

Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Frilund, Rebecca (2019) Tibetan Refugee Journeys: Representations of Escape and Transit. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 38 (3). pp. 290-313. ISSN 1020-4067

Published by: OUP

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdz007> <<https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdz007>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/44347/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)



**Northumbria
University**
NEWCASTLE



UniversityLibrary

TIBETAN REFUGEE JOURNEYS: REPRESENTATIONS OF ESCAPE AND TRANSIT

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study contributes to the scholarly call to increase studies on refugee journeys. It explores Tibetan journeys via Nepal to India and provides a novel case study about the Tibetan refugees who commonly cross the Himalayas at least partly on foot without passports and head to the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu, Nepal, from where they are assisted to India. Conceptually, the study argues that combining the studies of refugee journeys and transit migration increases understanding of the (Tibetan) refugee journeys. The findings reveal that the risky journey has a remarkable meaning both for those Tibetans who have done the journey and collectively for the diaspora Tibetans in India. As Tibetans, like refugees in general, are still often victimised and their subjectivities overlooked, the study also contributes to a fuller understanding of the Tibetan refugee agency through the journey narratives of the interviewees of this study.

1. INTRODUCTION

This ethnographic study contributes to the scholarly call to increase studies on the journeys of refugees and forced migrants.¹ I provide a novel case study of the Tibetan exiles who have journeyed from Tibet via Nepal to Dharamsala, a Himalayan town in northern India. I focus on their journey narratives and representations of the journey and demonstrate that the journey over the Himalayas has an important collective meaning for the diaspora Tibetans as it represents their refugeeness; four journey narratives of the 31 Tibetan-born interviewees of this study are used as more detailed examples.

Theoretically, the study draws both from studies on refugee journeys and transit migration. I argue that the concept of transit migration is helpful in increasing understanding of the journeys of the Tibetan refugees, particularly if the concept is understood flexibly and broadened so that it does not refer only to migration in the fringes of Europe where it has been used the most.² The approach is based on flexible understanding of and critical approach to such concepts as *forced* and *voluntary*³ or *refugees* and *migrants*;⁴ I connect the discussions on the blurredness of these type of categories with discussions on refugee journeys.⁵

Tibetan diaspora has got increasing scholarly attention particularly in the 2000s⁶ and several studies include discussions about Tibetan migration⁷ or focus on it.⁸ Nevertheless, Tibetan experiences or representations about their refugee journeys via Nepal to India have remained

¹ G. BenEzer & R. Zetter, "Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28(3), 2014, 297–318.

² Anonymous, 2017; see also A. Missbach, *Troubled Transit: Asylum Seekers Stuck in Indonesia*, Singapore, ISEAS, 2015.

³ M.B. Erdal & C. Oeppen, "Forced to leave? The discursive and analytical significance of describing migration as forced and voluntary", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(6), 2017, 981–998; V. Ottonelli & T. Torresi, "When is Migration Voluntary?", *International Migration Review*, 47(4), 2013, 783–813.

⁴ H. Crawley & D. Skleparis, "Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis'", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(1), 2017, 48–64; K. Long, "When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection", *Oxford Journal of Migration Studies*, 1(1), 2013, 4–26. A. Scalettaris, "Refugee Studies and the International Refugee Regime: A Reflection on a Desirable Separation", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 26(3), 2007, 36–50.

⁵ M. Collyer, "Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(3), 2010, 273–293, 279.

⁶ See for instance: D. Anand, *Tibet: A Victim of Geopolitics*, Delhi, Routledge, 2007; A-S. Bentz, "Being a Tibetan Refugee in India", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 31(1), 2012, 80–107; K. Diehl, *Echoes from Dharamsala: Music in the Life of a Tibetan Refugee Community*, California, University of California Press, 2002; M. Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors: Citizenship and Belonging in the Tibetan Diaspora*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009; A. Prost, "The Problem with 'Rich Refugees' Sponsorship, Capital, and the Informal Economy of Tibetan Refugees", *Modern Asian Studies*, 40(1), 2006, 233–253; F. McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile*, Chichester, Wiley Blackwell, 2016; B.P. Routray, "Tibetan Refugees in India: Religious Identity and the Forces of Modernity", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 26(2), 2007, 79–90.

