it is replete with varying lengths of accounts on diverse aspects of Tibetan culture, society or religion that are both studied as a singular entity and/or in comparison to the context and framework of the larger nation state space in which it is situated. Selected scholarships that have explicitly and implicitly shaped my own understanding of this broader field include Gyatso (2015;1997); Hess (2009); Huber (2012; 2008;1999); Karmay (1998); Kapstein (2013; 2006); Lopez (2018), McGranahan (2016; 2010); Norbu (1997;1981;1978); Shakya (1999); Stein (1972); Van Schaik (2011) and Yeh (2020; 2013).

Beyond individual studies, thematically, the diasporic Tibetan studies repository directly and indirectly speaks to and engages in some form of response to the grand narrative of colonialism(s) most notably 'Chinese settler colonialisms' in Tibet (Anand, 2019; McGranahan, 2019) and being refugees in post-colonial India (Kapoor, 2022; 2019). Therefore, colonization *is*

a key concept shaping the field. Writing about Tibetans in diaspora, I am also dialogically engaged with an image of an androgynous 'Tibetan' sans geography that is filtered and constructed within our psyche through larger discourses based within historical and contemporary notions of Tibet and Tibetans. Likewise, within the context of this study, so far as I can 'see' the conceptual framing of the field and the participants' ethnographic selves within the context of social helping– diaspora, indigeneity and kinship – are also inextricably linked as responses to colonization(s).

Analogous to the physical representation of the mandala, the outer and inner zones are the geographical locations of diasporic Tibetans around various parts of the world who are connected to the center through kinship's physical and virtual networks. The 'center' of the field mandala here are the sites in Vancouver and Toronto towards to which I 'travel' to arrive at a better understanding of the phenomenon of Tibetan diaspora social helping organizations, their types, scope, and evolution. Evoking the final act of the mandala's decimation after the completion of the ritual, is the reminder of the 'window' of the constructed field, its impermanence, continual process of change and (therefore) devolution, which also allows newer (re)constructions over time and space. As much as possible, I have attempted to understand and adapt to both the transience and the concreteness of 'moments' that construct and capture the field in all its physical and metaphorical dimensions during the fieldwork journey.

Sites & Accessibility: The Tibetan diaspora communities of interest are physically located in current day Metro Vancouver and Toronto, Canada. Metro Vancouver is located on the traditional territories of multiple First Nations groups, along the Fraser River, who spoke the hən̓ q̓ əmin̓ əm̓ language "extending from Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Kwantlen, Langley, Marpole, Burrard, Jericho, and Coquitlam to Tsawwassen. These groups are based in the metro

Vancouver areas known as North Vancouver, Tsawwassen, Vancouver, Richmond, Surrey, Langley, New Westminster, Coquitlam, and Pitt Meadows and were part of a complex network of communities that is not accurately represented through the colonial reserve system" (p. 26, Couture, 2019). In terms of spatiality, here Tibetans are primarily located in the cities of Burnaby, New Westminster, Surrey and Vancouver. The Tibetan association known as the Tibetan Cultural Society of British Columbia (TCSBC) is the main organization. Prior to the study, I had lived in and been a part of the Vancouver Tibetan community for more than 12 years and continue to identify as part of the larger Tibetan community, participating in community events including weekend Tibetan language courses for children hosted at the local Tsengdok monastery by the BC Tibetan Parents' Association. During this study, the initial phase of the data collection had been virtual i.e., via WHATSAPP and ZOOM and by phone, however once pandemic restrictions began to ease, I transitioned the data collection to participant observations, and formal and informal in-person interviews.

Toronto sits on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands (City of Toronto, n.d.). Traditionally the city was one of the stopping places for the Anishnaabeg on their Great Migration from the east coast before the indigenous group was displaced from the site in 1847 (Freeman, 2010). Tibetans are dispersed throughout the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) with higher densities of the population concentrated in the Parkdale neighborhood and Etobicoke. Etobicoke has come to be of significance to the community particularly due to the establishment of '*Gangjong Choeden Ling*' (*gangs ljongs chos ldan gling*) the 'Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre' (henceforth TCCC). Since 2007, I have periodically

visited Toronto over the years and maintain ongoing relationships with friends and acquaintances, many of whom I had known prior to their settlement in Canada through various Tibetan establishments in India and Nepal. During most of the study I could not physically come to Toronto due to Pandemic travel restrictions and so key informant interviews with *kyidu* members were conducted via online platforms. In May 2022, I was finally able to travel again. At the time, I lived in Jameson Avenue, in the Parkdale neighborhood for a month conducting intensive participant observations, follow up in-person interviews and attending community events and gatherings. This ethnography, therefore, includes both in-person and virtual data collection components gathered over a two-year period.

Beyond the symbolic act of solidarity with indigenous people through conducting land acknowledgement, the seeming normalcy of using non-native names and the 'foreignness' in using indigenous names for the territories we inhabit, embody the extent to which colonization works within and through us. Languages when not associated with popular or daily use even when reintroduced take on a reified, performative quality restricting their entry into the everyday ethnographic description even to proponents who support indigenous revival. For example, in my case, Queen Street, one of the two major arteries running through the neighborhood of Parkdale was reclaimed as 'Ogimaa Mikana', in the Anishinaabemowin language (CBC, March 5, 2020). Though symbolically visible, positioned right underneath 'Queens St.' on all road signs, this act connoting both subversiveness and 'literal' subservience carry its alterity thus rendering it invisible.

Further, thinking through the perceived cumbersomeness of identifying 'Ogimaa Mikana' (despite its *apriori* precedence) as the site name (rather than Queens St.) presents the ethnographic challenges of reflecting 'real life' practice, familiarity, and use of the space now.

These practical and functional concerns cohere in the environment of 'pragmatic killing' of past associations and names. In Kafkaesque terms, the story mainly involves that reality which follows post the great metamorphosis of the human into a giant insect. Everything else is fable. In a parallel corollary, for Tibetans living in exile on indigenous land, the erasure and disappearance of the traditional histories of the field sites under colonial geographies is reminiscent of the way native Tibetan names of places and sites in contemporary Tibet recalled by my field participants have been undermined by later Chinese iterations of these names that are being used as 'the' names of places in academic discourse.

Since discourse is inherently linked to power for 'power produces knowledge' (Foucault, 1977), even professed neutrality within scholarship assists and is complicit with the negation, and diminished status of the marginalized. Tracing and writing the Tibetan 'field' is therefore fraught with political implications. As a 'native' it is invariably an intimate journey and much like indigenous theorizing posits, its study cannot be upheld without acknowledging the kinship bonds of 'birth and bone' (*rigs dhang rud*). At the time of this writing in June 2022, while active 'fieldwork' data collection is completed, I continue to engage with participants to clarify or refresh certain remarks or memories. Further as a Tibetan by birth, I identify as a 'member' of the community. Therefore while there is a sense of closure in terms of the study timeline, I cannot completely 'exit' the field for it is home and long after its completion, will continue to meet many of the 'participants' of this research as fellow community members and friends, some of whom I have known since childhood in the Tibetan refugee school system.

Positioning and Field Access as a Relational Insider:

With the advent of decoloniality in academia and the decades that followed leading to increasing presence of non-white and native ethnographers with marginalized histories (Villenas,

1996), discussions regarding insider-outsider positions have moved beyond simplistic binaries of belonging and non-belonging to the complex ways in which relationality permeates every aspect of human interaction and societies (see Desmond, 2014). Regarding positionality, two types of discourses on ethnographic insider-*ness* in relation to the field- as expressed by 'native' ethnographers who identify as belonging to the field (Chawla, 2006; Hofer, 1968) and the increasing number of insider accounts within organizational ethnographies (for example see Bruskin, 2018) - have been useful in thinking about the self vis-à-vis the field. Both areas of discourse overlap in that they speak to identity formations and performativity, its *in flux* nature that underscore the researcher's dynamic relationship to the field and its social structures.

Identities as 'subunits of the self' have long been the subject of scholarship and from a social interactionist perspective are seen as i) meanings a person attributes to the self as an object in a social situation or social role, ii) relational, iii) reflexive, iv) a source of motivation and v) can operate indirectly (Burke, 1980). These 'identity' characteristics unfold in variegated ways during the study. As a Tibetan who has lived in both the homeland and diasporic Tibetan hubs, I am familiar with and draw upon common socio-cultural references that inform group conditioning and socialization. These mutuality help develop deeper understandings and insight into topical concerns or areas of group interest.

At the same time, relationality positions, limits and shapes advantages, disadvantages that can overtly and subconsciously impact one's identity as 'the ability of the self to take itself as 'me' (Burke, 1980). Relatedly, "reflexivity is nothing more than feedback to the self of the consequences of the processes that are the self. As such identities influence performances for there are assessed by the self for the kind of identity they imply "including correction of perceived "off target performances" (p.20) measured against an internal standard. As a Tibetan,

when conducting research in my ethnic community, communal allegiance, expected norms and behaviors bring their own set of other and self-imposed obligations which are continually evaluated, and corrected against the conventional norm. Where interactions in and with the field are concerned, these 'performances' between me and participants have often helped in creating rapport and familiarity that are vital components to establishing co-presence. In cases where 'reflexive' attempts to rectify 'off target performances' lands differently or differences emerge, to the best of my ability I have aspired to use these as occasions for insightful interludes into probing how and why it came to be so. While common identity may intrinsically motivate one to dwell on how the research may be perceived within and outside the community, the endeavor still is to write about the field, its strengths, challenges and conflicts as 'truthfully' encountered. Though agreeing that there is ultimately no 'objective' truth in the research process and textual output, one can nonetheless maintain a relative sense of objectivity and analytical rigor that differentiates social research from other forms of writing.

Much has been said about the advantages and limitations of native ethnographers and their familiar world in terms of accessibility, power, ethics, and trust (see Andits, 2014; Villenas, 1996). Reflecting on the demographic trajectory of the Tibetan diaspora pool, the majority of the community members have lived in India and Nepal. Many were born in Tibet. Being a Tibetan, I share many similarities with them. In terms of heritage, language and larger cultural influences, I did not have difficulty entering or understanding the field along these areas of association. Further accessibility was also not an initial issue due to my own formative and ongoing immersion in the larger structure that makes up the Tibetan diaspora including its educational and socio-political institution. Many of the informal participants are community members I have

known for years as friends, acquaintances connected through a network of exilic educational and social institutions.

At the same time, the initial 'insider' ease also poses its own set of challenges that revolves around the consequences of a common social identity mentioned above. Based on my own experiences during the data collection process, chief amongst such limitations, was the layered fields and intersectionality of identities within the common category 'Tibetan' and how these impacted interlocutors' co-presence and varying comfort, reticence to speak on certain topics. Such insecurities may stem from belonging to a small community where anonymity is hard to maintain and/or trust that another Tibetan may confide their views to others irrespective of their professed stance on confidentiality, professional or ethical code of conduct. In the Tibetan diaspora where the 'village in the world and the world in a village' is closely mimicked through interconnected networks, communal perceptions and relationships hold sensitive value. Further, as a researcher formulating questions and exploring responses to certain topics that are considered out-of-bounds or sensitive are necessary transgressions against cultural decorum or code of conduct. Such instances recall Villenas's (1996) categorization of ethnographers from marginalized groups who are institutionally affiliated to dominant (white) systems as ambiguous 'border crossers' (p.718).

From a research process standpoint, the ambiguity of my own positioning is laid most open when the larger goal of the study's inquiry necessitates questions in keeping with the progressive signs of the time but sound disingenuous or even crossing privacy lines when posed by a cultural insider. For example, when asked to identify one's gender, responses of younger Tibetans indicate normalization of such questions. However older Tibetan informants are often thrown back by the question, perhaps because someone from the community may pose such a

question and respond with laughter likely due to their traditional gendered world view. As the person conducting the interview too, such questions felt culturally out of context, even tactless within this setting despite the fact they are rightly inclusive and normalized in everyday work life.

Additionally, there were a few significant events that unfolded during the research process; the arrest of an ethnic Tibetan man from Tibet in New York by the FBI for allegedly infiltrating the community as an informant of the Chinese government; ongoing political turmoil related to diaspora elections that emphasized a common Tibetan identity over intra group, regional identity politics which impacts impression of *kyidu*(s). To mitigate these barriers, social work interview and assessment skills proved useful as did other well-known strategies to develop trust and familiarity including continual contact to nurture relationships, judicious discussion of the study's ethics particularly related to specific concerns and disclosure of my personal background where necessary to assuage participants' concerns or curiosity.

The intentional use of Tibetan dialect, code switching into English and sometimes Hindi, humor and visual representation of Tibetan-*ness* were also effective as psychological aids to creating rapport. As detailed in the preceding chapter on the 'Pandemic of diaspora', the ongoing global pandemic's impact on the study cannot be overstated. During the onset of COVID-19, subsequent lockdowns and restrictions, the social life of the community initially shrunk. Yet over time, the community morphed and adjusted to the reality of life in its 'new normal'. Being a part of the community as well as a researcher, I participated in communal events which have helped shape my experiences of field immersion and observation. In particular, the shift of communal

events, meetings and interfaces to virtual spaces offered an opportunity to observe the community's resiliency and functioning through a virtual ethnographic space.

Aside from communal events, I established and maintained connections with participants via phone, social media forums such as Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, ZOOM and Skype.

Communications via these mediums were maintained through text and voice messages as well as emails. Overwhelmingly, participants favored WhatsApp as the medium for frequent communications since WeChat is affiliated with and surveilled by the Chinese state. When WeChat was banned in India by the Modi administration in September 2020 (The Print, 2020) due to escalating geopolitical tensions between India and China, WHATSAPP overwhelmingly became the dominant social media application in use.

'Foreshadowing' Questions:

> Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies." (Malinowski, p.9, 1922).

Malinowski's (1922) phrase 'foreshadowed problems' is often quoted as the base from which ethnography begins. Revisiting the classic text, what seems to have been negated, perhaps due to its negative connotation, is the equally important part about 'preconceived ideas' which from a post structural perspective can also be construed as the embeddedness of personal subjectivity and lived experiences influencing positionality. Within the context of this study, the ideas preceding problematization were initially observations on certain kinds of perspectives related to social helping and social help organizations in Tibetan diaspora that were intriguing when mulled against the larger discourse presenting 'Social Work' as western (McNicoll & Yan,

2009; Yuen-Tsang & Ku, 2008). To illustrate, the confluence of ground experiences working in rural communities in Tibet in international development projects and later work as a professional social worker in Canada, particularly community work with Tibetan 'cultural' organizations in diaspora, showed many similarities with the tasks associated with social work though not recognized as such.

Further, if we examine the literature of social work, particularly in the global south, the boundaries related to the conceptualization of the role of social workers are so fluid as to be almost impossible to tell what is and is not social work. Even within the global North, rather than specificities of the profession's scope, the clarity of what is social work is drawn through territorialization of the term based on academic and professional regulations that protects the usage of the term and its status including transfer of such knowledge elsewhere as 'social work' which have previously been a central thesis behind Midgley's (1981) professional imperialism.

Thinking through these larger conceptual issues that impact social work praxis, brought attention to the development of Tibetan cultural organizations and *kyidu* – Tibetan kinship based formalized social help organizations. Historically, *kyidu* are traditional to the Himalayan region including Tibet and as formalized kinship-based social help organizations, they precede nation state formations. In their diasporic state, *kyidu* are not restricted by their conventional boundaries, as will be discussed in later chapters. On the other hand, examining the literature on 'ethnic' organizations in Canada show that they are labeled as 'ethnocultural organization'. The ethnocultural organizations are studied and interpreted in terms of their contribution or adverse effects on citizenship building and integration vis-à-vis the nation state. Further those who form and participate in these organizations are newer settlers who arrived as refugees and immigrants in Canada.

My initial framing of the research questions too also falls along these lines– how and what role do Tibetan ethnocultural organizations play in refugee and immigrant resettlement and integration in Canada? This unquestioning gaze aligns with social work's overall complicity and dependency on nation states where all new settlers of varying origins, experiences and aspirations are filtered through the lens of refugee and immigrant integration. To be clear, the point is not that resettlement and integration are not vital aspects of life for new settlers or that the categories 'immigrant' or 'refugee' are not important. Rather it is about how the discipline's gaze on these two identities (in alignment with the state) overshadows the existence of 'other' ways of conceptualizing group identity. This disciplinary leaning into methodological nationalism which occurs "when the nation-state is treated as the natural and necessary representation of modern society" (p.99) poses problems of reductionism, reification, and naturalization of the nation state (Chernilo, 2011). A more comprehensive definition of methodological nationalism being–

> The equation between the idea of society as social theory's key conceptual reference and the historical processes of modern nation-state formation. The idea of society becomes the all-encompassing presupposition upon which the most important features of modernity are explicated: class formations, growing bureaucratization, structural differentiation. The nation-state and modern society become conceptually as well as historically indistinguishable (Chernilo 2011, p.99).

As fieldwork progressed, these insights helped shift the study gaze to 'other' territories. A set of questions evolved exploring the origins and nature of the traditional ethnocultural organizations, their culture of help, contemporary motivations and how they serve and evolve with the diasporic population. What types of services– i.e., social helping roles– do they provide

that makes them viable for community members? What can these roles and services tell us about ethnic conceptualizations of the culture of social helping? What is (or is there) a place for diasporic social work within the larger discourse and discipline of social work? Consequently, this study explores the formation, evolution, and practices of two forms of diasporic Tibetan social organizations - the 'cultural' organizations known as Tibetan Associations (TA) and social help organizations known as *kyidu* through the lens of both its formal and non-formal members in Toronto and Metro Vancouver.

Methods & Data Analysis:

Haraway's (1988) epistemological principle of 'situated knowledge' which emphasizes the researcher's embodied location within the context of the research helped reinterpret my relationship with fieldwork. It also enabled critical assessment of the types of methods or 'tools' (Madden, 2019) that I could avail when conducting research during a global pandemic. The notion of situated knowledge helped view the pandemic not as an external obstruction but rather to situate it as part of the field's historical, social, and embodied context including having its own unique set of cultural processes, responses within the communities of study. Such a standpoint helped in alleviating the cognitive dissonance caused by an attempt to hold on to or mimic prepandemic standards, meanings and interpretations of the field and methods required for fieldwork immersion. In the following section, I discuss the methods used for the study which include participant observations, formal in person and online interviewing, informal discussions at community events and via FACEBOOK, WHATSAPP and WECHAT, documents analysis and field notes. In addition, other materials include - audio visual clips sent by *kyidu* members, organizational publication(s), official and other kinds of web information on social work/social helping discourse in public culture.

As the Tibetan Cultural Society in BC (TCSBC) in Vancouver and the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario (CTAO), and the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre (TCCC) in Toronto are the leading Tibetan community organizations, following cultural code of conduct and as a sign of respect for their role in the community, I reached out to the presidents of the organizations to inform them about my study. In Vancouver, I also announced the study at the TCSBC organized community meeting in January 2020 and to specific individuals during the Tibetan New Year (Losar) celebration event in February 2020, who may be interested in participating as key informants. I followed up via email outlining further details of the study, information about consent forms and confidentiality. Since I have been part of the Vancouver Tibetan community for a long time, interested individuals also approached me in confidence to participate in the study. Around the same time, I spoke to friends in Toronto regarding my research and requested assistance with participant recruitment. A former Vancouver Tibetan community member who had since moved to Toronto initially helped with recruitment of *kyidu* members from various organizations and these contacts snowballed, enabling recruitment of additional participants.

Coincidentally, the first key informant interview was completed on March 10th, 2020, the day of the commemoration of the 1959 'national uprising day' in Tibetan history. I completed two more key informant interviews in person before the provincial state of emergency declaration was enacted on 18 March 2020. With the announcement of pandemic restrictions including travel closures, my field visit planned for Toronto in the summer of 2020 had to be canceled. The closure of public physical spaces and the fact that many Tibetans worked in health care caused heightened tension in the larger community. In Vancouver, the TCSBC established two WHATSAPP groups– one for all the 'Tibetans in Vancouver' based on heritage and the

other for Tibetans who have paid membership dues for the year to the organization.

Tentatively at first, the virtual platforms quickly became normalized as communal space. Alongside public notifications and announcements from the community leadership, individuals recorded and posted Tibetan songs, positive quotes in English and Tibetan, videos of religious sermons and prayers as well as picture and inspirational video clips and speeches of the Dalai Lama. During this time, I attended community convened religious prayer meets and some of the weekly Wednesday *Lhakar* prayer meetings on ZOOM that are held in honor of the Dalai Lama since Wednesdays are considered the Dalai Lama's 'soul day' according to the Tibetan astrology. *'Lhakar'* has come to symbolize a cultural resistance day in the Tibetan world with many participating in songs, circle dances and wearing traditional dresses. In Toronto, the TCCC and various organizations conduct live webcasts via FACEBOOK providing updates on community events particularly centered on various types of pandemic-related service provision. With the ebb and flow of pandemic restrictions and its various waves, both the physical and virtual components of the field have been essential to its construction. Though the following methods are presented in distinct sections for clarity, they all are intertwined and unfolded organically across the duration of the study's timeline.

Interviews: Considering that ethnography is as much about conversation (and listening) as it is about observation (Forsey, 2010), interviews and informal exchanges with community members had a lasting impact on conceptualization of the data collection and consequently the study findings. The interviews for the study are broadly categorized into two sources– formal 'key informant' interviews and informal interviews. I describe the formal interviews as 'key informants' since the interviewees are current members of the TA, *kyidu* and other 'hybrid' forms. I communicated about the research via email or WHATSAPP and discussed the project, consent forms and interview set up in a more formalized manner. In total I conducted 50 such formal interviews. In addition, I also conducted 50 informal interviews of varying lengths with

community members regardless of their membership status in organizations, often in casual settings and on the spot– during community events, gatherings at friends' homes, cafes and other venues. These conversations tend to focus on broader diasporic experiences; the structure and role of Tibetan social helping; relationship, engagement, and perspectives on *Kyidu*(s) and other Tibetan organizations. Beyond these numbers, during the long process of writing this ethnography, innumerable interactions with community members as well as my own direct engagement in the activities of the TA have undoubtedly shaped the study.

Of the 50 formal key informant interviews, 22 were conducted in Vancouver and 28 in Toronto. Three of the interviews were conducted in person and the rest via ZOOM, SKYPE and WHATSAPP virtual platforms. Of these, 26 interviews are audio recordings while the others declined to be recorded. In general, initial contact was established via phone or WHATSAPP message where I introduced myself, provided a brief description of the study and left my contact info (email/phone/WHATSAPP). Once a participant expressed interest and agreed to be part of the study, documents including consent forms were sent via email along with confirmation of interview medium, date and time based on their preference. In Toronto, except for one individual, all key informants identified as current paid members of the Tibetan Cultural Association of Ontario (TCAO) and the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre (TCCC). The relationship between the two formally distinct but 'one organization' within the community is further discussed in chapter 5. Many of the interviewees are or had been executives or formal members of *kyidu* in Toronto and some were also involved in Tibetan political and educational non-profit organizations.

In Vancouver, all the interviewees identified as members of the TCSBC including a few ex-presidents of the organization and executive members. Some of the key informants had experiences and membership in *kyidu* in India and Nepal. One of the key informants in Vancouver was a member of a newly formed 'Tawang *kyidu*' a group exclusively formed by those who arrived in Vancouver BC through the Tibetan resettlement project (discussed in chapter 5). Requests to conduct interviews with other members in the *kyidu* were declined. The member explained that in previous discussions with the TCSBC executives, the group reached an understanding that they would keep a low profile. For *kyidu* members it was important that they "did not want to seem to be competing with the main organization". Except for four interviewees (two on WHATSAPP, and two on SKYPE), the majority opted for virtual ZOOM interviews.

Rather than written consent, many of the participants preferred to provide oral consent at the time of the interview and would also ask to detail the purpose of the study as they did not had the time to read the documents sent via email. Key informants differed in their preferences for confidentiality. Some agreed to have their names identified, others mentioned that they did not wish to be and a few stated that I should decide what would be most appropriate. In Vancouver, those I knew from the time of the resettlement project often stated they "(did) not need to see the papers", laughingly adding, "If I do not trust you, why would I do this?" Within this context, the research paperwork created a formalized air and dynamic that seemed to make some of the participants visibly uncomfortable.

The durations of the formal interviews are from one to three hours. These are often followed by conversations with participants on WHATSAPP to discuss any outstanding issues or concerns they may have had. During my stay in Toronto, I met some participants who were willing and able to be interviewed in person as well. While a framework of questionnaire was

developed that loosely formed the types of questions/topics relevant to the overall inquiry, I consulted the document as a refresher prior to, rather than doggedly sticking to the material during the interview process. Unless requested, I didn't provide the questionnaire ahead of time for it seemed to intimidate participants. This may likely be due to the text's perceived formality and often members would respond that they were not experts on the subject. Rather I found it more effective to a) emphasize the larger purpose of the study, b) key areas related to the interview, 3) reassure interviewees of my interest in their personal experiences and perspectives more than formalized 'knowledge and expertise' which has a learned connotation in Tibetan.

After the interview, I followed up with key informants via phone or WHATSAPP to provide any clarification to questions they may have had.

During the interview, rather than strictly confining to specific research questions, echoing Forsey's (2010) spirit of "ethnographic imagery" I also probed into participants' biographies and cultural influences that might provide links between their past and current interests, shaping their community experiences and perceptions. While Forsey (2010) makes a case for interviewing and informal discussion as helpful in picking up what participant observation may not, from the point of view of the study, being able to have these immersive experiences helped mitigate the limits of accessibility to the general field particularly due to the pandemic. The formal interviews were translated and transcribed from Tibetan into English and manually coded first by creating domains and then conducting thematic analysis. Additionally selected interviews were also imported into NVivo for more detailed coding. These two processes helped refine and develop more advanced themes for further analysis.

Participant Observation: Throughout this study, I have attended various community events including community meetings in both Vancouver and Toronto and miscellaneous informal gatherings both online and in person. I was not, however, able to attend *kyidu* gettogethers. The reasons my requests were declined were likely a) the enclosed nature of membership, b) *kyidu* meetings are held at various members' homes and participants did not feel comfortable revealing their participation in the study, and c) meetings were not being convened in-person due to the pandemic and most interaction occurred on *kyidu* group chats on WHATSAPP and TELEGRAM. In terms of the TAs, after the initial lull, small scale in-person gatherings of community members gradually resumed. Outdoor gatherings were organized for significant events such as the TCSBC election for new executive members, the highly polarizing election for the next *sikyong* of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and the two representatives for the Tibetan 'parliament-in-exile' from North America. I continued to participate and follow these virtual and 'live' Facebook events, noting my observations and reflection of the events. In 2022 community 'indoor' and in-person events resumed though masks were still worn indoors.

Though initially concerned about access to the field and its impact on participant observation since I planned on doing a traditional ethnography, one of the interesting things that the pandemic revealed was the complex yet consistent signs of cultural representation and copresence in the virtual world. My own experiences resonate with Hine's (2015) description of how the online ethnographic field can evoke and create 'co-presence' without it being tangibly tied or limited to physical presence. Over time, certain themes and patterns emerged about what the participants wanted to convey through the portrayal of their virtual 'place' and selves both overtly and subconsciously– be it wearing traditional dresses for events and when addressing the

audience, pictures of the Dalai Lama, an altar showcasing a pantheon of Tibetan Gods, Buddhas in the background, sutras, and books. Older interviewees tend to be more self-conscious on screen, though they soon seemed to get used to it during the flow of the interview.

Personal tragedies, stories of communal mishaps and controversies often lack specificity and are vaguely narrated. Attempts to probe further leads to memory lapses '*dren ghyi minduk*' or signs of discomfort to elaborate on the subject. Initially, I attempted to chase clarifications until repetitions of the pattern made it clear that there are intentional strategies given the modest size of the communities. The tension seemed to be between an ingrained need for selfpreservation against getting involved in *'rnyog dra'* (conflict/trouble) and the need to speak out about the internal hardships of a 'model refugee' community– deserving, grateful and hardworking, even during the times of a global pandemic. In many ways, insights into these pull and push dynamics are revealed by virtue of being a part of the field long before the study began. Thus, prior connectivity helped understand what Spradley (1979) refers to as the larger cultural meaning systems encoded in symbols that field observations and immersion seek to explore.

Documents Analysis: "Texts are active not passive interpretations" and as "socially organized practices of their production and reception' they can be assessed as "independent methodological and situationally embedded creations" (Wolff, p.285, 2004). The 'rhetorical character' (Gusfield, 1976) of documents are often forms of 'institutional display' (Goffman, 1961) and 'bureaucratic propaganda' to "engender the appearance of rationality and efficiency in the eyes of relevant organizational environment" (Altheide and Johnson, 1980). Cohering with the above understandings of the role and importance of documents in everyday life, I have reviewed and included publicly available, relevant organizational documents to further understand and contextualize the discursive nature and role of Tibetan social help organizations.

Towards that end, traditional and web-based news articles, public websites, and webpages of organizations on social media forums such as FACEBOOK and organizational publications, related materials were accessed. As previously discussed, due to privacy and confidentiality issues, access to *kyidu* meetings were declined while I attended the TA meetings and events in both Vancouver and Toronto.

Field Notes: As the initial authored representation of social life (Atkinson, 2001) field notes have been critical to the entire process of conducting and writing about the study. While taking stock of the various texts written on fieldnotes (for example Madden et al., 2020; Emerson, 2019; Atkinson, 2007), two interlinked but distinct suggestions of approaching fieldnotes were particularly helpful. Anderson's (2010) point of view about fieldwork, not simply as a way to take stock of the setting, but to record it in a way that makes myself, the observer, visible in the research process helped with establishing both the writing style and the approach to fieldwork I took during the study. Additionally, Corwin and Clemens (2020) practical tips, based on Gibb (2007) to assemble and use field note as a source for coding specific items such as acts, behaviors, events, activities, strategies, practices, meanings, participation, relationship or interactions, conditions or constraints, consequences, setting and reflection of one's own role in the research process– was helpful especially during the data analysis process. Naturally, I adapted the above based on the field situation and my own research context. For example, two distinct types of field notes were used – vlogs and written notes. During fieldwork, I found that lengthier notetaking felt intrusive and distracted attention from the research participant/context and therefore I chose to use short forms or key words. After the completion of the meeting/event, I video-recorded my impression in a stream of consciousness styled, 'unscripted' vlog rather than voice recording so that I could later recapture the event more vividly followed by a written reflective analysis. Combined, these two styles and processes helped capture the spontaneity of

the ‘unscripted’ reaction immediately after fieldwork as well as provide the time afterward to reflect and write in a more analytical manner since writing as a process automatically censors and refines thoughts.

Thematic Analysis:

Multiple readings and familiarization of material from data sources helped with indexing and coding data that were initially completed on flip charts. Subsequently, I also developed domains as the first and most important unit of analysis in ethnographic research (Spradley, 1979) to further develop follow up questions to probe and focus on issues, ideas, or thematic patterns with informants. Here I define domain based on Spradley’s (1979) classic conceptualization as “any symbolic category that includes other categories (where) all the members of a domain share at least one feature of meaning and the way to unearth it is to find similarities that exist among folk terms” (p. 100-102). Domains have a cover term, two or more included terms and “are linked by semantic relations i.e., the domain has internal structure (Borgatti, 1998). With development of key domains and further refinement of areas of particular interest and questions, I revisited them in subsequent interviews and continued to add further questions or areas to probe as themes emerged. Selected interviews were then imported to NVIVO qualitative analysis software for coding. The codes were later used to identify and rearrange larger themes and patterns that were further triangulated with follow up questions and communication with key informants. The findings have subsequently been synthesized and divided into distinct themes in the chapters. A defining part of this ethnography is that I continue to be immersed ‘in’ the field long after the data collection has been completed which consciously and subconsciously impacts its writing.

Notes on Language, Translation & Interpretation:

The alterity of the indigenous names when discussing the field sites evoke a familiar pattern in that the names of Tibetan places in Tibet too have seen imposition of newer Chinese versions of names in their place that are now standardized in official documents and even in academic discourse (see Appendix 5, Kolås and Thowsen, 2011). Since language conveys "the epistemological conceptions of relationship to land that are embedded in its enunciation" (p. 24, Couture, 2019), this insurgency is neither accidental nor purely utilitarian but to consolidate nation-state enterprise at the expense of native culture, identity, and language. Fanon (1963) writes that complicating and obliterating the use of native languages from the landscape and psyche is a familiar colonial tactic to subjugate the other's culture and therefore using language as a decolonial tool cannot be underemphasized.

Countering these structural onslaughts, my 'act of refusal' (McGranahan, 2016) is to intentionally identify the traditional Tibetan names of places and terms as a decolonial strategy. Anglicized transliterations are provided to assist with pronunciation for readers unfamiliar with Tibetan script. Keeping these as they are, serves as an ethical act and an act of preserving their continuity. They are (still) the names which study participants associate with and refer to as 'home' which have emotional, cultural, and political significance. Therefore, during the study, all interactions including participant interviews were conducted in Tibetan except in the case of five participants who preferred English. Frequent loan words from English, Hindi and Nepali especially for names of objects and 'modern' terms were often used. Code switching is a natural part of a transient Tibetan diasporic life and experiences of having lived 'elsewhere'. Being a part of this terrain, I did not face communication barriers. Where literal translations were needed, I consulted a Tibetan language researcher for proofreading.

Quality Assurance & Trustworthiness of Data

More than any one specific research tool, prolonged theoretical and practical 'field immersion' be it in the guise of work and lived experiences, ethnic membership in the larger Canadian Tibetan community and formal fieldwork since 2020, have helped shape the study. Relatedly, due to existing affiliations, I have been able to access a diverse network of formal and informal participants in the two field sites without facing barriers to entry into the two communities though (naturally) there are degrees of openness and accessibility towards research amongst members.

The participants (*kyidu* members, general Tibetan community members) that contributed to the study come from diverse walks of life, age, and gender– they are monastics, students, health care workers, home makers, retirees, community leaders, volunteers, and erstwhile CTA public servants. This diversity helps provide an automatic cross check on information shared though I also conducted frequent member checks and triangulation to review and probe participants about certain events or situations for a more holistic understanding. In the case of differences of opinions and understandings, these perspectives were explored further and often from such processes, newer insights and themes emerged. As such the purpose of the 'member checks' was not to find the 'truth' but interpretations of it amongst those involved and to ensure that to the extent possible, diverse opinions were validated and represented.

To maintain transparency and dependability, an audit trail has been kept for all data including interview records in original Tibetan documents and English transcript copies where applicable. Given the nuances of 'insider' ethnography, these are steps I have taken to ensure neutrality. Here the term connotes an ability to critically engage and identify my own biases and remain self-aware as a researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) rather than profess complete

objectivity or an apolitical stance. The study coheres that group behaviors and cultures are context-bound and even within a supposedly homogenous group many intra-group differences exist conflicting with the idea of a single unified culture. Nonetheless, there is also an underlying aspiration for group studies to be able to highlight insights into certain aspects of a culture or group behavioral patterns. For these can comparatively enhance understandings of other (especially similar) cultures thus helping transfer and build on existing knowledge. Similarly, a latent hope within this study is that through its inquiry into diasporic Tibetan social organizations and notions of social helping, the findings may be of value to not only Tibetans but other culturally similar Himalayan groups where related traditions of *kyidu* serve a valuable social function in people's lives.

Ethics:

The ethics approval and framework for the study was reviewed by the University of British Columbia's University Research Ethics Board (REB). The study was granted approval by the REB following which fieldwork was conducted. Whilst being an essential component and guideline, institutional 'bureaucratic' ethics is only the starting point and what unfolded subsequently as ethics has been inseparable from the matter of context, 'culture' and safety, or as Hine (2015) terms it 'ethical sensitivity'. As a researcher, 'ethical sensitivity' guided my general approach to one of careful deliberation and to err on the side of safety when confronted with uncertainties.

