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Constructing a Tibetan demos in exile

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This article explores how displaced Tibetans demarcate and characterize the Tibetan *demos* in the process of building a democratic community and a government-in-exile. In this democracy-in-exile, defining the *demos* is not only a means of representing a people, but also a means of regaining a lost homeland. Two specific instances of the construction of a transnational exile *demos* are investigated: citizenship and political representation. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile's formalized idea of citizenship builds upon ideals of equal and loyal members who form a single unit bounded by a common cause. This also constitutes the foundation for Tibetan citizens' political representation in the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. The parliament's definition of the *demos* enhances regional and religious adherence as essentials for determining who the Tibetan people are. The article refers to problems regarding how this construct, which defines who is included into the *demos*, inevitably means that some are excluded as well.

Keywords: citizenship; demos; exclusion; exile; loyalty; political representation; Tibet

1. Introduction

Ever since the birth of democracy in ancient Athens, the definition of democracy's political subject – the *demos*¹ – has been the pivot of heated debates and struggles (Held 2003). Who shall be included and who shall be excluded from belonging to the category of 'the people?' Who may participate in decision making that affects whole communities? Today the definition of the *demos* is disputed, for instance, in a multi-communal state such as India, in a supranational institution such as the European Union, and in an exile organization such as the Tibetan Government-in-Exile.

In the latter case, democracy has been given top-down by a religious and political leader in exile, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, to a people in exile. In the process of building a democratic government-in-exile, exile-Tibetans have had to define who the Tibetan people – *demos* – are and how this people can best rule – *kratos*. What is special about their democracy is that the *demos* should ideally include both Tibetans residing in Tibet and abroad in exile, and the *kratos* should ideally facilitate the exiles' return to a self-ruled, democratic Tibet. Consequently, democracy building in the exile-community is contained within the framework of what the Tibetans call freedom struggle.

It is my contention that from the perspective of exile, defining who constitutes the Tibetan *demos* and what characterizes this *demos* is a challenging political project that should serve not only as a means of representing a people, but also as a means of regaining a lost homeland. I explore this construction of a *demos* within a democracy-in-exile and

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show how the definition of who belongs to the *demos* inevitably means that some are excluded as well. Elsewhere belonging has been discussed with regard to the Tibetans' struggle of striking a balance between binary oppositions of tradition and modernity when it comes to, for instance, music in the life of refugees (Diehl 2002) or immigration to the USA (Hess 2009). I shall not look at Tibetans as carriers of culture caught between tradition and modernity, but focus on Tibetans as political subjects in a democracy-in-exile. I investigate democracy's 'boundary problem' (Miller 2009) of who shall be included into the *demos* by exploring how Tibetans' national belonging is understood through the lens of citizenship and political representation. What are the fault lines of belonging to a nation in exile – that is Tibetan and democratic?

The question of belonging in relation to inclusion and exclusion principles for a formalized exile-citizenship and political representation is not commonly discussed in diaspora studies (e.g., Cohen 2008) or in studies on political exiles (e.g., Shain 1989). Moreover, though the present article is informed by studies on alternative forms of belonging – be it as cultural citizens (Vega and Boele van Hensbroek 2010), flexible citizens (Ong 1999) or transnational citizens (Fox 2005) – the Tibetan case is not easily fitted into any of these categories. In fact, the exile-Tibetan efforts to construct a *demos* complicates our understanding of the roles that citizenship, political representation and also national loyalty have for political exiles. This is particularly relevant in view of Shain's seminal work *The Frontier of Loyalty* (1989).

In his comparative study of political exiles, Shain (1989) has shown how loyalty and recognition, implying national and international support for claims to power respectively, are crucial for political exiles. The construction of an exile *demos* is not questioned by Shain when he investigates loyalty and recognition in order to explain the kind of legitimacy that political exiles are seeking. According to Shain, one important expression of loyalty is citizenship. For political exiles, he relates, citizenship is a source of national pride, community and nationalism, a symbol of solidarity and obligation, and the basis for defining national loyalty. Thus, citizenship is also an asset to fight for and can be used as a weapon by the home regime that the exiles once left: home regimes can brand exiles as disloyal by withdrawing their citizenship or entice exiles to return home with promises of restoring their citizenship. Shain's interest in citizenship is focused on how the withdrawal and restoration of citizenship is a tool used by home regimes. Host country citizenship, which he barely touches upon (Shain 1989, pp. 152–153), is, however, an even more pressing issue for exile-Tibetans. My research supports Shain's findings in that citizenship is connected to concepts of loyalty, but as we shall see in the first part of the present article, the role of citizenship and its link to loyalty are highly ambiguous. As for recognition, Shain (1989) convincingly argues that those political exiles who organize a government-in-exile struggle to mobilize international support for their claim to be the legitimate representative of their nation. Following Shain, democratically chosen representatives play a decisive role in gaining recognition, and we shall see in the second part of this article how the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile (TPIE) strives to legitimize its claim to rightfully represent all Tibetans alike. However, unlike Shain I do not investigate the exile-Tibetan democratic organization in a parliament-in-exile as a quest for international recognition, but look instead at political representation in view of community concerns such as securing internal coherence and unity.

Recognizing that any *demos* is a political and social construct, my pursuit into the Tibetan *demos* incorporates the formalized notions represented by exile-Tibetan legal material on citizenship and political representation on the one hand, and how it is co-authored and contested by exile-Tibetans themselves on the other hand. This quest is

grounded on field research conducted in exile-Tibetan communities in North and South India during 2005–2007. I spent most time in Dharamsala, Deyiling and Bylakuppe where I completed 173 in-depth interviews, out of which 55 were conducted in Tibetan language. Tibetans from all walks of life were interviewed: from farmers and retired soldiers in remote villages, to intellectuals and political activists at the political headquarters. Before I relate to these voices, I briefly introduce the Tibetan exile and democratization to set the framework in which the exile-Tibetans' construction of the *demos* is contained. This will lead to the main body of this article, namely, the two-part investigation of (1) the definition of Tibetan citizenship and (2) its political representation in the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile.