⁷ N. Choedup, *From Tibetan Refugees to Transmigrants: Negotiating Cultural Continuity and Economic Mobility through Migration*, Dissertation, URL: <https://doi.org/10.7936/K75D8Q30> (last visited 1. Nov. 2018), 2015; M. Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors: Citizenship and Belonging in the Tibetan Diaspora*.

⁸ Anonymous, 2017; 2018.

understudied even though they have continued already almost 60 years. However, Dolma, Singh, Lohfeld, Orbinski and Mills⁹ examined health-related risks during Tibetan journeys over the Himalayas by interviewing 50 Tibetans in the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu (which they call Tibetan Refugee Transit Centre), a place where they usually head after crossing the Himalayas as it assists them to continue to India. The Centre is mostly funded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is involved mainly in running it in practice as an implementing partner of the UNHCR.¹⁰

India has been taking in Tibetans on humanitarian grounds since the flight of the 14th Dalai Lama in 1959, the beginning of the wide-scale Tibetan migration to India.¹¹ The People's Republic of China (PRC) had taken over Tibet around ten years before and the Tibetans began to worry about the safety of their religious leader. The Dalai Lama escaped to India with his entourage, and around 80,000 Tibetans followed him to exile by the end of 1961 seeking refuge in India, Nepal or Bhutan.¹² The estimations about the number of Tibetans in diaspora worldwide vary between 130,000-150,000,¹³ and according to the CTA, around 95,000 of them live in India whilst Dharamsala hosts around 14,000 Tibetans.¹⁴

The Chinese border controls became tighter for around twenty years in the early 1960s; the time of the so-called cultural revolution followed in 1966–1976.¹⁵ At the beginning of the 1980s, in the post-Mao era, more cross-border movement was allowed again. Part of those refugees who left during that time belonged to those who had been prisoned during the earlier decades, often migrating without travel documents illegally from the perspective of the PRC, but some were also given permission to make a pilgrimage to India between 1985–1988.¹⁶ However, the Chinese border controls became more strict again due to the pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa in 1987–

⁹ S. Dolma, S. Singh, L. Lohfeld, J.J. Orbinski & E.J. Mills, "Dangerous Journey: Documenting the Experience of Tibetan Refugees", *American Journal of Public Health*, 96(11), 2006, 2061–2064.

¹⁰ A. Frechette, *Tibetans in Nepal: The Dynamics of International Assistance among a Community in Exile*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2002, 135–136; T. Kauffmann, *The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees Survival Strategies of a Government-in-Exile in a World of Transnational Organizations*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2015.

¹¹ A-S. Benz, "Being a Tibetan Refugee in India", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 31(1), 2012, 80-107; N. Choedup, *From Tibetan Refugees to Transmigrants: Negotiating Cultural Continuity and Economic Mobility through Migration*; B.P. Routray, "Tibetan Refugees in India: Religious Identity and the Forces of Modernity".

¹² Dalai Lama, *My Land and My People: Memoirs of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama of Tibet*, New Delhi, Shrishti Publishers & Distributors, 1977; McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile*, 54; T.B. Subba, *Flight and Adaptation: Tibetan Refugees in the Darjeeling-Sikkim Himalaya*, Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1990.

¹³ Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), *Demographic Survey of the Tibetans in Exile*, Dharamsala Planning Commission, 2010; C. McGranahan, "Refusal as Political Practice: Citizenship, Sovereignty, and Tibetan Refugee Status", *American Ethnologist*, 45(3), 2018, 367-379.

¹⁴ Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), *Demographic Survey of the Tibetans in Exile*.

¹⁵ E.T. Yeh, "Exile Meets Homeland: Politics, Performance, and Authenticity in the Tibetan Diaspora".

¹⁶ K. Diehl, *Echoes from Dharamsala: Music in the Life of a Tibetan Refugee Community*, 34; McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile*; E.T. Yeh "Exile Meets Homeland: Politics, Performance, and Authenticity in the Tibetan Diaspora".