Another helpful way to consolidate the ethics of conducting research has been Smith's (2000) pointers about 'intentionality, benefits and ownership' of research. Diasporic Tibetans have long been subjects of research, leading to mostly favorable but also critical perceptions of

various aspects of our culture and history. Therefore, navigating the community in the role of 'insider' researcher is a sensitive process for one understands beyond conceptual extrapolation, the effects of living through and with such projections. Further, inhabiting the exilic fishbowl seems to have led to a degree of research fatigue and wariness amongst community members about researchers' intentionality as well as communal consequences of participating in such initiatives. As such, the privilege of access to community networks and members comes with certain moral responsibilities and expectations that are stronger for a Tibetan researcher. Literally and metaphorically, in essence one can never exit the field.

Ethical dilemmas regarding confidentiality and privacy of conducting research in smaller communities have been extensively explored and not to regurgitate the literature here, I cohere with such concerns. As it is not possible to determine with any certainty the consequences of how the work will eventually land, I have not published the real names or identifying information of participants in the study even though many of them gave permission for full disclosure. I am also aware that many who participated in the research have differing motivations regarding their engagement in the study. For example, some have seen it as a medium through which they can provide 'feedback' to the leadership and ongoing organizational dynamics in the community. Others have viewed the study as a platform to critique or clear their name(s) in communal strife and controversies. Some have chosen to voice 'the good and the bad' within the Central Tibetan Administration and societal trends in the larger Tibetan diaspora. Differential motivations aside, all participants took part in this research as it is undertaken by 'a fellow Tibetan' and may be beneficial to the community or even of use to the 'Tibetan government/administration' (CTA) in the development of its future policies.

My natural alignment with these sentiments aside, I have unequivocally clarified that the research is part of my PhD program, an individual initiative and not in collaboration with the CTA nor does the study have any formal affiliations or sponsorship from the administration. To reiterate, the overall goal of the study in exploring Tibetan diasporic social helping practices and organizations is to explore a) how the findings may enhance our understanding of the function and role of social helping in diaspora and b) how antecedents and contemporary contexts of social organizing evolve into hybrid systems of social help in diaspora. I explicitly outlined the rationale and objectives of the study to clarify its terms as an ethical obligation towards study participants. At the same time, considering it is the informants' fundamental ties to the community that binds them to this research has inadvertently shaped what I choose to write about and when silence seems more prudent. Guided by the larger ethical framework, the study explores group ability to define, represent and advocate what social help means within their milieu and how they organize in ways that makes meaningful sense for them. This exploration will hopefully paves the way for engagement in co-construction and knowledge development of Tibetan 'social work' that can be of benefit for the larger community.

Limitations:

In undertaking the study, one of the largest hurdles psychologically and pragmatically has been the tightening of restrictions during the pandemic including curtailment of research activities which affected access to field sites, scope of field observations and research timeline. While this study covers a range of organizations and member perspectives within the field sites, it is nonetheless limited to the field sites of Vancouver and Toronto and do not cover other provinces in Canada where there are Tibetan communities. Moreover, considering the transnational nature of diaspora, comparisons between the Tibetan *kyidu* in Toronto and New York (where the largest number of Tibetans live in

North America) or even *kyidu* belonging to other Himalayan groups in New York would add greater dimension and depth to understanding their form(s) and evolution today. However, due to time and resource constraints such comparative excursions have not been undertaken. These limitations in turn prevent any claims to macro theorizing regarding the *kyidu* social help system of the Himalayas. Therefore, the present work is but an initial primer updating its descriptive studies in the past and more pertinently herald *kyidu's* settlement in Canada.

An additional note is also called for in terms of my conditioning as a Tibetan researching one's own community which can lead to being too near the 'object' of study leading to cultural blind spots affecting the overall quality of the study. Identifying as a community member and a volunteer, while being a professional social worker and conducting graduate research work, it has been challenging to maintain professional boundaries between these roles. For example, few of the community members participating in the study have requested supportive or resource counseling related to their personal lives prior to or after an interview. As a social work researcher, I have viewed these instances as positive transactions and self-advocacy on their part. In fact, it may well be that due to past volunteer work within the Vancouver Tibetan community, many of the participants consented to participate out of a sense of obligation and good will. Such interactions are not without power inequalities and do impact research processes and findings. Mindful of these dynamics, I have attempted to engage with the myriad demands of the changing roles to the best of my capacity. Ultimately however, what is contained in these pages are socially bounded, time and context dependent 'truths' that do not claim or aspire to an objectivity that is detached from the larger human habitus.

Chapter Five

Imagining Relatedness: Kinship as Diaspora

In chapter one, I discussed how diaspora as a field of study focuses on various analytical points and changing aspects of the construct today but what remains constant is its connotation of a literal and emotional sense of belonging elsewhere. Where previously the focus has been on conceptualizing this alterity through identity formation, the approach here is to show how identity in turn intersects with kinship's social helping notions, organizing and real-life practices thus shaping each other's trajectories.

Embedded within the dynamic conditions of diasporic hybridity, the Tibetan 'case' centers around notions of kinship which in this study, for analytical purposes are grouped into three thematic domains. Firstly, the kinship-organizing notions of a Tibetan unity grounded in 'national' identity cultivation based on the 'core of sacred things' (discussed below) in exile. Secondly, notions of kinship organizing whose roots predate the formation of exilic life and are directly traced to the closed space of the homeland which time, memory and loss have rendered sacred and spiritual. To be clear, homeland as a sacred space has long been a 'nationalist' discourse and therefore not simply a diasporic 'creation' but here I filter it through the fluidity of traditional, cultural relations with land and the motifs of loss and distance which renders associations with 'space as politically negotiated' (Massey, 2005). In the Tibetan context, narratives of homeland's special-*ness* and sanctity are especially a central theme in collective remembrance and acts of reconstituting the site in exile. Thirdly, closely aligned in tenet to regional-based kinship organizing notions but born on diasporic shores is a subtype of localized kinship formation that is based on specificities of exilic communities. Such affiliations in exile

have their own kindred network, language and cultural references and organize social helping activities as well.

Like Ants Across the World:

> When the iron bird flies and horses run on wheels the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the face of the world… (Attributed to the 10th century Indian master Padmasambhava).

Those who grew up in the Tibetan diasporic communities know that myths and tales foreshadowing the loss of homeland are part of communal lore, their sway keenly felt at the tenuous intersection between tradition's lengthy roots and the 'nowhere' predicament of exile. Such 'end of the(ir) world' myths also exist in indigenous cultures too (see Robertson, 2012) as a sensemaking mechanism for "the truth of myth is essentially tied to a community's history" (Kapstein, p.143, 2000). In this case, the above prophecy is attributed to the legendary Buddhist tantric master Padmasambhava who is believed to have visited Tibet during the time of king Trisong Detsen's (*Khri Srong de'u btsan's*) (r. 755/6-797) reign (Tucci, 1955; Cantwell & Mayer, 2013).

The textual source of the material is considered a 'terma' (*gter ma*) a genre of Tibetan revelatory treasure texts of which Padmasambhava is regarded a patron saint (Kapstein, 2000; 2022). Despite the saying's popularity however, Van Schaik (2007) states that the material's historical origins 'cannot be reliably traced'. The dubious nature of its veracity aside, the text's allure persists amongst Tibetans likely because as Shakya (1999) notes, it predicts the inevitable coming of the Tibetan diaspora. For the elderly community volunteer in Toronto who quoted this text during our interview with a philosophical flourish, Tibetan displacement was destined, in our *'las'* and therefore inevitable.

To illustrate–

On a late Sunday afternoon, I met *pala* at '*Ghangjong Choedenling'*– in English known as the 'Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre' (TCCC) where he was circumambulating the massive Mani prayer wheel installed near the entrance of the main building. Greeting each other in Tibetan, we struck up a conversation. I mentioned that I was in Toronto studying the Tibetan social organizations and asked if he would share his thoughts about the TCCC. He agreed on condition of anonymity. Carrying on our conversation, I addressed him simply as '*pala*' (father, also used generically to address elderly men). Like many Tibetans of his generation, *pala* did not know his exact age except that he was in his 'seventies'. As a young man, in 1965, he had fled his hometown in the Kham region to Nepal where he lived in Kathmandu running a Tibetan antique business for almost 30 years. After his daughters married and moved to Ontario in the mid 2000s, he too immigrated to Canada on the family sponsorship program. Reflecting on his escape from Tibet and the Chinese takeover of the region, *pala* knowingly stated–

> There is nothing we could have done. You know Guru Rinpoche predicted a long time ago that we will be driven out of Tibet like ants when the iron bird flies so it is in our destiny (*las)*.

Thematically, the role of destiny, karmic fate ('*las*') has previously been the focus of analysis in aspects of Tibetan society (see Hussain, D., & Bhushan, B. (2011) or Mills (2015) with qualities such as apathy and forbearance attesting to complacency and stoicism. The characteristics aside, here I want to point out how the play on the text's 'otherworldly' source and antiquity brings out diaspora's global motif – the haloed native land nestled in a timeless past. Viewed from the point of exilic subalternity the quote's popularity seems only natural. That

Padmasambhava or ‘guru rinpoche’ is undeniably Tibetanized through the ages also brings forth another element of interest – Clifford’s observations (2013; 2007) of the complicated lines between indigeneity and diaspora, which is thematically an important aspect in notions of diasporic kinship formation. Additionally, the prophecy’s materialization and belief in a collective Tibetan fate provides an inlet into group consciousness where racial and ethnic mutuality conjoins one’s identity as tied to kindred others through centuries of genealogical, regional, and cultural mixing amongst those inhabiting the Tibetan plateau. Fatefully tied by mutuality of experiences, trajectories and networks, diasporas are a form of group kinship.

Kinship as biologically and socially constructed through interpretations of ‘substance and code’ is grounded in both interpersonal kinship relations that can be 'consanguineal or affinal', as well as group arrangements of descent” (Carsten, p.2, 2000). Within the context of the study, ‘group arrangements of descent’ is of relevance since we are speaking of ‘Tibetan’ as a category though Carsten’s (2000) point about the fluidity between the biological and the social is also noteworthy if one examines traditional understandings of group genealogy as discussed in the subsequent section. For Tibetans, diasporic kinship began with the historical incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1951 (Sperling, 2004) and the development of an exilic community.

Shakabpa (1967) recounts that on April 5th, 1959, the Dalai Lama crossed the border into India after which preparations for a Tibetan government-in-exile was initiated with many of the personnel from the traditional cabinet subsequently leading key offices within it. Officially, the Tibetan Government-in- Exile (TGIE) known formally in English as the Central Tibetan administration (CTA) was subsequently established in Dharamsala, India (Anand, 2003). The initial years of the Tibetan diaspora including early accounts of foreign aid and charitable

organizations' involvement can be found in Shakabpa's (1967) historical account. While sharing similarities with each other, Tibetan societies in Tibet and in diaspora are increasingly distinct from each other largely due to their locations within the nation states of China, India, Nepal and Bhutan. Additionally, the initial sites have expanded and today the 'field' I study are formed of Tibetan refugee and immigrant settlers holding Canadian citizenships or permanent residency permits on indigenous people's land. A growing number are also undocumented migrants for around the radius of Parkdale neighbourhood's 'Little Tibet', in recent years an underbelly of rejected Tibetan asylum claimants awaiting either their appeal date from the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) or resigned to their 'undocumented' status continue to exist quietly.

Alongside these harsher immigrant realities, unperturbed by the irony of it all, our small communal functions contain a familiar, grand motif. They commence with the 'anthem of the great nation of Tibet' (*bhod rgyal khab chenpo' rgyal rlu*) and with each passing year the speeches gather lengthier epithets befitting the deified stature of the Dalai Lama, ending with an aspirational wish that 'the truth of Tibet may (one day) be revealed'. Reflecting on the grandiose performativity of our inner world against the puny reality of everyday lives lived as racialized immigrants, metaphorically, one is more inclined towards examining the chasm separating the axial points of the diasporic bridge than the interstitial potential of its hybridity.

For Tibetans, the origin stories of common ancestry connoting kindred 'blood' (substance) and culture (as code) are rooted in classical understandings of group kinship, while their diasporic-ness today allow us to see how its sociopolitical location within diverse nations impact kinship imaginings and practices. Where group kinship imaginings may be steeped in a multitude of notions and formations, its 'real life' test is the ability to carry out espoused views through practices of relatedness. Hence, beyond abstraction of 'kinship as culture' (Sahlins,

2013) which it may well be, the empirical barometer through which one can assay group kinship and its importance in social life is through examining the culture of 'help', its organizing and practices. In doing so this study recognizes the dialogical relationship between social helping and kinship, how they are in turn shaped by each other's notions, organizing and practices. Subsequently, as much as the ethnography speaks of the ways in which kinship permeates social helping notions, organizing and practices, it equally reflects how social helping inevitably impact shape kinship affiliations and formations.

In Toronto, the largest site of Tibetans in Canada (Bentz, 2022), there has been a mushrooming of Tibetan social organizations since the early 2000s, the overwhelming majority of which is aimed toward 'cultural preservation'. Even in Vancouver, the site of a much more modest Tibetan population, there is the Tawang *kyidu* formed by Tibetans from the Tawang region in present day Arunachal Pradesh when they came to the lower mainland as part of the federal resettlement initiative which I discussed in previous chapters. Consequently, culture as a critical linkage in Tibetan diasporic kinship configurations today and its conveyance and performance are largely (and necessarily) selective acts, rooted in ties of Tibetan nativity to combat diasporic limbo. That which is defined and maintained as Tibetan culture are therefore notions and practices whose essence(s) and locations are attributed to Tibetan indigeneity though they too have traveled across generational time and space.

Here to recap briefly, my initial research agenda was to study the types of community initiatives and social helping organizations within, positing that the ethnography would/should reveal lacks regarding aspects of service provision as an underlying rationale with the hope that the journey would be a step towards theorizing Tibetan Social Work. Yet over the course of the research in the field sites, speaking to community members about their involvement in groups

and/or examining the types of practices deemed 'social help', overwhelmingly the 'data' pointed to kinship's sense of relationality/mutuality (Sahlins, 2013; Carsten 2000) as pivotal to how and why Tibetans organize and engage in communal social helping.

From the very outset, when asked why they engage in group organizing and social help activities, community members spoke of these activities as inherent to their identity as "people of resistance" (*Nga mtso thabs rtsod mi rig red* or *bhod pa chik yinpe ngos nes*). 'Diasporic Tibetan' as both 'substance and code' of kinship cements the myriad cultural 'ties of mutuality' which grounds social helping notions, organizing and practices in the field. Therefore, focusing on exploring how articulations of kinship 'imaginings and practices' (Sahlins, 2013) impact social help notions, organizing and practices in the Tibetan diasporic communities in Canada became central to the ethnographic task.

Assaying Kinship Ties of 'Tibetan' Mutuality in Exile:

Focusing on diaspora as kinship, its organizing unit for membership is the identity category 'Tibetan'. As an identity 'Tibetan' is so naturalized and seen as 'self-evident' that it is as if Schneider (1984) is describing the same when he writes about kinship as a "compelling set of ideas for the doctrines seem self-evident, as well they should if they are essentially our own cultural conceptions' (p.3). Underlining Tibetan 'relatedness' – defined as "the ethnographic particularities of being related in a specific cultural context" (p. 4, Cartsen, 2000) are the collective narratives of loss of homeland, Tibetan culture and religion, the upheaval of exile and the development of the Tibetan diaspora under the 'presence' (Tibetan *Kundun*') of the Dalai Lama's leadership.

Kauffmann (2018) posits that political and religious 'survival strategies' that appeal to a diverse group of non-Tibetan supporters and organizations led to a larger global material and moral support for Tibetans that endures to this day. Be it communal conceptualizations and activities of social helping as well as existing kin structures, they are all embedded in the above understandings of kinship(s) which simultaneously derive authority from tradition and the evolving configurations of belonging in a diasporic space. Borrowing Sahlin's (2013) conceptualization of kinship as 'ties of mutuality' here I situate understandings of Tibetan diasporic kinship through the purview of the larger kinship studies that have helped provide an analytical axis to conceptualize and frame the construct within the study. Pragmatically it is neither possible nor useful to provide an exhaustive account of kinship's long trajectory within social sciences. Instead, I focus on key theoretical standpoints that shaped its conceptual understanding, its deployment and (re)imaginings. While kinship within Tibetan studies has been helpful as a vantage point for the 'state-of-the- field', in terms of theorizing, it has its own limitations as discussed below.

With Tibetan society classically being the domain of anthropological interest, several studies within it reflect the disciplinary interest in kinship as a construct. Befitting the era of their structuralist explorations, kinship within these studies reflect the larger fascination with classification and categorization of its 'substance and code' (Carsten, 2000). For example, see Levine (1988;1987) on village kinship structure, Goldstein (1971; 1978; 1987) on polyandry and kin relations; Aziz (1978) on Tibetan social cohesion in Nepal; Prince Peter of Greece's (1955) 'field' understandings on adelphic polyandry in Tibet and Benedict (1942) on kinship terminology; Cuppers (1989) on Tibetan-Newari kinship lexicon. Even as macro shifts in kinship theorizing occurred elsewhere, works on Tibetan kinship continue to focus on family

individuation theses (see Bao, 1992; Chenakstang 2013). Collectively, these studies help provide a vantage point to how traditional understandings of kinship within the context of Tibetans are conceptualized and forms a baseline for newer extrapolations to develop. More recently, post structural perspectives on historical writings on Tibetan kinship by Bingaman et al. (2021) and Diemberger (2021) have been helpful although its domains are rooted within Tibet and religious history in the case of the latter. While religious-based groups are outside the scope of this study, Diemberger's (2021) work exploring Tibetan spiritual kinship presents an important aspect particularly in the case of existing monastic groups and the guru-disciple relationship that challenges kinship's dominant tethering to familial norms and boundaries.

Of relevance to Tibetan social organizing is Miller's (1956) formative accounts of *kyidu* as mutual self-help groups since the linkages I document between kinship and social helping 'organizationally' manifest through *kyidu*. At the same time, the article on *kyidu* was written at a time when Tibetans had recently fled to their initial diasporic site in India. Since then I am not aware of other studies that discuss the state of *kyidu* in Tibetan diaspora though there is a recent descriptive article on the subject (Tsondrue, 2011) based in the TAR. Culturally, the nearest proximal study on contemporary kinship organizing that we have are studies of *kyidu* in the United States of Himalayan groups such as Sherpa (Pasang Yangjee Sherpa, 2019) and Mustang (Craig, 2020). Both these works explore how *kyidu* evolve over the course of space and time. For example, Pasang Yangjee Sherpa (2019), in her article on Sherpa *kyidus* based in the United States discusses how larger *kyidu* are often registered as non-profit organizations and are 'in effect community organizations intended to support community members' (p.21). These studies show that within the context of the globalized world it is not so much a question but a fact that 'kinship travels' (Craig, 2020) but how kinship travels, (re)forms and organizes in the

Tibetan diaspora especially given its outward migration trend to the 'west' especially since the 1990s have thus far not been studied. As such, understandings of Tibetan kinship seem to be stuck in a past resembling the narrative equivalent of 'once-upon-a time.'

Nearer to the cultural Tibet, Craig's (2020) part ethnographic, part fictionalized account of the Mustang Himalayan community in present-day Nepal examines the group's circular 'khora' of migration between New York and home. In examining the evolving 'ends of kinship' Craig (2020) study how 'kinship travels' clarifying that 'ends' here connote the expanding trajectory of kinship rather than its finish. Yet one cannot help but wonder how the very choice of word belies a kind of an end to what was, the fragility within its double meaning or in Derridean deconstruction, 'the natural tension' within the text. Be that as it may, Craig's (2020) theorization, grounded in localized language and philosophical positioning is a move beyond the seasoned ethnographer's inclusion of the 'non-western' field to imagining the possibility(s) of what transformative theorizing can be. It is a step towards mitigating what Bhabha (1994) laments as the limits of critical theory (and of its proponents) whose inability to transgress western institutional bias leads to the confinement of 'non-western' as simply 'an alternative'. In the case of the Tibetan diasporic communities in Toronto and Vancouver, it is interesting to see how diasporic sojourns impact kinship formations, its articulations, and 'ends' (Craig, 2020). As Carsten (2020) writes the "capacity to imagine or settle in new worlds relies not on aberrant or marginal qualities of kinship, but on some of its most fundamental and intrinsic aspects" (p.321). Logically therefore, I explore the sources of Tibetan 'kinship's imaginings' (Sahlins, 2013), its underlying narratives in the two communities and relationally their 'dimensions of affinity' (Kramer, 2011) that impact notions of social help organizing.

The Imagined Ties of Tibetan Mutuality in Diaspora:

Central to operationalizing group kinship notions and formations is the construction of Tibetan as an identity category. To be clear, the focus here is not on dissecting Tibetan ethnicity per se but to show how identity and kinship are inherently tied to social helping as a way of practicing relatedness. Social helping therefore is a critical component of the kinship 'matter'. If we examine the dimensions of affinity within the category Tibetan, there is the 'national' Tibetan affiliation construed as a melding of cultural and religious affinities that have existed across the Tibetan plateau over centuries (Yeh, 2020) and the result of nationalist reimagining and push within exilic discourse tied to sovereign articulations of the erstwhile Tibetan government in exile (present day CTA) and its institutional system.

In Canada, this larger 'national' identity is closely represented in the construction of the 'Tibetan cultural organization' referred in official communications of the Office of Tibet as the 'Tibetan Associations' (TA). The TA is aptly titled '*bhod rig chithun tsogpa*' (literal translation- Tibetan United Association). The 'other' is the ethnic 'Tibetan' rooted in individual and familial place-based affiliations resulting in the specificity of *kyidu* since their membership is based on a locality or a region rather than the 'national' Tibetan identity. Both these social organizations exist as forms of Tibetan social organizing in the diasporic communities in Canada (as well as the United States and Europe) and are the focus of the study. Past scholarship has conceptually dwelt on the ambiguity of 'Tibetan' as an identity category. Here my task is to explore the ways in which field encounters present empirical insight into how being 'Tibetan' is operationalized within and through kinship based social help organizing in contemporary Tibetan diasporic society.

Ties of National Imaginings:

> Tenzin: (*Bhodpa chik yinpe chah ne*) 'Being a Tibetan raised' and educated in exile, I don't believe we need *kyidu*, I don't understand why we need these separate groups. The more *kyidu* we create in our community, the more divisions we have. What is the need for a *kyidu*? It is like today one individual creates a *kyidu*, tomorrow another one will want to create one too. We already have a Tibetan organization (*bhodpa tsogpa*) so there is no need for other groups… Are you studying *kyidu*? I thought it was about the *tsogpa*.
>
> Me: I am examining both…why do you think people form *kyidu*?
>
> Tenzin: Because some people want to use it to further their own regional agenda, and many are like sheep and follow them blindly. I even tell other Tibetans, we have an administration (*ngatso diktsug chik yo reh*) there is one Tibetan organization here, so why is there a need for other groups? We are so petty and keep fighting amongst ourselves based on provincial identities when many Tibetans in Tibet are suffering.

After four attempts, trying to set a time and date for the interview, during the lockdown, Tenzin and I were finally meeting on ZOOM in April 2020. Beyond the framed portrait of a young Dalai Lama hanging behind his tanned couch, much of his home remain shrouded from the camera. This was my first 'meeting' with him although we had several communications via text message regarding the study. Tenzin's name came up through one of my field informants in Toronto who mentioned I should interview him about social organizations in the area as he is "very active in the community" over the years.

When I initially reached out to Tenzin around the time the COVID-19 pandemic rumblings were starting, we had planned an in-person meeting in Toronto. He had readily agreed

to participate with the caveat that I would not use his real name, merely identifying him as 'Tenzin' - arguably the most common Tibetan name in the diaspora, symbolic of the current Dalai Lama's shortened name (Tenzin Gyatso).

Tenzin's apparent disapproval of *kyidu* is not surprising. In interviews with leaders and community members of the TAs in Toronto and Vancouver, it is not uncommon to come across sentiments denouncing regional attachments in favour of a common Tibetan kinship. This universality projected by the TA as the organization for 'all Tibetans' is reflected in its official status as *'Bhodrig Chithun Tsogpa' (bhod rig spyi mthun tshogspa)*, literal translation- United Tibetan Association. As a TA community volunteer in Toronto proudly declared, "When people ask where I'm from, I say I'm from Tibet ('*Bhod*'). Who cares whether you are Khampa, Amdo or U-Tsang, it does not matter. We are all refugees here". Others assert this perspective through their identification and membership in the TA rather than provincial groups, "I am a member of the Tibetan community organization but decline to be part of any other *kyidu tsogpa*". The idea that specificities do not matter except for 'being Tibetan' is in essence similar to Tenzin's stance that there is no need for other group organizing when there exists a common Tibetan organization. Within the community, such sentiments are not new or surprising, but does it really *not* matter?

If we examine intra-group experiences and the existing political system and structure of the CTA, the answer is understandably much more convoluted, for as in all narratives it depends on who you ask. The perspectives of the *kyidu* members later on will underline this narrative truth. For now, returning to Tenzin, his membership in the TA and his participation in its various activities is based on (as he alludes to) his exilic upbringing through which he conceptualizes what 'being Tibetan' means to him. To him a unified Tibetan organization in the locality is all

one needs and he 'does not understand' why there exists 'all these *kyidus*'. While I will further analyze his opposition to *kyidu* formation in the subsequent section, here I will illustrate how

'being Tibetan' is key to understanding how the national Tibetan identity serves as a kinship tie of mutuality binding all within the group. To extrapolate, below is a synthesis some of the key ideas espoused in both historical and contemporary conceptualizations of the identity category 'Tibetan' which in turn directly impacts notions of kinship in diaspora.

Based on analysis of classical Tibetan sources such as *sBa bzhed*, *Mani bKa' bum* whose origins date to the 8th and 12th centuries (Gyatso, 1987) and from documents discovered in the Dunhuang cave manuscripts (see Dalton, & Van Schaik, 2006), there exists a significant number of scholarly works that shed light on early Tibet. For example, Kapstein (2006), Richardson's collected writings (1998), Van Schaik (2011), Stein (1972) and Schaeffer et al (2013) all depict various aspects of the socio-political life of 'Tibetans'. Collectively the writings trace the various phases of the plateau's development, from its formative origins as clans and tribes in the region to the latter day Yarlung empire and the Buddhist theocracies until the communist takeover of the region in the late 1940s. Shneiderman, (2006) points out that the Tibet and Tibetan in these writings often conflate race, ethnicity and nationality. I view the conflation as reflective of the conceptual fluidity of the terms- 'rig' and 'gyud' in (literal and oral) Tibetan, depicting the incommensurable task of translating native concepts wholly into western categories. Therefore, the 'Tibetan' encapsulated in the scholarship defies structural fixity and by necessity leans into poststructural indeterminism of its very existence while being 'present' all throughout.

The complexity of the term Tibetan can be gleaned from Dreyfus's (2005) attempts to untangle its web. He points out a truism that while 'full-fledged nationalism' did not exist prior

to the 1950s, a sense of collective identity- a 'Hobsbawm type of 'proto-nationalism' existed amongst Tibetans since the 13th or 14th century as depicted in early Tibetan works which made it possible for them to later organize as a group and transition with ease into "nationalist modernity". Dreyfus's (2005) reference to this notion of 'Tibetan' coalesces with diasporic understandings of 'greater Tibet' (*bhod chenpo*) and the existence of a historical, sociocultural and religious entity beyond the boundaries of the present-day Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), carved in 1965 by the PRC. Discursively, 'Tibet' is present in both political (TAR) and ethnographic (TAR and Tibetan cultural areas) dimensions. Shneiderman (2006) recommends distinguishing between the ethnic Tibetan within the nation state, for example as an 'ethnicity' within China and Canada, and the national Tibetan. Be it the historical proto-organizing principles leading to the Tibetan national most prominently held in exilic discourse, or the alignment and tensions between the ethnic and national Tibetan, the 'ties of mutuality' between these conceptual areas in folk understandings influence later day kinship organizing in diaspora. Tenzin's notion of 'being Tibetan' is therefore a way to communicate kinship's 'mutuality of being' (Sahlins, 2013), morally rationalizing his political, sociocultural perspectives, actions as being aligned with the greater good of the group.

Whether in informal discussions or in interviews this sense of 'being Tibetan' is the relational thread that ties members' motivation and rationale for engagement in social helping. Yet the ways members construct and relate to domains within this identity is individualized, which subsequently impacts kinship formations, its alignments, and tensions. 'Being Tibetan' allows individual subjectivities to converge into a commonality in terms of motivations and rationale for communal engagement and organizing in social helping within the two field sites. Therefore, whether it is speaking about their experiences in community social helping activities

or reasons for group organizing at myriad levels, a shared sentiment across members rests in the common phrase “being/as a Tibetan" (*bhod pa gchig yin pa’ngos nes*) as articulated above. But what are the cultural threads that bind ‘being Tibetan’? An insight into the significance and consciousness underlying this phrase in the diasporic cultural milieu is mentioned by Diehl (2002) in her account of the conversation with the late Tibetan scholar Dawa Norbu.

Diehl (2002) writes that Dawa Norbu understood ‘Tibetan unity’ to be founded on “a core of sacred things" which include “the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan language, and a devotion to the physical landscape deemed to be the rightful home to them all” (p.65). These prevailing commonalities were further strengthened by contemporary ties of shared memories of displacement, loss of homeland and common experiences of cohabitation within the Tibetan settlements and institutions in diaspora. Such characteristics helped develop political solidarity and enabled a coordinated resistance under the traditional leadership of Ganden Phodrang (*dga’ lden pho brdang*) headed by the current Dalai Lama in exile.

Structurally, the sanctity of the Tibetan ‘core of sacred things’ is manifest in the CTA’s ‘non state, state-like’ entity, explored by McConnell (2015; 2009) where these characteristics are amplified through various exilic institutions. Together they form a resistance culture where those living within it are deeply embedded in its hyper political world. International aid including both governmental and non-governmental support for the diasporic community maximally assists in the creation and continuation of the CTA’s intricate ‘state-like’ social welfare structure (Coelho & Somayaji, 2022; McConnell, 2009) crucially strengthening its ability to organize and work as a ‘non state, state-like’ entity. Towards that end, the CTA and Tibet advocacy groups variously appeal for international support for their movement through the global language of human rights (Dreyfus, 2005) and increasingly now within the context of indigenous rights resurgence in narratives of discrimination against native Tibetans in their homeland as discussed below. In

short, dwelling within and emerging from both individual and structural relational components, are an intricate maze of shared experiences, mutual associations that enables the development of group kinship. Hence what is simply articulated as 'being Tibetan' is from the point of view of kinship, the central node that emotionally, experientially and structurally binds Tibetan diasporic mutuality in the field today.

Notions of Familial Place-based Kinship:

Having discussed the Tibetan 'national' ties of mutuality, in the following section I present kinship notions related to specific, regional place-based ties of mutuality leading to the formation of the 'other' type of social help organizing, namely the *kyidu*. To do so, I will first revisit Tenzin's sharp response to my query regarding whether he was part of any *kyidu*. His reaction is not unfamiliar for often I came across very similar sentiments dismissing *kyidu* as '*choh yo mareh*' (useless/meaningless/pointless) from many other Tibetans in both Toronto and Vancouver. And yet if *kyidus* are 'meaningless', why are there a growing number of them in more recent diasporic hubs like Toronto and New York? Even in Vancouver, a city that comparatively has a much smaller Tibetan population, there is the elusive '*Tawang kyidu'* formed by a group of newcomers belonging to the Tawang region in present day Arunachal Pradesh, India. In North America when there are TAs in the major urban centers where most Tibetans live and given the group's modest size, why is there a need for *kyidu*? Why, as Tenzin points out, is one Tibetan organization in the locality not enough? This seemingly simple question defies straightforward understanding. Tied to the notion of what 'Tibetan' means, it is interlinked to one of the fundamental areas that many have attempted to tackle from various analytical lenses since the idea of 'Tibetology' itself was conceptualized within western academic discourse (Shneiderman, 2006).

To visit this query from the point of view of kinship formation, the pan Tibetan identity nurtures the group's 'national' formation, whose structures and organizing in the field today are discussed through the values and organizing of Tibetan associations. Parallel to this formation exists a traditional, regionalized form of Tibetan kinship predating the birth of exile. This kinship based on localized, place-based identity is highlighted by the case of diasporic *kyidu* in the community today. Delving deeper into their forms to explore 'dimensions of affinity' (Kramer, 2011) within, one can see how their interdependence, as well as underlying tensions are reflective of and inform responses to notions and kinship-based organizing in the larger diaspora. The confluence of these varying elements forms the crux of what it means to be a diasporic Tibetan today. Within the context of the types of Tibetan social helping organization, the TA and the *kyidu*; the former premised on notions of an imagined national space 'Tibet' and the latter on the physical contours of a localized Tibetan space, both propel membership and interest in social helping organizations grounded in notions of identity. In the following section, I present the case of the Ngari dharchen (*mnga ris dar chen)* in Toronto to illustrate how notions of localized, familial place-based kinship anteceding diasporic identity shape social help organizing.

Reimagining Place-based Kinship: The Dharchen in Parkdale

Since 2010, in Toronto, a committee of nearly 20 people from the region have taken to continuing the annual tradition of upholding the Ngari *dharchen (mnga ris dar chen)*. The banner is hoisted annually on the auspicious 15th day of the month of Vesak by the Dharchen Kusheng (*dar chen sku bzhengs*) group who are all members of the Nagri Foundation. One of the founding members of the group in Toronto told the story of the revival of the *dharchen* tradition thus–

> During the Fifth Dalai Lama's time, 'Ngari kor sum' *(mnga ris skor sum*) declared allegiance to *Ganden Phodrang* against the Ladakhi king and became part of Tibet. The occasion was celebrated by hoisting the banner in front of Mt. Kailash. The practice was discontinued between 1959 and 1982. In the 1980s when people in Tibet could travel to India, some from Ngari got an audience with His Holiness (the Dalai Lama) and appealed for his guidance as they were concerned about failing crops and other ill omens afflicting the region. He advised them to revive the *dharchen* tradition and since then, from 1983 onward not a single year has been missed. Being from Ngari (region) we (the group in Toronto), all thought that it very important to continue with the tradition, so that's how the group was formed here. This year is the *dharchen's* 340th anniversary and its tenth year in Toronto.

In interviews with other members of the Ngari Foundation, similar themes about the banner's significance to the history of Ngari people and the holy pledge undertaken on their land in the presence of one of the most recognizable and revered Buddhist sites, Mount Kailash, were told time and again.

(Figure 7: Hoisting *dharchen* in front of Mt. Kailash, Tibet)

(Figure 8: *Dharchen* at Karma Sonam Dargye Ling Monastery, 12 Maynard Ave. Toronto)

The Ngari *dharchen* (*mNga Ris Dar Chen*) is an annual banner hoisting event in the Ngari region of Tibet. For contextual background, historically Ngari was a 'threefold dominion' known to Tibetans as *ngari korsum* (*mgga' ris skor gsum*) founded in the early tenth century during the Tibetan Yarlung empire. The area covers Ladakh, Guge and Puhrang, as well as

secondary regions including Ruthok, Zangskar, Lahaul, Spiti, Kinnaur, Jumla, Dolpo and Mustang which were subsequently divided amongst its descendants (Jinpa, 2015). During the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign, a Mongol-Tibetan army under Ganden Tsewang, grandson of Gushri Khan was despatched in 1679 (Jinpa, 2015) to suppress "Ladakhi hostility to the Gelukpa" and to aid the fifth Dalai Lama's quest to consolidate "the Tibetan world into an atleast-partly centralised state" (p.328) which resulted in Tibetan victory over Guge-Purang region (McKay, 2015).