2. Democracy contained within freedom struggle

Many Tibetans followed their leader, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, into exile after he fled Lhasa on 17 March 1959. For these Tibetans, exile provides a temporary shelter from where they fight and prepare for a self-ruled and democratic Tibet. Around 130,000 Tibetans have left Tibet and established themselves in exile, most of them residing in India. Fifty-two settlements, which are either agricultural, handicraft-based or agro-industrial, have been established for Tibetans in India, Nepal and Bhutan. These settlements are meant to work as self-sustained communities where Tibetans can live and work together, but many reside outside of the settlements as well.²

In 1960, the exile-Tibetans instituted a government-in-exile that is situated in the north Indian hill station Dharamsala. This government-in-exile claims to have a historical, legal and moral right to represent all Tibetans, and it portrays itself as the continuation of the Lhasa government that ruled Tibet as an independent country until 1951 when Tibet was incorporated into the People's Republic of China. It has no international legal recognition as a government-in-exile, but it is nevertheless the main agent regulating the exile community and the main mediator between exile-Tibetans, and foreign NGOs and governments (Frechette 2002). Furthermore, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile has 11 foreign missions and the Dalai Lama is its foremost spokesperson who travels abroad extensively.

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, who is viewed by the exile-Tibetans as the architect of their democracy (Brox 2008b), has stated that he had already thought about reforms in line with democratic values before going into exile and that he also finds Buddhism compatible with democracy (e.g., Dalai Lama XIV 1999). Apart from such official explanations for initiating a democratization process upon arrival in Indian exile, one must also consider that having a democratic system in exile can provide an efficient system for legitimate succession of political leadership with more longevity and stability than the institution of reincarnated Dalai Lamas. Furthermore, claiming to be in democratic transition can also serve as an ideological weapon contesting the legitimacy of Chinese rule in Tibet, which exile-Tibetans view as undemocratic and illegal. At the same time, the exile-leadership can be said to have accommodated the dominant discourse of democracy promoted in the international community, thus employing an important means of generating support and obtaining diplomatic recognition.

It is a major challenge, however, to employ a discourse of democracy that has international resonance, to embark on the road to liberal democracy while being in exile, and at the same time build democracy in a culturally sensitive way to safeguard loyalty and national unity under the exile-leadership. Although the Tibetan Government-in-Exile should be a continuation of governance in pre-1951 Tibet, its composition does not replicate the historical Lhasa government that was overall an undemocratic elite rule by

aristocracy and clergy, in which government monk officials and lay officials shared offices and administered religious and political affairs.³ Several democratic reforms have been launched in exile: hereditary titles and the allocation of reserved seats for lay officials and monk officials in government offices have been abolished; the people democratically elect their representatives; the parliament has come to power and influence; the political dominance by the Gelug school (one branch of Tibetan Buddhism) has been ended; and there is now a clear separation of legislative, executive and judiciary powers.

In 1963, the Dalai Lama promulgated the *Constitution of Tibet* (TPIE 2005b) that can be seen as his reply to Chinese and Western representations of pre-1951 Tibetan governance deemed theocratic and backward. With this document, the Dalai Lama and the Government-in-Exile showed that they were committed to return to Tibet any day to establish a democratic government. The 1963 constitution expressed ideas on how to democratically govern a future free Tibet, but as exile became prolonged, it was necessary to update and provide proper guidelines for democratic governance in exile. With the introduction in 1991 of the *Charter of the Tibetans-in-Exile* (TPIE 2005b), democratization was pushed forward using principles of institutionalized separation and balance of powers: it distinguished between the legislative, executive and judiciary, and contained the fundamental principles of governance, rights and duties, provisions for administering settlements, and the three commissions for election, public service and audit. The ‘three pillars of democracy’ were instituted: the Supreme Justice Commission, the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and the Council heading the seven departments for religion and culture, home, education, finance, security, health, and information and international relations.

These democratizing efforts have led the Dalai Lama to conclude that the exile-Tibetan institutional frame now is ‘completely democratic’ (Brox 2008a). Nonetheless, Tibetan critics lament that after 50 years of exile many Tibetans still neither understand nor practice ‘true democracy’. Assessments by Western scholars Ardley (2003), Frechette (2007), Roemer (2008) and McConnell (2009) also identify several democratic deficits in the Tibetan exile-community, some of which Tibetan critics recognize as well. Examples include factionalism, religion’s interference in the sphere of politics, the undemocratic position of the Dalai Lama, and the lack of formal opposition, accountability and people’s participation. Many young Tibetans, however, interpret the mobilization of exile-Tibetans prior to the March 2011 prime minister elections as evidence of a shift of paradigm among the Tibetan *demos*, whose members now actively perform citizenship.

3. Citizenship

As argued in the Introduction, an opening into understanding the construction of the Tibetan *demos* is to look at how Tibetan citizenship is demarcated and characterized. One has to note that exile-Tibetans are first and foremost subjected to the laws and governments of the host countries where they reside either as foreigners, refugees or citizens. Few Tibetans are citizens in the country of their resettlement, and in India, where most exile-Tibetans have settled, they are foreign guests according to India’s 1946 Foreigners Act (IRBC 2006).⁴ It is a complex challenge for a stateless people to formulate citizenship beyond the nation state.

The Tibetan Government-in-Exile has defined citizenship in its legal code, the *Charter of Tibetans-in-Exile* (TPIE 2005b). The overall principle for Tibetan citizenship is a common origin – the principle of *jus sanguinis* – since it is granted regardless of geographical location to members of the home nation and the national diaspora. According to article 8, Tibetan citizenship may be granted to persons whose biological mother or

father is of Tibetan descent, and persons married to a Tibetan national for more than three years. Furthermore, Tibetan refugees holding a foreign passport may retain Tibetan citizenship if they, under difficult circumstances, had no choice but to take foreign citizenship (TPiE 2005b, pp. 2–3).