According to Tibetan sources (Anon, 2002), the triumphant occasion in 1681 was marked by the hoisting of the dharchen on the *sershung (gser gzhungs)* grassland in 'the holy presence of Mt. Kailash. The occasion, attended by the territorial heads and the local population symbolizes Ngari's loyalty to the Dalai Lama and acknowledgement of the reign of Ganden Phodrang's *(dga' ldan pho brang),* the Tibetan traditional government.

According to one of the group members in Toronto, from that time (1681) onward, the annual *dhachen* tradition was held every year except during the period between 1959 - 1982 due to PLA incursions and subsequent unrest in Tibet. In the 1980s, during the period of liberal reforms in PRC, contacts between homeland and exile were re-established. The *dharchen* tradition was revived upon the current Dalai Lama's encouragement in both its historical home in Ngari and in parts of the Tibetan diaspora where Ngari groups were formed under the aegis of its central organization located in Dharamsala, India. The organizational details are presented in the subsequent chapter on 'Organizing Kinship'.

Symbolically as the 'centre of the universe' in early Bon accounts as well as a sacred site for later Tibetan Buddhist luminaries, Kailash also known as *'tise'* '*ghang rinpoche*' is considered a preeminent Hindu and Buddhist sacred site (McKay, 2015; Namkhai Norbu, 2013).

Additionally, this sacred pledge binding the ruling class of Ngari and its people with *Ganden Phodrang* is seen to be of marked political significance 'for the whole of Tibet' - like other historical *dharchen* commemorating important milestones of larger group history in Tibet.

Moving back to the ritual practice of *dharchen* in Toronto, members speak of how it marks Ngari's historic importance and show of solidarity of provincial acquiescence and loyalty to the Dalai Lama– symbolic of the Tibetan nation. Yet the practice is tempered both by the physicality and liminal politics of diasporic space. Far from the towering presence of Mount Kailash (see figure 1) and Ngari's alpine grassland where an expansive crowd gather for the annual event in the region, the abode of the Toronto *dharchen* for the past ten years is the modest backyard of the Karma Sonam Dargye Ling center in the inner-city neighborhood. A group member explained that ideally, the group wanted the banner placed 'somewhere in the natural environment around the picturesque lakeshore or atop a hill' befitting Tibetan tradition. However, the member noted the stringent regulations of the use of public space in Canada, observing- "This country has so many regulations, this is not allowed, that is not allowed…we are not even allowed to perform *sangsol* (incense offering) outside in public". Subsequently, the group then contacted the leadership of the TA for their permission to hoist the banner at the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre (*gangs ljongs chos ldan gling*) but their request was met with prolonged silence. In an interview with another group member, he opined that the TA leadership may not have responded to their request–

> … perhaps because they did not understand the *darchen's* significance to the whole of Tibetan history and may have thought of it as a regional custom or if other groups may raise questions or cause trouble.

Ultimately, the group approached the head of the local Kargyu monastery who agreed to let them conduct the event annually on their premise. More than a year later, when the group eventually received approval from the TA leadership to hoist the banner at the Tibetan community center, they in turn declined because "at that point we had already established a relationship with the monastery." Additionally, a diasporic amendment to the historical Ngari *dharchen* practice is to hoist an additional banner, which as the *dharchen* group explained is dedicated to the long life of the Fourteenth (current) Dalai Lama (see figure 2).

Where the *dharchen* is hoisted in Ngari as part of the local culture and often a highlight for tourist attraction today, in diaspora, it is its political significance – centralizing Ngari's place in Tibetan history – that is touted by its advocates. In interviews with members of the Ngari Foundation, a salient theme is their construction of Ngari *dharchen* as an event of 'national importance' in Tibetan history 'signifying Ngari's loyalty to *Ganden Phodrang*', the traditional Tibetan government. Ngari Foundation is after all titled '*Ngari Chithun Tsogpa*' *(Ngari spyi mthun mtshogs pa*') literally Ngari United Association which uses the same descriptor as the Tibetan associations in Tibetan - '*Bhodrig Chithun Tsogpa*'. Some *Ngari* interlocutors are insistent that they are not a *kyidu* for they are 'much larger than a *kyidu* even if people may unknowingly say *Ngari kyidu*. Senior members of the Ngari Foundation point out that unlike other groups in diaspora, they were "the first to be officially recognized and permitted by the exile government to form an organization". These iterations make sense in the context of the politics of exilic society for as much as regional-based groups speak of their loyalty to the national agenda, the identity boundaries between the regional and the national Tibetan do not make for a seamless kinship formation.

In the face of communal criticisms, *kyidu* members often rationalize their affiliation and the need for continuity of traditional place-based organizing as relayed below by one member–

> In exile we say Tibet '*Bhod*' consists of the three regions of *Dotoe, Domed, Utsang* but in history they actually say, Tibet includes "*bhar dbus gtsang ru zhi, smed domed sgang drug, stod m'nga ri skor sum*" (the four regions of Utsang, the six ranges of Domed, the three dominions of Ngari). We don't bring up the importance of Ngari as it's useless to fight amongst ourselves… But the point is, who will look after and preserve the historical significance of our region if not people belonging to it so because of that we have regional organizations.

The importance of localized place-based affiliation in the consolidation of Tibetan identity can be traced to early scholarship on Tibet and therefore the importance of place is not simply a result of diasporic rupture but rooted in the continuation of 'indigenous' Tibetan belief systems. For example, in unravelling the myth of Tibet as a landscape located atop a demoness (*srin mo),* Gyatso (1987) discusses "a very Tibetan proclivity to imagine features of the landscape both small and large scale as animated" (p.48) and traces these conceptualizations to antiquity – "what R.A. Stein calls the nameless Tibetan religion (which) fully pervades organized Buddhism and Bon"(p. 49). Other works discussing place-based religio-spiritual dimensions can be found in Samten Karmay's erudite works theorizing Bon (2003; 1998; 1972) the indigenous Tibetan 'system of beliefs' that predates Buddhism, where he discusses the importance of land and a place-based sense of the world as 'authentic' to early Tibetan beliefs and societal formations. Huber (1994) also writes about the practices of ascribing particular native sites as sacred throughout "premodern and contemporary times" for "the physical environment in both its animate and inanimate dimensions is believed to be occupied by a host of deities and spirit

forces"(p. 25) that dwell in coexistence with the personhood of the individual/s and their larger community. Existing practices of *kyidu* such as Nyenam *kyidu* continue to place major emphasis on the spiritual dimension of space where a core activity of the group as narrated by a *kyidu* member includes "hoisting prayer flags of the sacred landmarks within their locality where local spirits and protectors dwell." The case of *dharchen* in Parkdale can also be seen as a diasporic co opting and continuation of the practice of ascribing native sites as sacred.

Returning to the case of the Ngari *dharchen* event in Toronto, one can see how the incommensurability between the complex historical past of intra group conquests and alliances on the Tibetan plateau and the present day need to consolidate politically as a cohesive group underlies the TA's lack of response regarding hoisting the Ngari *dharchen* at the TCCC. For the members of the Ngari Foundation, *dharchen* participants as previously discussed, 'Ngari's unique place' and historical significance makes them insist that they are 'different from other *kyidu*'. Yet the very embeddedness in the particularities of place also produces different allegiances, understandings and priorities that result in sensitivity and discord within types of kinship-based organizations. For example, referring to the national and ethnic notions of Tibetan identity, the disjunct between members' perceived importance of *dharchen sku shing* and its seemingly 'regional' nature to members of the larger Tibetan organization is a source of tension between the TA and the Ngari Foundation'. Thematically, these issues are further explored through members' organizing scope of kinship practices in the subsequent chapter.

The ritual continuity of replicating the Ngari *dharchen* event in diaspora as a case speaks to how the 'omnipresence of both elaborate and simple rituals' in Tibetan social life (Cabezon, 2009) continues in diaspora. The ritual practice of installing banners as markers of territorial conquest, belonging and as a material object of religious significance conjoins the political and

the other-worldly affairs which as a tradition can be traced to the earliest conceptualizations of place-based identity in the Tibetan world as discussed above. In organizational gatherings, practices, be it the simple scarf offerings marking the start and end of leadership terms within the *kyidu* and Tibetan associations (TA), the traditional structure of cultural events including the language used in speeches, one can see how these rituals play a role in formalizing group kinship bonds through customary rites. The nostalgia and idealism with which Tibetan diasporic bodies envision and form new(er) kinships based on frameworks of pre-existing notions, their pragmatic negotiation of scope and boundaries within, are common elements of its organizational tale.

Reflecting on the insecurities and the unsettling effects of regional identities makes one posit that the narrative around why it does not matter which region you are from as long as you are 'Tibetan' prevails precisely because *it* matters. Exile as Said (2000) insightfully points out is after all a "jealous state" where there is "the drawing lines of between you and your compatriots" (p.141). Regional affiliations are deemed as undermining Tibetan 'nationalism' and therefore detrimental to group cohesiveness particularly because of its vulnerable location in exile. Even members belonging to regional place-based *kyidu* refrain from and are reluctant to openly admit to a strong sense of regional affiliation, likely for fear of being labelled divisive or causing friction within the larger community for unsettling the 'common Tibetan' identity. These tensions can also be viewed as essential to and important for understanding the evolving narrative of how allegiances and transgressions within kinship formations are formed and reformed over time reflecting diaspora's very hybridity (Bhabha,1994). A question remains, that with prolonged exile and diasporic expansion, how can generations sustain the more concrete axials of identity merely through an effervescent image of a 'nation' without grounding the larger ID in the concrete encounters of place and lived memories? Paradoxically, in diaspora why should one not

emphasize the 'national' Tibetan through the language of a comprehensible unit such as 'nation' without which the appeal for territorial sovereignty on the world stage is not justifiable or even feasible?

As a classical diaspora, born from the resultant chaos of a new 'national' place making process, the Tibetan kinship code is fundamentally constructed in a sense of shared spatiality that is 'porous and fluid' (Massey, 2005) as are its negotiations with (de)territoriality. Viewed from a global perspective, the fissures created by historical and contemporary colonialism(s) through refusal, disregard for and erasure of native understandings and orderings of space can be seen across the contemporary world. For both the ethnic and the Tibetan national, the politics of place and place-making are central to diasporic kinship conceptualization. Dwelling on the intersectional play between Massey's development of the treatise of space (2005) and post structural kinship scholarship notably of Sahlins (2013) and Carsten (2000), one can see how negotiating place making and the notion of space are common features of kinship.

Indigeneity and Regional Kinship Dimensions Within:

The notions underlying ties of mutuality amongst diaspora Tibetans through a) the national Tibetan kinship grounded in the 'core of sacred things' (Diehl, 2002) and b) kinship notions related to the traditional place-based 'dimensions of affinity' (Kramer, 2011), create alignment with North American indigenous issues, adding their voice to 'indigenous Asia'. To extrapolate, Tibetan grievances and claims of 'violated specialness' (Barnett, 2001) propel group solidarity to preserve the 'core of sacred things', helping to foster and organize Tibetan kinship at a macro level. The larger national push and advocacy contains within its fold traditional dimensions of affinity' (Kramer, 2011) which have their own organizing patterns and distinct

cultural ethos that also align with themes of displacement, *apriori* territorial rights and the destruction of cultural systems that thematically resonate with indigenous narratives in North America despite contextual differences. Be it Tibet as a homeland or a specific region on the plateau, *indigenous* conceptualizations of spatiality and belonging elsewhere drives kinship in Tibetan diaspora.

In particular, there are close connections with the notion of spiritual connection to the natural environment as part of the Tibetan native's worldview. As previously discussed, the conceptualization(s) of space as impacting social configurations of place – where the geography of the communities are shaped by the particular type(s) of spirits and deities it is aligned with and pays obeisance to can be seen in Samten Karmay's works (1998; 2007) on theorizing Bon, the Tibetan indigenous system of beliefs before the advent of Buddhism or his explorations into social organizing in the Tibetan region of Amdo (see article initially published in French in 1987, English publication in 2022). The potency of these belief system can be understood from the fact that even with Buddhism's subjugation of the wrathful Bon spirits inhabiting homeland's earth, sky, rocks, and rivers, they were not exterminated. Rather they were converted into Buddhist protector deities, thus remaining an inalienable part of Tibetan ritual, psychological, religious, and cultural life today (see Cabezon, 2009). From a broader context, this type of coexistence with the natural habitat's terrestrial and extraterrestrial 'bodies' as forming a part of the homeland's geomantic sacredness is also a known characteristic defining indigenous people's spiritual outlook and relatedness to space. Together, these notions form a kin allegiance with indigenous groups where despite differences in how individuals articulate being Tibetan, fundamentally the struggles are seen as similar in that both groups are mutually aligned in their oppositional landbased movement.

Additionally, during fieldwork interviews in both Toronto and Vancouver when speaking with several Tibetans, most noticeably those who have undergone higher education or work in professional settings within the Canadian system, often their views encapsulate comparisons between indigenous issues in Canada and the Tibetan struggle. Prominent Tibetan diasporic activists have written and testified in the Canadian parliament about the draconian educational system in Tibet (https://tibetaction.net/campaigns/colonialboardingschools/) through evoking a narrative similarity of it to the horrors of the residential school system's legacy amongst indigenous people in the country. Personally, while a structural argument can be made in terms of the 'colonial' boarding schools in the TAR, drawing upon lived experiences in Lhasa, admission in these 'mainland' institutions is in fact seen as aspirational, a sign of familial success and a status symbol. Tibetan families often make every attempt to get their child(ren) into the mainland system. Rather than forced parent-child attachment issues, violence, sexual abuse and deaths resulting in intergenerational trauma, the key issues here are about the long-standing marginalization of educational policies and structural deficits impacting the Tibetan region including the secondary status of the Tibetan language, which are all tied to the state's policies aimed towards assimilation into the Chinese motherland.

In sharp contrast to North American indigenous identity and seemingly at odds with the trajectory of indigenous discourse today, there exists within the discourse of both the universalizing and regional understandings of Tibetan, a connection between empire and indigeneity. These communal understandings of the 'Tibetan empire' and its conquests, including well-established historical linkages between the Tibetan and Chinese imperial courts seem ideologically distinct from the tonality of North American indigenous rights arguments on the rise in Tibetan political activism today. All this is to say that while there is resonance to the larger

theorizing of Chinese control over Tibet as a form of settler colonialism, contextual differences between the two 'cases' in terms of space-time configurations make for a distinct unfolding of interpreting and contextualizing 'indigenous' issues on the ground. My point here is not to set up a hierarchy of victimhood which is a fruitless exercise given contextual subjectivities but a larger cautionary note that attempts to authenticate Tibetan indigenous-ness through 'other' settler colonial experiences inevitably limits the very bounds and ways of 'being indigenous' across the world.

Understanding the distinct place-based kinship formations in the field today, a brief detour surveying Tibetan indigeneity is necessary. Historically, Shakya (1999) noted a truism that the Tibetan 'national' unity was achieved to a great degree by the advent and threat of Chinese dominance. Revealed through this statement is the understanding that while the traditional Lhasa government held sway over much of the region, various localities operated in relative autonomy and were often organized and led by distinct clans and local leadership. The ground realities of contesting Tibetan sovereignty through the rhetoric of the Westphalian nation state can be seen from the numerous appeals made to governments and the United Nations by Tibetans discussed in contemporary discourse across a range of ideological positionalities– for example Goldstein (2019), Thondup & Thurston (2015); Shakabpa (2009); Sperling (2004) and Shakya (1999). These encounters evidence an ideological incommensurability between the 'Tibet' situation and the modernist nature of the western political gaze.

Such hurdles prompted the exilic administration to etch its dream of independence into a known shape, thus working to shake off any ambivalences of the past in favor of a grand Tibetan narrative including homogenization of the term 'Tibetan'. The resultant projections of statehood can be clearly seen in the language of the reports produced by the government-in-exile at the

time – for example the ten-year report on Tibetan rehabilitation compiled by the Office of the Dalai Lama (1969). The nation making efforts by Tibetan *émigré* elites have been critiqued as being partial towards central Tibetan customs and notions in the development of Tibetan 'national' identity in exile (Coelho & Somayaji, 2022; McGranahan, 2010). This 'national' project, often at odds with its anti-colonial ethos, has most recently been explored through the perspective of regional Kham leaders of the time (Dhompa, forthcoming 2022). The levelling of regional identity(s) and affiliations towards a national goal reveal that the larger diasporic group identity (premised on the core of sacred things) is conjoined in a complex bricolage that thematically maintains distinct understandings and traditions of place-based indigeneity(s).

Pertaining to Tibetans, I discussed the complexity of the case vis-à-vis contemporary indigenous rights movements elsewhere (Watermeyer and Yan, 2022). Here the focus is on notions of indigeneity within traditional kinship groups and its constructions affecting formations in the field today. If stripped of all complexities, the Tibetan struggle at its core is against Chinese territorial control over *their* land and as such the ongoing PRC control of the region is seen as a form of Chinese settler colonialism (Anand, 2019; McGranahan, 2019). It is not a stretch to posit that these theoretical developments have been encouraged, given the many similarities observed between other indigenous groups and Tibetans, and what (Huber, 1997; Yeh, 2020) mentions as the political alignment to indigenous rights ethos notably in the Dalai Lama's environmental stance since the 1980s.

It is also a fact that in the case of Canada, there is official recognition (even if tokenism) of the systematic marginalization, and harm inflicted against indigenous groups while no such recognition exists within the PRC. In fact, PRC is seen to have tightened its control and

surveillance over ‘ethnic minorities’ since Xi’s ascendancy. There are also other major differences, of which most notably indigenous issues within North America, Australia and New Zealand are predominantly discussed in the context of European settler colonialism’s creation of the native-settler binary (for example Miller, 2018; Simpson, 2018; Lowman et al.,2015; Wolfe 2006). In the global south, mired in historical relations, migration and intermingling over centuries as works conducted in Tibetan studies show (cited previously), the demarcating boundaries between empire and indigenousness, settler and colonizer are no longer distinct. For example, Shah (2010) discusses this complex intermingling in her study on Jharkhand when contemplating the complexity of post-colonial India and its *adivasi* population.

Further, the blurred boundaries between categories such as ‘indigenous’ and ‘ethnic nationality’ (Neizen, 2002) within contemporary nation states are also an issue here. Yet notwithstanding the structural limits of categorizing group identities and their regional differences, claims of *apriori* territorial habitation, custodianship of land, anti-resource extractivism and distinctiveness of socio-cultural identity vis-à-vis the dominant group that are at the heart of all indigenous movements (De la cadena & Starn, 2020) are also the core themes of Tibetan resistance. The takeaway here is that while broader comparisons aimed at signaling settler colonial status quo in the region is understandable, existing contextual chasms and nuances within ‘cases’ are eschewed in political theatrics. A globalized ‘indigenous’ narrative risks consequences of categorical positionings and ultimately reifies what is meant to be a pluralistic ecology of meanings reflecting the many ‘truths’ of diverse spaces. In the case of Tibetan indigeneity, field understandings of the linkage between indigeneity and empire(s) needs to be taken into analytical consideration for any meaningful theorizing on the topic despite their unsettling connections.

In examining the trajectory of Tibetan *résistance***,** its increasing similarity with the indigenous movement is something Yeh (2020) and Huber noted (1997; 1994) in their observations particularly on Tibetan environmentalism in the political sphere. However, at the grassroots level as McGranahan (2018) recollects in her field encounters with Tibetan activists, there was a reluctance to define the movement along those lines, instead seeing the 'Tibet issue' as an illegal occupation of one independent nation by another. What these writings indicate is that 'indigenous' as a political identity was a more recent uptake within Tibetan diaspora movement, which is distinct from the question related to Tibetan indigeneity which I discuss in relation to regional kinship formations. These shifts in political stances should be withheld in the context of other major changes most notably the official divergence of the political movement from independence (*rang brtsen* pronounced '*Rangzen'*) to autonomy or the 'middle way approach' *dbu mai lam pronounced* '*Umay Lam*' (for an internal perspective see https://mwa.tibet.net/). Socially too, the fragmenting hubs in India and Nepal beginning in the mid 1990s due to westward migration posed new challenges to CTA as discussed in earlier sections, all of which reflects the volatility of diasporic spaces.

Responding to the unpredictability threatening group cohesiveness, 'culture' increasingly took center stage as the collective (safe) space through which one can project and contest both Tibetan-*ness* and (implicitly) Tibet across the varied nation states in which Tibetans emigrated. In Canada, this hyper consciousness has meant Tibetan communities' alignment with liberal multiculturalism, be it through titling and registering their organizations under the larger domain of charitable ethnocultural organizations or participating in token multicultural events and festivities.

Focusing on the relational dynamic between kinship and indigeneity, the latter's performance(s) in diaspora which nurtures kinship imaginings and practices in the field also comes with certain tensions. While indigeneity's very struggle is framed against imperialist tendencies of the modern nation states, in the Tibetan context the *différance* is that the exilic discourses were served in a 'national container' leaning into modernist tendencies towards 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer & Schiller, 2003). Assayed from this vantage point, the 'core of sacred things' uniting all Tibetans– the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan language and territorial belonging to the physical landscape of Tibet (Diehl, 2002)– in a way encapsulates the hegemonic standpoint of a grand narrative. Furthermore, one can posit that for Tibetan scholars raised in exile such as Dawa Norbu, the notion of 'Greater Tibet' and relatedly tales of the Tibetan empire (c. 600 - c. 850) and the sacred kingship (see Tucci, 1955) whose sources hearken to a time when the civilizing force of Buddhism tamed a demonic, feminine landscape (Gyatso, 1987) is a well-known narrative. Therefore for 'native' scholars and for advocates alike, the challenge is fitting the intricate, often perplexing narratives of belonging and sovereignty into a westernized nation state discourse in a bid to render Tibetan subalternity comprehensible for a global audience.

Moving from the individual to group positionality, exilic statements of being the voice for Tibetans in Tibet have with the passage of time also come under criticism related to the problems of representation, cultural reification and of being out of touch with contemporary life in Tibet. Under these situations, homeland in diaspora is a space that Pierce, Martin & Murphy (2010), (drawing on Harvey and Massey's work), comprises both 'experienced durability' as well as 'ephemerality' of places. This meta-Tibet infiltrates both the national Tibetan and the highly localized specificity of regional *kyidu* kinship organizing centered on mutuality of the concrete

contours of place, bringing to the fore the importance of land-based relational understandings of kinship formations. Here I use 'meta' to connote a contemporary diasporic relationship with the homeland which is not only of an 'imagined Tibet' but in its presence closely resemble the ethnographic texture of Akhil Gupta's (1995) *sarkaar*– mystical, powerful, elusive and ubiquitous. This *présence* Tibetan is often captured in the ongoing negotiation between CTA's modernist agenda and an individual's sense of belonging to a distinct clan and place-based affiliation amongst groups which is not merely *old history.* The ordering of Tibetan kinship formations within and without is characteristically one impacted by 'place' which Massey (2005) defined as the ongoing political negotiation of space.

After Dispersal: Assembling Notions of New Place-based Kinships

Dwelling on the context of social organizing today, as diaspora heralds a seismic shift in one's sense of place in the world, history's stabilizing narratives of origin, rituals and traditions assume heightened significance. Yet emphasizing the conceptualization of the homeland purely through the prism of loss and its point of departure is to overlook the embeddedness of the culture of placemaking and how these notions travel, for diasporas are always 'in process' (Arutiunov, 2002). Transporting kinship practices into diaspora(s) constructs it anew since the space and conditions amidst which they are organized and performed are *foreign*. For instance, the *dharchen*'s resurrection in Parkdale may be based in history but it also creates a new set of localized kin relationships that are historically both new and not in existence. What Sahlins (2013) describes as "the enigmatic effects of kinship bonds – of the kind often called 'mystical' – whereby what one person does or suffers also happens to others" (p.2) is interpretive of the common Tibetan phrase pronounced '*kyidu chigpa*' (*skyi sdug chig pa*) literally (of) same

happiness and sorrow, used to describe mutual happiness and sorrow between individuals or for more formalized kinship-based social help organization (see Miller, 1957).

Notions of mutuality in diaspora are political and helps structure organizational forms and members' engagement and participation in social help activities. Additionally, depending on the axial of Tibetan mutuality, I have shown linkages between notions and specific group formations which will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter. Here, I will discuss how one of the features of Tibetan diasporic formation is the way in which mutuality, expanding from the initial 'core of sacred things' and regional place-based affiliations structures newer formations that complement the inherent fluidity with which Carsten (2004) beholds kinship analysis. Describing kinship as "an area of life in which people invest their emotions, their creative energy, and their new imaginings which can take both benevolent and destructive forms" (p.9), Carsten (2004) further arrives at kinship's fluidity through surpassing the boundaries of biological 'substance' (including blood, genes, biogenetic substances – see Lien & Melhuus, (2007) in the face of new technological possibilities. Within the context of the study, 'Tibetanness' (also rooted in 'substance' and 'code' of relatedness in history (Strathern, 2005; Lien & Melhuus, 2007) gains newer dimensions of affinity and affiliations due to experiences unique to the exilic context.

Often community members will describe their 'Tibetan-ness' through narratives of early childhood and adult life experiences spent in exilic institutional systems, most notably its education system, settlements, and relationship of self and family to the CTA. Some who are actively involved in community work and born in Canada, speak of Tibetan-ness as being transmitted through parental memories of Tibet, a sense of righteousness in fighting for human rights and recovering that which is rightfully 'ours'. Within their narratives is also a heightened recollection of the larger 'western movement for Tibet in the 80s and 90s' in popular culture and

how it significantly shaped their relationship with the community. Examining the bricolage of diverse streams of individual affiliations, these can broadly be distinguished through the type of notion of 'ties of mutuality'– the national Tibetan, regional place based and exilic systems-based group organizing. With subsequent expansions into societies elsewhere, Tibetan kinship associations travel adapting to changing landscapes, legalities and needs, which I explored through the case of 'Ngari *dharchen*' (*snga ri dar chen*). What these kinship domains have in common are, as mentioned previously, their place-based embeddedness as the source of group affiliations as well as tensions.

In both the field sites in Toronto and Vancouver as explored in preceding sections, the main organizing concept is tied to the kinship of belonging to a common 'homeland' and relatedly the formation of the Tibetan cultural organizations which are the largest organizations, also known as Tibetan associations. These organizations are as Wangdi (2008) noted a pan Tibetan phenomenon in that wherever a pool of Tibetans settle in a new locality, such an organization is founded premised on the idea of a homogenous Tibetan identity. As the Tibetan population increases within the locality, it is also accompanied by the formation of traditional types of *kyidu* kinship formations (Wangdi, 2008) based on birth or family origins to a specific region in Tibet. Conceptually, the two are bound in 'ties of mutuality' to places and as such can be seen as complementary but often have underlying tensions stemming from differential connotations regarding individual and group affinities and kinship allegiances. Additionally, the third type of kinship formations are purely exilic place-based systems, be it settlements or 'schools as family and family as nation' (Lokyitsang, 2022) affiliations. As one of the field informants laughingly relayed, his "*phayul* is TCV" (Tibetan Childrens Village) alluding to the

educational institution's creation of a place for the thousands of children who were raised in its environment.

While the organizing structures are discussed in the subsequent chapter, here I am highlighting their conceptual significance in Tibetan diasporic kinship formations today. The three domains are interconnected conceptually through the notion that their mutuality stems from kinship borne out of rootedness in place. Be it the homeland, the region of birth/family origin or the diasporic 'school (as) family nation' (Lokyitsang, 2022) – all three underline the embeddedness of place as fundamental to diasporic kinship. For theoretically, if diaspora's hybrid state offers up a possibility of cultural hybridity that examines difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (Bhabha, 1994), tensions persist in examining the (meta)physical (be)longing for homeland carved within its stretched limbo. Interviewing community members in the field sites, across the board, responses regarding the rationale for the formation of Tibetan social organization(s) brings to the fore the importance of one's place of origin popularly referred to as fatherland '*phayul*' or country 'l*ungpa'*. Yet colloquially, these terms are used fluidly and are not strict categories. For example, during interviews or informal conversations, community members would identify *phayul* as Tibet – our fatherland/homeland is Tibet (*ngatso' pha yul bod red*) and it is also common to hear it used in the context of regional affiliations such as Kham, Amdo, U-Tsang – 'Amdo is my fatherland/homeland' (*nga' phayul Amdo red*). *Lungpa* is also interpreted as both country or place and therefore used interchangeably with *phayul*.

Beginning with the classical notion of Tibetan 'victim' diaspora, it is a truism that dispersal compounds loss, anointing the homeland as an idealized space in collective memory through narratives of its *extra*ordinariness, as the fabled site of one's origin and eventual return. Inter-related to the role of distance and expansion of Tibetan kinship trajectories from diasporic

hubs, is also the maintenance of its continuity by a generation who sees themselves as bridges between the past and immigrant identities of the new world. The dominance of such interlocutors and their place of 'origin' narratives within the diaspora have ironically shifted the prevailing conceptualization of who is a diasporic Tibetan. That these notions of who and where a diasporic Tibetan in Canada is from, have distanced itself from the ancestral homeland was what I was reminded of during a random encounter with two older Tibetan women in Toronto.

On an early morning in May I walked to the local *Kargyu* (*bka' rgyud*) monastery (the site of Ngari *dharchen*) a few blocks away from where I was staying. Outside the site's modest backyard, the ground still had remnants of some snow from the unseasonal snowfall the evening before. The brisk early morning air and the forlorn looking traditional Tibetan banners in the backyard strangely reminded me of Tibet. I stood near the pole and just then heard approaching footsteps. Two Tibetan women dressed in traditional *chupa* – likely here to circumambulate the '*gompa*', (*sgom pa*) – offered that the monastery was closed as the monk was away visiting another centre that day. We exchanged greetings and they asked where I lived. I mentioned 'Vancouver' upon which one of them asked if I came from Nepal or India? I responded '*Bhod*' (Tibet). The older woman smiled, "Of course we all originally are, but I mean are you from India or Nepal?" "No, I am from *Lhasa*", I said and noted their surprised look.

The extent to which the Tibetan diaspora have developed since its early days can only be gauged when we read of its tragic beginnings in accounts such as Dervla Murphy's travelogue (1966) and the communications documenting the Tibetan situation and appeal for help that are archived within the 'Ockendon International' (formerly Ockendon Venture) files at located at (surreyarchives.org.uk). Popularly enshrined in the diasporic institutional organizations (https://www.dalailamainstitute.edu.in/affiliation) is a statement ascribed to the Dalai Lama,

"From the day we became refugees, our basic objective was to rise to the very place from where we have fallen down." Yet depicting diasporic progress and continuities as shorn of vulnerabilities is to belittle the harsh contours of marginalized lives in search of citizenships and opportunities for upward social mobility.

Critically too, one can view group hyperactivity in smaller kinship formations as perhaps reflective of a devolving centre leading to various fractures caused by an expanding diaspora. For political activists and commentators also view the expansion of the modest population of the Tibetan diaspora elsewhere, is at the cost of fragmentation of its communal structures and settlements in previous centers such as India and Nepal. It is also a truism that diasporic expansion from India and Nepal (with its less regulated, highly porous borders), where there is governmental support for distinct Tibetan settlements and political autonomy of the CTA, cannot be matched by the individualized, integration-based approach of Canadian multiculturalism. Therefore, the emergence of Tibetan kinship groups in Canada is not simply an ode to the original and newer homes in India and Nepal. Similar to its development in the United States as Pasang Yangjee Sherpa (2019) observes, these groups also serve as local 'community organizations'.

With the Tibetan diasporic administration overseeing an expanding constituency, previously center-dependent relationships of living in the settlements and close-knit communities have loosened its hold. As self-reliant residents and citizens of privileged nations, for Tibetans in Canada, the CTA's jurisdictional reach in terms of material/resource dependency motivating larger group membership ties are no longer a critical consideration. The new reality of living in a liberal multicultural society has also coincided with independent formations of smaller, heterogeneous 'cultural' groups alongside the larger Tibetan associations. Underpinning these

kinship alignments and organizing, is a sense of 'special' subalternity that began with a collective journey into exile.

Increasingly the contextual transporting of values, and worldviews in diaspora is challenged by incommensurability of experiences, the differences in culture between the lengthy axial points of hybridity as theorized through the metaphor of the bridge (Bhabha, 1994). As such the liminality of diasporic kinship lies in the tensions between the ability to mold to evolving circumstances while understanding that continuity cannot replicate or guarantee permanence for groups as minute in number as Tibetans. Ultimately then, diasporic kinship is premised on myriad discourses, physicality of homeland space(s) that simultaneously must transcend its own conceptual bondage to invite new(er) interpretations and ways of organizing and surviving as a group. While the 'ends of kinship' (Craig, 2020) may stretch across diverse terrains, migration's every push and pull can test its very limits. Hence kinship-based organizing (discussed in the next chapter) plays a critical role in maintaining the group's interest and structural formation.

Chapter Six

Structuring Diasporic Kinship(s): Tibetan Social Organizing

This chapter moves forward to explore how kinship formations grounded in Tibetan kinship notions of space and place-based understandings, structurally manifest through communal social organizing. In doing so, it examines the local Tibetan Associations (TA) in the field sites and *kyidu*– the traditional place-based kinship social help organization including its newer exilic iterations. I will present how these two forms of group kinship organizing while molded anew in its existence within the Canadian milieu, evoke in their structures, visions, membership, and activities, tangible and emotional 'ties of mutuality' (Sahlins, 2013) to both exilic predecessors and historical Tibet. Furthermore, while these two organizations are seen as distinct from each other, their organizing precepts, functioning shares similarities and are shaped by each other.

Conceptually, it may be worth reiterating that the diasporic Tibetan identity claims (which shape social organizing) are not fixed absolutes but variably interpreted and placed on a continuum of time and space and as such always 'in-process'. Therefore, while there is no true essence, or an undistilled primordial 'Tibetan-ness' devoid of outside influences, yet based on historical time-space, and to relay the embeddedness and *settlement* of a particular sociocultural phenomena in the region, terms such as 'authentic' 'traditional' or 'indigenous' to Tibet are deployed. These then form an aggregate of ideas and meanings that 'hang together' in their 'discursive formation' (Taylor, 2013) - in this context to mean 'Tibetan'. As such evocation of images and associations deemed quintessentially Tibetan exist despite the truth that tracing

autochthony's root is a quixotic enterprise. With these markers in place, I will now venture forth into examining how kinship structures and its structuring are manifested through Tibetan social organizations in the field.

Tales of Tibetan Kinship Organizing in the Field:

The Tibetan diaspora is considered one of the most organized and closely networked global 'refugee' communities (McConnell, 2015). In Chapter 5, I explored diasporic Tibetans' kinship notions of 'ties of mutuality' (Sahlins, 2013) grounded in the national Tibetan, exilic, and traditional place-based affiliations. I also discussed how these notions of mutuality contain circles of proximal relatedness that are informed by understandings of space and the processes of place making. Placemaking is defined as a 'bottoms up, asset-based, person centered process' grounded in 'collaboration and community participation to improve the livability of towns and cities' (Toolis, 2017; Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). For diasporic Tibetans, the act of placemaking is an act of cultural, political, and psychological resistance. Rooted in diasporic kinship based on notions of common group identity(s) and experiences, the Tibetan social organizations in Canada are both a requiem for the homeland and a familiar continuation of organizing structure(s) conceptualized in the initial diasporic hubs of India and Nepal. Suffice is to say that from Miller's (1956) formative study of the Tibetan *kyidu* (written as '*kidu*') to the present day, there are newer developments in the realm of kinship-based organizing.

For those who have lived within Tibetan settlements and hubs in India and Nepal under the overarching presence of the CTA, diasporic life in Canada is a shift towards new realities. In the early 70s, prior to the formation of the Tibetan social organizations in Canada, there were small Tibetan religious centers '*chos tsog'* (*Chos tshogs) (*Haynes, 2010; Jackson, 2003). These centres were created following a Tibetan lama's visit to a local site by their non-Tibetan followers for religious purposes. In both field sites, those who first settled in Vancouver and

Toronto state that it was only after the initial years of their arrival that the beginnings of Tibetan social organizations (formed by Tibetans) came into existence. These were and continue to be represented within the Canadian context as cultural organizations or associations with a prefix or suffix of the name of the local province or urban centre in which it is located. For example, the Tibetan Association of Alberta or the Tibetan Cultural Society of British Columbia. To the Canadian public, the TA is one of the many ethnocultural organizations in the country.

Within the Tibetan diasporic world, the CTA's formal representative in North America, the Office of Tibet (henceforth OOT) (https://tibetoffice.org) refers to the cultural organizations in English as the 'Tibetan Association'. In Tibetan, the *tsogpa* is formally known as '*bhodrig chithun tsogpa'* (*bhod rigs spyi thun tshogs pa*) – literal translation 'United Tibetan Association'. Within the local communities, in common parlance Tibetans simply refer to the TA as *tsogpa* (*tshogs pa*) or *bhodpeh tsogpa (bhod pa' tshogs pa)*. Aligning with this larger gaze, I use the term TA for general consistency except in cases where the occasion demands specificity in which case, I identify the organization by its full title.

As the main Tibetan organization in the locality, the TA organizes and provides a Tibetan public space far from the larger exilic institutional structures in India and Nepal. The TAs in the field sites in Toronto are the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario (henceforth CTAO) (https://ctaogc.org/) and the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre (henceforth TCCC) (https://www.tcccgc.org/). Note that while the CTAO and the TCCC are legally registered as separate organizations, they are run by the same executive leadership and the cultural and social helping activities are mainly organized under the aegis of the TCCC. In conversation with local community members, CTAO is regarded as the 'political' arm of the community since Canadian

charitable laws have restrictions against registered charities partaking in political movements and advocacy work.

In the lower mainland area of Vancouver, the TA is entitled the 'Tibetan Cultural Society of British Columbia' (henceforth TCSBC) (https://www.tcsofbc.org/) and provincially it was the sole Tibetan organization until 2010. On July 26th, 2010, a separate TA, the 'Tibetan Cultural Society of Vancouver Island' - TCSOVI (https://www.tcsovi.com/) was created by Tibetans living on Vancouver Island (https://www.orgbook.gov.bc.ca/entity/S0056979) who were, until then, considered part of the mainland TCSBC. It is beyond the scope of the current study to discuss a detailed account of the formation of TCSOVI which comprises of roughly 100 Tibetans on Vancouver Island. Anecdotally, the main cause of the break from the larger organization occurred due to the need for Tibetans living on the Vancouver Island to commute to the mainland to provide '*chatrel*' (the annual voluntary financial contribution to the CTA) collected by the TCSBC.

Formed by the initial clusters of Tibetan families who were resettled in the country in the 1970s, the TAs in Canada are the first Tibetan grassroots organizations in the country. Yet not all provinces where groups of Tibetan families were dispersed during the initial resettlement project stayed to form communal organizations. Based on field discussions with community elders, those who were resettled in places such as Saskatoon and Winnipeg left the area after the first few years through mutual networks, moving instead to the sites mentioned below. Today there are seven TAs in Canada (https://tibetoffice.org/north-american-tibetan-associations-contacts) based in Calgary, Toronto, Belleville, Vancouver, Victoria, Montreal and Ottawa. The Tibetan Association of Alberta based in Calgary, founded in 1972 is the oldest (Chyssem Project, 2020). Across the board, TAs broadly envision their goal as preservation of Tibetan identity and culture.

Compared to their initial years of formation in the late 70s and early 80s, with subsequent waves of Tibetan settlement, membership in the organizations increased significantly.

Development of the TAs in the Field Sites: Following interviews and informal discussions with elders in the two communities, their narratives provide an insight into the processes and gradual development of the TAs in the two sites that is presented below. The Tibetan associations in Canada were formed by the initial group of Tibetan families who settled in Canada in the 70s through the first federal resettlement project. Community elders in both BC and Ontario reminisce that within their respective provinces, the clusters of Tibetan families would often gather during weekends to socialize, share meals, conduct prayers, and celebrate Tibetan festivals including the annual commemoration of March 10th regarded as the historic Tibetan national uprising day. In B.C. the gatherings were held in individual homes on a rotational basis and often the venue was also based on whoever had a large enough space to host the group. In Ontario, due to the larger group clusters, the gatherings were held in community halls either in Belleville or Lindsay. The gatherings served an important function in that they provided a Tibetan cultural atmosphere for the families who wanted their children to learn Tibetan, understand its history and religion since the younger generation were getting highly acculturated into the Canadian system. Collectively the families were bonded by a mutual desire to enable their children to learn the Tibetan language, preserve its history, religion, and cultural traditions. As one of the founding members stated, "we wanted our children to understand our history, language and know what it means to be Tibetan".

Over time, as the families became more settled in their new lives with an expanding circle of non-Tibetan networks, especially Canadians sympathetic to the Tibetan cause, discussions about establishing a formal local Tibetan organization '*bhodpeh tsogpa*' (*bhod pa' tshogs pa*)

materialized. According to one of the founding members of the CTAO Lobsang Mentuh, in 1978, after a year of meetings attended by household representatives of the Tibetan families living in Belville, Cobourg and Lindsay, the 'Ontario group' formally created the 'Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario' (CTAO). Mentuh also attributes the discussions regarding the planning and the development of the organization as primarily spearheaded by two individuals– Ngawang Lungtok affiliated with the Kundeling estate and a former principal of the Tibetan school in Simla and Tsering Wangkhang. He recalls–

> We respected Kundeling's opinions and Tsering Wangkhang's English language skills were much more advanced than others in the group and he enlisted the support of a lawyer sympathetic to the Tibetan cause who provided pro bono services to assist with legal processes and paperwork related to the organization's formal registration.

In B.C. one of the elders reminisce on the beginnings of the TA–

> I moved to B.C. in July 1975 from Alberta. At the time there were 5 or 6 other Tibetan families living in B.C. who had also moved individually over time as the Tibetan resettlement was not approved by the provincial government. In 1979, a few individuals including Palden Rongyal, Tsega, Kelsang and Phuntsok got together to form a Tibetan *tsogpa*.

However, things took a complicated turn for the newly created *tsogpa*. According to two other members of the time, later that year internal conflict led to the group's decision to shut down the fledgling *tsogpa.* Contextually, within the larger diaspora, this was a period when there were allegations of individual Tibetans secretly receiving financial incentives from Taiwan's 'Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission' undermining the exile government (McGranahan,

2005) as the sole authority to represent negotiations on the Tibet issue. Those accused of being '*Taiwan phogs bzas*' (a derogatory term meaning 'being on Taiwanese payroll') were perceived to be against the exile government and by association deemed disloyal to the Dalai Lama as the head of the administration at the time. Such individuals were subjected to gossip, ridicule, and socially excluded. Against this larger backdrop, when it became known that personnel from the Office of Tibet in the United States was enquiring why one of the founding members of TCSBC had allegedly travelled to Taiwan, it created internal conflict within the group. Eventually it led to the collective decision to disband their *tsogspa* for the time being.

Almost a year later circumstances changed, and the families came together to re-establish their *tsogpa.* Phuntsok, the longest standing president of TCSBC (for over twenty years) recounts the event thus–

> In 1980 His Holiness the Dalai Lama first visited Canada and in Vancouver he met with the local Tibetans here… He advised them to form a local Tibetan organization as it would be beneficial for us. After his visit we had meetings again and discussed reestablishing our *tsogpa*. Palden Rongye was elected as president, I was the vice president, Yuthok's daughter Tsepel became the secretary. The annual membership fee was $15 per adult, fifty percent off for those under 18 years old and free for those under 10 years old. We also decided that our *tsogpa* will be not for profit, not get involved in politics and its aim will be the preservation of Tibetan culture.

Phunstok recalls that non-Tibetan supporters including those who were involved with TRAS (the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society) recommended that the group formally register the

tsogpa. None of the elders involved in the formation of the *tsogpa* could recall the exact date of the *tsogpa's* incorporation as a non-sectarian, charitable organization under the B.C. Societies Act except that it was sometime in the 1980s. The organizational website states that TCSBC was incorporated in 1981 by Tibetans in the greater Vancouver region however according to the charitable registration records, the date of the registration is noted as December 15th, 1986.

(Figure 9: Executives of the Tibetan Cultural Society of B.C. circa mid 1990s)

Of note, to contextualize Phunstok's earlier remarks that the *tsogpa* would 'not be involved in politics', outwardly it appears as if he is referring to the Canadian charitable law's restriction against political involvement. To be clear, it is instead an avowal to not get involved in the politics of the government-in-exile which had caused fissures within the small group leading to the previous closure of the TA as discussed earlier. The decision 'not to be involved in politics' also reveal how it is an important concern for the group for it had direct impact on local ties and relationships.

Structurally, the TAs from its very beginnings were consciously shaped by exile politics and administration. Be it members' resolve to abstain from its politics in order not to hinder communal peace or in their support for the CTA 's governance tasks through material, advocacy and administrative support, the local TA is a transnational community organization. The services provided by the TA to the CTA (through the OOT) as mentioned before is critical for its governance of transnational communities. The OOT's recognition of the TA as the only Tibetan organization with whom they officially liaise to maintain linkage with local Tibetans, provide the TA its moral stature as the main 'mother' organization' (*tsogpa ama*) in the locality. The relational links between the two are critical for the continuity of the diaspora which in turn is embedded in ties of 'Tibetan' mutuality.

Leadership & Entanglement for a Space of One's Own: The TAs in Toronto and Vancouver formally organizes various communal activities, events (discussed in chapter six) as registered organizations. However, their events and meetings continued to be held in various community centers and affordable rental spaces in the locality due to lack of ownership of their own space. The aspiration to own a communal space in Vancouver remains unfulfilled due to the steep prices of Vancouver real estate, the modest size of the community and its limited financial resources. In Toronto, under the leadership of the *tsogpa* which was at the time functioning solely as CTAO, a space was secured for the community center in October 2007. The account below details how like almost every grand Tibetan cultural moment in exile, this acquisition too is linked to the person and the institution of the current Dalai Lama.

Beginning in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the increasing number of Tibetans migrating to Toronto (detailed in the introductory chapter), the city became by far the largest

Tibetan community in Canada. The site's rising significance within the Tibetan diasporic world can be seen when the 29th Kalachakra initiation by the Dalai Lama was conducted in the city. The religious event was attended by 70,000 people, including Buddhists from all backgrounds. The ticket sales from the Kalachakra event and the Dalai Lama's other public speaking engagements became the seed money for the purchase of a 50,000 square foot, decommissioned industrial space as the Tibetan community center. Speaking about the acquisition of the site, a longstanding TA executive recalled–

> We raised around 1 million dollars from the Kalachakra event and approximately an additional 600,000 from hosting a public talk at the Roger's center. The one million dollars was further divided into portions where $660,000 was offered to '*Paljor lekhung*' (CTA Department of Finance). At the end we had around $660,000 – $700,000. That money became the seed fund to buy the community center in 2007.

Per government report, the projected cost of renovation was a total of 6.6 million dollars out of which the federal government provided a matching fund of 3.3 million dollars from its infrastructure stimulus fund (Government of Canada, April 2010). Notwithstanding the significant gains made, local Tibetans look back on the period between 2011 – 2013 as a highly turbulent time. Community members speak of the alleged financial mismanagement, lack of transparency marking the 2010 – 2011 leadership including the threat of losing the newly purchased community center due to the inability to meet ongoing maintenance and mortgage expenses. Choedon (2016) discusses how the local Tibetan Women's Association and female leadership took charge to resolve the leadership vacuum during this time.

Understanding the 'truth' is a difficult endeavor as information is fragmented and hearsay abounds. Typically, the narrative aligns with the following common account provided by a community member on the condition of anonymity–

> We all considered Norbu Tsering la (the president at the time) as highly capable and he was well-respected in the community. He even bought our community hall. I don't know what happened but when he left the office, people said he committed financial fraud
>
> ('*pehsha* ('*paisa*' hindi) *dze wa red lab ghyi yod red*') and that he did not disclose all the information about how much trouble we (the community) are in to the incoming president and the new executive team. So, when his term was over and the new board members took over, it was really a bad time. The next election nobody wanted to be the president because there are too many responsibilities, people were frustrated, and I think everyone feared being blamed if things did not improve. Some even said we should sell the community center. Then the local Tibetan Women's association took charge and things got better over time.

When I attempted to probe further into the specific details of the conflict with former and current TA board members, they abstained from sharing details while acknowledging that "it was a tough time for the community". One of the current committee members, reflecting on the issue, stated that the transfer of community leadership between the outgoing and incoming board members should have been a more transparent process. From the point of view of a board member, the main failing is seen as the lack of disclosure of TCCC's overall infrastructure condition. According to the executive member "the building needed extensive structural and lighting renovations, the community had legal liens over 1.5 million dollars against the center

and the overall liabilities exceeded almost six times its assets". Not wanting to dwell too much on the past, the board member emphasized how the incident is also an example of what community solidarity can overcome stating that ultimately communal bonding "helped rally people together to overcome these obstacles". In interviews with those who were subsequently involved as part of the community center's renovation committee, the material resources and years of effort it took to fundraise, plan and transform the building into its current state is relayed with much pride.

For TCSBC in the lower mainland, dreams of a community center remain elusive. While the organization received funding support during the Dalai Lama's visit to Vancouver in October 2014, the proceeds from the ticket sales of the public event were donated for the purposes of the resettlement of the newcomers in the province (TCSBC; Annual Report 2014-2015, University of British Columbia). However, it was followed by allegations against leadership of funding mismanagement and misuse leading to much internal gossip, speculations, and division within the *tsogpa*. While conducting the study, many of the community members refrain from openly sharing their perspectives on the topic and instead indicate their approval or disapproval through subtle innuendos and recommendations of who to speak with. For example, those who support the community leader at the time would remark that even if one work hard for the community, 'ungrateful people' will find ways to blame them for baseless wrongdoings. On the other hand, those who are critical of the leadership state that financial statements are not well maintained, that one should treat all community members equally and not foster 'special' (*bhai bandi*) for political reasons.

Several interviewees also alleged that the special treatment of the newcomers from Arunachal Pradesh who came through the federal resettlement initiative and comprises of the

largest group in the community are for the purposes of wanting to be re-elected as president during community elections. Contrary to these charges, in my interview with the community leader in question, the individual shared that he had no wish to continue as the president of TCSBC after the completion of the term and that it was only due to repeated requests from the public that he agreed to step into the role.

When seeking community members to take part in the research, several members privately suggested that they had 'nothing personal against the current president' but that I should speak with one of the former board members who has 'actual evidence' against the leadership of financial mismanagement. I had never interacted personally with the ex-board member (who I will call Karma) before the interview and emailed my request for an interview. Responding to my email, the ex-board member agreed to be interviewed. Karma mentioned that I should use their real name since they "have nothing to hide" and that it was important for the community to know what had happened. However, following the individual's demise, ethically it seemed more apt to withhold all identifying information.

Karma was a child when the family came to Canada as Tibetan refugees from Manali (India). He described his younger siblings as "completely Canadian", do not share his interest in Tibetan culture or community though they may occasionally attend some of the cultural events. Karma's family was amongst the initial group who formed TCSBC though over the years they became less involved in the community. Family and work obligations led to minimal interaction with the larger community until he was urged by a previous president of the TCSBC to assist with the organization. Karma was subsequently elected as an executive member of the TCSBC.

Karma asked a non-Tibetan friend, a retired certified accountant, to volunteer and supervise the community bookkeeping, including auditing the organization's 2014 financial statement. Briefly, the 2014 financial statement (the year of the Dalai Lama's visit and the fundraising through ticket sales) disclosure was the root cause of the controversy against the TCSBC leadership. Publicly the controversy began when during a cultural event, a community member demanded further details about the financial statement presented to the community.

Speaking about the financial issue, Karma stated, "the accountant discovered the Ticket Master report did not match the report that that executive committee had sent out to the Tibetans..." Acknowledging that the incongruency of the financial statement was later addressed by the TCSBC president, Karma nonetheless felt that the way the issue was resolved was not satisfactory. He stated there were no official receipts to account for the missing tickets and that "email from friends confirming receipt of the tickets is not sufficient". Further adding, "it could all be legit but if I was on the executive committee at that time, I would never accept that." Noting that the issue was "creating a clear division" (within the community), Karma decided not to pursue the issue any further. From the standpoint of the TCSBC leadership, requests for further details were fully complied with and the ex-president submitted required proof in the form of documents, email communications. Those who support the latter's position maintain that the allegations persist because of "personal dynamics and jealousy" and that there is no evidence of wrongdoing on the ex-president's part.

Amidst these fissures within the community, several TCSBC executive teams have changed hands. The financial conflict resulted in an almost militant transparency of the administration of communal funds. Where prior to the conflict there existed a certain kind of laissez-faire attitude, informality in the administration of community funds, the allegations led to

a state of hyper alertness and transparency. Noting the change in organizational culture, one community member reflected on its pros and cons–

> "The *tsogpa* is becoming more and more Canadian. Earlier an executive may not be clear about their dealings, but they will also work non-stop and take risks for the community. Now people don't do anything (new or significant) because if you fail everyone will talk about how you wasted money and not that you tried your best. The good thing is everyone is accountable these days, but the leadership team also seem to fear taking initiatives which is what makes us successful as a community."

Ethnographically speaking, I noted that both community members and leaders share what they call 'inside stories' (*nang stam*) or *nang gyi kehcha* (*nang gyi skedcha*), opining against revealing these details to the 'outside world'. Often stories are shared with a caveat that it is up to me as the researcher to "decide whether or not to share it" or with a personal disclaimer- "I don't know but this is what they say" thus avoiding any direct entanglement. Personally, in doing so, members can balance their perception of me as part of the Tibetan community and my role as a researcher writing about the community. Beyond questioning these as strategic ploys to shape the research or use it as a platform to voice unsettled grievances, from kinship's perspective, it also speaks to the awareness of the lines between the inner and outer worlds of the diaspora. Such boundaries seem to incite conflicting desires - to share "what truly is/or happened" as an opportunity to amend or narrate one's 'truth', while conscious that divulging these internal matters may be transgressions against the internal code of group dynamics.

Anatomies of the *Tsogpa* & *Kyidu*

Examining the organizational forms in the field it seems only apt that I borrow the irony of Austen's (1813) famed opening lines that 'it is a truth universally acknowledged' by Tibetans that the *kyidu* and *tsogpa* are not the same. For you do not have to venture too far into communal interactions before you notice the ambivalent vernacular use and interpretations of the types of social organizations in Tibetan. This contrasts with the approach taken by previous studies, where based on a particular analysis, the 'type' of social organization is defined and construed as a *kyidu* (Miller, 1956; Tsondre 2011), *niamle* (*mnyam las*) (Kang & Krone, 2022), or a *tsogpa* (Muhlich, 1997). Further such categorizations exclude a comparative account of how these terms intersect and exist in relationship to each other within the social organizing sphere and importantly how they evolve over time and space. Consequently, the emergent narrative appears as though these categories are self-evidently independent which do not reflect the reality of their fluidity in terms of relationships and exchanges with 'others' in the social space. Here it needs to be emphasized that the organizational 'types' presented below are aimed for coherence and clarity, but their forms and functions intersect in many ways as to make any concrete demarcations simplistic. In subsequent sections I show how their différance (from a deconstructive lens) is upon closer inspection much more ambiguous than one may initially
think.

Tibetan Organizing Terms: In its literal meaning, *kyidu* is a conjoint word comprising of '*skyid'* (happiness) and '*sdug'* (suffering). Conceptually, in the '*Dung kar tshig mdzod chen mo' (2002)*- the encyclopedic source for Tibetological terms *kyidu (skyid sdug)* is contextually described as '*skyid sdug gi 'thab len*' (p.251) explained as–

khyim tshang phan tshun bar du skyid po byung dus legs gsol rten 'brel dhang 'bron 'bod lag rtags skyel res yod pa hang sdug po byung dus rogs ram byed res kyi 'brelba dampo yod pa' don la gho.

(Strong relational bond/affinity between households through celebration of mutual happiness by partaking in each other's celebratory events, reciprocal gift giving and during times of sorrow/misfortune provide mutual assistance, support one another.)

However, the text does not contain an entry on *tsogpa*. In Miller's (1956) formative work examining *kyidu,* which she spelt as *'kidu',* she defined the term as "a formalized system of mutual aid" and stated that "this organization" may have evolved from an earlier form of formalized friendship known as '*Ganye*' (see Miller, p.160, 1956). Miller's (1956) definition is carried on by subsequent works on the subject including the term's literal meaning based on Jaschke's (1881) Tibetan – English dictionary as "happiness and misery, good and ill luck" (Miller, p.160). More recently, the CTA Department of Education's formal initiative to standardize usage of Tibetan terminologies (https://tibterminology.net/dictionary/association/) defines these social organizing terms as follows: 'organization' *dik tsuk* (*sgrig 'dzugs*), 'association' *thun tsog* or *kyidu* (*mthun tshogs, skyid sdug*), 'foundation' *shi zug* or *de tsa* (*gzhi 'dzugs, bde rtsa*). Interestingly, the OOT, in their reports address the local Tibetan cultural organizations as *Chithun tsogpa* (*spyi thun tshogs pa*) – 'Tibetan Association' which if we recall in the CTA's proposed standardization of the term (association) is translated as *kyidu*. From the point of view of diasporic Tibetans' group kinship formation and structure, this translation speaks to the perceived hierarchy within social structures. For instance, interpretation of the TA as Tibetan 'association' *thun tsog/kyidu* – a unified group (within the locality) fundamentally aimed

at mutual welfare (*kyidu*) reflects a localized arrangement. From the OOT's perspective, the TAs are a grassroots 'communal' organization of Tibetans in the locality, hence the term 'association'. Yet from the point of view of the TAs, they are registered charitable organizations '*tsogpa*' officially representing the Tibetans both transnationally to CTA through the OOT and locally within the Canadian provinces in which they are based (for example, Ontario, B.C.).

My positionality here is not that the translation of terminologies be it from Tibetan to English or the every-day language used, needs modification or is inaccurate per se. Rather it is to show that the multiple descriptions or definitions exist as 'perspective' points dotted along the axials of the 'Tibetan' kinship hierarchy. As such the terms linguistic gaze contain a perspective within that continues to evolve as the Tibetan diaspora expands further into time-space. These connotations in turn impact how groups organize and represent themselves – as one elder stated, "We don't have a *shung* (*gzhung*) here, but in its place is the tsogpa". *Shung (gzhung)* translated as 'government' connotes the CTA. Referring to the TA's role in the locality highlights the symbolic importance of the local organization which connects the community to the larger network of Tibetans and the CTA. For without the TA, it will be exceedingly difficult for the CTA to carry out its transnational governance tasks. Beyond the functional tasks, it is through the local TAs that the CTA maintains its critical connection with Tibetans spread across various localities in North America, Europe and Australia.

Moving on from the ambivalent nature of organizational 'types' and how they shift and adapt to diasporic flux, here I present a list of reported *tsogpa* and *kyidu* in the two field sites. The number of organizations vary mainly due to the difference in the sizes of the two communities in Vancouver and Toronto. In the lower mainland of Vancouver, the 'Tibetan Cultural Society of B.C' (TCSBC) is often identified simply as the '*tsogpa'*. Asa mentioned in

previous chapters, the Tawang *kyidu* is the only identified *kyidu* in the area, created by the newcomers from Arunachal Pradesh who came through the federal resettlement project. In addition to the two, other organizations in Vancouver include the B.C. Tibetan Parents' Association, Vancouver Tibetan Football Club (VTFC) Association and *Lhaksam Metok* (Tibetan Women's cultural performance group).

In the province of B.C. TCSBC was the only Tibetan association until in June 2010 when Tibetans on Vancouver Island formed a separate local Tibetan association known as the Tibetan Cultural Society of Vancouver Island. During my interview with the president of the association at the time of the research, he mentioned that there were 37 members and approximately 87 Tibetans connected to the organization mainly comprising of those who came to the island from Arunachal Pradesh through the resettlement project prior to which the island only had a few Tibetan families.

In Toronto, by far the largest Tibetan population in Canada, members commonly note that 'there are many *kyidu* and *tsogpa*' in the community. While a TCCC volunteer provided a list of 15 organizations (see Appendix A) based on their record, community members in Toronto at the time of the research state that there are in fact many smaller *kyidu* and the total number of groups can be between 20 to 25 groups. Amongst them all, the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario (CTAO) aligned with the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Center (TCCC) form the two largest '*tsogpa*' in the GTA.

Between Culture and Politics: The Tibetan Associations in Toronto and Vancouver

The Tibetan Associations (TA) in Vancouver and Toronto are both registered charitable organizations under the provincial Societies Act of the province of B.C. and Ontario and known as Tibetan cultural organizations in the locality. Examining the development of the TAs, in this

section, I will discuss how favorable domestic attitudes towards ethnocultural rights and culture certainly helped influence the 'cultural' model of the organizations. However, their formations were also motivated by an understanding of the *political task* of culture (relatedly identity) and cultural continuity rooted in diasporic consciousness. In both study sites, during interviews with former and current executives of the TAs, as well as community members about what they understand as the main organizational purposes of the TA, narratives cohere around two interlinking responses cutting across all narratives and ages – the need for a 'Tibetan gathering space' (*bhodpa 'dzoms sa*) and 'Tibetan cultural preservation' (*bhod kyis rig gzhung srung skyob*). Both these elements, I posit, are critical aspects of 'diaspora' development in Canada.

TCSBC and CTAO (TCCC was formed much later in October 2007) as organizations are developed by the first groups of Tibetans who came from a highly charged political climate of the exilic centre in India. Many of the individuals involved experienced death and loss within their family during the Chinese takeover of Tibet. Community elders in both field sites who took part in the initial formation of the TAs recall a growing understanding of their new environment's openness to 'ethnic culture' upon arrival in Canada. Their experiences relate to Shneiderman's (2006) reference to the shift in portrayal of Tibetan identity within nation states as previously discussed in Chapters 1 and 4. In addition, the Tibetans were advised by individual Canadian supporters of the Tibet movement to organize as a charitable group. As one elder recalls, 'they told us here the government gives us the right to practice our religion and culture as a Tibetan'. In interviews with Phuntsok and Lobsang who assumed key roles in their respective TAs, for many years, from their vantage, the main vision and organizational goal for Tibetans in developing the TAs is articulated as based in their intrinsic motivation "to help the cause of the

Tibetan movement" and "being a Tibetan, our responsibility to preserve its culture and religion". The Canadian multicultural framework with its protection of group cultural rights was therefore a viable avenue through which ethnic Tibetans could align and maintain continuity of the exile national agenda.

In its outlook, the TAs cater to the notion of 'common Tibetan' identity which also imbues them with moral and cultural legitimacy to publicly speak, represent and organize on behalf of 'all Tibetans' notwithstanding the intricacies of intra group dynamics within the community. In comparison to other organizations in the locality especially in the case of Toronto, they are described by community members as being the 'umbrella' or the 'mother' organization (*mtshog pa ama*).

To summarize, coming from the diasporic hubs in South Asia, for the vast majority of Tibetans in Canada, political hyperactivity has long been a part of communal identity and a highly institutionalized process of the exilic supra structure under the aegis of the CTA (see McConnell, 2015). Therefore, in tune with their developing understanding of the larger Canadian legal framework which permits the organizing of ethnocultural groups under the aegis of shared culture, Tibetans formed ethnocultural groups. As an ethnocultural organization, the TA is motivated by cultural preservation which as discussed in preceding chapters underlines a key political task and basis in advocating for Tibetan sovereignty and identity.

Organizational Beginnings and Evolution:

In Ontario, the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario (henceforth CTAO) was founded in 1978 as a not-for-profit organization (Chyssem Project, 2022) by the local Tibetan families living in Lindsay, Cobourg and Belleville. On October 17, 2007, the Tibetan Canadian Cultural

Centre (TCCC) was formally established, known as *Ghangjong Choedenling* (*gangs ljongs chos ldan gling*) in Tibetan. As with most institutional landmarks of the diaspora it was named by the Dalai Lama. A former executive member of the organization explains–

> His Holiness provided the name *Ghangjong Choedenling* for our proposed community center in 2004 upon our request so that is the Tibetan name and in English we simply call it the 'Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre.

The CTAO and the TCCC (located at 40 Titan Rd. Etobicoke ON) are legally registered as two distinct organizations managed by the same executive board as was confirmed by a past president of the CTAO and TCCC during our interview. Noting that publicly when describing the TA in Toronto in the Tibetan media outlet, the narrative is of there being one *tsogpa*, I asked why this was so. The executive member reasoned that it was 'to avoid confusion'. Yet the confusion of whether there are one or two *tsogpa* in Toronto persists even amongst Tibetans living there and in the larger Tibetan diaspora.

For instance, in conversations with community members who are newer to the city or not as involved in the TA's internal workings, they insist that 'there is only one *tsogpa*' often identifying it with TCCC's Tibetan name '*Ghanjong Choedenling*'. Others who are aware of the existence of CTAO in addition to TCCC often conceive of them as having 'just two different names but in reality, are the same' (*ming gnyis yod red yin nes dngos nas tsogspa gcig red*'). A long-time volunteer and former executive board member when speaking of the organizational names, stated–

> Previously *Ghangjong Choedenling* (TCCC) is called CTAO and in 2007 when His

> Holiness came after which we got the community centre our organization *shifted* from Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario to Tibetan Canadian Cultural centre. So, I am an executive member of this organization, formally called CTAO.

Locally, the narrative that the community organization transitioned from 'CTAO to TCCC' is a popular notion. The Tibetan name for TCCC bestowed by the Dalai Lama carry cultural and moral significance, and therefore '*Ghangjong Choedenling'* the name of the center is often used to connote the community organization i.e. CTAO. Furthermore, the concrete space of the centre and its myriad Tibetan cultural, religious events and programs provide a physical landmark as the 'community organization' in comparison to the abstract nature of the CTAO. The less prominent status of the CTAO can be seen in the way members unironically address it as 'the other organization" even though it was originally the only *tsogpa* in the locality created by the first Tibetan families in Ontario. Communal interpretation as to why there are two

different names vary. Some members opine that the two have distinct functions in that the CTAO takes charge of political activities while the TCCC focuses on culture. Others state that the TCCC had to be registered separately because the CTAO had briefly lost its charitable registration status due to administrative oversight during the tenure of a previous board. When questioned whether the information was factual, it was neither confirmed nor denied by a past president of the CTAO and TCCC.

A rationale suggestion for the existence of both is that, in Canada cultural organizations that have charitable registration status are not allowed to be involved in political activities. Further the president and executives of the CTAO and TCCC in interviews reiterated that the division between the two are based on functional needs of the community i.e. the CTAO serves

as the political arm of the community while the TCCC oversees the cultural and religious spheres. A prominent member of the Canada Tibet Committee also explained during an informal conversation that the laws of the Canadian cultural organizations were tightened due to cases related to some Punjabi and Sri Lankan community members' involvement in the Khalistan movement and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Descriptively the above presents the status and conceptualization of the field organizations. Reflecting on their state, it becomes apparent how the critical fluidity (and necessity) in Tibetan diasporic conceptualization of the *cultural as political* are at odds with the division of the two in the Canadian milieu. The need to adhere to Canadian federal and provincial laws to keep their organization afloat in turn shapes communal strategies which ironically reiterates how ethnic culture must be performed on the larger multicultural stage. In the case of the Tibetan community, the division of the political and the cultural tasks further highlights how diasporic beings find ways to continue *apriori* affiliations, agendas through engagement and negotiation with existing citizenship and legal frameworks of the nation state.

Administering the TAs: Community members who first moved to Toronto in the 90s speak of the CTAO's organizational development and evolution in various ways – the expansion of the executive team from four to thirteen and membership count "of roughly a few hundred up to 1500-1600" current paid members at the time of the study. The development of the TCCC, expanded the organizational scope beyond cultural events and activities to ongoing social and educational programs that are more targeted towards specific topics and groups (youth, seniors, women-focused) albeit with a culturally Tibetan focus (to be discussed further in the next chapter). In essence many of the programs and services provided by the TA in Toronto are similar

to other Canadian non-profit organizations, except that the service recipients are exclusively Tibetans.

Functionally, the administrative structure of the Toronto TA consists of an executive team or 'board members' comprising 11 to 14 elected members who oversee both the CTAO and TCCC. The leadership structure includes the following positions – the president, vice president, treasurer, accountant, event coordinator, cultural coordinator, religious coordinator, education coordinator, social services and outreach coordinator, 'Green Book' coordinator (known as *chatrel* – payment of an annual voluntary contribution to the CTA), Volunteer coordinator, IT/Web AV system, kitchen coordinator, maintenance and facilities coordinator. Since many of the activities are physically conducted at the TCCC, it also has specific committees such as the Information Technology committee, the religious committee and the Renovation committee that oversee ongoing programs and management of the community center. In B.C. the initial fourmember executive team of TCSBC has expanded to a seven member executive team. While the initial structure, developed during its inception in the 1980s, of appointing a president, vice president, general secretary and accountant remain, the expansion includes the positions of a cultural coordinator, 'Green Book' '*Chatrel*' coordinator and a storage keeper. The CTA recognizes CTAO and the TCCC as the TAs representing Tibetans in Ontario and in B.C. recognizes TCSBC as the TA representing Tibetans in Metro Vancouver. As previously discussed, the other TA (TCSOVI) is based on Vancouver Island. In both Toronto and Vancouver, the executive board members of the TAs are elected for a two-year term. All Tibetans are eligible for membership in the TA although to be board members, individuals must be paid members of the TAs for the current year. Both TAs have their own distinct bylaws.

According to one of the board members of the CTAO, the bylaws state that "if you are a board member for two consecutive terms, four years in total, you are not allowed to run for the fifth and the sixth year". TCSBC bylaws do not specify the number of years a member can be elected as an executive except to state that nominees are not allowed to be part of the election committee. Therefore, in the past, individuals have served as the community president for multiple years. However, today the popular understanding is that the TCSBC executives can be nominated for two terms after which they need to step down for at least one election term. Both the TAs are completely volunteer driven including all its elected board members. Based on interviews the main source of financial income is membership fees, individual donations and fundraising at events. In Toronto specifically, the TA secures occasional provincial funding for educational language grants and has rental income from the community center which is often booked to host group meetings, weddings, prayer ceremonies and fundraising events.

***TA Membership & generational changes*:** Tibetans in general view themselves as part of the 'community' by virtue of their heritage whether they have paid the annual membership fee to the TA or not. This may be because the 'Tibetan community' in concrete terms is officially represented by the local TA which often gets conflated with the idea of the collective group. However as shown below, the actual paid enrolment in the TA varies annually. There are also many Tibetans who do not pay their membership fees due to logistical issues, changing generational and cultural taste of events. For the community leadership these are newer challenges of living in a highly individualized North American setting, undermining communal notions of collective Tibetan identity which are strongly etched within the exile institutional system.

Membership criteria in the TA are based on Tibetan heritage including mixed Tibetan parentage children and non-Tibetan spouses. Naturally, the two TAs vary in their membership sizes based on the number of Tibetans in the province. The TA is considered the main organization representing Tibetans in the region by the community and by virtue of their status consider all Tibetans as *defacto* members. However, the number of paid memberships varies from year to year. For example, of the estimated total of 450 Tibetans in the Vancouver lower mainland, in 2021 there were 90 paid household representatives out of 139 household representatives. This number is based on the WhatsApp group chat membership count. To elaborate, there are two groups created by the TCSBC executive board. One of group chats can only be accessed by those who have paid membership dues for the year while the other is for all Tibetans in the locality.