Although dual citizenship is permitted, it is discouraged, both by the Government-in-Exile and fellow exiles (Roemer 2008, Hess 2009). Exile-Tibetans disagree on the issue of adopting foreign citizenship and the significance of remaining ‘stateless’.⁵ On one hand, possessing foreign citizenship can be seen as empowering. For instance, it is generally approved that Tibetans living in the USA adopt citizenship on the grounds that as members of a democratic superpower they can perform their duty as transnational political actors and good Tibetan ‘ambassadors’ better and more effectively (Hess 2009). Being a Tibetan and a citizen of the USA is possible because they sever the link between citizenship and nationality. In this view, a foreign passport is not a proof of national identity or where one belongs.

On the other hand, though Tibetans living outside of South Asia usually take foreign citizenship, claiming rights as a citizen in India is generally looked down upon. Some of my informants have likened it to ceasing to be a refugee and becoming an Indian. One Tibetan MP explained: ‘You are a refugee by birth and struggle. This is not our home. Our parents came to India for struggle – not to settle down. Then we have to go back’. For some conservative Tibetans, taking Indian citizenship is the same as hurting the integrity of the freedom struggle and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. In this view, we can recognize the equivalence that Shain (1989) made between citizenship, nationality and belonging. Taking Indian citizenship may thus be a form of self-exclusion. Hence, most Tibetans in India do not have Indian citizenship for two reasons: either because they have waived their right to citizenship as a sign of being loyal Tibetan citizens (Hess 2009) or because their application was simply rejected, though few will admit to that. I met Tibetans who confessed whisperingly that in fact they owned an Indian passport. Similarly, I witnessed Tibetans discussing, with a mix of envy and contempt, a friend’s success of going abroad carrying an Indian passport.

Citizenship, then, is ambiguous and it is invoked to judge national belonging. The challenge for exile-Tibetans is to perceive citizenship as telling one’s membership in a political community, and not as proving one’s loyalty to the nation. Nonetheless, as clarified in the following, loyalty is both a moral code and an obligation defined in legal terms. Tibetan citizenship, according to the charter’s article 13 (TPiE 2005b, p. 5), is defined by five fundamental obligations. Tibetan citizens have to ‘(1) believe and trust the country of Tibet; (2) truly respect and practice the Charter and the code of law; (3) struggle for the victory of the Tibet cause; (4) pay taxes in accordance with the code of law; (5) perform responsibilities imposed by law in times of critical danger to country and people’.

The provision of tax duty given in article 13(4) above is important to notice because, in fact, only tax-paying exile-Tibetans can be citizens. Tibetans above the age of six years residing in exile are expected to make financial contributions to the Government-in-Exile, the so-called ‘voluntary tax’ (IRBC 2006). Not everybody pays this yearly token amount, but the tax is unavoidable if one wants to benefit from the services and programs administered by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, such as poverty alleviation programs and international scholarship and resettlement schemes. One’s annual contributions are specified in the so-called ‘green-book’ issued by the Government-in-Exile. Only Tibetans living outside Tibet who are recognized as Tibetan nationals (through an in-person interview) and registered in exile can carry this document, but a valid green book gives no rights in the host country (IRBC 2006). Furthermore, the tax duty actually determines

exile-Tibetans' democratic rights since it is only green-book holders with duly paid tax who have the right to vote in national and local elections in the Tibetan exile community. The green book is thus imperative when it comes to the construction of *demos* because it proves that a person belongs to the exile-Tibetan *demos*.

The obligations described in articles 13(1–3) above are also essential in the definition of the *demos* because here it is established that one must be loyal and aspire to the goal of the united Tibetan nation (TPiE 2005b, p. 5). As I have been reminded time and again during my research, the ideal of a loyal people who are united for a common cause is highly relevant to political representation and it forms obvious markers for deciding who is included and who is excluded from the community of loyal and organized exile-Tibetans.

Let me illustrate this by showing how an issue of religious controversy is seen by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile as a threat to political unity.⁶ The so-called Shugden controversy is a longstanding conflict that escalated in 1996 when the Dalai Lama proclaimed that government departments and monasteries should not worship the spirit of Dorje Shugden because '...this practice fosters religious intolerance and leads to the degeneration of Buddhism into a cult of spirit worship' (DRC (Department of Religion and Culture) 1998, p. i). Tibetans as individuals were free to worship Dorje Shugden, but if they continued the practice they had to cut their ties to the Dalai Lama. The Shugden controversy is a highly charged conflict, splitting the Tibetan community into a majority who followed the Dalai Lama's order and a minority who upheld their Shugden practice. Many simply abandoned the practice in an act of loyalty, but among those who did not, some were subjected to verbal and physical attacks by fellow exiles and therefore felt forced to leave their settlements. A few Shugden supporters even renounced the Dalai Lama and applied for Indian citizenship, thus demonstrating, in an act of self-exclusion, that they did not belong to that Tibetan community. Many Tibetans condemned Shugden worshippers, accusing them of forming a fundamentalist cult – even of being terrorists⁷ – engaged in reversing the Tibetans' democratization process in order to re-install theocratic governance and work against freedom of religion (DRC 1998). There were also Tibetans who defended their Shugden practice saying that they were victims of religious persecution and that they were being excommunicated. They claimed that by banning their religious practice, the Dalai Lama has not only hindered freedom of religion but also shown himself to be autocratic and intolerant, and thus far from a democratic leader.⁸

These examples show that in this conflict, protagonists from both sides invoked the democracy discourse in order to delegitimize the opponent and argue for opposite stands, claiming that the other side was breaching democratic norms, while they themselves were upholding democracy and the freedom underpinning it. The Shugden controversy and other conflicts reveal the centrality of unity and loyalty for understanding the dynamics of exile politics (Brox 2012). This is common for exile organizations, as observed by Shain (1989), who noted that a successful homecoming for political exiles depends heavily upon the strength and unity of their organization and upon the leadership enjoying massive support. The many Tibetans whom I have talked to, who fear a disintegration of their nation while they reside in exile believe that maintaining national unity and loyalty is necessary if they want to survive as one people with a legitimate claim to their homeland Tibet. To them, exile is a state of emergency and this emergency may justify restrictions placed on freedom and rights in order to uphold national unity. Hence, the ideals of unity and loyalty are keys to understanding the troubling exclusion and inclusion issues concerning the construction of a Tibetan *demos*. Another key notion is equality.