According to the president of the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario (CTAO), it is estimated that Toronto has more than 8000 Tibetans and the number of paid membership size vary considerably from year to year. As he explained- "Some years we have around 900-1000 paid members, the highest have been between 1500-1600 paid members a year." Explaining the gap between the total number of Tibetans and the number of paid members, he stated–

> It is not because people do not care but they are busy and often forget to pay membership dues. So, when we created the online membership fee payment system, the number of paid members noticeably increased.

In Vancouver, the TCSBC annual membership fee is $30 per adult while students, those below the age of 18 and above 65 years old pay a reduced rate of $15. Children under 7 years also do not need to pay the annual membership fee. Comparatively, the annual membership fee

for CTAO/TCCC is much higher due to the upkeep required for the community centre. In both the field sites, executive board members do lament that many Tibetans in the locality do not pay the membership fee despite their repeated appeals during events and other cultural gatherings. One of the TCCC executives exasperatedly noted, "How many Tibetans have immigrated to Toronto but in my 12 years of being a board member, I have never seen our membership rise beyond a 1000 people which is unacceptable!"

Discussions on barriers to membership fee payment with local non-paying Tibetans include several reasons. One of the main reasons cited is not knowing how to pay the membership fee when newly arrived in the area, forgetting to pay due to work and other commitments. Many also mention that a) the membership fee is too costly for a family or b) they missed the membership fee this year but have otherwise paid their fee in previous years. Of note, younger Tibetan professionals also candidly share that they do not want to pay membership fee because the events and programs 'are always the same'- targeted towards seniors and children; the religious events are too traditional rather than interactive sessions on meditation or aspects of Buddhism that is of everyday relevance. Speaking candidly about why she does not pay membership fee, Dolma, a recently graduated registered nurse in her twenties, stated–

> Our parents' generation enjoy going to the community center, but our age group don't seem to like it too much. My friends say "*choh yoh mareh*" (there is no point/meaningless) because all they do is rake up old stories about financial mismanagement, gossip…And when we do attend events where they tell us to pay membership, they emphasize the financial discounts we can get rather than talk about why the *tsogpa* is important. So even though I feel very strongly about my identity as a Tibetan, I am not enrolled with the *tsogpa*.

Membership fee collection is also critiqued by others for different reasons. In my interviews with two Tibetans raised in Canada, they both opined that collecting membership fees beyond 'two or three generations' by the TA is a risk to its survival in Canada. Commenting on the state of the 'abandoned ethnocultural centers' that are now used as rentals, one of them candidly remarked–

> Look at all the ethnic groups that came to Canada, how many colleagues at work do you know who are first or second-generation immigrants and paid members of their community? Our parents' and our generation may pay because we know the *tsogpa* is important for our cause and culture, but I don't know if the younger generations will have the same bond. If we want to survive, we must change the way we do things and not just fixate on membership fees and community halls.

The understanding that the TA needs to evolve and keep abreast of changing communal needs to maintain its relevance is felt both by the community leadership and its constituents as discussed below.

Sports for Change?

During an interview, an executive member laughingly admitted to hearing that "the youth say TCCC is only for adults and seniors" hinting at the lack of relevant youth programs and services. In their own ways, the changing TCCC/CTAO board members have attempted to address these challenges, especially the need for youth inclusion and participation. The addition of the new gymnasium within the TCCC is one such initiative. It hopes to amend the general lack of youth focused programs and serve as a concrete incentive for membership enrollment fee. According to the executive member, the development of the gymnasium has led to an increase in youth involvement -

> Now we have a basketball court, and it brings our younger generation into our organization. It's a good start… I have been telling my young friends that you must start volunteering and learning about our community, then you can run our community. Don't expect me to be an executive member even when I am 80 years old.

Between basketball to upholding the community's cultural mantle seems a long journey. Walking through the large hallways of the abandoned lighting factory that is now a Tibetan public space, I could hear youth playing basketball just a few doors away from where the silent statues sat in the 'shrine' hall. In the auditorium, a few volunteers were cleaning up the last pieces of debris from the fundraising concert held the night before, bits of shiny strings and plastic décor. *Ghangjong Choedenling* (literally translated as 'Snowland Dharmic Abode/realm' – a reference to the remote homeland) seemed truly a site of hybridity, in that its tenacity and resilience is writ large in the tumultuous history of its making within the community and the paths that led Tibetans to Canada. As a center it gathers religious heads, politicians, activists, scholars, tourists and visiting Tibetans from across the diasporic communities. At the same time, as an 'ethnocultural organization' the long-term survival of the TA and concerns regarding the practical maintenance of the center will continue to be a part of communal challenge.

Overall, the TA derives its status of being seen as the main 'mother' organization (*tsogpa ama*) through its organizing category of the 'universal' Tibetan kinship under whose umbrella the fledgling others dwell. The TA is also weighed by concerns regarding its sustainability as discussed before. Furthermore, its task of fostering a 'Tibetan' community in Canada is challenged not only by external conditions but also internal claims for material and human resources within *tsogpa- kyidu* organizing as presented below. Incidentally, both these

organizations are nestled within and operate in the name of kinship's continuity. Moving on from the *tsogpa*, the following section will now discuss the formation and evolution of *kyidu* in the field.

***Kyidu*: Then & Now**

As a reminder of the context in which *kyidu* (*skyid sdug*) as a form of localized kinship organizing emerged in the bygone Tibetan 'past', I want to evoke L.P. Hartley's (1953) description of it as a 'foreign country'. This foreignness requires one to culturally grasp the notion of time and distance in traditional Tibet which may best be articulated through an old Lhasa lament. It is said that two lovers wanting to elope far from parental wrath agonizes over whether they must flee to *Medogungkar* the Land's End (g*nam gyi mtha' Mal grdo gung dkar*) or to *Gyantse* the Sky's End' (*sa'i mtha rgyal rste*). Metaphorically perceived from one's own centre (of Lhasa), it is as remote as travelling to the earth's periphery and the other even more un-surmisable- as if travelling to the limits of the sky. Artistic liberties aside, the fact that today the Lhasa County of *Medogungkar* is approximately 331 kms from *Gyantse* prefecture and easily accessible, provide a sense of how understandings of distances have undergone a paradigm shift.

Relatedly, from both imagined and concrete notions of distance, what one can observe from the descriptions of early Tibetan societal life in the writings of Namkhai Norbu (2009; 1997; 1981), Karmey Samten (2005;1998; 1995), is a sense of highly localized identity. This includes the existence of distinct clans, a loosely based system of proto religion closely connected to the natural environment and a need for mutual dependence for survival. Combined, these factors understandably lead to the formation of mutual self-help relationships out of which *kyidu* as an organized social helping system amongst household groups within a locality emerged, in the

absence of a modernist social welfare system. Before delving further into the state of *kyidu* in the field site today, here I will highlight some pivotal works related to its understanding though it is worth noting that the scholarship on the system as it pertains to exile Tibetans stops in the late 1950s. More recently there has been only one descriptive article on the subject in Tibet (Tsondru, 2011) with most of its explorations conducted elsewhere (Craig, 2020; Sherpa, 2019; Ugyel, 2018; Shaw, 2015).

The Tibetan word *kyidu* (phonetically written in the past as '*kidu'*) is a shortened form of two Tibetan words '*skyid po*' (happiness) and '*sdug po*' (sadness/sorrow) as discussed earlier. As a native speaker, I have opted to phonetically spell it as *kyidu* since a minor, yet audible enunciation of the letter 'y' (in '*skyid*') and 'g' (in *sdug*) renders a more accurate pronunciation of the Tibetan word which Pasang Yangjee Sherpa (2019) also uses in her article on Sherpa *kyidus* in New York. Moreover, it is also the community members' preferred way of rendering the term in English. Conceptually, *kyidu* is defined as a type of Tibetan organized self-help system that had been in existence in Tibet prior to the Chinese takeover of the region in 1959 based on Miller's (1956) early research in India and Nepal with Tibetan refugees who had fled into exile. However, it is also hypothesized that *kyidu* may have been adapted to Tibet based on groups, set up by migrant traders from Nepal such as *Guthi* and *Dhikur* (see Bista,1978; Doherty, 1978) and Messerschmidt (1978). Similar kinship organizing concepts aimed at mutual helping can also be found in Ladakh, amongst the Manangi (Rogers, 2004), the *mitra* trading friend or privileged correspondent amongst the Bhutia bordering on Northwestern Nepal and Tibet, the *Ingzong* system of the Lepchas with Tibetans in Sikkim which in Tibetan is known as *'res'* connoting reciprocity and '*khu*' (shortened form of *khu bo* meaning paternal uncle). From a broader

perspective then, as an organized mutual self-help system, *kyidu* as a prototype existed across the Himalayan regions.

In Tibet, the term *kyidu* is used in relation to and perceived to have developed as skillsbased, organized self-help groups by artisans and tradespeople sometimes amongst groups of households in the villages for the purposes of mutual aid. Miller (1956) also posits that *kyidu* may in turn be a more developed form of *Ganye (dga nye)* ('*dga bo'* – meaning 'loved ones' and *'nye bo'* – close/intimate relations) an 'earlier prototype' formed within close groups in the Shigatse (*gzhis ka stse*) area, Sherpas and Sikkimese, and amongst Amdo and Kham Tibetans living in Lucknow. *Ganye* as an individual and familial based membership into a group is seen to exist "wherever a group of Tibetans live together for any length of time" and a Tibetan migrant acquires *ganye* "after the first year or two" of his settlement in a locality. However transient Tibetans in the area are excluded "because his earth and stone does not come with him" (Miller, 1956) which speaks to Tibetan embeddedness of kinship as rooted in place (discussed in notions of kinship in Chapter 5). Overall, these formative studies significantly shaped understandings of *kyidu* as a type of Tibetan self-help organizing that have similarities with other kinds of mutual help organizing(s) existing across the cultural Himalaya.

Miller (1956) also hypothesized that based on organizing behaviors of Tibetan refugees and migrants, *kyidu*-like organizing may have existed in the nomadic regions as well and that it is perhaps known by a different term. That such forms of organizing did exist in the nomadic regions too can be evidenced based on Namkhai Norbu's (1997) ethnographic account of journey and life amongst Tibetan pastoralists in the *Dzachuka* region in the 1950s. In his field observations, Namkhai Norbu (1997) notes the antiquity of the practice described as 'formalized friendships' (p. 6) as an important part of nomadic society existing in other pastoral regions too.

Explaining the phenomenon further, he describes how nomadic families enter a formalized friendship pact with each other whereby they "pledge to observe with sincere solicitude, the spirit of the nomadic adage 'rejoice in happy times together, together bear adversities" (p.6). Ritually the pact must be consolidated by taking a formal oath called *najog* without which it is not recognized. Additionally, Namkhai Norbu (1997) points out that 'formalized friendship' can also be between communities and that "where the pact involves two communities, it is sworn in a rite called "pounding the blood-red hide" (p. 6). For Tibetan nomads, the blood-red hide holds much material and spiritual significance as livestock are vital for survival and considered sacred thus conveying the value placed on formalized friendships. However, aside from this ethnographic account, the extent to which such forms of formalized friendships were prevalent in the nomadic regions is not known.

Critically, the significance of this otherwise descriptive account is that Namkhai Norbu's (1997) observations were in fact of nomadic life in 1951 in Tibet, placing his fieldwork prior to Miller's study with Tibetan refugees in India. It also reflects societal norms of a time and space before the introduction of Chinese social reforms in Tibet. Therefore, while *kyidu* is traditionally associated with agricultural areas, its core construct as a kinship organizing structure for mutual aid through life events (symbolic of the terms 'happiness and sorrow') existed in other Tibetan cultural regions. What one can also deduce is that the organizing unit for nomadic 'formalized friendships' that Namkhai Norbu observed as well as the formalized social help organizing of *kyidu* are both grounded in the shared universality of the human condition, or to use Sahlin's (2013) term 'the mutuality' of happiness and sorrow. The fact that such a 'friendship' is a) only recognized after a formal (*najog*) oath swearing ceremony and that b) it can be between individuals, families and nomadic tribes is evidence that a formalized mutual helping system at

the individual, familial and group levels exist in Tibetan pastoralist society. Conceptually too, it is worth noting that mutual aid as both a 'factor of evolution' and 'with its anarchical roots' (Kropotkin, 1914) aligns well with the highly independent and rugged demands of the Tibetan nomadic lifestyle. To theorize, *kyidu* (beyond its definition as an organized form of mutual social helping system) as praxis is contextualized and grounded in the shared mutuality of human life course trajectories, sustaining kinship amongst individuals, groups and communities.

***Kyidu* & Development in Diaspora:**

Keeping in mind the earlier discussion on the comparative notion of space between communities, places in historical Tibet, one can imagine how the advent of exile signaled a shift in the scale of *kyidu* imaginings and organizing. Tibetans formally spread across the expanse of Greater Tibet (see map https://www.loc.gov/item/74692434/) came to live in highly close-knit acreage of exilic settlements in India and Nepal. Where traditionally, *kyidu* were skills-based, highly localized organizing, diaspora led to the formation of 'regional' place-based *kyidu* indicating how exile with its clustered sites and the CTA's centralizing power and influence ushered a massive shift in organizing ways of being 'Tibetan'. Relatedly *kyidu* organizing significantly expanded its kinship formation and boundaries, for the term itself (connoting shared happiness and sorrow) do not have parameters against its application towards any 'type' of group setting. Thus theoretically, *kyidu* is formed and used to connote various types of mutual affiliations. As a social helping system and ideology, it can be hybridized to meet different contextual realities in varying sizes and formations so long as its fundamental understanding of practising kinship is upheld through mutual support in times of happiness and sorrow. Thus, where *kyidu's* historical transfer to Bhutan from Tibet led to its adaptation as a social welfare system under the Buddhist constitutional monarchy (Shaw, 2015), in Tibetan exile increasingly *kyidus* came to be consolidated based on regional identities and/or place of birth so much so that

this feature is now popularly seen as its defining identity today. In common parlance too, *kyidu* accommodates a wide berth/flexibility of its application to any organizing groups and colloquially, community members today use the term widely to connote *group affinity* as well as *affiliation* (my emphasis) as shown below.

For often when asked how to differentiate between a *kyidu* and other types of social organizing, popular responses include- "*kyidu* is for folks from the same region to get together" or "when I hear *kyidu,* I think of *lungpa* and *phayul"* previously defined in chapter 3 as fluidly interpreted to connote hometown, country and homeland (and in this case refers to hometown). The diasporic shift in understanding *kyidu's* connection as localized identity(s) automatically conjures relational association with nativity and/or birthplace. However, the tension within exilic kinship notions (national and ethnic Tibetan as discussed in previous chapter) also imparts *kyidu* with a sense of subversiveness often resulting in its othering as a type of organizing structure. For example, a community member who earlier lived in India shares this sense of trepidation against *kyidu* when narrating the story of the development of *Gyantse Diktsug* (*sgrig 'dzugs*).

> "Back in Dharamsala when the Gyantse *kyidu* was first formed, I said I do not agree it should be called a *kyidu*. So, it was later changed to *Gyantse Diktsug* (organization).
>
> Interviewer: Why did you not want it to be called a *kyidu*?
>
> Because at the time we were all living in Dharamsala and there is a 'centralized government' (*bhod gzhung*) so there is no need to form various *kyidu*… It seemed more prudent to focus our loyalty and commitment to the exile administration therefore we decided to call it a *diktsug*. Historically, people of Gyantse have been involved during wars in the Tibetan army, in government service provision so there is a continuous

history of loyalty, commitment towards the government. Also, there is the bigger *U-tsang tsogpa* who can involve themselves in politics, so we don't have to."

The above allusion to the loyalty and long-term affiliation of the people of Gyantse to the Tibetan traditional government and rationalizing this history as grounds for refusal to be seen as a *kyidu* speaks to the term's subversive status in exilic polity. It highlights the complicated, ambivalent dynamics between the politics of diasporic identity and cultural survival where as much as there is a need to maintain the tradition of *kyidu* organizing, diasporic conditions (re)create and form social meanings anew. Ironically too, despite *kyidu's* evolving configurations, both *kyidu* members and its critics reify it as a 'traditional Tibetan organizing that existed in Tibet' when describing its existence and importance in the community. These tensions are further tied to the politics of place-based identity and affiliation as diversions against the larger fight of the Tibetan national, which I discussed earlier in the context of the TA's stature within the community and articulations of Tibetan identity.

Organizing Kyidu: In Vancouver, as previously mentioned there is only one organization that describes itself as a *kyidu* – the Tawang *kyidu* while Tibetans in Toronto allude to there being various *kyidu* in their community. During my initial interviews and informal conversations with *kyidu* members based on the list provided by the TA (see Appendix I), groups are included either because they are titled as *kyidu* or are seen to operate as a *kyidu* i.e., members share kinship ties based on mutuality of placebased identity. This open-ended application of the term *kyidu* is also reflected in Tibetans' responses to both its literal meaning as a type of Tibetan organizing for mutual help as well as connoting a certain kind of shared affinity within a social group. Furthermore, the boundaries between these two meanings are open, highly ambivalent and fluid as in the case of the '*Ontario Toepa Rigshung Thuntsog'* (Ontario *stod pa' rig gzhung mthun*

tsogs), in English entitled Toepa Cultural Society of Ontario which local Tibetans also colloquially refer to as *Toepa (stodpa) kyidu* (see below). For *kyidu* in its literal meaning simply connotes a sense of kinship that manifests through mutual support during important life events and circumstances – birth, death, illnesses, marriages, financial loss/aid, and get togethers to celebrate Tibetan religious and social festivities. On the other hand, the sense of *kyidu* kinship as an organizing form in the diasporic setting is often depicted as a regional place-based affiliation, therefore instead of a 'cultural society', due to the common place-based characteristic of the group (being from the *stod* region) it is deemed a *kyidu*.

Relative to the size of the diasporic TA which is built on the premise of the universal 'Tibetan', conventionally diaspora *kyidu* are shaped by regionalized identity(s). Diaspora *kyidu* have smaller membership size, members are more familiar with each other compared to the members within a TA setting and focuses on social help activities within the group. Traditionally therefore a *kyidu's* scope is seen as being concerned with the group's welfare as opposed to the *tsogpa* which oversees larger societal concerns. *Kyidu* such as the Nyalam *(gny' lam) kyidu* can be seen as falling within this category if one examines its organizing structure as described during my field interactions and interview with a founding member whom I will call Tashi.

> The Nyalam *kyidu* was initially formed in Nepal in 1967 and my family was involved in its founding at the time. In Nepal, we have around 600 to 700 people, roughly 200 households from Nyalam and we elect 15 executive members. The two with the highest votes are elected president (*tsogs rtso*) and vice president (*tsogs gzhon*) for a three-year term. In Toronto we have around 150 individuals from Nyalam and roughly 30-40 households who are members of the *kyidu*. The Toronto *kyidu* has a president but we did not have an election. We just requested a member who was previously the *kyidu* president

in Nepal to take on the role. We also directly requested people from different areas to be executives. In 2018, a president was selected. The selection was done during the *Zamling Chisang* (*dzamgling spyi bdzang*) event when people gather, and we look at who may be a good candidate. We tell those selected that they are mainly responsible for relaying announcements or notifications to the group otherwise there are not many things we need to do here. It is all volunteer based. Our main objective in forming the *kyidu* was that in Tibet we celebrate *Zamling Chisang* (*dzamgling spyi bdzang*) on the thirteenth day of the fifth lunar month with incense offering (*Lhabsol*) and afterwards we have a celebratory event party, so we wanted to preserve this tradition. Another reason was that we have many people who are from Nyalam but do not know each other and so the *kyidu* serves to introduce and meet each other especially young boys and girls. We also teach cultural performances and songs to our youngsters and perform at '*Toepa Chitsog' (Toepa Society*) gatherings but due to COVID last year we were unable to do so. We agreed to collect $25 per person to help support members during critical events such as death and to help any newcomers (in Toronto) from Nyalam.

Tashi spoke of how the "main Nyalam *kyidu*" in Nepal is older, more established and without disclosing details stated it is 'financially stable' and does not require help from its Canadian counterpart. There is no formal administrative set up linking the two *kyidu*, for example a signed agreement to be a chapter or the provision of an annual fee. Instead, the connection is viewed as self-evident for members of the *kyidu* in Toronto are previously members of the Nepal Nyalam *kyidu*. The selection of the president too is based on prior history of the individual as the president of the *kyidu* in Nepal. As such there appears to be a sense of portable continuation of the *kyidu* in Canada and they consider themselves as maintaining ties with the Nyalam *kyidu* in Nepal. Delving further into the workings of the *kyidu*, Tashi shared that

the Nyalam *kyidu* had published their region's history. Tashi's hesitance to share the only copy of the text (long out of publication) dissipated over our newfound connection when it turned out that I knew the author's son through exilic school affiliation. Subsequently the book was mailed from Toronto.

Further explorations into *kyidu* led to the Ontario *stod pa' rig gzhung mthun tsogs* which local Tibetans also simply referred to as *stodpa kyidu*. The '*Toepa' (stod pa)* are people whose homeland communities are in the *Tingri* (*Ding ri)* region of central Tibet surrounding Mount Everest. During my interview with Kelsang, he introduced himself as a long-time member of the '*Toe rigshung tsogpa'* (*stod rig gzhung tsogs pa*) in English known as 'Toepa Cultural Society of Ontario' founded in 2018. He mentioned that the organization has approximately 1000 members who either came from or traced their family origins to the agrarian and semi-pastoralist communities considered part of the *Stod* region in Tibet. The group focuses on events specific to the region such as the celebration of '*Phag nying*' (phag snying), *Tsangpa Losar* (gtsang pa lo sar) and regional cultural performances. Organizationally, the leadership structure is unlike the *Nyalam kyidu*. As Kelsang explained–

> We don't have a leader (*'go khrid yod ma red*") but we have *nyerwa, (gNyer ba) nyerma (gNyer ma) and tsipa (rtsis pa)* who are all volunteers. To be included in the *tsogpa*, at least one member of the family should be *Toepa* who can then introduce the family members through marriage connection in the *tsogpa*. We don't tell anyone you can't be part of the *tsogpa* because you are not *toepa* but at least one member of the household needs to be *toepa* or else it doesn't work (*yinne nangmi nang neh chik Toepa goh reh mashi yung ghi mareh wa*).

Kelsang's description of the leadership structure as comprising of *nyerwa* (male steward), and *nyerma* (stewardess) is noteworthy. Unlike the other *kyidu(s)* in Toronto where the leadership terms are akin to the TA, the *Ontario Toepa Rigshung Thuntsog* echoes Miller's (1956) classical description of *kyidu* leadership terms apart from the *tsipa* (treasurer/bookkeeper) which is a newer addition. Discussing his role, Kelsang passionately spoke about preserving his homeland's rich tradition of folk songs, dances and shared anecdotes of his native village in Tingri where many of his extended relatives still live. In the '*toepa kyidu'* he stated, a key task is to ensure that the youth from the region can continue the tradition of their homeland in Canada. During our interaction, he recited snippets from Milarepa's (a Tibetan yogi saint) famed *gur lu* (*sgur glu*) marvelling at the spiritual depths of the verses and how listening to these songs gave his life "some meaning in a crazy world". Admittedly what he liked most about the '*toe rigshung tsogpa*' are the events it hosts where, "we spent the whole day singing and dancing local folk songs. We forget all our problems and it is as if we are in our native village."

That the songs and dances act as protective cultural barriers against life stressors and strengthen kinship ties within is obvious. In addition, like what Tashi had earlier mentioned regarding one of the needs for creating Nyalam *kyidu* in Toronto, an underlying hope is that these events as gathering spaces may provide an opportunity for "the young Tibetan girls and boys of our region to get to know each other' strengthening kinship ties through intra group marital alliances. Thus, beyond songs and dances as reminders of simpler times or even alleviation of worldly 'problems', structurally these (performative) events serve as social acts to memorialize a shared homeland's contours into diasporic social and political consciousness thereby (re)producing both old and new ties of mutuality.

Axials of Kinship & Diasporic Ambivalence

Moving further into *tsogpa* and *kyidu* as structures of Tibetan social organizing in the field, here, I will explore how the two are fluid, ambivalent forms rather than rigid categories. The larger diasporic history and condition brings distinct political connotations, biases and prejudices in interpreting communal perceptions of the terms. These are made vividly clear through a) past encounters/recollections of differentiations in designation of terms as well as b) current interpretations of what *kyidu* and *tsogpa* are and c) what the organizing form *ideologically* represents which speaks to the differing axials of the kinship repertoire. These underlying dynamics in turn makes it clear that kyidu and *tsogpa*, beyond organizing forms, shows how the cultural is political within diasporic consciousness and space.

Unlike the literal Tibetan meaning of the term and the 'officially' proposed standardization guidelines regarding the use of these terminologies, field encounters with community members in the two sites reveal the following folk understandings as to how they conceive '*tsogpa*' and '*kyidu*'. To illustrate, when community members speak of Tibetan social organizing, its types and number of groups in the area, their responses center around mainly two distinctions: *tsogpa* and *kyidu*. Both terms are used to communicate distinct characteristics of organizing – one that is centered around notions of a Tibetan national as promoted by the '*tsogpa*' and '*kyidu*' as a traditional, locally specific place-based understanding of 'Tibetan' identity(s) rooted in kinship alliances discussed in the previous chapter. This larger differentiation is encapsulated using an example by a former community leader of the TCSBC–

> The *tsogpa* is for all Tibetans, it is formal and legally registered non-profit organization with paid membership, mandates and gets tax exemption, whereas *kyidu* is "*nang tsok*" with no membership fee or formal structure.

Much like perception of the t*sogpa* and *kyidu*, community members additionally explain the differences between them as – "*tsogpa* means formal organization whereas *kyidu* are smaller than *tsogpa",* "*tsogpa* provides societal welfare while *kyidu* means individuals within the group help each other in times of happiness and sorrow". Further formal registration is also seen as granting the *tsogpa* legal validity and recognition in communal perception while *kyidu* is associated with informal, *adhoc* organizing usually amongst one's closer kinship network. Contextually, as shown above in both field sites *tsogpa* is often synonymously associated with the TA. The distinction that the *kyidu* are kinship affiliations particular to and grounded in localized regional identities while the *tsogpa* is embedded in a Tibetan national kinship rooted in the 'core of sacred things' is also a long-standing notion influencing diasporic kinship formation as explained in the previous chapter. At the same time popular perspectives also maintain that *tsogpa* and *kyidu* are distinct types of organizing - the *tsogpa* being 'larger and more formalized' while *kyidu* is perceived as 'smaller and informal'.

Yet the seemingly clear understandings of what constitutes *tsogpa* and '*kyidu* in popular perceptions are also not without their own entanglements and deeper ambivalence steeped in everyday practices. As a professionally trained community worker in Toronto pointed out during our interview, regarding their confusing distinctions when it comes to how one determines whether a group should be called a '*tsogpa'* or a '*kyidu'*–

> Our Tibetan terms are weird/peculiar 'khed tsapo dug' (khed mtsar po 'dug). We have 'tsogpa' and we have 'kyidu' but we also use it jointly as '*tsogpa kyidu*'(tshogs pa skyis

sdug). But then we also say *tsogpa* and *kyidu* are not the same.

What is shown here is that vagaries of conceptual murkiness flow into everyday parlance of the terms in the field for their praxis boundaries are not as clear cut including what is seen as 'defining' characteristics. These arrangements indicate that official terminologies exist alongside diasporic fluidity and 'creolization' of everyday language use which have their own distinctive denominations and layers of interpreting différence.

Further conflating the terms' application, Tibetan community members from Arunachal Pradesh living in Toronto and Vancouver today also state that *kyidu* is also used as an active verb. For example, when there is a need to visit a household due to a life event (an illness or a family member leaving town), one can say, "*Nga skyid sdug 'gro dgod yod*" (I need to go for *kyidu*) – which if examined through the lens of standard Tibetan may be deemed incorrect. The interchangeability between the two types of organizing and their similarities are also acknowledged even by those who assert that the two (*tsogpa* and *kyidu*) are distinct categories. During such interviews, often the realization of the term's open-ended boundaries begin to dawn even as the community member attempts to illustrate how the two are different- as in the case of a seasoned Tibetan activist who was sharing their perspective of the distinction between the two–

> I think the *tsogpa* is more formal in terms of Canadian governance or Canadian law. They are registered as Canadian non-profit and are not just willy-nilly paper tigers with a nice fancy letterhead…*Kyidu* can be whatever they want, they can say hey we are TCV *kyidu*, we are this region *kyidu*, we are women's *kyidu*, whatever they want to be. *Kyidu* are for me the physical manifestation of setting up a Facebook group. Anyone can do it. Only the *tsogpas* have legal weight and governance according to Canadian law. To act or serve and speak on behalf of the certain stakeholder community though mind you I believe

> some of the *kyidus* are formalized as well and I think they are doing fundraising and whatnot…I have done very little work with *kyidu* in Canada or elsewhere, so I am in no position to speak on it with any expertise.

Here we can see that at the outset the main thesis regarding the distinction between the two is the registration status which imparts the *tsogpa* with a certain authority unlike the casualness associated with *kyidu*. However, it is followed by the realization that *kyidus* too can be and are registered, have stakeholders, and engage in similar 'fundraising' activities. Member perspective above of *kyidu* as a formation of 'whatever they (you) want' referring to its wide range and the earlier comment about the differences between a *kyidu* and *tsogpa* explained by the TCSBC community leader of '*kyidu as nang stok' (inner circle of relations)* seems to reflect some shifts in diasporic social organizing.

To extrapolate, the above notions of *kyidu* collates more to Miller's (1956) observation of *gangye* (*dga nye*) groups where it is comprised of *gasa nyesa* (*dga sa nye sa*) or *gabo nyebo* (*dga' bo nye bo*) translated as intimates, close friends and associates" (p.158). Yet *ganye* is no longer identified by anyone in the field as a type of organizing but its characteristics such as informality and closeness within members is perceived as characteristics of *kyidu*. Furthermore, if one examines a 'prototype' Tibetan *kyidu* in Nepal in existence during the early decades of exile, as in the case of Khatsara Newar– Nepali traders, descendants of the former residents of Lhasa living in Tibet prior to the arrival of the Chinese and their *kyidu* established in 1974, titled 'Welfare Association of Nepalese born in Tibet' (see Muhlich, 1997) the scope and details of their functional activities including the interchangeable use of the term *kyidu* and *tsogpa* only reiterates the 'problem' of representation as being a part of diasporic history.

By far the most notable understanding about what makes the type of organizing a *kyidu* according to community members today, is that its member affiliations are particular to and grounded in regional identities. For example- "*kyidu* is based on belonging to the same place of birth, village or native region – '*lungpa chigpa*' (lung pa gcig pa) while the *tsogpa* is regarded as a pan Tibetan organization transcending region-based identities - "*tsogpa* is for all Tibetans". These friendships, close knit relations are on a communal scale tied to diasporic *kyidu* as representative of kinship affiliations particular to and grounded in localized regional identities through either birth and/or family origins. Strictly speaking, in terms of historical development, although *kyidu* organizing existed in Tibet prior to the Chinese control of the region, as Miller (1956) pointed out that in larger centres such as Lhasa these were primarily based on professions such as 'painters, carpenters, tailors, bridal headdress-makers, cobblers, silversmiths and other craftsmen' (p.163) which seems to have some resonance with the Asian conceptualization of caste as vocation.

The larger groupings of *kyidu* organized around 'regional and provincial' identities are therefore a diasporic Tibetan construction. This 'phenomenon' was made possible by the political consolidation of identity(s) in exile, enclosed Tibetan settlements shrinking spatial distances between and within Tibetan regions, flattening localized identities into 'regional' identity(s). These truisms also exist alongside conceptual and real-life ambiguities of the Tibetan social organizing terms, further riddled by the absence of any comparative sociological analysis that meaningfully delves into the varying textures of the terms.

Overall field responses convey that outwardly a distinction exists in terms of the communal perception between *tsogpa* and *kyidu* which is centered around the *tsogpa* as projecting a larger scope, membership size and often with an official registration status. At the

same time, there is acceptance of practices where a group can be called either a *kyidu* or *tsogpa.* Further attesting to the transgressional bounds of the two categories, the two can even be fluidly conjoint as – '*tsogpa kyidu'.* Further, newer diasporic realities bring additional 'reasons' for the blurring of these lines. For example, unlike the diasporic setup in India where the CTA has significant autonomy (McConnell, 2009) including management and administration of Tibetan social organizing, in the newer Tibetan diaspora(s) including Canada, the extent of its leverage and day-to-day relationship with population is minimal.

The current location of a *tsogpa* or a *kyidu* in the larger Canadian multicultural setting therefore means that in practice, where an organization can fulfill the provincial criteria for a specific type of registration, groups can opt to seek and be provided formal registration should they chose to. Under these circumstances, transgressional considerations are kept in check by relational dynamics, perceptions of communal propriety and intra group 'cultural' feedback. Taking a closer look into the ambivalent nature of their organizing dynamics, here I will further discuss tensions within and between these two relational forms.

'The Mother and her Children': Dynamics Between the Tsogpa & Kyidu

Sonam's voice boomed in and out of our WhatsApp video call as he went about cleaning and getting his restaurant in Parkdale ready for the evening ahead. It was 3pm in Toronto. Every now and then he would apologize for the background noise. This was our third attempt at setting up a time to talk about his memberships and participation in the TA which he referred to as '*bhod peh tsogpa*' (Tibetan association) and his regional *kyidu*. Sonam spoke of both the TA and the *kyidu* as distinct entities that were important to him in different ways and likened the relationship between the two as

being akin to a 'mother and child'. The *tsogpa* he stated, is like the mother and all other organizations are her children. Are there any tensions between the two, I asked?

"Families have issues, but it doesn't mean we don't care for each other" he smiled. The 'motherchild' analogy is not uncommon when speaking with community members in Toronto where many organizations had mushroomed after the second wave of the Tibetan settlement in 2000s and Toronto became the largest site of Tibetan settlement in Canada. Sonam's sentiment is also a commentary often echoed in the community by *kyidu* members when discussing how they view the structural and relational alignment between the TA and *kyidu.* Organizational dynamics are often explained using the analogy of a familial structure where the TA as the collective Tibetan organization is the 'mother' (tib '*tsogpa ama'*) of all organizations as previously discussed in

preceding sections.

The close knitted and hierarchical structure that *kyidu* and other organizations assume visà-vis the TA speaks to the underlying order of kinship organizing structures projected through the pan Tibetan and regional place-based identity(s) in diaspora. These are further grounded in notions of kinship (discussed in previous chapter). For community members therefore, the TA as representative of the collective Tibetan identity is hierarchically placed ahead of *kyidus*. Consequently, as much as *kyidus* are considered a native form of Tibetan social organizing (Shaw, 2011; Miller, 1956) a fact which may lead one to think of them as being seen in a favorable light, findings show that its role and relevance within the larger diasporic community is often questioned and critiqued. Such concerns surface when posing general questions regarding whether someone is a member of *kyidus*. Frequently community members would respond that as a Tibetan they feel a sense of loyalty and responsibility towards the Tibetan cultural

organizations (TA) but 'do not think having many *kyidu tsogpas* are beneficial for our society'. A former prominent member of the CTA in Toronto disapprovingly stated, "when one group creates a *kyidu*, then another group imitates by creating their own. Before long there are too many small organizations in our community risking collective unity", referring once again to *kyidu's* potential to subvert group unity.

Moving to Vancouver, as mentioned previously there is only one *kyidu* known as the *Tawang (rta dwang) kyidu* created by Tibetans from Arunachal Pradesh who came to the lower mainland through the resettlement project (see chapter three for details). Tawang is the name of the Indo-Tibetan border located in present day Arunachal Pradesh, India which was historically under Tibetan control. The region is inhabited by several other indigenous groups who have also lived in the area for centuries (Huber et al., 2012). While the larger group declined to be interviewed in the study as discussed in previous chapters, two group members engaged in an informal discussion. According to them, the formation of the group "happened organically in 2018" when one of the individuals from Tawang, who had come to Canada alone through the resettlement project faced health problems.