3.1 Equality, citizenship and democracy

Equal citizenship is usually placed at the core of democracy (Held 2003) and means that all adult citizens have an equal right to participate in decisions concerning them. This ideal has been adopted in articles 9–12 of the *Charter of Tibetans-in-Exile* (TPiE 2005b) establishing the fundamental rights of Tibetan citizens, such as equality before the law (irrespective of race, class, religion, etc.), religious freedom, the right to vote and nominate candidates for the parliament, and other rights such as freedom of expression, public assembly and association. The legalized ideal of equality substantiates the democratic intent of the exile-elite that has not only moved away from a societal structure that has been deemed feudal, but also away from traditional governance deemed theocratic. Exile-Tibetans nevertheless question this fundamental ideal of equality when it comes to the people's capability to rule. I will illuminate this issue by exploring the translation of the term *demos* and related debates. The meanings associated with the two Tibetan terms denoting democracy point to alternative conceptions of who should constitute the Tibetan *demos*. Furthermore, it is telling that while the exile-elite promotes equality as fundamental for democracy and wants to dispose of elite rule, ordinary Tibetans, however, are overall reluctant to trust their peers to govern.

Translating foreign concepts such as democracy poses huge challenges, not only in pinpointing what the original word 'democracy' means, but also in identifying and translating what it is in another language. The two Tibetan counterparts to 'democracy', *dmangs gtso* and *mang gtso*, do not contain exactly the same implications as the English word. The English term 'democracy', in turn, is of course not able to capture the distinction between the two Tibetan terms. The first syllable *dmangs*, in the Tibetan concept *dmangs gtso*, has predominantly occurred in the term *dmangs rigs* meaning 'lower classes' or 'low caste' (Skt. *sūdra*). Translating democracy into *dmangs gtso*, *gtso* referring to 'rule', can thus be understood as putting the lower classes first and letting the masses rule. This was also the term employed by the Communist Chinese to translate their version of democracy into Tibetan language, relating *dmangs gtso* to reforms such as allocating the land and riches of the Tibetan clergy and aristocracy. The first syllable *mang*, in the second translation of democracy *mang gtso*, on the other hand, does not point to any class distinction, but to quantity, namely, the 'many' (*mang po*) or the 'majority' (*mang phyogs*). The Tibetan Government-in-Exile standardized the translation of democracy as *mang gtso* ('majority rule') after 1991, indicating a reinterpretation of democracy away from 'low' toward 'majority'.⁹ In the context of the difference in meaning of the two Tibetan terms for democracy, *mang gtso* and *dmangs gtso*, it is worth noting that, at the beginning of exile, the Dalai Lama defined democracy (*dmangs gtso*) as a rule by the lower classes that form the majority:

We have to know the meaning of democracy [*dmangs gtso*] well for actualizing democracy combining spiritual law with politics tomorrow.¹⁰ For example, 'people' [*dmangs*] refers to a majority, not to an elite or a wealthy and powerful minority. Instead it refers to the many, the hardworking lower ranks living at the lowest level [of society]. 'Rule' [*gtso*] refers to this majority seizing the lead or becoming the masters of the land. [So *dmangs gtso*] refers to them seizing the lead and becoming the masters of the country. Moreover, having become the masters of the country and studied well the responsibilities to be taken on, it is indispensable and extremely important to increase one's understanding and the scope of one's individual capacity. Otherwise, if one is attached to the mere word 'democracy' [*dmangs gtso*] but does all kinds of things without knowing anything, then nothing but difficulties and mishaps will result. (Translated from Tibetan (Dalai Lama XIV 1986, pp. 55–56))

In his speech, the Dalai Lama's translation of 'democracy' (*dmangs gtso*) is ambiguous: he defines democracy as people's rule (*dmangs gtso*), in the sense of the lower ranks, but it is

also majority rule (*mang gtso*) since these low classes make up the main body of the population. He also emphasized in his speech that the people had to educate themselves in order to gain proper qualifications for democracy, and I will return to the importance of an educated *demos* soon.

The two equivalents to democracy in Tibetan language, *mang gtso* and *dmangs gtso*, aptly capture the debates surrounding the history of democracy in exile-Tibetan communities as well as in the West when it comes to the issue of who constitutes the people who should rule. Throughout history, there has been a reluctance to entrust governance to ordinary people or, in Tibetan terms, to the lower classes *dmangs*. The ideal in a democracy is that citizens do not need any special insight or divine revelation to fulfill their obligations in a democracy and they are free to make their own decisions. This point is relevant to exile-Tibetans who have had to accommodate democracy within a societal structure that traditionally saw the elite as rulers. The elite included the aristocracy and clergy headed by the Dalai Lama, who has an elevated status within Tibetan society.

During my fieldwork, several Tibetans confirmed that there are indeed points of friction between modern democracy and traditional Tibetan governance, but they did not agree to what extent traditional ways posed problems in contemporary political culture. Some Tibetans lament that the uneducated Tibetans are incapable of ruling according to democratic ideals because they uphold traditional values and practices that are not compatible with democracy. As an example, they assert that a good family name or belonging to the clergy can carry a candidate through democratic elections. Thus, they believe that the old Tibetan idea that aristocracy and clergy were better equipped to rule than ordinary Tibetans had survived in exile. The observation that Tibetans lean toward the ideal of elite rule despite the exile-elite's professed ideal of popular rule has also been noted by Frechette (2007) and Roemer (2008) and can be supported by my own findings as well.