> The older Tawang folks said we need to get together as a group. We just want to be able to help each other, do activities together because unlike Tenzin Gang (settlement in Arunachal Pradesh) who have their own settlement, we are all *khathor* (scattered households). We know each other's backgrounds and families whereas TCSBC is too big to be able to look after everyone.

One of the *kyidu* members shared how "TCSBC (leadership at the time) may have felt threatened, so we changed from *tsogpa* to *kyidu*", reiterating both the sensitivity and the fluidity

of the lines between *tsogpa* and *kyidu*. The fact that one can change the identity of the organizing form to assume a subservient position to the *tsogpa* further reiterates and mimics the hierarchy between the national and Tibetan as an ethnicity. As the t*sogpa* for all Tibetans at the local level, the TA reflects the idea of a national Tibetan and consequently Tawang as a smaller region-based identity assumes a subservient stance that replicates the underlying political and cultural understandings of the axial of group kinship formation in diaspora. Responding to the dynamics between the TA and the Tawang *kyidu*, the former TCSBC president explained–

> The Tawang group meet separately and conducts their own Tibetan New Year. When someone inside the group leaves for vacation (to Arunachal Pradesh) the group holds their own get together. If this trend continues, other people (in the community) may form their own *kyidu* in the future… Having a *kyidu* is both good and bad. If there is a *kyidu*, we can liaise more easily, send out notifications to members so people cannot pretend they did not hear about it. Because the groups are smaller it will be easier manage members, but the con is that people may pay more attention to their own *kyidu* than us (the larger Tibetan community organization).

Clearly from the point of view of the TCSBC leader, despite having some benefits, *kyidu* formations may lead to further fragmentation of the community and present risks of competing group interests undermining the authority of the TA to conduct community work. In Toronto as well, the concerns shared by the TCSBC president is also reflected by an executive board member of the TA who candidly declared–

> I am personally against *kyidu*…We don't need Lhoka *kyidu,* Domed *kyidu* whatever whatever…we need one umbrella organization like the Canadian Tibetan Association of

> Ontario, which is same as Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre, so that everybody will work hard as executive members or do whatever needs to be done for this organization. Having too many *kyidu*, leaves less options when recruiting executive member or working groups for the main organization. There are so many *kyidu* and more *kyidu* means more internal differences.

These concerns may also be amplified because in terms of the outlook related to organizational goals there are commonalities blurring the conceptualization between the diasporic TA and *kyidu.* For example, both TAs and *kyidu* identify cultural preservation, fundraising, events organization and welfare of its membership, the visible difference being its sphere/axials of relational identity formation.

Kyidu members dismiss the above concerns as unfounded, clarifying that they are nonpolitical, concerned only with social helping and accept/are happy to be "under the umbrella' of the TA as the dominant organizations in the locality. In the words of one of the members "how can a mouse ever compete with an elephant?" Despite criticisms, *kyidu* have proliferated in Toronto with the significant increase in the size of the Tibetan population in the city over the last few decades. Many *kyidu* members speak of the number of years they have been involved including early memories of their parents and relatives participating in the organizations in India and Nepal. They share how these familial involvements create a sense of identity, pride and knowledge of their native land thus influencing their involvement in the continuity of *kyidu* in Canada. Others state that they feel the need to identify with and organize distinct forms of organizational offshoots that are specific to and reflect the historical importance of their own native place. As a *kyidu* member questioned–

> We talk about cultural preservation. How can you preserve Tibetan culture without understanding its region-specific characteristics and dialect? Can you expect a Lhasa Tibetan to speak *Khampa* dialect or an Amdo person to preserve Kongpo cultural songs?

Furthermore, conceptual understandings of what a '*kyidu*' is, everyday usage of the term, including its structural formation and scope allows enough ambiguity and ambivalence to interpret the local TAs as diasporic expansions of *kyidu*. These boundary issues are highlighted when we see the ambivalence of the Ngari Foundation's location and how its members make sense of and interpret its myriad positioning(s).

Becoming 'Ngari Foundation':

The Toronto Ngari Foundation was formed in 2010, spearheaded by a group of Tibetans who trace their family origins to the Ngari (*mg' ris*) region in Tibet. Its significance to the notion of historical Tibet has been discussed in the earlier Chapter on the section related to the *dharchen* in Parkdale. According to members, the organization's main purpose is to preserve the culture and traditions of Ngari people, maintain the annual *dharchen* banner tradition, to look after the welfare of the Ngari people and to help Tibetans in Tibet. The organization is headed by an elected board of 11 executive members including a president on a two-year team. Former and current executives state that membership fees are not strictly enforced as they do not want to pressure people which also results in not having an exact record of the number of the people in the group.

Based on key informant interviews, membership counts ranger from "60-670 paid members" and "200-300 people affiliated with Ngari" who attend the organizational events during which they collect donations yields better financial outcome than a set amount. Those

affiliated with Ngari region in Toronto are from various parts of the Tibetan diaspora and therefore many do not have past ties. As one member surmised –

> There are a lot of Ngari people, but the problem is the Ngari people from India do not know Ngari people from Nepal, Ngari people from south India settlements (e.g., kollegal, bylakuppe, Mundgod) do not know people from other regions so getting more members to join becomes a problem.

According to one of the founding members, those who initially organized the group in Toronto were known members of the Ngari community within India and Nepal where they lived prior to their arrival in Canada and were affiliated with the 'Central Executive of Ngari Chithun Association' in Dharamsala (https://www.facebook.com/CentrexNyariAssociation/) or its local chapters in the Tibetan settlements of India and Nepal. Based on organizational document, 'Central Executive of Ngari Chithun Association' (*mga ris spyi thun tshogs pa*) in Dharamsala was 'officially' recognized by the Tibetan government-in-exile's cabinet on August 13th, 1993. The main headquarters is in Dharamsala, with local chapters in Tibetan settlements in India, Nepal (Kathmandu and Pokhara), Switzerland, and the United States. Membership is based on affiliation with Ngari either by birth, marriage, or family origins based on collateral from existing members, mimicking notions of place-based kinship associated with understandings of *kyidu*. Prior to the recognition of the government-in-exile of the consolidated '*Ngari Chithun Tsogpa*', members recount the existence of smaller localized groups often known as '*Ngari kyidu'*, *dharchen kusheng tsogpa* (*dhar chen sku bzhengs tshogs pa* like the group in Toronto) and Ngari Cultural Organization (*Ngari rigshung tsogpa*).

Recounting the group's formation in Toronto, founding members stated that while they initially planned to form '*Ngari chithun Tsogpa*' in Toronto, during the meeting, things shifted–

> People said for now because we are new (to Canada) let us instead create a *dharchen kusheng tsogpa* first and then gradually we can form *Ngari Chithun tsogpa*. Everyone voted and the majority agreed to establish *Dharchen Kusheng*, so the group here in Toronto is *dharchen kusheng*.

Additional reasons against formally establishing a local chapter were mainly because of the responsibilities the group would need to undertake i.e., administrative tasks of liaising with the Ngari head office in Dharamsala, obligations to complete set activities and goals as well as the requirement to attend annual general meetings. However, the decision to remain as *'Dharchen Kusheng'* was complicated by the need for Canadian official registration as a nonprofit charitable organization and according to members to "remain open to future possibilities when we become more established in this country". As Tsewang explains–

> When we discussed registration to avail Canadian charitable benefits, we felt we should support both Tibetans and non-Tibetans and it was very important that our hands are able to stretch into Tibet as that is our ultimate struggle. Based on this country's tradition (*gyelkhab ghi dro tang)* we decided it was not appropriate to keep the name *Ngari Chithun Tsogpa*. Instead used the English term "Foundation" which can be understood and applied broadly to get support from both Tibetans and non-Tibetans. Therefore, we are Ngari Foundation, but the true meaning (*dhon dhampa*) and goals is the same as *Ngari Chithun Tsogpa*. Whether we call it *dharchen kushing* or Ngari Foundation, it is the same. The *dharchen kushing* will gradually become *Ngari Chithun tsogpa*. The

> ‘foundation’ connotes that it is a registered organization in Canada so it will remain.

At the same time ‘Ngari Foundation’ as a name within the larger Tibetan community is not as commonly used. When community members are asked to identify *kyidu* in Toronto, they refer to the group as ‘*Ngari Kyidu’*. Even within the group some members agreed to being called either a *kyidu* or a *tsogpa*. A prominent member of the group with whom I was advised to speak by several informants regarding the organization’s status stated–

> At this time, we only conduct a limited number of activities, and we are not formally a branch of the central Ngari *tsogpa* in India, so we can be considered a *kyidu*… some within the group even say that we should call ourselves *‘dhar chen ku shing tsogpa’ (*see details about the *dhar chen* in chapter 3*).* The organizational name reflects an aspirational wish to help all Tibetans including those in Ngari as we become more established here (in Canada).

Yet others outrightly reject being classified as a *kyidu*. Lobsang, a long-time member maintained–

> Whoever is saying *Ngari kyidu* is wrong. *Kyidu* are completely different, like we have ‘*Dokpa’ (nomad) kyidu’* in Nepal which exists even now. *Ngari* is a *tsogpa* like ‘*Shunu’ (*Tibetan Youth Congress*)* or the Tibetan Women’s Association (TWA). We have approval of the *Ganden phodrang*… the government’s approval, whereas *kyidu* is about your *lungpa, (familial hometown/native place of birth),* it can be a village and doesn’t need approval if you want to form one. Ngari is huge and has so many different places within it.

For members like Lobsang, the assertion that Ngari is a *tsogpa* rather than a *kyidu* including its comparison to the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) and the Tibetan Women's Association (TWA) both of which are exilic pan Tibetan organizations reveals key folk understandings of the differences between the two forms. Firstly, it aligns with similar conceptualization of *kyidu* mentioned in the preceding section as being '*nangtsok*' (inner/close circle) that has an air of informality even if it is organized as a group. Secondly this 'inner circle of relatedness' also connotes a smaller membership whose scope and purpose are seen to be limited to overseeing the welfare of the small group – as in the example cited by Lobsang of there being a '*dokpa kyidu*' ('*brog pa skyid sdug*) for Tibetan dokpa (nomads) in Nepal rather than for all Tibetans. Further, the understandings of the differential scope of practice between the *kyidu* and *tsogpa* underlines a dominant diasporic narrative related to the hierarchy of social organizing where due to *kyidu's* specificity of membership on a particular regional identity is regarded as being of lesser importance in comparison to the all-encompassing 'Tibetan' *tsogpa*.

As discussed in chapter five these understandings are tied to the development and importance placed on nurturing the pan Tibetan political identity in diaspora. The irony here is that despite group members' view of Ngari comprising of many '*lungpa*' within, from a pan Tibetan perspective, its membership is nonetheless rooted in regional specificity thus aligning it with diasporic understandings of a *kyidu*. Therefore, like other regional based kyidu, Ngari is seen as a kyidu and hence subservient to the TA as the 'mother' organization within the locality. The hierarchical dynamics informed by the political culture of the Tibetan diaspora impacts social organizing and conceptualizations at the local level in Canada.

Overall, the fluid and multiple positionings of members vis-à-vis kinship organizing and structuring attests to an understanding that these formations are all relational aspects of and tied

to a mutual sense of belonging to the Ngari region. At the same time a perceptible shift can be seen in the externalization of the organizational gaze and voice. Where the *Ngari chithun tsogpa* is a response to intra group identity consolidation in response to structures of kinship within the exile community, 'Ngari Foundation' is an attuning outward to newer considerations, opportunities presented by settlement in Canada. It may also be that the distance from an erstwhile sociopolitical life centered around the CTA's hegemonic gaze may also have led to a resurgence of multiplicities within the umbrella 'Tibetan' to come to the fore. In the end, kinship structuring in diaspora as nestled in old and new(er) experiences across time and space seems a way of 'home making' in the absence of home. That such a 'project' is also a sensitive undertaking can be echoed in Fannon's (1963) words–

> …the caravan should not be stretched out, for in that case each line will hardly see those who precede it; and (wo)men who no longer recognize each other meet less and less together and talk to each other less and less (p.315).

The myriad structures of Tibetan organizing be it *kyidu, tsogpa* or its blended forms are in many ways attempts to keep the stretching caravan from breaking, by seeking ways to blend and adapt its 'line' across changing diasporic shores, for diaspora is a journey that begins at home and continues without a foreseeable end.

Chapter Seven

Practicing Relatedness: Social Helping Activities in the Realm of Diaspora

For pragmatists, ultimately the value of any kind of abstractions on the importance of kinship ties of mutuality may be judged through its concrete act, its 'practices' of relatedness in the real world. This chapter discusses how the activities that *tsogpa* and *kyidu* conduct as social helping critically provide a) an 'estimation' of their worth for members within this organized kinship and b) insight into what the act or the activity reveals about the group's conceptualization of social helping based on Sahlin's (2013) treatise that kinship is after all culture and cultural. Extending the notion of social helping as a cultural act, I explore what the various activities that the *tsogpa* and *kyidu* implement as social helping say about Tibetans' approach to help and how their practices of relatedness align and conflict with larger frameworks of formalized social care delivery such as the professional practice of Social Work.

The informal care work performed by *kyidu* and *tsogpa* are couched in terms such as help '*rokram' (rogs ram) and* (social) service *'chitsog shabshu' (spyi tshogs zhabs zhu).* Such terms are also seen as *'chos' (dharma)*– guiding individual motivation and ethics of care in the service of the Tibetan (national and ethnic) identities in the diaspora. The similarities and differences of these activities in comparison to professionalized services provided in formalized settings suggests that while formal training, state and provincial legalities occurs in the context of a larger secular framework, praxis itself as a space has no rigid boundaries separating the practitioner's inner and outer worlds of interpreting and conducting 'help'. Critically however from the point of view of care scholarship and practice, formalized and informal help evidence ideological, ethical differences in the ways in which 'care work' is approached.

Further, where the myriad Tibetan diasporic acts of social helping converge more cohesively is that its articulations of 'practices of relatedness' and performance emphasize the salient nature of the politics of cultural helping in diaspora. Note– to differentiate between references to formalized, professional social work services and informal kinds of help that are sometimes referred to as 'social work' by community members, I use the capital 'Social Work' for the former and the small letter 'social work' for the latter.

Place, Identity & the Politics of Social Helping:

The Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre's (TCCC) religious and social gatherings are events where one tuns to past affiliations and the past in turn recognizes them, engulfing them into the communal fold through the various alumni associations, *kyidu* and the *tsogpa*. The interplay between individual participation in these events, organizations and the role that the diverse organizations play in turn seems to produce a Tibetan public space whose template mimics earlier societal blueprints of exilic life in India and Nepal. The community centre as a physical site and institutional sphere is a source of collective pride not only for local Tibetans in Toronto but also to the frequent Tibetan visitors from other parts of North America. As such *Ghangjong Choedenling* has come to be regarded as a symbol of Tibetan communal achievement and the many tales of vicissitudes involving its purchase (as discussed in the preceding chapter) in retrospect even add to its 'preciousness'. Here I will first explore how the centre and relatedly the TA operates as a transnational space in the political service of the larger diaspora while maintaining its 'apolitical' stance.

It was a sunny morning in May 2021. Turning into 40 Titan Road, I was met with the familiar sight of the brightly painted traditional Tibetan gateway and prayer flags. On the ground,

freshly drawn in white chalk were elaborate Tibetan auspicious symbols. A steady number of Tibetans were already heading into the centre, women in their traditional *chupa (phyu ba)* dresses, while few of the men wore traditional shirts. Following their lead, I made my way past the entrance that opened into a compound often used as a parking space leading to the building with its giant *Mani* prayer wheel in the corner. Entering the side door, I stood outside the door of the main chapel mutely admiring the imposing Buddhist statues that the Toronto Tibetans had managed to install. According to people within the community, many of the statues procurred through significant donations provided by local Tibetans. Standing at the door, I was greeted by one of the monks from the nearby Kargyu monastery. Gesturing with his hands towards the statues, he said "we are so lucky in Toronto".

It is a remark I hear often from many Tibetans who speak of the city as the 'best place to live' in the country. For them Toronto offers all the convenience and opportunities of a Canadian metropolis along with a Tibetan communal life. For Tibetans, more than any other places in Canada, Toronto, more specifically the neighbourhood of Parkdale and the TCCC, less than 20 minutes away in Etobicoke are nucleuses reconnecting friends, former neighbours, *kyidu* acquaintances from exilic settlements and its various educational and work institutions. Of note, Parkdale's member of provincial parliament (MPP) is Bhutila Karpoche, a Tibetan woman with the Ontario National Democratic Party (NDP) elected to the post in June 2018 and re-elected in June 2022.

On this occasion, the TCCC was hosting the CTA *sikyong* (political leader) Penpa Tsering as part of his North American tour of the Tibetan communities, a few months into his winning a highly divisive Tibetan election conducted during the pandemic. The new *sikyong*

Penpa Tsering was known as a long-time CTA bureaucrat who had held various positions in the CTA establishment. He had won against a candidate known to be close ally of his archrival Lobsang Sangay– the outgoing *sikyong* of the CTA who had completed two terms, after which one is not eligible to stand for re-election (Brox, 2016). But why did the election matter so much and how did it impact the *kyidu* and *tsogpa*? For that, one needs to go further into time to understand the political alignments that are tied to the notions of place-based identity discussed in chapter 5. For context, below I will recount a simplified account of the key events influencing the political climate since it impacts the ways in which the TA, and *kyidu* operate.

Amongst the Tibetan public, it is commonly known that Penpa Tsering and his predecessor the former *sikyong* Lobsang Sangay have a significant history of rivalry. Their heated campaigns first played out in the public during the 2016 *sikyong* election when the two men were contesting candidates for the post. Ultimately, Lobsang Sangay won the election for a second term and Penpa Tsering took on the post of the official representative of the Dalai Lama's Office of Tibet, North America. However, this arrangement did not last long. In November 2017 Penpa Tsering was ousted from his post under a directive issued by the cabinet under the leadership of Lobsang Sangay on alleged charges of neglect and non-compliance (Tibet Net, 18 Nov 2017). This led to Penpa Tsering's appeal to fight the charges at the Tibetan judicial court in Dharamsala and the 'court' ruled in his favor (Tibet Express, 15 Oct 2019). Subsequently during the 2021 *sikyong* election, Penpa Tsering ran against Kelsang Dorjee Aukatsang, a close ally of Lobsang Sangay. He won the election (Hindustan Times, May 14, 2021), heralding his return to the CTA as the new *sikyong*.

The Task of Remaining Apolitical: The acrimonious nature of the larger political 'events' presented above impacted both the TAs and *kyidu* in various ways. The TA leaders in

Toronto and Vancouver spoke of the challenges in maintaining unity within their locality and the need to not let the larger 'politics impact communal peace'. As an executive board member of the TA shared during the time of *sikyong* elections in a virtual Zoom interview in August 2020–

> We are very careful right now because we don't want to say or do anything that may seem partial towards one group of supporters. Personally, I am a Penpa Tsering supporter, but I made sure I participated in a 'thank you event' for Lobsang Sangay for his work.

The TAs and *kyidu* responses to the heightened political tension of the recent years is to maintain an organizational stance of 'no engagement with politics' (*chab srid skor sheh mchog ki med*). For example, *kyidu* leaders deny endorsing any 'political' views or candidates within the group and state that in their WhatsApp and Telegram chat groups, there are rules prohibiting member engagement in any 'political talk' or 'sharing their political views or media content' which are deleted by the chat group administrator. A *kyidu* member shared that he "got a warning when he posted a chabsid (*chab srid*) video. When asked how they define what is considered 'politics' (*chab srid*), the response was 'any talk or content about political leaders' ideology, supporters' that may have the potential to hurt the sentiments of other members within the group.

The irony notwithstanding – the larger Tibetan movement is political to its core – the TA and *kyidu* vocally denounce 'involvement in politics' asserting that they are 'not political'. Their responses carry the ebbs and flows of regional tensions in the Tibetan 'axials of kinship' formations since the inception of the diaspora which have never completely subsided. Diasporic *kyidu* as an intra group place-based organizing is often seen as a potential platform for organizing and promoting provincial interests. At the same time beyond espoused political ideologies,

candidates' regional affiliations are scrutinized. This includes his/her support base and its linkage with familial place of birth not only to the homeland, but newer associations of belonging tied to educational systems and homes in exile. Comparatively speaking, here the public narrative is skewed against Lobsang Sangay. His familial ties with the 'Kham' region (a group that has a history of political conflict with the exile administration) tend to bring allegations of regional parochialism against his support base by other Tibetans.

Moreover, despite local TAs and *kyidu* efforts to remain 'neutral' as an organization, individual Tibetans do politicize the relational affinity between a specific locality and the CTA leadership in power. For example, after the election of the new CTA *sikyong*, a community member casually stated that "Penpa Tsering will not visit Vancouver often compared to other North American Tibetan communities because majority of the people here are Lobsang Sangay supporters". Others knowingly claim that "*khampas* will vote for Lobsang Sangay" referring to his familial regional homeland/place of origin in Tibet. The night before the above mentioned community event in May 2021, during a phone call one of the members of a *kyidu* deliberated over whether he should attend the event, torn between his sense of obligation as a Tibetan to respect the *Sikyong* as the head of the diasporic 'non-state state' (McConnell, 2016) and not wanting to be labelled a 'Penpa Tsering supporter' and by implication seen as anti Lobsang Sangay within his *kyidu*. In another instance, during an interview with a *kyidu* member in June 2021, I was asked who I preferred between the two candidates. When I responded that my alignment depends on their stand regarding specific policies, the interviewee laughingly dismissed my answer as 'politically correct' surmising that "even if you are not a staunch supporter of either one of them, you *must* have a preference".

The point here is not about whether such public assertions are factual but to illustrate the ways in which individual Tibetans engage in and are affected by regional and political ties of affiliations. Contextualizing these realities, the TA and *kyidu*'s structural declaration of remaining 'apolitical' is in fact a political move to keep communal peace on which rests the continuity of the organization and the larger Tibetan movement. In this, their political decisions reflect a kind of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 2012) whereby *kyidu(s)* cohere on a 'national' stance despite their regional identity-based formation for the purposes of the larger resistance movement. These decisions also result in their abiding to the status quo and continuation of existing axials of kinship hierarchy which upholds (at least publicly) the pan Tibetan identity over regional place-based loyalties. At the same time, the placement of the imagined national over the localized, familial land-based affiliations is enacted via a Tibetan national discourse whose arch is stilted by the very foreignness of the space in which it performs.

Returning to the event in May 2021, it was an important day for the community as it marked Penpa Tsering's first public appearance in the community as the new *sikyong*. The event was hosted by the TA at the center's larger auditorium. After the welcoming remarks of the TA president, Penpa Tsering spoke at length in Tibetan for several hours on various topics and issues concerning the diasporic administration. The new *sikyong* urged the 'Toronto public' (Toronto *mi smang*) to overcome their individual political differences and work together for the common good of the Tibetan movement. By far the largest site of Tibetans in Canada, the *sikyong's* visit to Toronto is an acknowledgment of the locale's importance in the larger communal politics. At the same time, notwithstanding the size of the community and their political pull, the TAs in both Toronto and Vancouver (like all other TAs across the diaspora) perform key administrative tasks for the CTA that assists its governance of the diaspora.

Interconnected to the TA's hosting of events for visiting CTA personnel, they provide critical community linkage and outreach services between the Office of Tibet (OOT) which is the official representative of the Dalai Lama and CTA with Tibetans in the locality. Functionally, these tasks set the TA apart from other organizations including *kyidu* in the locality. The TAs in Vancouver and Toronto are the community linkages and provide 'outreach' services between the OOT as the official arm of CTA and the Tibetans in the locality. It is also the only locally formed Tibetan organization in the area that the Office of Tibet liaises with regarding delivery of announcements, support for any initiatives that the administration undertakes. The TA in turn reaches out to the Tibetan public and other organizations in the locality during community meetings and via their social media platforms to garner support for the initiatives. Besides mundane undertakings, a characteristically Tibetan administrative task for the TA is the notifications from the OOT to conduct *shabrim* prayer sessions to 'clear obstacles for the Tibetan cause and for the long life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama'. Specific to this activity, the TA organizes the communal prayer sessions where a list of specified prayers identified by the CTA's Department of Religion and Culture (https://tibet.net/department/religion/) is chanted. Upon completion of all requested activities by the OOT, the TA updates the office and the latter in turn relays the information to the CTA. Of all these, arguably the most important tasks that the TAs assist with is the collection of the annual Tibetan '*chatrel*' voluntary tax contribution of 36 USD https://tibet.net/support-tibet/pay-green-book/) on the CTA's behalf. As discussed earlier, they also oversee the CTA elections locally for *sikyong* candidate and members of TPiE every five years.

Not surprisingly in the field therefore, some who previously lived in Tibetan settlements in India and Nepal speak of the role of the local TA president as akin to being the 'head of the

settlement'. Others, as previously mentioned, refer to the TA as the 'mother' (*mtsogs pa ama*) organization within their locality using familial kinship formation terms to symbolize its significance and lead role in the community's organizational hierarchy. To summarize, the TA's formalized relationship with the OOT (and relatedly the CTA), its role in carrying out the various administrative duties also establishes its moral authority as the main Tibetan organization in the locality, whereby other Tibetan groups within the locality are assumed under its umbrella.

Culture as Social Help:

(Figure 10: TCCC - Nobel Peace Prize 33rd Anniversary Celebration)

A general sentiment amongst Tibetans in the field when they dwell on why they engage in acts of social helping center around the narrative of relational bonds to the physical and visceral 'community' embedded in its 'substance' as belonging to a common race and/or ancestry

(*bhodrig spun da*) and 'code' of shared homeland, socio-political history, religion, language, contemporary diasporic experiences and allegiance to the Dalai Lama and the CTA as their 'nonstate' state. Relatedly, in the field interactions with those involved in *kyidu* and *TAs*, they often describe their activities as being 'in the service of Tibetan culture' (*bhodpeh rigshung ghi ched dhu shabchi zhus*). For Tibetans who view their culture as being at 'perennial risk' (Said, 2000), it requires guarding against both internal decay and foreign onslaughts. Under these circumstances, cultural practices, be it performances, use of Tibetan language or religious events are deemed helpful acts of preservation alongside more normative understandings of social helping as pragmatic, task-oriented services such as resettlement services, seniors and youth support programs.

For example, Dawa, a long-time traditional performer and member of the *Toepa (stodpa) kyidu* explains how his cultural performances are acts of social helping:

> In my village in *Dingri*, I was a shepherd. We have a strong tradition of '*gorsheh*' (circle dance) which begins in the afternoons and lasts until late evenings… sometimes all night long. Tibetans who are born outside of Tibet don't have experiences in these kinds of traditions, so during *Toepa* gatherings we present these traditions. When I perform traditional songs and dances, the elders really like it and reminisce about Tibet. If the songs and dances remain, then I think our language will remain because when you are interested in the songs and dances then you are interested in the language in which it is expressed.

Evoking the linkage between cultural performance to continuity of lived memories, tradition, and language survival, Dawa is touching upon key themes of socio-political relevance

to diasporic Tibetans. As such he views both his *kyidu* and the TCCC are working towards a mutual 'cultural' goal though their scope differs for one is representative of regional kinship while the other is representative of Tibetan 'national' aspiration.

The commitment towards cultural preservation also aligns with the TAs' role as 'cultural' organizations whose mission is to maintain and preserve Tibetan culture though the activities of the TAs may differ in scope due to membership size and available resources of the organizations. For example, TCCC has the advantage of owning its own center, where it conducts programs and services including youth, seniors' wellness programs, concerts for fundraising purposes. In comparison, TCSBC's main ongoing program is the weekend Tibetan language classes conducted in collaboration with the B.C. Tibetan Parents' Committee and the local Tsengdok monastery (https://www.tsengdokmonastery.org/). Yet despite the differences in the range of activities performed 'in the service of Tibetan culture', the two TAs' operational frameworks are similar, and these similarities extend to other TAs across North America, Europe, and Australia as presented in the table on domains of social helping activities that they engage in. How these activities encapsulate the ways in which Tibetans perceive social helping are thematically presented below.

Social Helping Activities of the TAs and *Kyidu*:

The various activities of the TAs and the *kyidu* discussed by the community members are synthesized in the tables below along with a conceptual map presenting their respective 'areas' based on the activity's primary task/focus. Along the lines of McConnell's (2015) 'non-state state' perspective of CTA, here I want to reiterate how the CTA's conferment of certain political and administrative tasks conveys moral and formal validation of the TA's role as the preeminent

Tibetan social organization in the locality in the minds of Tibetan public. This in turn contributes to the dominant view amongst Tibetans that other organizations including *kyidu* are 'under the umbrella of the TA' thus reaffirming the hierarchy of Tibetan diasporic kinship formation through social organizing systems as well. Most noticeably one can see this 'hierarchy'

replicated when we conduct a comparison of what Tibetans in the field present as social helping activities of the TA and the *kyidu* as shown in the below table followed by an analysis of the key domains.

A comparative table of the social helping activities of the TA & *Kyidu*(s):

Social Helping Domain: Events Aimed at Maintaining the 'Core of Sacred Things'			
Activity: Event Organization	**Type /Occurrence**	**Organization**	**Note**
Tibetan New Year (*Gyalpo' Losar*)	Cultural/Annual	TA & *Kyidu*	Tibetan New Year
Regional Place-based Losar	Cultural/Annual	TA & *Kyidu*	Sonam Losar གཏོར་&ཚེས་(*gtor sbos*) Torpoeh Losar (1st day of the eleventh Tibetan Lunar month)
Region-specific Cultural Events	Religious & Cultural/Annual	*Kyidu*	Examples: Phag sNying Dhar Chen Nyalam Sang Sol Ngari Founding Day

National Uprising Day	Cultural/Annual	TA	Annual commemoration of the Tibetan 'national' uprising day (10th March 1959)
Dalai Lama Birthday Celebration	Political/Annual	TA	
Tibetan Democracy Day	Cultural/Annual	TA & *Kyidu*	Celebration of the 'gift of democracy' by the Dalai Lama in exile.
Nobel Peace Prize Commemoration	Political/Annual	TA	Annual celebratory event of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize accorded to the Dalai Lama.
Lhakar (White Wednesdays)	Cultural/Weekly (Late spring – early fall 'circle dance' held on Wednesdays)	TA	Dalai Lama's 'soul day' (Wednesday) is a Tibetan cultural day.
Lhabhab Duchen	Religious/Annual	TA & *Kyidu*	
Vesak (Tib. Saka Dawa)	Religious/Annual	TA & *Kyidu*	
Public Religious Talks, events such as 'Long Life Offering' ritual For Dalai Lama (Tenshug)	Religious/No set date and time	TA & *Kyidu*	Religious figures invited by *kyidu* tend to be lineages with whom the region has association with. TA invites major heads of Tibetan Buddhism sects and religious figures who are in general better known amongst the general Tibetan public.
CTA Personnel Visits & Talks	Political	TA	Political
Tibetan Concerts	Political	TA	Fundraising for cultural and political events
Tibet Festival	Fundraising/Cultural Advocacy	TA	Aimed towards awareness raising about Tibet for Canadians

Communal Picnic - *Kyidu* picnic - West coast Tibetan Picnic	Cultural	*Kyidu* TA (TCSBC)	Summer Picnic get-together of all members for group cohesion TCSBC partakes in the West Coast Picnic' – a group of TAs in charge of hosting the Tibetan West Coast picnic on a rotational basis during the Dalai Lama's Birthday
Cultural Preservation: Performances Heritage Language	Teaching cultural performances Tibetan Weekend language School Tibetan Summer Language/Cultural Immersion Program within Canada and abroad (India)	*Kyidu* & TA TA TA	*Kyidu* focuses on their own regional cultural performances while the TAs construes all performances under the 'Tibetan culture' umbrella

(Table 1*:* Social Helping Domain: Events aimed at maintaining the 'Core of Sacred things')

Social Helping Domain: Advocacy Work			
Activity	**Type**	**Organization**	**Note**
Represent the Tibetan community at the local and provincial levels. Relationship building with local government	Political & Cultural	TA	Member of Canadian Multicultural Council Organize Tibet Festival Participate in ethno cultural/multicultural activities.
Offer support, liaise & coordinate activities, and events with *kyidu*(s), Pan Tibetan *tsogpa*(s) and Tibetan religious organizations	Political & Cultural	TA & *Kyidu*	The TA and *kyidu*(s) liaise and coordinate events with each other.

Coordinate & Implement CTA initiatives locally: - Liaise with the Central Tibetan Administration (via NA OOT) - Carry out collection of annual 'Chatrel' voluntary tax collection - Carry out CTA *Sikyong* and parliamentary elections - Disseminate OOT Announcements to Tibetan public	Political	TA	Only TAs liaise with Central Tibetan Administration through their representative –the North America Office of Tibet (NA OOT) and help coordinate, implement their administrative tasks locally TAs liaise with and undertake coordination of events with pan Tibetan organizations such as Tibetan Women's Association Tibetan Youth Congress, Students for Free Tibet Chushi Gangdruk (Political Organization)
- Host CTA Personnel Visits & Talks - Partake in NATA annual conference organized by the NA OOT - Liaise and assist Tibet advocacy groups, organizations locally and internationally			Local Tibetan religious centers Tibet advocacy groups such as the Canada Tibet Committee, Parliamentary Friends of Tibet and International Committee for Tibet
Procure and manage community cultural space	Administration and Management of the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre	TA (CTAO)	TCSBC is working towards procuring a community centre.

(Table 2*:* Social Helping Domain: Advocacy Work)

Social Helping Domain: Provision of Practical, Emotional & Cultural Supports			
Activity: Community/Member Support	**Type/Occurrence**	**Organization**	**Note**
Member Assistance during important life events	Financial and other help, emotional support rendered during: Childbirth Marriage Sickness Death Housewarming	*Kyidu*	Other supports include help in organizing, preparing and undertaking ritual ceremonies associated with specific events and generalized emotional support.
Crisis-Based Individual Support	Financial and logistical supports (needs-based) during unforeseen/critical circumstances in *kyidu* member's individual life Family mediation and conflict resolution Pandemic Support Services: - Vaccine site setup by CTAO at the TCCC in collaboration with health authority - Hot meals & Grocery delivery for both Tibetan community members and Canadian healthcare workers, shelters in GTA	*Kyidu* Specific *kyidu* TA	Several *kyidu* cite case based crisis support for individuals during times of unforeseen crisis/need. All *kyidu* and TA leaders state that they will aid if individuals request personalized help. CTAO provided all the services listed during the pandemic while TCSBC's services were related to disseminating public service announcements and holding weekly virtual *Lhakar* events.