Despite the Dalai Lama's and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile's ideal of people's rule, many exile-Tibetans do not trust their own and their peers' ability to deliberate and rule. They prefer power positions to be filled by appointment of people from among the elite at Dharamsala headquarters, whom they regard as qualified and educated, rather than by election of ordinary people in the settlements (Brox 2008b, Chap. 9). Lack of trust in their own abilities to make decisions for the common good is a problem that exile-Tibetans whom I have talked to unanimously agree can be resolved with more education. They reason that education will generate better understanding of democracy from which democratic action and participation is thought to naturally follow. Therefore, education of the masses – regardless of status and wealth – is crucial to ensure the equality and the ability of the people to rule skillfully.

The Government-in-Exile and exile-Tibetan civil society agents are the main educators teaching the people the skills of democratic citizenship. These educators target local community leaders believing that they are able to spread the message of democracy to the public. Not everyone agrees that this is sufficient since it is still the leaders who receive education while the masses remain 'unqualified for democracy' as one Tibetan farmer told me. They are taught that the model citizen should know the ways of democracy, pay tax duly, exercise his or her franchise rights, take responsibility for the well-being of the united community, and in other ways show loyalty toward the Dalai Lama, the Government-in-Exile, the charter and the Tibetan nation. The most common way to perform citizenship is by political representation, which is catered to by the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. The parliament is not only a means of political representation, but also an instrument in the struggle for a self-ruled and democratic Tibet that I shall address

in the following sections. We shall see how the Tibetan *demos* is organized into finer categories to which Tibetans can belong.

4. Political representation

As explained above, the ideal of equality, loyalty and unity are decisive for understanding belonging when it comes to citizenship. This is also reflected in the political representation of the *demos* in the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. The parliament ideally upholds equal representation of a manifold *demos* bound together by a common cause. This ideal is related to the exile-community's strongly felt need to secure national unity during the emergency situation of exile. The parliament is supposed to mirror the Tibetan population, but instead of a multiparty system, it has adopted a special quota system based on a religion–region template. This template defines the character and boundaries of the Tibetan *demos* by dividing the people into laity and clergy who originate from one of the three Tibetan regions and adhere to one of five religious traditions recognized as being Tibetan. These categories are not, of course, self-evident, and though the intention might have been inclusionist, the template excludes certain groups of Tibetans from political representation in the parliament.

4.1 The religion–region template

The quota system that the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile has adopted means that the seats in the parliament are allocated to delegates according to their regional origin and religious adherence as described in the charter (TPiE 2005b, pp. 23–38). More specifically, the template stipulates that ten seats in the parliament are reserved for two representatives from each of the five religious traditions recognized as being Tibetan, namely, the so-called indigenous religion Bon and the four major Buddhist traditions Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug. Another thirty seats are allotted to ten delegates from each of the three Tibetan provinces. Only four seats are reserved for exile constituencies with two delegates residing in north America and two in Europe (regardless of their regional and religious affiliation). Additionally, the Dalai Lama can appoint one to three delegates, but he refrained from doing so at the latest election to the Parliament-in-Exile in 2006.¹¹

Members of parliament are democratically elected by exile-Tibetans above the age of eighteen who hold a valid green book, as referred to in an earlier section. Also the electorate is divided according to regions and religions as described in the election rules (TPiE 2005a, pp. 29–44). In elections for parliament, a layperson votes for 10 regional candidates and can only vote for those belonging to the same region as him or herself. A person whose parents originate from different regions can choose which region to officially belong to. It is possible to change one's regional affiliation upon marriage, when one can adopt the region of one's spouse. Monks and nuns have dual franchise rights: one kind of vote for their ten regional candidates and another for their two religious candidates. Thus, lay Tibetans have ten votes, and monks and nuns have ten plus two votes. This contradicts the ideal of 'one man, one vote', an ideal that many exile-Tibetans also uphold. They argue that clergy and laity should have equal rights, which can be achieved either by abolishing this system altogether or by extending the dual franchise rights to lay Tibetans who are devout Buddhists and who should therefore have the same right to vote for religious representatives. A few individuals within the Government-in-Exile have also admitted to me that it was a mistake to give the clergy dual franchise rights when the charter was written in 1991.

The quota system is supposed to ensure that the parliament make-up mirrors the composition of the Tibetan population residing in Tibet and in exile. Furthermore, since the Parliament-in-Exile maintains to speak on behalf of all Tibetans, it is important that it can argue that it is the legitimate representative of a unified Tibetan people, whether they are in exile or in Tibet. We may question, however, to what extent the members of parliament know the aspirations of the Tibetans residing in Tibet. Moreover, since Tibetans in Tibet have no way to participate in exile-elections, neither by standing for election nor by voting in elections, the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile must be seen as representing the tax-paying exile population only.

The composition of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile with seats referring to one's regional origin and religious adherence has a strong rationale in the Tibetans' struggle for self-rule in Tibet, apart from meeting the need for voice. For instance, it supports the Tibetans' claim to Tibet by defining their homeland's territorial boundaries. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile does not acknowledge the existing borders of the political entity Tibet Autonomous Region under the People's Republic of China. It aspires for an autonomous region of Tibet made up by the present Tibetan Autonomous Region, which corresponds to the central Tibetan province of Utsang, plus the Eastern Tibetan provinces of Kham and Amdo that were split up and incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan in 1965. By defining the *demos* as composed by Tibetans belonging to the three regions of Utsang, Kham and Amdo, the Parliament-in-Exile draws the borders of the territory that the Tibetan freedom movement claims.