	- PPI disbursement - Disbursement of Tibetan Medicine and protective amulets sent by the CTA to local community members - COVID Prevention and Awareness Materials - Online prayer sessions and *Lhakar* event		
Regional Cultural Preservation	Teaching cultural performances	*Kyidu* & TA	*Kyidu* focuses on their own regional cultural performances while the TAs construes all performances under the 'Tibetan culture' umbrella
Youth Programs	Youth guidance and mentorship Youth Outreach Program, Advocacy, CO-OP Placement, Sports Platform for developing social connections and potential matrimonial alliances	Some *kyidu* TA (CTAO) Specific *Kyidu*	
Culture-based Seniors' Program	Buddhism Classes Prayer Sessions Wellness & Yoga Classes	TA (CTAO)	

Resettlement Support	Network support to assist with basic resettlement needs such as housing, informal local orientation and information support, language assistance, medical accompaniment	Specific *Kyidu* TA (TCSBC)	Pema Koe *kyidu* provides resettlement assistance for their members as the newest *kyidu* in Toronto.
			TCSBC as the official sponsor took charge of resettlement of 122 families in the lower mainland between 2013- 2017. The Toronto TA was not officially involved with the federal resettlement project though the TA supported the setup of an independent resettlement committee which helped support newcomers from Arunachal Pradesh.
Transnational Aid & Connectivity	Linkage with other *kyidu* (of same homeland) in North America, Europe, India and Nepal Linkage with North America Tibetan Associations (NATA) formed and organized by the Office of Tibet (OOT) as the formal CTA representative. TA linkage with North America Office of Tibet Representative. Transnational financial assistance for specific projects and hardship in regional homeland	*Kyidu* TA TA *Kyidu* & TA	*Kyidu* chapters outside of Canada TAs in North America as well as Europe. OOT Ngari Foundation financial support for clinic construction at Mt. Kailash, Ngari Region, Tibet Financial assistance for non-Tibetan locals in *kyidu* 'region' – Arunachal Pradesh, India TA Financial Assistance, fundraising for CTA initiatives

(Table 3*:* Social Helping Domain: Provision of Practical, Emotional & Cultural Supports)

Examining the list of activities presented, beyond political tasks which I discussed in the preceding section, the social helping activities that the two TAs in Toronto and Vancouver

undertake include planning and organizing several annual events symbolizing key historical moments of Tibetan socio-cultural and political history. Tibetans articulate participation in these events as their 'responsibility' towards a culture and identity under threat. For community members, participation in these events is therefore seen as fulfilling a vital responsibility of service to the community. During the celebratory events such as the annual birthday of the Dalai Lama or the Nobel Peace Prize commemoration, the Tibetan traditional cultural performances from various regions mark the sanctity of the occasion followed by a mix of popular Hindi and Nepali songs well known to diasporic insiders.

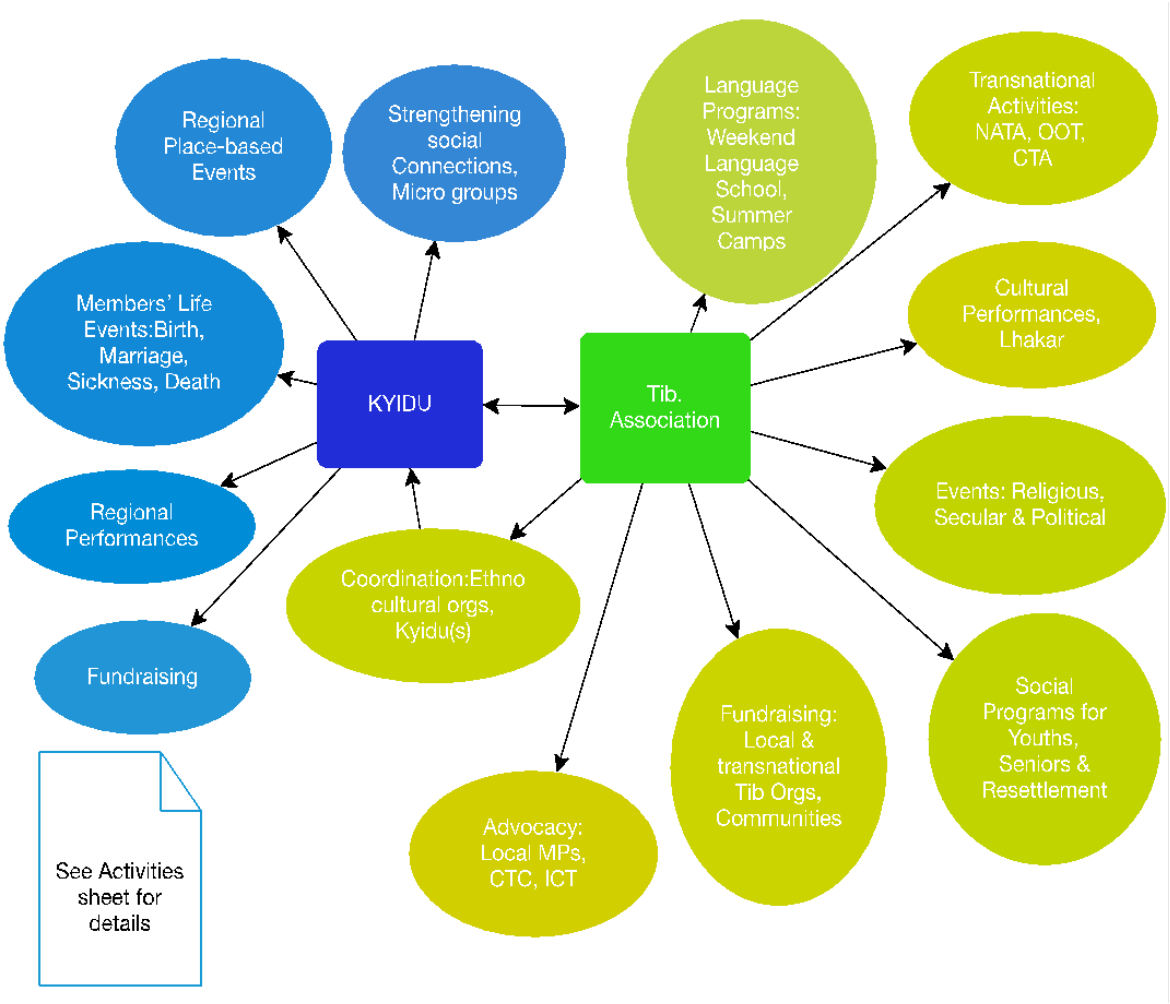
The rhetoric of communal responsibility aside, for many Tibetans participating in these events, it is a positive social opportunity for meeting newer members and especially reconnecting with familiar faces. The lure of such events for many is based on their affiliations to exilic settlement, schools, workplaces, and religious institutions. Wangmo is a typical example. Born in the diasporic 'center' of Dharamsala, she became a teacher in one of the Tibetan schools and later immigrated to Canada on spousal sponsorship. By the time I met her in May 2021, she had lived in Canada for almost five years. Wangmo's daughter has transitioned into 'Canadian' life but for her and her husband the Tibetan community events and concerts are the main public events that they partake in. Reflecting on their social life in the country, she laughingly remarked "my daughters tease me saying our *ama* (mother) dresses up only for *Ghanjong Choedenling*." TCCC as a public space matter to Wangmo and performatively she 'dresses up' for here she is seen and recognized by peers, many of whom know her familial background and/or her associations with exilic institutional systems. Like other immigrant stories, many Tibetans too speak of how they left their 'rewarding jobs' in the exile institutions for life in Canada. Here they blend into the global pool of 'Asian' immigrants working in various blue-collar jobs. Within this

humdrum of daily existence, the TA evokes a sense of larger purpose and belonging.

Wangmo's person also reflects the myriad exilic associations with its own set of tropes that are exercised through mutuality of the use of specific vernacular language, humor, mannerisms, dress code and a penchant for selective memorialization of the past. The community gatherings for local Tibetans therefore engage through various cultural acts, the continuing ritual of citizenship and belonging to the Tibetan 'nation'. Inevitably then, it is not surprising that whether one attends an event organized by a TA in Canada, United States, Paris, Switzerland, or Australia, the universality of its cultural template is recognizable across nation states bound in a chain of relational moments and memories. Aside from their scope – regional versus pan Tibetan – embedded in kinship notions (discussed in Chapter 5), and the political and moral validation conferred to the TA due to their association with the CTA, the social helping activities have a largely similar framework as shown in the comparative table and conceptual map below. Needless to say, the boundaries between the domains are fluid, open and in-process.

Setting aside the formalized relationship of the TAs with the exilic centre represented through the OOT, the functional activities between the *kyidu* and the TA are in fact quite similar as presented in the tables and map above. In fact, if we reflect on the formation of the TA in its early days, one can even posit that when first developed amongst the clusters of Tibetan families in the field conceptually and functionally it mimicked *kyidu*, as place-based identity 'Tibet' with a focus on its members' welfare. The similarities between the two still exist today if one were to examine the social helping activities of the TAs and *kyidu* as presented in the above mapping of their activities. It was the TA's quest for legal recognition and official registration as a 'cultural' organization with charitable status that further spurred its hybrid destiny. As such the field TAs in Vancouver and Toronto retain ritual elements and traditions of the old and the newer pan Tibetan

identity, while also performing to the multicultural notes of the Canadian state. The following section analyzes these dynamics further.



(Figure 11: Mapping *Kyidu* and TA social helping activities)

From the standpoint of the community leaders, members of *kyidu* and TAs, the activities undertaken, be it cultural performances, language, religious events, are all for the 'preservation of Tibetan identity and culture'. Furthermore, besides these activities, as mentioned above, being 'Tibetan' is associated with certain common responsibilities including volunteering for the TA, membership and enrollment in the TA, contributing an annual voluntary tax (*chatrel*) collected by the TA on behalf of the CTA as the Tibetan administration. These responsibilities are instilled

amongst Tibetans during their *apriori* years in exile societies of India, Nepal as constituents of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

More specifically, the cultural acts are directly linked to the 'core of sacred things' including the Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan language, and the physical landscape of Tibet (Diehl, 2002) discussed in chapter five. For example, the organizing structure of the TAs and the *kyidu*(s) are formed based on the memory and image of the physical landscape of Tibet. The Dalai Lama as a cultural symbol of Tibet is celebrated for his various accomplishments and through initiatives such as '*Lhakar'* (*lha dkar*) – which marks Wednesday as an important 'soul day' of the Dalai Lama (https://www.voatibetan.com/a/1404065.html). The religious prayer sessions, teachings, collaborations with Tibetan religious centres including frequent '*shabrim'* prayer sessions based on instructions from the CTA Department of Religion can all be traced to maintaining the continuity of Tibetan Buddhism amongst its populace. The TAs development of weekend language schools, language teaching collaborations with Tibetan educational and religious institutions in India are directly related to the conservation of Tibetan language.

From a Tibetan perspective, the TAs are therefore more formalized social organizations bounded in kinship based on a Tibetan 'national' identity while *kyidu* are inward focusing placeoriented organizations, based on cultural preservation and mutual help. Despite overlaps between the TAs and the *kyidu* activities as discussed earlier, for community members, the ascribed outward and inward tendencies of the two organizing types become grounds for their crucial distinction. When examined from the point of view of Canadian multiculturalism, the TA's very activities can be seen as ways in which the 'Tibetan ethnocultural group' actively partake in citizenship rights to assert their cultural identity. For multiculturalism provide a legal

framework for the rights and development of ethnocultural organizations within the Canadian milieu.

Individual Tibetans too acknowledge this right for often community members speak of how "Canada is multicultural, we have the freedom to be who we are". Yet state multiculturalism alone is far from sufficient to understand diasporas' inner motivations and engagement in communal social helping activities as well as the nature of many of the activities they deem as social help.

Relatedly, the diasporic frames of the *kyidu* and the TAs pushes normative understandings of 'culture' within Canadian multiculturalism as 'celebration 'of immigrant artifacts, food and performances. Moving into the realm of 'supra culture'- where its conceptualization as the grand narrative co-opting all social life and activities into its fold - the culture and cultural acts of Tibetan diasporic social helping blurs the separation between the social and the political. Therefore, while the Canadian state regulations mark a distinction between cultural and political organizing, for diasporic Tibetans to be political is to be cultural and to be cultural is to be political. Thus, kinship as culture and cultural acts of social helping as visceral ways of *practicing kin relatedness* in the service of the larger Tibetan cause is at the heart of Tibetan communal life. Tibetan constructions of social helping are therefore necessarily 'cultural'.

To summarize, while globalization and opportunities for upward social mobility compel the outward pull towards Canadian citizenship, Tibetan identity maintains an internal pull and awareness of the unsettled, diasporic condition. Therefore, more than celebration of Canadian multiculturalism, the inner world of the diaspora drives and frames the social helping activities of as critical cultural acts in the service of the greater Tibetan cause. Thus, the internal, local, and transnational factors that contextualizes Tibetan social helping are inevitably tied to the struggle

for the 'imagined nation' (Anderson, 2020) of Tibet. Paradoxically, the unavoidable group precondition for expressing sovereignty through a westphalian construct brings its own set of ethical challenges. The need to pursue and maintain a common 'Tibetan' identity invariably constrains other forms of internal life that diverge from this larger cause for the 'national' homeland. As such the tension within the Tibetan diasporic psyche and social life is often the conscious and unconscious repression of internal manifestations of 'sovereign' thoughts and ways of life in the service of greater good, (un)ironically mimicking patterns of hegemony it seeks to dismantle. To be clear when alluding to the hegemonic patterns of thought in the exilic system, I am not conflating the intra group dynamics within the diasporic society to the same ilk as colonial oppression. Rather it is to illustrate what is known within. The narrative of a common Tibetan identity largely based on central Tibetan knowhow, culture and the subversion of regional identities as an inevitable by-product of the need to adopt a nation-state characteristic (ironically shaped as a reaction to and against imperial, colonialist notions) that inevitably minoritize divergent bodies within. Hence even when the *kyidu* and the *tsogpa* are mutually interdependent and align in their larger vision and ways of conducting social helping activities, their hierarchical perceptions are also shaped by the conceptual shadows of what and who they represent. Moving on from the kinds of social helping activities conducted by the TA and *kyidu*, the following section presents a preliminary theorizing on the Tibetan social helping system.

Theorizing Tibetan Social helping: On Values, Structure and Processes

At the time of this writing, there are no studies on Tibetan social helping though there exists passing references on the topic in historical and contemporary Tibetan diaspora writings. Reviewing these materials in combination with the field data, I provide an initial framework to understanding the place of social helping and its practices within Tibetan society. From a

structural perspective, I conceptualize these formative understandings of Tibetan social helping and notions of welfare, through two interrelated developments: Buddhist ideals, historical understandings of welfare and the organic spread of grassroots mutual helping acts, organizing between individuals, groups necessary for survival.

The Dharma (Chos) of Social Helping & its Imperial Antecedents:

The conceptualization of social helping as an innately moral act with close ties to religious traditions, is in a sense universal when we examine the relationship between charitable giving and faiths around the world which predated the development of modern social welfare systems (Leighninger, 2008). Many Tibetans working in the health care settings as care aides, and nurses speak of their work as 'dharma' (*las ka 'di chos red*), reflecting on how their 'helping' profession and Buddhist cultural conditioning intersect to shape their perspectives. Dwelling on how Buddhism is embedded in their psyche which impacts their approach to work, they also speak of how in times of personal and professional difficulties they lean into it as a protective barrier against life stressors. By Buddhism, here I am referring to Tibetan Buddhism as a complex whole; the cultural embedment of a centuries-old, institutionalized religion, often referred to as '*chos*' in whose higher power the common Tibetan is conditioned to fear and believe.

Importantly however in Canada, it is not uncommon that Tibetans find their cultural perspectives on social help are often in contestation with the cultural and legal frameworks of the Canadian work settings which carries its distinct (eurocentric) understandings of professional boundaries and expectations. As Wangmo, a registered nurse candidly shared her experience–

> At work, Canadians have a lot of boundaries and say things like it is not my job whereas as a Tibetan, it is hard to say no when someone asks for help. Our parents tell us it is '*chod*' (dharma), to do as much as you can for others to accumulate merit (*tsog sah ghi reh*) but here it is seen as a weakness and people tell me I should be more assertive.

Where Wangmo's conditioning sees doing 'as much as she can' as the right way to approach care, in her work setting it is construed as not being more assertive or lacking ability to set professional boundaries with care recipients. Thus, she is told to be 'more assertive'. Wangmo's cultural understanding of care work as '*chod*' and her moral conflict with standardized professional boundaries as restrictive are shared by many other Tibetans working in the field of health and human services. Such narratives indicate that while professional standardization, state and provincial legalities occur in the context of a larger secular framework, for the practitioner these are fluid domains and culturally in negotiation with their inner worlds. Additionally, Wangmo's articulation of the role Buddhism plays in her conditioning leads to a key component of larger Tibetan understandings related to social help as discussed below.

Broadly speaking, dharma and social help have been tangibly linked through concepts such as 'engaged Buddhism' (Queen & King,1996). In institutional Tibetan Buddhist settings, one can see its influence in the range of local and transnational charitable, non-profit organizational work that monastic institutions engage in diaspora and Tibet. While generally understood that a social welfare system in a modern sense of the word did not exist prior to the Chinese takeover of the region, there nonetheless existed in traditional Tibetan society conceptualizations of help and charity embedded in Buddhist philosophy and morality that can loosely align with native conceptualizations of 'social welfare'.

Exploring the ties between Buddhism and social helping in the Tibetan context, an analysis of the literature documents the existence of a formalized practice of charitable 'donations', imperial laws of good conduct (*mi chos tsangma chudruk*) since the Yarlung period as part of the imperial administrative and governance system. It can be evidenced by imperial land 'donations' for the monasteries since the time of the Tibetan king Tri Songdetsen (r. 712755) who first created the land registers towards that purpose (Li & Cobin, quoted in Schaeffer; Kapstein & Tuttle., p.71, 2013). Records from the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* which depict the development of Tibetan historical narrative drawing upon eulogies to kings from official inscriptions, edicts, poetry and narrative traditions from China and India (Schaeffer; Kapstein & Tuttle, 2013) also alludes to the linkage between dharma and welfare. For example, lauding the achievement of the dharma kings, it states–

> Externally they expanded the realm in four directions. Internally welfare was abundant and undiminished. They created parity between high and the low among the blackheaded subjects…They gave to the needy… The customs being good, and the realm elevated, men were generally happy." (Quoted in Schaeffer, Kapstein & Gray, p. 46.
>
> 2013).

While such statements may well be a part of imperial propaganda to establish moral authority, linkage to divinity (as can be found elsewhere in the larger world), nonetheless what it shows is an understanding of how resource distribution and public welfare correlate to societal happiness. Further it underlines an ethical moral imperative for 'good' practices as the rightful conduct of dharma kings (*chos rgyal)* thus promoting an idealized understanding of social welfare as a virtuous act of governance. However, in the Buddhist hierarchy social helping is a

‘worldly’ act and therefore subservient to the ultimate helping act of enlightenment. For example, in ‘The Criteria of the Authentic Scriptures’ (*Ka Yangdakpe Tsema*) attributed to the king Tri Songdetsen (r. 712-755), it is stated that the ‘mundane’ act of charitable giving, while a meritorious ‘worldly deed’ when performed with a noble view (or good intention), is not above the transcendental aim of enlightenment.

Critically, the point of view that spiritual enlightenment is more aspirational than worldly help may metaphysically resonate for the religious and social elite, yet it is a harder proposition for the masses who needs to survive on feudal handouts in the form of charity. Furthermore, charitable practices during the Tibetan imperial reign cannot be assayed without also acknowledging the political agenda of the Buddhist civilizing mission linked to the existence of a ‘cultural Tibet’ that spreads into modern day Nepal, India, and Bhutan. That such magnanimous imperial ‘gifts’ are provided within a feudal space of highly entrenched hierarchies and division where a small number of lay and monastic elites rule over the majority of the population is an established fact.

Interestingly, the current day Bhutanese monarchy whose predecessors are traced directly to Tibetan nobility (Aris, 1979) and are credited with introducing the Tibetan *kyidu* in Bhutan, to this day practices charitable granting of lands for the poor and land-*less* through ‘Kidu’ as a formalized social welfare system (see Ugyel, 2018; Shaw, 2015). Yet as detailed in previous chapters, the earliest documentation on *kyidu* in Tibet by cultural outsiders such as Miller (1956) speaks of it purely as a grassroots phenomenon and there is no mention of its linkage to the practices of ruling elite. While there is no tangible evidence to suggest concrete linkages between the grassroots Tibetan *kyidu* and the *kidu* system as adopted by the Bhutanese monarchy and expanded as a social welfare approach, the usage of the same terminology, historical linkages do

suggest that it is more than just mere coincidence. Did a structural component of *kyidu* vanish because of the diminishing significance and erasure of the Tibetan empire? Did the Bhutanese monarchy later co-opted granting of lands as 'kidu' (*kyidu)* system in lieu of the term's literal and cultural resonance as welfare? While these questions are outside the bounds of this study, they may someday be pursued to hypothesize the full meaning and scope of what *kyidu* is and can be.

Additionally, the depiction of imperial charity as part of establishing divinity is also not dissimilar to stories of imperial magnanimity elsewhere in the larger world, often tied to colonization. In more contemporary times too, Yeh (2013) examines Chinese state magnanimity in the TAR from the perspective of 'gift' giving (Marcel Maus, 1925) and how such a 'help' dynamic set up a hierarchy that ultimately marginalizes Tibetan voices and experiences from its very process and benefits. While a detailed historical analysis of the critique of social aid as 'gift' is outside the scope of this study, it seems nonetheless important to point out the discrepancies in conducting acts of social helping without addressing structural inequalities.

These criticisms aside, when conceptualizing Tibetan social helping tradition, what the historical references are useful for is that they attest to the embeddedness of Buddhist outlook in relation to social helping. These cultural 'codes' live on and continue to influence Tibetan perceptions on social helping in the diaspora today. In everyday parlance too, Tibetans say '*mi la rogs pa byed na chos red*'/'*mi la phan thogs na chos red*' (helping people is *dharma*). The moral positioning and act of social helping as closely tied to Buddhism also correlate to the populist and scholarly conceptualization of Tibetans (including Tibetans' own interpretation of themselves) that all facets of Tibetan 'culture' is influenced by Buddhism. These cultural worldviews can cause ethical and moral tensions between the individual's private values and the dominant sphere of Canadian care delivery systems as exemplified through Wangmo's account above.

Grassroots Mutual Help Organizing Systems:

Reflecting on the structural development tied to Tibetan social helping, the existence of mutual support systems between individuals, groups necessary for life survival at the grassroots level. Grounded in the literal and philosophical sense of shared human life trajectories of 'happiness and sorrow' are systems such as *kyidu* or '*niamle'* (*mnyams las*) cooperatives in Tibet (Kang & Krone, 2021). The *kyidu's* historical development as a form of grassroots social organizing and its evolving configurations in diaspora not only amongst Tibetans but other Himalayan groups (previously discussed) speak to its enduring relevance as a helping system. Philosophically, as a way of approaching social helping based on mutual happiness and sorrow, *kyidu* aligns with the shared 'truth' of the universal human condition.

Critically, in examining *kyidu,* the importance of space emerges as a preeminent feature, essential to its structural formation. Space as 'land' is valued from imperial times and used in the administering of welfare through charitable land grants as discussed earlier. As 'place' it is critical for the formation of one's social identity – an environment that births and shapes the types of kin affiliations and group belonging. Understanding the importance of land (and its lack thereof as the exilic condition) also offers an insight into the Tibetan communities' fixation for ownership of space as discussed in the preceding chapter and why the Toronto community center (TCCC) assumes such significance. Simultaneously understanding of one's spatial belonging is not just historical and fixed, therefore in the Tibetan diaspora, social helping organizing, and its activities are also shaped by newer forms of helping behaviors. Mindful of these evolving understandings at the grassroots level, what the 'ethnocultural organizations' do provide is a cultural space for the client population it serves, including social helping activities that are organically cultural without reducing it to a framework or a practice model. However, the

potential of such organizations is restricted by the overall legality regarding professional territorialization, the division between formal and informal care delivery including the differential understanding of how care is defined within a geopolitical space.

The Evolving Nature of *Kyidu*: On Diasporic Hybridity

In chapter 5 and 6, I discussed how the notions and structures of kinship social help amongst Tibetans are tied to its connections to both historical and contemporary diasporic 'truths'. While the existence of a diaspora depends on the imagined continuity of the old, group survival also demands paradigmatic shifts to adapt to changing circumstances.
Previously I discussed how, for Tibetans, continuities of their past are maintained through notions of kinship and social organizing practices. Here I will focus on how the practices and structure of *kyidu* adapt and evolve over time in the hybrid space of diaspora. Hybridity as classically defined by Bhabha (1994) is "the interstitial passage between fixed identity opening up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (p.4). Hybridity in this case will be discussed through exploring how the historical *kyidu* as a terminology for organizing help and as a set of practices have evolved in the diasporic landscape mimicking contemporary social development and Social Work.

Dolma is a member of the Pemakoe (*pad ma dkod*) *kyidu,* in English titled Pemakoe Welfare Association of Toronto. During our interview, she narrates how the Pemakoe *kyidu* in Toronto is formed by Tibetans resettled from Arunachal Pradesh who came to Canada through the federal government's special policy act (as discussed in preceding chapters). The *kyidu* membership is based on individual affiliation to the five Tibetan 'camps' (settlements) in

Arunachal Pradesh considered a part of the Pema Koe region. Each 'camp' can select two individuals as their representative forming a total of 10 representatives. Further those from the region who settled in the GTA prior to the resettlement project are classified as one group and can nominate two members. In addition to the six groups, there are two 'reserved seats' for women thus constituting a total of 14 executives who directly vote amongst them to elect the president and vice president. At the time of writing, the *kyidu* has over 200 members composed of Tibetans from the Pemakoe region in present day Arunachal Pradesh and includes a few individuals from the region who had settled in Toronto prior to the resettlement project. As a criterial place-based affiliation, the Pemakoe *kyidu* conforms to the 'classic' definition of a *kyidu* and yet members within it acknowledge that it was newly created in Canada for 'historically there was no Pemakoe *kyidu*'. Interestingly, in its event posters, the group represents itself as 'Pemakoe *kyidu tsogpa*' (mtshog pa). Of note, I previously discussed the use of the conjoint term in the context of diasporic evolution and ambivalence and how conservative Tibetan language speakers may find it a misnomer since *kyidu* is described as a type of mutual social help organizing and *'tsogpa' (mtshog pa)* connotes a more formal type of organization.

However, as explained previously Tibetans from the larger region of Arunachal Pradesh (where Pemakoe is located) do use '*kyidu*' as a verb. Further during conversations with Tibetans from the region, one of them explained that *kyidu* (as an organizing form) is also known by the term '*mang*'(*smang*) locally. Many of the activities that the group engages in are similar to activities performed by other *kyidus* (see above tables) such as preservation of local dialect and cultural performances, fundraising, local events, picnic get togethers, prayer sessions and Buddhist teachings. However, alongside these activities the Pemakoe *kyidu-tsogpa* helps families with 'exceptional health needs' and language barriers with tasks such as medical

accompaniment, financial assistance during major illnesses, conflict mediation between couples, fundraising assistance to build a home for a family in the Pemakoe locality whose house burnt down, and gifts for children who succeed in getting scholarship based on academic merit. The *kyidu-tsogpa* also focuses on building relationships with the '*yulmi*' non-Tibetan locals in the region (Arunachal Pradesh) particularly during the pandemic when the local population needed financial assistance for food security. As Dolma further explained–

> Our *shichak* (Tibetan settlement) is economically okay compared to the "*yulmi*" (local non-Tibetans) as families there have connections here in chigyal. There are different types of '*yulmi*' and many are very poor, including refugees from Bangladesh who live hand to mouth (*dharing sah na sang nyin mehpa*) and are discriminated against by locals. It is very important to keep good relations with the locals, so we fundraise here, contact local groups there and send money to them for rations. Helping them makes the locals realize that we didn't leave them when they were facing problems.

The Pemakoe *kyidu-tsogpa's* expanding and strategic kinship axial to include nonTibetan locals of the region brings to the fore the role of social helping in helping form newer alliances for diasporic groups. The activities of the group show that despite their exit to Canada, familial ties to the region exerts a continuous hold on members reminiscent of Craig's (2020) travelling ends of kinship. In the case of Pemakoe group, these 'ends' also signify two significant changes. The *kyidu's* newer kin obligations reimagines boundaries of traditional kinship social helping formation to traverse beyond shared ethnicity. Secondly, it expands *kyidu* social helping practices beyond the traditional focus on the internal welfare of the group thus melding the hybrid universe of the diaspora into the form of the traditional *kyidu*. Thus, the evolving *kyidu* in both its form

and function speaks to how kinship and its notion of mutuality is impacted by diasporic space time.

(Figure 12: Pemakoe *Kyidu* Picnic Poster July 2022)

Moving further into hybrid interstitial spaces are formations of pan Tibetan organizations such as the Tibetan Children's Project Canada (TCPC) which was initially formed in Toronto by a group of Tibetans in 1999. According to one of the founders of TCPC Thupten, the initiative started within their close knit group - "where our small *kyidu* of 6-7 friends decided to use the collective group fund to assist Tibetan college age youth in India" Today the group is simply known as Tibetan Children's Project (https://tibetanchildrensproject.org/tag/tibetanchildrensproject-canada/) as they expanded beyond Canadian borders with volunteer coordinators in New York, Nepal and India. While TCP

functions as a nonprofit organization today and is not a '*kyidu'* in the traditional sense of the word, it is worth noting how the organization's beginning is linked to a '*kyidu* of friends' and how the term is fluidly used and interpreted. The activities of these organizations raise questions about the line between informal and formalized systems of helping.

Interpreting Social Help and Social Work: In Between Language and Meaning

Here I will elaborate further on the complexity of delineating Social Work (construed as an academic and professionally regulated discipline) from 'social work' (as a generalized term connoting societal help) in the field since the study represents an initial foothold straddling the two worlds of Tibetan studies and the discipline of social work. Towards that end, in earlier sections, where available I provide historical references to outline group values and understandings of social welfare. I also explore their continued linkage in the field today and the types of social helping activities that *kyidu*(s) and TAs conduct in service of the greater Tibetan kinship.

In Tibetan, social help is literally translated as '*chitsog rokram'* (spyi tshogs rogs ram) while social work is translated as '*chitsog lehka*' (spyi tshogs les ka) and a 'social worker' as '*chitsog shabshu wa*' (spyi tshogs zhabs zhu ba). What is important to note is that beyond literal translations, akin to many other non-western contexts, in Tibetan, the term 'social work' or 'social worker' do not specifically connote an academic and professional discipline as it has come to be understood within the more professionalized settings of Europe and North America. Furthermore, Tibetan encounters with various diaspora have their own subjective influences on how 'social work' and relatedly 'social worker' is contextualized. For example, in India during my field research in 2018, colloquially those who engage in any social help activities frame their

work as ‘social work’ and even identify as a ‘social worker’ though they may not have undergone professional training or have registration credentials - a case in point being the staff at the Tibetan LHA Charitable Trust in Dharamsala which identifies as an ‘Institute for Social Work & Education’ (https://www.lhasocialwork.org/about/).

In exploring the ‘definitional’ tasks of terms such as ‘social help’ and ‘social work’ in Tibetan, it is important to convey what their meanings connote within the Tibetan world beyond a verbatim English-Tibetan (or vice versa) translation of the terms. Here, I am referring to discourse as language and textual meanings tied to and shaped by larger societal structures, indicative of power relations (McHoul & Grace,1997) within the diasporic space. To share a few insights from the field about ‘folk’ understandings during interviews and impromptu discussions, is to reflect with the use of language to differentiate terms when it comes to distinguishing social helping activities from professional social work. For instance, Tibetans would often say (*spyi pa’ las ka), chitsog shabshu* (*spyi mtshog zhabs zhu*) – ‘public work or social service’ when discussing social helping activities and revert to English when using the term ‘social work’ as a way of enunciating the difference between the two. Encounters with professional social workers through Canadian work settings (for example– health care) also makes them aware of the differences between their own cultural conceptualization of social work and the capitalized

‘Social Work’ as a regulated professional practice within the Canadian context. Yeshi, a licensed practical nurse (LPN) at one of the longterm care facilities run by the city of Toronto, defined social work thus when explaining it to her 17-year-old daughter, “Actually, all work for societal benefit is social work but in Canada it has a different meaning, right?” Trained as a nurse in India, Yeshi had come to Canada as part of the refugee family reunification program through her husband. For Tibetans like Yeshi who encounter social work practitioners through their work

settings, there is an awareness of the differences between their own cultural conceptualization of what social work is (as universally reflective of all types of social help) and what it *becomes* within the Canadian context. This 'becoming' is what Yeshi is indicating to, when she states that social work in Canada has a 'different meaning'.

Moreover, community members in the field themselves identify a difference between terms such as *'chiweh lehka' or 'chitsok leka'* from the English usage of the word 'social work'. For example, one of the members praising the work of a former community leader stated, "*khorang chitsok lehka dhang shabchi lo manpo shu reh, yin ne* social worker *dhindeh ma reh*" (For many years he has been involved in social work and service for the community, but he is not a Social Worker). As such despite synonymous, English-Tibetan translations of i.e., *chitsok leka* (*spyi mtshog las ka*) to social work, Tibetans in Canada understand how this generalized translation does not fully convey what they know of the 'other' social work. Thus, a perceptible shift occurs in the form of language code switching from Tibetan to English, to punctuate this 'distance' within meanings by those who are familiar with the nuances. Given these understanding, in English I use 'social helping' as a more informal, open-ended way to define the types of activities performed by the *kyidu(s)* and *TAs* even though community members alternate between the Tibetan terms '*chitsog shabshu'* (social service) and *chitsok leka'* (social work')

when speaking in Tibetan to refer to community activities.

Like Yeshi, for many other Tibetans in Toronto and Vancouver working as nurses, care aides and housekeeping staff within the health care authorities, their growing understanding of professional Social Work as a regulated profession is tied to their work in health care and even occasional entanglements with the Ministry's family and child protection services. These newer

experiences relating to Social Work in Canada differ from how elsewhere the term is used colloquially with a much wider, less discretionary application.

As Dolma, a care aide, observes–

> In India, anyone who helps or works for society like *neta* (Hindi for 'politician') say they are social workers". Living in Canada, I came to understand that social workers are counselors and case managers. You can also get in trouble with them if you are reported to the Ministry.

As far as social helping is undertaken as a type of social work to address or to alleviate a particular social issue, intrinsically speaking any kind of social work is about rendering social help. Yet if one is to translate Social Work in Tibetan, literally – '*chitsog* (social*) lehka* (work)' – while not incorrect, is devoid of the distinct value and ethos of what the term culturally evokes in both 'western' and Tibetan contexts. For as discussed earlier, Tibetans draw linkages between social helping acts to Buddhism, morality as grounded in acts of kindness and compassion. Additionally, the lapse in translation will likely draw protests from disciplinary scholars whose rebuttal stem from the identification of modern Social Work within the western (and increasingly 'other' worlds) as *a distinct* academic and professional discipline. Realistically too, Social Work in Canada exists as a practice regulated by provincial professional bodies, with specific educational training requirements, ethical code of conduct and scope of practice(s). Therefore rendering Social Work as synonymous with any kind of social helping is not reflective of the field's contextual reality.

Therefore, rather than the literal translation of Social Work as '*chitsog* (social) *lehka*

(work)', its interpretation in Tibetan will instead benefit from a more holistic understanding that relays the ethos of what Social Work is – be it both as a professional and academic entity today or even beyond what the term conjures when employed by Tibetans in informal context. Rendering Social Work's values through the subliminal connotations of 'help' (*rokram*) and 'service' (*shabshu*) underpinning the seemingly neutral and open-ended 'work' (*lehka*) is integral to its definition since the processes, acts and outcomes of doing Social Work are ultimately value-based in the service of 'empowerment and liberation of people' (IFSW, 2014). As such I use *chitsoh shabshu (spyi mtshog zhabs zhu)* to connote social work, '*chitsog shabshu' cheleh'* (*spyi mtshog zhabs zhu'i ched las*) as the professional practice of Social Work and *chitsog shabshu rigpa* (*spyi mtshog zhabs zhu' i rig pa*) as the academic discipline. This terminology also aligns with the translation of Social Worker as '*chitsog shabshu wa*' (*spyi tshogs zhabs zhu ba*) according to the CTA's initiative to standardize the use of conceptual terms.