Moreover, through the template, the parliament asserts to represent all Tibetans originating from these three regions without distinctions. This claim has been challenged on several occasions and by various agents – not only by the Chinese government. One infamous example concerns some Eastern Tibetans who at the beginning of exile refused the authority of the Dharamsala administration. In 1965, they formed the Tibetan Welfare Association, popularly known as the '13 Groups' or the '13 Settlements', and with the help of international donors they developed their own settlements and policies.¹² As part of their self-exclusion, they did not pay voluntary tax to the Government-in-Exile until the 1980s, and in 1971, inhabitants from the 13 Settlements in India applied for Indian citizenship in protest (Tibetan Review 1978). Thus, similar to the Shugden supporters' act of self-exclusion, they cancelled their membership to the Tibetan *demos* by announcing that they opted for naturalization in India. Though they later withdrew their application for Indian citizenship following a negotiated agreement, this act was not only seen as showing resistance toward Dharamsala authorities, but was also viewed by many Tibetans as killing the freedom struggle. A very tragic result of this conflict was the assassination of the group's leader Gungthang Tsultrim in Clement Town in 1978. Rumors had it that members of the Dharamsala elite had planned the murder because his independent views and acts undermined the authority of the Government-in-Exile (Tibetan Review 1978). On several occasions, Eastern Tibetans have questioned whether the Dharamsala administration represented them in a fair manner and have accused it of favoring Tibetans originating from Central Tibet. Since the dawn of exile, the issue of such regionalism has been brought to the surface in conflicts, thereby challenging the claim that there was a national collective identity overriding regional loyalties, and thus the authority and legitimacy of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile.

Apart from region-based representation, the seats allocated to delegates from religious traditions also form an important component in the definition of the Tibetan *demos* that supports the freedom struggle. First of all, by allotting seats to religious traditions, the prominence of religion in Tibetan society is highlighted. It signals that the protection and

patronage of Bon and Buddhism are matters of national concern, and thus a responsibility resting with the government. Second, the seats are indicative of Tibetan society's character and composition. Since a large part of the Tibetan citizens in pre-1951 Tibet were clergy, and since monastic institutions and culture have been reestablished and given great importance in exile, it follows that the clergy forms a separate and significant category of Tibetans who should be represented in the democratic setup. Some Tibetans even see the monasteries, comprising several thousand monks as constituencies in their own right. Moreover, monks and lay people both participate in the freedom struggle, and therefore, exile-Tibetans argue, they should be represented in the democratic system. Overall, they agree that monks and nuns are Tibetan citizens who have the right to stand for election, to fight for a seat in the parliament or ultimately to become prime minister. In fact, the first directly elected prime minister-in-exile was the monk-scholar Samdhong Rinpoche who won the elections in 2001 and again in 2006. Only a minority of exile-Tibetans whom I have interviewed objected to the election of Samdhong Rinpoche on grounds that he should stay away from politics because he represents religion. In the words of a Tibetan intellectual: 'After all he is a Tibetan and he has a right to represent his citizenship'.

Finally, allotting seats for representatives of various religious traditions also proves a commitment to end centuries of political dominance by only one tradition within Tibetan Buddhism – the Gelug. The Dalai Lama, the regents and the monk officials in the pre-1951 Lhasa government invariably belonged to this lineage (Goldstein 1993). In exile, Gelug dominance was replaced with an equal inclusion of four other religious traditions. Yet, these traditions are not the only ones that existed in pre-1951 Tibet or that are practiced by Tibetans today. In the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, there are no seats reserved for other Buddhist traditions, Muslims, Christians or atheists. Though there has been a preferential treatment practice to reserve offices in the Dharamsala administration for Tibetan Muslims, religious minorities are otherwise excluded from receiving special treatment or representation in the parliament.

Among Buddhist exile-Tibetans this exclusion policy is defended with reference to the Muslims and Christians being a numerically insignificant group and therefore not eligible for representation. Others argue that Muslims and Christians have chosen to become Indians. Tibetan Muslims were recognized as Indian citizens with reference to their Kashmiri origin and were thus repatriated to India in late 1959, and today many of them live in a Tibetan colony in Kashmir (Tibetan Review 1976). Tibetans who grew up as orphans in Christian missionary schools also became Indian citizens. Tibetan Muslims and Christians whom I have talked to overall do not regard the Tibetan Government-in-Exile as representing them, although they do see themselves as Tibetans. Since they perceive the government as an essentially Buddhist institution, they do not wish to partake in it.¹³ Seats allocated to religious traditions are a right restricted to Bon and the four major Buddhist traditions anyway. Hence, although Christians and Muslims may belong to the category of Tibetan citizens due to their Tibetan origin and are allowed to pay taxes to the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, they cannot claim rights as Tibetan minorities or claim political representation in the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. In that way, they are not part of the Tibetan makeup in the democratic system. They belong to the democracy of India.

4.2 Unity, the common cause and no-partyism

The exile population, consisting of laity and clergy with different religious observances and originating from one of Tibet's three provinces, have equal, not proportional, representation

in the Parliament-in-Exile, though they are not equal in number.¹⁴ The exile-population is dominantly from Utsang and adheres to the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. I have argued that giving the exile-minorities from Eastern Tibet and the four religious minorities seats in parliament should ideally prevent communal strife and disintegration of the exile-community. Nonetheless, several communal conflicts have erupted. Cases already mentioned concern the 13 self-excluded settlements invoking a debate on regionalism and the Shugden controversy spurring discussions on sectarianism. Both conflicts questioned the Dharamsala leaderships' fair representation and treatment of minority groups and challenged the Tibetan Government-in-Exile's claim to be democratic and legitimate. Moreover, in both conflicts applying for Indian citizenship demonstrated self-exclusion.

The parliament's religion–region template that is founded upon the ideal of no-partyism is, of course, not in itself able to hinder communalism. In fact, as observed by other scholars as well (e.g., McConnell 2009), some Tibetans argue that the template actually encourages factional fighting because the setup itself recognizes and defines the Tibetan *demos* as constituted by provincial and sectarian divisions, thus accentuating division instead of unity. There are also some Tibetans who argue that the regional associations and the different religious groups in the Tibetan exile-community practically constitute formalized political opposition that in effect replaces political parties. For example, the big home-district associations in exile and particularly their umbrella organizations, which are politically involved, seek influence and representation in the parliament by campaigning for their own regional candidates before national elections. The fundamental idea of the parliament-in-exile is that there is no need for political parties since Tibetans share a common interest and are bound together in unity. Being a people in exile, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile believes that it is better to organize elections according to the religious traditions and the regions found in the country that they once lost.

The religion–region template of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile means that members of parliament are elected on individual capabilities and without any reference to political manifestos or party policies (McConnell 2009). The parliamentarians do not form interest groups working in opposition to one another, but are supposed to 'struggle for the victory of the Tibet cause' – to quote the charter's article 13(3) that I have related in an earlier section. The delegates and the Tibetan *demos* whom they represent are united in that they share the common interest of returning to a democratic and self-ruled Tibet. The political culture in the Tibetan exile-community is generally ruled by a strong norm of unity (Magnusson 1998, Ardley 2003, McConnell 2009) and many exile-Tibetans, whose chief concern is a united struggle for freedom, believe that a multiparty system enhances self-interest, disagreement and disunity, contradicting the freedom struggle's demand for altruism, national consensus and unity.

On the other side are those who believe that the need for national unity in exile does not revoke the need for formalized opposition in a democracy. For instance, the biggest exile-Tibetan organization, the Tibetan Youth Congress, argues that a multiparty system constitutes an essential element of 'real democracy'. Having delegates who represent parties and constituencies will promote representation and accountability of the parliament that, according to the Tibetan Youth Congress, is not prevalent today (Brox 2008b, Chap. 6). The Tibetan Youth Congress even formed a political party in 1994, the National Democratic Party of Tibet, which has about 5000 members (www.ndp4tibet.org). Yet, the party was not endorsed in the parliament and it cannot compete for seats in national elections. Moreover, it is the only existing political party in the Tibetan exile-community

and it therefore ‘becomes automatically insignificant’ as the then Prime Minister-in-Exile, Samdhong Rinpoche, once told me.

Samdhong Rinpoche spoke strongly in favor of what he calls a ‘party-less democracy’. He advocates no-partyism basically because it suits a people who are new to democracy. It is ‘politically unenlightened’ Tibetans, he explained, who form the majority. Therefore, the *demos* is overall unaccustomed to democratic ways and thinking. In his argumentation, Samdhong Rinpoche looked at the late Jayaprakash Narayan, the famous political leader in India, who had advocated a party-less democracy. Narayan professed the conviction that non-partisan politics could build a participatory, consensus-based and classless democracy. Similarly, prominent Tibetans, such as Samdhong Rinpoche, support the argument that the Tibetan people’s interests are better served outside a party system, at least as long as they are in exile. Exile is the time to unite – not to compete. Therefore, the main argumentation goes, Tibetan democracy has acquired a distinctive form suitable to their special exile circumstances: There is no formalized opposition but a cohesive body of Tibetans with different religious and regional affiliations bound together in a common cause.

5. Conclusion

Several Western scholars (e.g., Roemer 2008, McConnell 2009) have viewed the process in which exile-Tibetans have established a state-like polity in exile and democratized it in an instrumental perspective, seeing their democratic transition as a ‘calculated political strategy’ (McConnell 2009, p. 128) of obtaining international recognition. In the present article, I have left explanations of exile politics as directed toward an international audience, and instead looked at exile politics as internal empowerment aimed at attracting and maintaining a loyal Tibetan community working for the common cause of returning to a self-ruled and democratic Tibet. I have investigated how the Tibetan *demos* is demarcated and characterized through the formalized idea of Tibetan citizenship and political representation by the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. The *Charter of Tibetans-in-Exile* establishes citizens’ rights as founded upon the ideal of equality, and citizens’ obligations that enhance unity and loyalty. The qualification of the *demos* in political representation divides Tibetans into categories of laity and clergy belonging to one of three regions of Tibet and adhering to one of the five religious traditions.

By looking at citizenship as a political collective and the most common way to perform citizenship, which is political representation, I have demonstrated that the definitions of the *demos*, the good citizen and the loyal community entail that some sections of the exile population are expelled from political influence. One example is the stigma attached to Tibetans’ naturalization in India that is seen by many Tibetans as a declaration of different belonging, an act of self-exclusion, even as an act of treason. Taking Indian citizenship can be a process that is self-activated by those who want to demonstrate that they do not wish to belong to the national community of Tibetans organized under and represented by the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. The Tibetan case complicates our understanding of the role citizenship plays and its connection to loyalty, just as it reveals how Shain (1989) was mistaken when he asserted that citizenship is simply the basis of defining national loyalty and proving national belonging. For some exile-Tibetans, loyalty and national belonging are directly connected to citizenship, but for others they are not and these Tibetans do not view their foreign passports as a proof of their lack of commitment to the nation or the freedom struggle.

I have argued that the definition of the *demos* in the Tibetan exile-community should function not only as a means of representing a people, but also a means of regaining a lost homeland. To this end, exile-Tibetans are trying to foster a conception of the *demos* in the singular, which Heywood (2002, p. 69), in his outline of alternative conceptions of the *demos*, has described as ‘a single, cohesive body, bound together by a common or collective interest’. The collective interest of the exile-Tibetans is a struggle to return to a future self-ruled and democratic Tibet. The creation of the *demos* in this democracy-in-exile is formed upon the key concepts equality, loyalty and unity when seen through the lens of citizenship and political representation. The ideals of unity and loyalty, which according to its advocates are necessary in order to survive in exile and return to Tibet, inevitably mean that some are excluded. The space for inclusion and belonging may contract or expand as the markers of exclusion and inclusion are constantly challenged by the Tibetans themselves. This is happening in the case of taking foreign citizenship and might very well challenge other aspects of the *demos* construct as well. For instance, is it fair that the non-tax payers, the Shugden worshippers, the Muslims, the Christians, the atheists and the disloyal are not equal citizens? Does their exclusion facilitates the Tibetan freedom struggle?