Interpreting social work across regions and what it (should) represents is a subject that I have earlier expanded on when discussing the discipline's indigenization in the context of the Tibetan world through the complex lens of indigeneity (Watermeyer & Yan, 2021). Simply put, any understanding of what Social Work is must take into consideration the cultural, sociopolitical context of the region in question rather than a predetermined concept based on prior definitions of the subject elsewhere. Though contextual importance is openly endorsed, the reality can be much more complex and within the context of the discipline's development in China, the case was about the debacle of indigeneity's erasure when discussing indigenization. In the hybrid space of the Tibetan diaspora, interpreting Social Work is to consider both the historical, traditional cultural notions, social helping systems as well as the external factors influencing the community's exposure to contemporary changes and development. In both the homeland and

diaspora, power relations and the discipline's relationship with the state or non-state state body can impact the way communities interpret, respond to and navigate Social Work.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, ultimately it is at the level of the everyday activities, in the applied practices of social helping that one can assay the commitment to and worth of any kinship 'ties of mutuality'. Therefore, the type of activities Tibetan social organizations engages in (discussed in the preceding sections) shape communal kinship and as a concrete marker forms an indication of the 'value' of group kinship beyond conceptual rhetoric. Critically influencing the scope, value judgement of the types of activities practiced by *kyidu* and TAs are factors such as the small size of the community, its limited material and human resources as a volunteer driven operation.

A question then arises as to what the role of kinship is in relation to Social Work since this and the preceding chapters have been thematically focused on ways through which kinship manifests in the field via notions, organizations and through applied social helping practices. A cursory review of the Social Work literature will reveal that its direct entanglement with 'kinship' are primarily related to topical issues and interventions related to adoption, foster care settings (for example Skoglund et al., 2022; Leon & Dickson, 2019; Taylor et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2010). Critically speaking, these works view kinship narrowly through the lens of 'family' structure based on the individuation thesis, focusing on biological components or kinship's 'substance'. Nonetheless they are evidence of how kinship matters are primal and come to the fore when presented with the need for Social Work interventions amongst extremely vulnerable groups. Aside from the direct reference to kinship as mentioned above, the closest one comes to speaking of it is to refer to 'network' 'connectivity' which while proximal is far from connoting the same when comparatively assayed against kinship's cultural depth of 'substance and code'.

Perhaps the use of terms such as 'connectivity' and 'network' are also deliberate in that they are seen as more western oriented, modern apparitions of understanding people's attachment and linkage with one another rather than kinship - a concept associated with the 'ethnic' often colonized 'other'. But the fact of the matter is no one escapes kinship for everyone born is tied to kindred others through its axials nestled in biology and sociological *karma* and that which we call 'identity' is often nestled in the basics of kin conceptualization.

Centralizing kinship requires an epistemic shift in how we view Social Work care provision. To borrow bell hook's (2014) words, it requires theorizing and practicing development 'from the margins' for ways to advance praxis away from an institutionalized approach towards a decolonial, community centered way of living. As such matters of kinship, its formation, dynamics and development are not simply a facet or a factor but central to social work praxis when it comes to its conceptualization and application. As much as 'client centered care' approaches including 'professional boundaries' have a contextual role and place, critically one should be able to see how its language is immersed within the larger commercialization and transaction of care undermining the very existence of the mutuality of human condition between its two categories – the service provider and the recipient.

Much like the use of 'culture' to replace ethnicity, race, and connote specific characterization of minorities, the 'client' in practice settings is often less connotative of structural agency, and more about conceptualization of a willing consumer of service. And yet even when we attempt to impersonalize care relations, in practice settings we (still) see how the development of strong therapeutic relationships is psychologically constructed by 'clients' through relational terms such as 'friendship' in areas as diverse as counseling, palliative care, child protection and general case work that Social Workers practice (Hughes et al., 2016;

McLeod, 2010; Beresford et al., 2008; Bailey et al., 1992). The development of praxis through the lens of 'immigrants and refugees as a population' and 'service recipient' should be accompanied at the very least by a critical awareness of how Social Work practices can lean into methodological nationalism and overshadow valuable components such as an understanding of services that 'immigrants and refugees' themselves seek to initiate and what they tell about the cultural practices of social helping. Thinking through this domain are some self-evident questions.

How do the various groups who settle in Canada mobilize community building and determine what holds value for them? How are these services shaped by their previous locations and in what ways do such social acts differ from and/or add value to the dominant culture or ways of service provision? From the standpoint of organizational equity too, with immigrant aid provision driven by a model that benefits larger organizations with human and financial capacity to compete and bid for public funding sources, how do we ensure organizational equity and sustainability of smaller groups that are completely volunteer driven and often representative of voices of MWM (minority within minorities)? Here it is not to say that mainstream organizations do not provide services for minorities but to raise the issue of organizational diversity and autonomy as part of protective structural measures. Relatedly, if Social Work employment is mostly tied to large publicly funded organizations and the majority of the Social Workers work within these settings, how can the discipline understand, theorize and view practice from the margins?

Conceptually, the study approaches the group through the narrative of kinship, community social helping and traditions of social help systems. Deviating from the way the

Canadian world filter ‘immigrants and refugee’ narratives, it places social help through the lens of group kinship. For in many ways, irrespective of where one practices social work, often the challenge lies in exploring ways to embed kinship’s relational, community engaged spirit as a structural response against institutionalized ways of living. The location of kinship at the heart of social care provision therefore seems relevant when we speak of transformative praxis.

Chapter Eight

Concluding Thoughts

Between Theory and Practice:

In April 2023, the TCSBC conducted its election for the 2023 and 2024 two-year term. Later that evening, I received a call from an outgoing executive member, "*Acha* (sister), you have been elected as the new president." My initial reaction was to laugh aloud at the absurdity of the situation. I had not put forth my name as a candidate, neither had I attended the event on the day which was supposedly a requirement. Several days went by as I consulted mentors and friends, reflecting on my decision, should I or should I not accept? Objectively, declining the position in lieu of parenting, work and study commitments made practical sense. Yet bearing witness to communal social help organizations up close over the course of the study had shown how invaluable they are to the community. Afterall isn't 'real life' involvement the most foundational and evident indicator of commitment to the field? Beyond the norms of gauging accountability through knowledge dissemination, community service and engagement seems the apparent bridge between research and practice. The fact that it was also the first time that the community had elected a woman in the role of the president since TCSBC's incorporation as a charitable organization presented a feminist imperative. During the course of my fieldwork, several women had spoken candidly about the communal norm of being seen merely as accessories to male leadership. A past female executive member of TCSBC spoke of her disillusionment, "I thought I will be doing something meaningful but what they see is a pretty face who they can show off at events and treat like a secretary." Three days after the initial announcement of the TA election, I stepped into the role of the president of TCSBC in what seemed like the completion of the ethnographic circle reiterating its relational 'truth' of the

blurred bodies of the researcher and the field at large. While the community engagement initiatives and experiences in the field since then are outside the scope of this study, I will provide a brief synopsis of the events leading up to the election.

After the pandemic restrictions were lifted, a group of Tibetan parents in the lower mainland approached the head of the local monastery, Tsengdok Rinpoche, and expressed their desire for a space so they could conduct Tibetan language classes for community children. Rinpoche agreed to host the language classes on his center's premises. Initially called *'Munsel Lobta'* (*mun sel slob grwa*), later it came to be known as '*Lodoe Kunphel*' (*blo grdos·kun phel*) – a name given by the Dalai Lama for the school at Tsengdok Rinpoche's request. As a Tibetan weekend language school, *Lodoe Kunphel* is modeled after similar weekend language schools across Tibetan communities in North America. The classes are held every Saturday at the monastery, and the B.C.Tibetan Parents' Committee manages the operational task of running the school.

This was not the first time that the monastery had helped organize Tibetan language classes for the community. Previously several attempts were made to set up a language school but due to lack of teachers and because of the challenges of sustaining student enrollment the initiatives had not been sustainable. "One last time," Rinpoche said, as he felt there were enough families to form a critical mass. The language school continued to expand and at the time of this writing there are around 45 to 50 children enrolled in the program. In July 2022, less than a month into taking my sons to Tibetan classes, I became the substitute teacher for the kindergarten class and took on the role of 'general secretary' for the B.C. Tibetan Parents' Committee upon the request of its members. It was the members of the parents' committee who later voted for me during the community election. Reflecting on my own journey, while the study requires closure

the question as to how one exits 'the field' when embedded within its kin network remains a more complicated issue.

Initially when I began the study, I was interested in exploring the phenomenon of the proliferation of Tibetan social help organizations through the lens of multiculturalism, seeing the *kyidu*(s) and TAs' place amongst the 'ethnocultural' organizations in Canada. Though a truism, it did not sufficiently capture the multidimensional outlooks reflected within the montages of events, narratives, and textual materials spanning fieldwork in its construction of the ethnographic story. As much as the early Tibetan sojourners found themselves pulled into what is arguably attributed to Pierre Trudeau's intellectual dream of a multicultural Canada, they also pushed to develop a distinct kind of community whose structure and values mimicked the blueprint of their exilic kinship. Centering on mutuality based on group identity, loyalty to the Dalai Lama, Tibetan culture and religion, Tibetans' engagement with citizenship and advocacy is also focused on the continuity of their struggle for homeland in diaspora. In contrast to their modest numbers or perhaps because of this very fact, individual households came together to forge their own communal spaces within their localities in a short span of time after their arrival in Canada. Yet diasporic placemaking is ultimately a subaltern exercise in that it is placemaking in the absence and yearning for place and belonging. As discussed in the case of Tibetans, often the quest and procurement of space also risks material and psychological fissures within the communities.

Examining the rationale for diasporic social organizing activities and groups also led to examining diasporic consciousness through the lens of kinship particularly given the conceptualization of Tibetan *kyidu* in previous literature. Subsequently, chapter one began with a focus on the diasporic development of Tibetan communities in the field sites of Toronto and

Vancouver including kinship's role in initiating community building as an integral part of that story. The affinal type of group kinship formation operates through two interconnected axials -– localized place-based identity and the 'national Tibetan identity' both of which are grounded in historical Tibet as well as the later development of exilic identity. These two axials of Tibetan kinship formation are not always harmoniously in sync with one another even though their survival is contingent upon the other's thriving.

Ideological tensions are further offset by what community members discuss as practical 'evidence' of how these concerns are validated – identifying the challenges in community event scheduling, organizing and participation when there are too many competing events. The regionbased affiliations that diasporic *kyidu* represent through their identity can be a source of tension in exile politics. The *kyidus'* place-based identity consolidation along with their active engagement in social welfare of their members' lives show how their social helping acts intersect and are seen as competing with the larger TA agenda for a unified front. As a TA member critical of *kyidu* formations simply put "when there are two *Lhakar* events on the same day, the *kyidu* members will go to their own event and miss the larger Tibetan event". The similarities in organizing and functional practices between the two forms despite their differences in scope is therefore not unnoticed by many community members. It is also not uncommon amongst community members to beleaguer the mushrooming of *kyidu* as undermining the collective strength of the TAs despite the TA's status as the 'mother' organization in the locality. It is worth noting that on the part of the *kyidu* too, awareness of the long-standing politics of place and identity in diasporic history propels open acknowledgement of the TAs' authority. Substantial effort is made to avoid the perception of subversion against a collective Tibetan unity.

In consecutive chapters, I explored how the two *avatars* of group kinship formation in diaspora presents themselves through their notions, organizing structures and social helping activities. Chapter five explored Tibetan diasporic kinship notions of mutuality based on affiliations thematically grounded in historical place-based identity, the prominence of the 'core of sacred things and exilic experiences as part of larger group consciousness propelling motivations for community engagement and constructions of social helping acts. Where previous work focused on the politics of nationalism and pan Tibetan identity of the Tibetan diaspora, in this study, the attempt has been to capture diaspora as kinship through the lens of social helping notions, formation and practices embedded in both universalist and localized place-based discourses. For as a framework, it is ultimately kinship's 'ties of mutuality' underlying notions, organizing and social helping activities that create and sustain 'community'.

Within the axials of kinship formation, despite interlinkages, in diaspora the political emphasis on a national identity creates a binary, hierarchical outlook that often subverts localized kinship formation and organizing as disruptive to the larger cause. Yet for any kind of deeper engagement and immersion, how would a 'Tibetan' come to understand or have an appreciation for their Tibetan-ness without a recourse into the kinship axial of their familial origins or network, tied to the specificity of place? For the larger Tibetan diasporic consciousness, nurtured as much by a sense of imagined history of a nation through a recounting of time, equally it seems necessary to pin those imagined narratives to the concrete contours of *a* landscape and in the specific vagaries of place-making, which as an age-old tradition can be alluded to in native scholarships (example Samten Karmay 2022; 1998, Namkhai Norbu 1997; 1981) that I discussed in previous chapters. For affinal kinship to sustain, as with arguably any kind of kinship formation, the imprint of time and space are essential which provides an insight into how kinship

is likened to the all-encompassing fluidity of 'culture' (Sahlins, 2013). Ultimately, these boundaries between the universalist and localized place-based formations are rendered obscure in that their constructions share similar themes and replicate key patterns of 'thought' organizing, be it their look back into history or who they are today.

In their *wholesome* encapsulation of the spatial and conceptual dynamics, the discursive to and fro of kinship that include and expand beyond ancestral '*Bhod*' with a repertoire of 'nonTibetan Tibetan' spaces authenticating assertions of Tibetan-ness, is where the universal and the local blend in the hybrid *intersitiality* (Bhaba, 1994) of diaspora. Simultaneously, if the diasporic uptake of 'old histories in new geographies' (Spivak, 2021) secures kinship formations, its 'other' and self-othering positionality also provides a perspective to Tibetan subalternity's appeal to indigeneity, sovereignty through the discourse of culture, thereby relegating all cultural activities in the service of the larger cause and hence perceived as vital acts of social helping. Thus, notions of social service, social help and arguably any constructions of social work in diaspora will characteristically be transnational at its core.

Kinship notions further pave the way to chapter six, where thematically the 'national' Tibetan and place-based localized identities manifest in seemingly two different social help organizing structures of the *kyidu* and the TAs. Yet despite outward differences in their scope and social help practices as well as tensions underlying the two, the findings show that similarities in the blueprint of their kinship organizing, outlook and consolidation are unmistakable. Where sometimes the organizing *hyperactivity* seem a mirror to the unrelenting Tibetan political will to imprint group struggle and identity, in many cases the shrillness of the act and its fragmenting pools of smaller place-based identity(s) also hints at deeper chasms facing the pan Tibetan identity when viewed from an understanding of the administration's loosening hegemony over its

expanding constituents. Anecdotally, memberships within the pan Tibetan TAs are declining with each passing year while localized *kyidu* and *kyidu*-like grouping activities are more visible both within the community and in the Tibetan virtual sphere. How these trends relate to a global upsurge in provincial and nativist discourses in recent decades and whether a return to universalist ideals and identity(s) are in the making can only be wondered aloud at this time.

Conjectures aside, today in the case of Canadian Tibetan communities, diaspora *is* (almost) home rather than dispersal while homeland, especially for the generation that has never known its physicality or lived experiences, is couched in the emotionality of 'violated specialness' (Barnett, 2001) or the language of social justice and human rights. Conceptually, one can sense these evolving dynamics leading to the same question that the larger diaspora theorizing is reckoned with – how eternal is life in diaspora and its unfolding 'post diaspora' stage? Here one experiences the limits of language to depict relational thought for as Emirbayer (1997) points out, it is ingrained so deeply within the western language pattern itself that one can only *capture* fluid states of *things* as in a state of 'substantialism'.

Dwelling on the axials of localized kinship, in analyzing the *kyidu* anew, where past scholarship (Shaw, 2015; Tsondre, 2011; Miller, 1956) examined it through the lens of structural and functional 'organization', in this study, I have discussed its location and positionality within the larger politics and evolution of diasporic kinship and importantly how its structure and function of social helping are *practises of relatedness* (Sahlins, 2013). Furthermore, if we examine the TAs especially when they first developed, in many ways they emulate the group welfare functionality of a *kyidu* and seen from a Canadian perspective ethnic membership criterion mimics the designation of a *kyidu* for Tibetans. Metaphorically too, *kyidu* as a noun

amalgamates the two experiential sides of human existence – happiness and sorrow– and symbolizes life and the need for kinship structures to share its victories and vicissitudes.

Examining the formation and evolution of Tibetan social help organizations in Canada, individuals variously express that such activities are essential 'social helping' 'mutual help' and 'service to the community' with the rationale for their engagement stemming from a sense of "duty as a Tibetan". These sentiments echo themes from prior diasporic history in India and Nepal, where their very pervasiveness had a trope-like characteristic in communal settings. Encountering them frequently within the study helped see their folk significance anew through the central domain of kinship's conceptualization, operation and organization as shaping the distinct 'culture' of Tibetan social helping in and of diaspora.

In chapter 7, the outline of the types of helping activities of *kyidu*(s) and TAs show that both structures have evolved over time and continue to do so. Comparatively speaking, relative to the TAs, *kyidu* social help activities are cultural acts inwardly focused within their membership including translocal ties with kindred *kyidu* of the region. The TAs' activities are focused for 'all Tibetans' and in its function and scope, is increasingly a hybrid structure adopting larger Canadian language and understandings of 'community organization' and 'social services' into their modality. Kinship in the guise of its organizing structure; as *kyidu*(s) and TAs, provide a physical and virtual 'place' to organize, administer and perform as community, creating and enabling a sense of spatial belonging amidst the field of diasporic ambiguity.

Challenges: Dwelling on *kyidu*, despite their existence today and the prominence of local TAs within the locality in terms of their cultural activities, their future growth and sustainability are not matters set in stone. Privately, they raise concerns about whether the *kyidu* and the TA can

continue with their current status quo in Canada beyond one or two generations. Pointing to the repurposed examples of past minority cultural 'halls' and centers in metropolitan centers they assert that if one is not a part of the larger visible minority group that can lobby for economic and political support, cultural continuity is not feasible due to lack of critical mass, the integration of younger generations into Canadian society who may not share the same relational bond and cultural pull towards their ethnic identity. In time, the TAs and the *kyidu* may disappear because members will find it hard to carry on the demands of community work as volunteers and with decreasing activities, membership in the organizations will gradually cease for people will lose connection with each other.

Furthermore, where Tibetans were previously immersed in myriad exilic institutional setups that require close contact with the CTA for social functioning, as Canadian citizens their relationship and power dynamic with the CTA is inverted. A growing sense of association with their new citizenship is in a way exemplified by increasing requests in recent years by the TA and Tibetans in Canada for a distinct Office of Tibet (OOT) representative located within the country rather than a shared 'North America' representative based in the United States. The rationale for such an appeal is the overtly American leanings of the OOT, their perceived lack of understanding of Canadian politics and physical presence in Canada.

Surveying the Tibetan resistance movement, it has gone through myriad stages – from *rangzen* (freedom) connoting independence as a nation to formal adoption of a 'Middle Way path' (autonomy) in 1988 after the Dalai Lama's Strasbourg Proposal to the European parliament (Norbu, 1991). While 'cultural preservation' was always a critical component of the collective movement, in the wake of the formal ideological shifts (from independence to autonomy), it assumes an even larger significance today for both the exilic establishment and its constituents.

Resultantly the 'cultural' ties of mutuality have created and fostered a network of social organizations today that provide a range of niche services for the community and in essence connects the diaspora through an intricate web of affiliations. Critically, one can also see how the overall culture of emphasis on collective 'helping' responsibility – prevalent in both the psychological makeup of the *kyidu* and the Tas – can overshadow important social challenges such as poverty, homelessness, mental health and substance use issues. Related to this outlook, Hess's (2009) conceptualization of the Tibetan 'immigrant ambassador' can be said to have its developmental roots in an earlier slogan used for children and youth. The 'future seed of Tibet' (*ma'ong bhod kyi sron za*) is a trope-like chant, well known to all those who were part of the Tibetan exilic school system, variably used by administrators, teachers and staff to both admonish and inspire. Such conditionings incentivize a communal climate that espouses model behaviors, celebration of success stories, where members strive for self-sufficiency and upward socioeconomic mobility. The rhetoric of '*chigyal*' (literally – foreign country, connoting the west) as a place of opportunity to advance individual and communal interests further acts as an added pressure.

Within such an atmosphere, complex societal problems such as poverty, mental health and addiction, tend to be pushed into the domain of the private sphere as moral, individual failings. Field conversations particularly with youth and adults dealing with problematic substance use and addiction issues highlighted how communal disappointment often expressed as 'so shameful as a Tibetan' - further isolates and marginalizes them from the larger group. The TAs are aware of these growing issues, yet unable to address their complexities due to lack of human and financial resources as volunteer-based organizations without a sustained funding source or trained personnel to provide supportive programs. Furthermore, not being formally

connected with the larger Canadian health and social service system, organizationally, they do not have the mandate or wherewithal to intervene on such issues even when they are the most closely connected and aware of the issues at hand. What is concerning is that in both field sites, although a small group, unaddressed and insufficient support, lack of understanding of mental health and addiction issues compounded by moral judgment and stigmatization is on the rise especially amongst youth. While these issues need further exploration, a deeper dive into the specific areas is outside the current scope. Be that as it may, in the following section I offer some preliminary thoughts as to the current nature and engagement of professional Social Work in Canada and how it may be worth exploring pathways through which the discipline can rethink its engagement in community development, which have been increasingly neglected over the past decades.

The Road Ahead: Diaspora Social Work

From the perspective of a larger 'helping' scholarship, the *kyidu* and TAs that I study, particularly their activities, can be characterized as mutual helping or mutual aid activities of ethnocultural organizations. In fact, classical studies on Tibetan *kyidu* as I have pointed out in earlier chapters defines the organizational type as 'mutual help or aid'. Kinship based mutual helping or mutual aid as a type of social helping relationship far precedes the development of modern social work as a discipline and professional practice whose growth is closely linked with the rise of welfare states particularly in the western context. Diverse types and traditions of mutual aid exist in different parts of the world and in the Himalayan region alone, in addition to the *kyidu* in Tibet and 'kidu' system in Bhutan (Ugyel, 2018), similar organizations including the Dhikurs amongst Newaris (Messerschmidt, 1978), *Ganye* preceding *kyidu* in Tibet (Miller, 1956), and Pashpun in Ladakh (Le Masson, 2013). These varied traditions of mutual aid in the

context of globalization of ideas, markets, movement, and technology have continued to adapt and evolve. At the same time, with the introduction and dominance of modern social welfare systems including increasing professionalization of 'help' delivery systems and regulation of disciplines such as social work, the contemporary scope and status of traditional grassroots-based helping traditions has receded to the margins. The rise of secular, professionalized help provision intersects with the progressive turn taken by welfare states to battle complex social issues since they are no longer seen simply as individual failings but tied to structural inequalities. On the other hand, institutional involvement also incentivizes expansion of professional territorialization of social helping including standardization of practices inadvertently leading to a separation and a hierarchy between formal and informal systems of helping. These elements are further offset by cultural differences in the context and practices of Social Work as seen through the larger discourse on indigenization of social work and the fact that discourse on indigenization of social work invariably references the existence of social help traditions of the region(s) before 'social work' (see Watermeyer & Yan, 2021).

Within the context of social work praxis in Canada today, there is focus on incorporating and improving services for racialized, visible minorities be it through the usage of culture-based approaches such as cultural competency, cultural humility, and cultural safety with corresponding acknowledgement of diversity, representation, and equity in various settings. These initiatives have enhanced praxis capacity to work with diverse populations but the lack of federal and provincial policy and funding support for the structural sustainability of these organizations mean that they operate outside the margins of the professionalized social help industry. Professionally trained social workers are removed from 'ethnic' organizations and seldom encounter the

workings of such organizations unless their 'case' involves a member of the community and even then, it is highly unlikely that the social worker or the agency seeks the 'community' since kinship is viewed primarily from the point of view of 'blood' or consanguineal kinship. Despite this lack in practice, 'community' remains a key parlance in social work practice and scholarship.

Furthermore, a tangible unit through which we know of the 'community' within the study are the modest organizational set ups run entirely by volunteers who often do not have formal training in health or social help provision and lack both the resources and capacity to meet complex care challenges. Inclusion of these networks as part of the larger structure of care delivery systems will enable them access to program funding, ability to recruit and collaborate with professional social work services. The inclusion of non-formal helping traditions in the larger care delivery systems can enhance the ability to develop closer connections with grassroots communities as well as build stronger kinship networks critical to community development. A holistic social care delivery system requires integration of both emic and etic perspectives and in the context of globalization and mass movement where Canada is a 'refugee and immigrant' receiving country, exploring the involvement of the various ethnocultural organizations in care delivery and community building offers a structural response beyond the scope of individual-based 'cultural' humility and safety approaches. Arguably, community building, and development is not sustainable without a sense of relationality for creating a 'community' requires shared interests in one another's *kyidu*. It is this 'truth' of mutuality that is also depicted in chapter 4 through the 'metaphysical' allegory of the mandala as the cosmic 'universe' including all sentient and non sentient beings within its conceptual phenomena.

Kinship as a vital affirmation of the shared truth of human life trajectory as 'happiness and sorrow' creates and sustains communal connections and for Tibetans, their relatedness is also grounded in mutual experiences of dispersal, exilic life and struggle as Tibetans. Yet as mentioned earlier, a growing concern is the sustainability of such initiatives over the years with changing generations. Within this context, some opine that the *kyidu* and the TAs should morph into 'Himalayan' immigrant aid organizations offering 'professional services' for Tibetans and other Himalayan populations in order to procure provincial funding for their survival. Yet others do not think that the Canadian government will be concerned with 'Tibetan' affairs but posit that the CTA may want to salvage the *kyidu* and TAs because they maintain its connectivity with diasporic constituents. As perspectives, they are reminders of how diasporic organizations, construed as being in a space where it doesn't naturally belong, are identified as 'foreign' not only by those outside its unit but by its own membership as well. In the Tibetan case, additionally this differentiation may relate with shifting communal awareness of how 'help' at large is defined largely with concrete functional tasks rather than the group's prioritization of 'acts of culture'.

The 'helping' scholarship within Social Work (Steingberg, 2010; Shapiro 1997; Adams, 1990) categorizes help into formal and informal help based on the type and background of the personnel providing service delivery. Yet these studies have mostly been conducted in the past decades and for those working in various types of social helping settings, today the boundaries between formal and informal services in terms of their functional tasks are often blurry and overlap in real life. As shown in the study, distinctions of such kind are especially problematic where group kinship-based helping is concerned, for elements of both formal and informal helping are at the core of its very ethos. Social psychology perspectives have also noted how informal help is expected to be a natural part of kin formations and relationships, creating a

critical link between kinship and social helping. In fact, one may view social helping as a primary factor underpinning kinship relations and as such kinship-based helping is anchored in interpersonal dynamics. At the same time, the type of help conceptualized and rendered occurs in the context of a formalized mutual help setting and are organized acts of helping construed as beneficial for the group. Social helping rooted in kinship thus crucially becomes a vantage point into understanding group kinship priorities, dynamics, and issues. Reciprocally, this vantage point provides a concrete inlet into understanding how social helping shape and evolve kinship formations including tensions and relational spheres in diaspora.

Where diaspora is the stage upon which the study is mounted, kinship as the key organizing theme provides an inlet into how its notions, practices and organizing shape social helping definitions, activities and structures. Discussed in the preceding chapter, the use of kinship in Social Work thus far is focused on understanding and creation of familial structure amongst vulnerable children and youth in foster care and adoption. Moving beyond the topical area of Social Work practice within the child and youth foster care system, findings from the fieldwork centrally locate kinship's role as indelibly tied to social helping through notions of group identity, place-making and 'nation' organizing, linking social helping to both formalized and informal social work. Further, disrupting bounded categories of the concept, the study also concurs with kinship's ability to not only 'travel' as Craig (2020) suggests in her work but importantly (re)form communities through organizing diasporic trans-belonging. As elaborated in the chapters on various facets of kinship, suffice is to summarize that its centrality within social helping and crucially community building as discussed above, suggests various potential ways through which its application can be woven into Social Work development both locally and transnationally.

Encountering kinship at the heart of social helping also opens further questions as to how we may locally foster and develop its formations beyond individual families to enhance community building. Social Work as both a practice and academic discipline occupies a vital role in bridging the gap in care delivery knowledge and practice within various micro and macro settings. Given the increasing advocacy within the field towards a community-based rather than institutional way of living, matters of kinship are critical to this shift. Aligning with a push for centralizing relational praxis, as a teleologically humane concept premised on a consciousness of interdependence of all phenomena, kinship's relationality is at the core of all 'social' work. This holistic and relational focus of kinship culture (Sahlins, 2013) also aligns with the growing arsenal of anti-oppressive practices within Social Work and makes its use particularly appropriate when developing praxis in traditional non-western and indigenous cultures.

From a structural perspective, the cultural acts of social helping conducted by Tibetan social help organizations serve a vital purpose in that it further abets the strengthening of the ties of mutuality within the group. Furthermore, speaking of the critical role of 'helping' as a key notion or characteristic that shapes and defines kinship practices, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between Social Work and formalized kinship social helping practices which is currently outside the scope of the study. The need for further investigation may be especially significant for Social Work development amongst Tibetans and other Himlayan groups – to find out how disciplinary development in the region can coexist with traditions of kinship-based helping systems providing vital social support for people and are a foundational part of their social life.

Maintaining these traditional social help organizations in Canada will be challenging as multiculturalism provides minorities individual rights to practice culture but does not provide

structural protection of minority culture (Taylor et al., 1994). In addition, the state does not allocate funding for ethnic organizations to provide social services for its own members. This institutional tendency indirectly excludes access to professional help within ethnic-run organizations thus reducing the types of services that they provide or receive to 'informal help' which are entirely dependent on untrained community volunteers. In the case of the Tibetan community these issues are directly tied to inconsistency regarding challenges in volunteer retention thus causing premature program/service termination, lack of knowledge regarding program development and accountability issues due to minimal or no formal training in financial management or community development work. Most critically, the lack of funding and resources creates a leadership vacuum where the communal demands exceed the volunteering capacity of executive members to engage meaningfully in the processes and outcome of community organizing and development. These very constraints further impact the ability to manage and develop administration capacity, transparency, and documentation for organizational development.

Minority organizations also face the pressure of mimicking larger organizational forms to survive as entities. The dominance of majoritarian bias from a public policy standpoint may be unavoidable but by the same token it is the other side of this very 'truth' which calls for an equitable eye to safeguard cultural helping ecosystems. Critically the issue is not that there is no infrastructure and know-how for provision of niche minority-within-minorities (MWM) services, for example in the case of related Himalayan communities, aside from the Tibetan social organization, there also exists the Bhutanese and Nepali cultural organizations but structural barriers prevent these organizations from delivering care. The larger conglomerate of immigrant aid organizations due to critical mass offer some form of culturally appropriate services as

evidenced by the number of programs with options to match recipients with a culturally homogenous service provider. Yet these services cover larger visible minority groups and not niche minorities within this category.

Tying closer into questions regarding sustainability, is an implicit understanding of the comparative hierarchy of social help provision and a functionalist approach to help where issues related to basic practical needs (Maslow's hierarchy) are considered far more imperative despite acknowledgement that 'culture' matters. For example, in Canadian Social Work praxis, where culture is evoked, it is relegated to discussions of appropriateness or as a process or outcome oriented tool for understanding the non-white client or group as evidenced by the literature on 'cultural' frameworks such as cultural competency (Este, 2002), cultural humility (2015), and cultural safety (Fernando & Bennett, 2019). The critique here is not that the cultural frameworks do not serve a valuable purpose but to point out that a fundamental difference exists between the state and its diasporic population in their framing of the *culture of social work*. The role of methodological nationalism as discussed in previous chapters, allows the state and by association Social Work to imagine and locate culture as external to their natural 'secular' projection of selves – somewhat akin to the popular adage that 'there is no Canadian culture'. Whereas for diaspora(s) to survive as an entity, kinship as culture must be projected. Notwithstanding projections, philosophically, dwelling on the two forms of affiliation, Judith Butler (2002) draws parallels to the literary play Antigone and Creon interpreting the relationship between kinship and nation to "assume the separability of kinship and the state even as it posits an essential relation between them"... questioning "whether there can be kinship without the support and mediation of state and whether they can be the state without the family as its support and

mediation" (p. 2-3). In essence, the axials of kinship formation despite tensions between the local and the universal, coexist within an interdependent dynamic scale.

Most notably since Midgley's (1981) charges of 'professional imperialism' against Western Social Work, disciplinary scholarship and praxis development in the west has focused on decolonial approaches to manage ethno-racial 'differences', structural inequities within its geographical space. Transnationally, these initiatives have spurred various discourses on indigenization of the discipline and formation of country-specific Social Work(s) that are aligned to local contexts. This study philosophically aligns with the larger scholarship in that overall, such developments have helped create an awareness of how coloniality, group power and structural inequities produces poverty, societal inequalities and that knowledge production, practices are undeniably shaped by these overarching supra structures. At the same time, the gaze through which the discipline tackles 'minority' issues is overwhelmingly through the container of the nation state as if it is a natural state thus leaning into methodological nationalism. This phenomenon is also tied to the liberal individuation bias which as Emirbayer (1997) points out leads to methodological individualism and nationalism in societal studies.

The problem of gaze and relatedly discursive viewpoint as power being critical factors in conceptualization of the 'problem' is also why I take a diasporic rather than a nation state 'immigrant' perspective to evoke the field's multiple affiliations, citizenship and belongings. To be clear, the omission of the 'immigrant' identity is not by any means to insinuate that one can escape it simply by way of subversion but to punctuate how in its absence, 'other' ways of identity and knowing offer a different narrative standpoint and truth. Creating a narrative space from a diasporic perspective (instead of 'immigrant') unsettles the point of reference from a new 'immigrant' identity to intentionally evoking continuing relationships to 'old histories in new

geographies' (Spivak, 2021). Upending the seemingly natural order of things reminds one that ultimately, structuring a center-periphery relation is like social identity, a subjective construction of positioning self(s) in relation to others. This type of border-thinking is important on account of minority speak using categories and language set from a majoritarian perspective conforming to the proverbial glass ceiling reminiscent of Lorde's (1984) famed pronouncement that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'.

Another way in which this study consciously deviates from previous Social Work scholarship that speaks of 'diaspora' is in relation to its theorizing and application of the term. Where the tendency has been to use 'diaspora' as a descriptive term, here the effort has been to engage in the larger transdisciplinary theorizing on the subject including a regional understanding of Tibetan 'area studies' about the group's historical development. As such the treatment of the term is not simply a reference to geography but encompasses psychological, socio-cultural, and political conditions of the group. The latent hope is that by incorporating these scholarships within Social Work, there will be more tools for disciplinary scholars and practitioners to avail multiple ways of knowing and working with newer communities.

In fact, diaspora, as an area intersecting global migration, notions of nativity, territoriality, and transnational networks challenges tendencies of methodological nationalism within social work to offer an alternative perspective to current citizenship-based orientation, sedentary understandings of diversity especially for minorities whose complex indigene histories cannot be viewed the same as erstwhile citizens of nation states migrating to the west. In such cases, there is even an ethical imperative for Social Work as an emancipatory discipline to remain conceptually untied to 'national' categories especially when group struggles are linked with territorial disputes, oppression and structural inequalities against contemporary nation states.

For the communities involved in the study, diaspora helps bring into focus the continuing ties of history as not simply 'the past' but how its forces and trajectories shape the very nature of their organizing and engagement within the context of social helping. Tibetans in the field objectively understand that they are settled in Canada as citizens, however the fact does not seem to erase their continuing narratives of 'being refugees', of not having their own country and its associated lack of closure. Beyond the limits of the 'field' I study, one can see that with increasing conflicts in the world today on ethno-racial, religious and political divides, mass displacements into old and new diasporas are on the rise including within Canada. Exploring ways through which Canadian social work praxis may develop its scholarship, practice-based assessments and intervention strategies to understand the individual and group complexities of transnational communities within seems only logical. Further, diaspora perspectives in social work may also provide insight into areas such as 'indigenization', where it is not only a matter of disciplinary contextualization between nation states, or binaries between the indigenous and the non-indigenous other, but of incommensurabilities and ambiguities that these myriad threads of group identity entangle within a globalized 'national' time space.

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