Although basic principles within the ideal of liberal democracy have been guiding the formation of democracy in the Tibetan exile-community, the principles for inclusion and exclusion, I argue, are based on ideas of whether potential members benefit the Tibetan freedom struggle or not. The construction of the Tibetan *demos* – as manifested in the definition of citizenship and in the structure of the parliament – is inextricably linked to, and thus constrained within, this framework of being in exile and being a freedom movement.

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Notes

1. Apart from the two Greek notions *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule), italicised words appearing in this article are transliterated Tibetan words. Standard Tibetan terms and names, such as lama and Gelug, are transcribed without italics. All translations from Tibetan are the author’s own.
2. Fine studies on Tibetan exile-communities include Diehl (2002), Frechette (2002) and Hess (2009).
3. For an introduction to the Tibetan Government pre-1951, see Goldstein (1993).
4. The Delhi high court established the right to Indian citizenship for Tibetans born in India before July 1987 in December 2010, the date when the right to citizenship by birth was removed from the Citizenship Act (Tibetan Review 2011). Time will tell to which extent Tibetans will claim this right and the ways in which the freedom struggle will be affected.
5. For example, there are several online discussions on citizenship issues at <http://www.forums.phayul.com> under headings such as ‘Indian Citizenship for Tibetans born in India’, ‘Anyone looking for citizenship?’ and ‘Vote for Gyari Dolma if you want to remain a refugee for the next 50 years in exile’.
6. One example of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile’s perception of the Shugden controversy as detrimental to political unity is its exposition of the controversy entitled *Dorje Shugden Versus Pluralism and National Unity* (DRC 1998, p. 3–15). Dreyfus (1998) and Mills (2003) have provided valuable insights into this controversy.
7. The 2001–2011 Prime Minister-in-Exile, Samdhong Rinpoche, once likened ‘Shugden perpetrators’ to ‘terrorists’ in an Aljazeera news item (<http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/peopleandpower/2008/09/200893014344405483.html>).

8. See, for instance, the Dorje Shugden Devotee's Charitable & Religious Society based in Delhi (www.shugdensociety.info) or the London-based Western Shugden Society (www.westernshugdensociety.org). The latter claims to be 'freeing Buddhism from political pollution' and 'protecting Shugden practitioners from persecution by the Dalai Lama'.
9. I will speculate and suggest that if we also take into account that the Communist Chinese used the term *dmangs gtso* to coin their own version of democracy in Tibetan language, the shift from *dmangs gtso* to *mang gtso* may function as a measure to distinguish between 'democracy the Chinese way' (*dmangs gtso*) and 'democracy the Tibetan way' (*mang gtso*). This would be similar to the distinction that exile-Tibetan officials has made between Chinese 'culture' (Tib. *rig gnas*, Chi. *wénhuà*) and Tibetan 'culture' (Tib. *rig gzhung*) (Brox 2006). See also the fascinating debate in 1991 on the spelling and thus the meaning of democracy and *demos* in the Tibetan language magazine 'Young Shoots' (*lJang gzhon*) volumes 2 and 3, by intellectuals Pema Bhum, Ragra Trethong and Samdhong Rinpoche.
10. What I have translated as 'spiritual law' and 'politics' is in the Tibetan original *chos* and *srid*. When Tibetans pair spiritual law with politics, it usually points to the historical ideology of the traditional Tibetan state, in which there was a close relationship between *chos* and *srid*. For more details on this Tibetan maxim see Brox (2012).
11. Religious and regional adherences have been yardsticks for the Tibetan *demos* from the beginning of exile (TPPRC (Tibetan Parliamentary & Policy Research Centre) 2003). The quota system underwent transformations in the 10 parliaments emerging from 1960 to 1990, which were made up by 12–17 members. For example, in the first parliament established in 1960, there were only three representatives from each of the three provinces and one from each of the four major Buddhist traditions. In the second and third parliaments, however, one seat was reserved for a female representative (this seat was lost again in 1974) and in addition, the Dalai Lama could nominate one prominent Tibetan. The seat reserved for a representative of the Bon religion was established in 1977. The number of MPs was fixed to 43 plus 3 members in 1991, and increased by 1 in 2010 with an additional North-American seat. Interestingly, Tibetans outside South Asia are supposed to disregard religious and regional loyalties and instead vote for members who are responsible to their constituencies by electing two North American and two European representatives.
12. Devoe (1983, 157ff.) has given details of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile's exclusion policy to secure loyalty, and how 'renegade settlements' have suffered from this. See also Tibetan Review (1978) and Ström (1995).
13. Some Tibetan Christians and Muslims also perceive the freedom struggle as an undertaking for Tibetan Buddhists only. One Christian woman expressed it like this: 'I am a Tibetan, but for me he [the Dalai Lama] is not God. For me he is a very righteous king, the king of my country . . . If it is God's will, then I will go to Tibet, but the freedom struggle is not mine'.
14. In lack of any precise data on the sizes of these groups, the available characteristics of 82,629 exile-Tibetans aged 18 and above, who had registered as eligible voters prior to the 2006 MP election, may indicate the proportions of the different groups: The Utsang electorate constituted 51.88% of all registered voters, compared to Kham with only 22.29% and Amdo 5.03%. North-America had 3.39% and Europe 2.73%. Among the religious traditions, the Gelug electorate comprised the biggest religious group by 9.43%, followed by Nyingma 2.32%, Kagyu 1.58%, Sakya 0.99% and Bon 0.35%. These data were provided by the Election Commission in an unpublished document entitled *Bod mi mang spyi 'thus skabs so so'i 'os bsdu chen mo'i skabs ming gzhung deb bkod dang/ dngos su 'os 'phen ji byung/ brgya cha bcas kyi re'u mig gsham gsal/* ['The below table cites in percent the registered voters and the actual voting participation on the occasion of the general elections for individual Tibetan members of parliament'].

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