1989; martial law was applied in Tibet and travelling to India became more difficult.¹⁷ More movement was allowed in the 1990s; some of the escaping Tibetans were those who were politically active during 1987–1989.¹⁸

Some of the Tibetan-born interviewees of this study escaped to India already in the early 1990s after the martial law was lifted, but most of them arrived in the 2000s. All of them transited Nepal and the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu before arriving in India; it has for long been thought to be the easiest route when escaping without documents.¹⁹ Nepal has usually let Tibetans transit although it has not been taking in new Tibetans as refugees after 1989 at least partly as it wants to maintain good relationships with the People's Republic of China (PRC)²⁰. The PRC has pressured Nepal to arrest or repatriate Tibetans who transit Nepal²¹, and there are signs that China's pressure on Nepal has increased after the PRC tightened its border controls and policies towards Tibetans after the Tibetan riots in various parts of Tibet during the times of the Beijing Olympics in 2008;²² after the riots the number of Tibetans arriving in India dropped dramatically.

According to two officials in Dharamsala's Tibetan Reception Centre,²³ 2,500–3,000 Tibetans tended to arrive in India yearly before the border controls of the PRC became stricter because of the riots. When I visited the Centre for the first time in my first fieldwork trip in 2009–2010 around 1,000 had still arrived after the Olympics, but when I visited it the last time in December 2015, it hosted only two Tibetans. The officials stated that commonly only approximately 100–250 Tibetans have arrived per year after the Olympics. However, they estimated that if the border controls were to be relaxed, more Tibetans would arrive again although other reasons, such as smaller family sizes and economic development in Tibet, may affect the decrease in number as well. Nevertheless, as new Tibetans still arrive in India and most of the diaspora Tibetans or their family members have done the journey, it is an embodied experience or a close narrative for the Tibetans in Dharamsala.

This article will continue as follows. I first discuss the theoretical and conceptual choices that I have made and continue to the fieldwork methods and materials. In the empirical sections, I first explore the common characteristics and collective representations of the Tibetan journeys and then move forward to the four selected journey narratives of the interviewees as examples of these

¹⁷ R. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising*, London, Hurst & Company, 1994, 9; E.T. Yeh, "Exile Meets Homeland: Politics, Performance, and Authenticity in the Tibetan Diaspora".

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 652–653.

¹⁹ B.P. Routray, "Tibetan Refugees in India: Religious Identity and the Forces of Modernity", 81.

²⁰ L. Song, "China and the International Refugee Protection Regime: Past, Present, and Potentials", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 37(2), 2018, 139-161.

²¹ E.T. Yeh, "Exile Meets Homeland: Politics, Performance, and Authenticity in the Tibetan Diaspora", 652.

²² See for instance Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/01/nepal-increased-pressure-china-threatens-tibetans> (last visited 10. Oct. 2018).

²³ Personal communication, 15 Dec. 2015.

journeys. I also briefly discuss their situation after the journey. I conclude by summing up the findings and discussing why it is useful to connect the studies of refugee journeys with the studies of transit migration in the case of the Tibetans and perhaps also more widely in scholarly discussions.

2. COMBINING STUDIES ON REFUGEE JOURNEYS AND TRANSIT MIGRATION

Since BenEzer and Zetter's call for more studies focusing on the journeys of refugees and forced migrants, i.e. what happens during "the actual exilic process, the medium that connects the two ends",²⁴ several studies have shed light on refugee journeys. Lyytinen,²⁵ for example, explores the refugees' "journeys of trust" and demonstrates how Congolese refugees fleeing to Uganda create trust or mistrust for certain people, places or institutions during their exilic journeys, which affected positively to the success of the journey. Nardone and Correa-Velez²⁶ explore the journeys and vulnerabilities of the unaccompanied minors (mostly Afghan) who reached Australia, finding out that their journeys often started in their minds in their homelands before the actual journey started and that the journey sometimes continued in their minds still in Australia although it was their final destination. Furthermore, Freedman²⁷ focuses on women migrants arriving in Kos and the gendered nature of the difficulties during their journeys, finding out that although they considered Kos as a place of transit, they often felt more free and safe already in Kos despite the refugee camp conditions.

BenEzer and Zetter²⁸ seek to develop a special genre of journey studies within refugee studies as refugee journeys have been largely ignored or seen "merely as transitory stage", and call for better tools to analyse the phenomenon. I argue that migration studies, particularly studies on transit migration, have a lot to contribute to the studies on refugee journeys on an analytical level as these studies emphasise the importance of the transit phase and often explore what happens during the journey.²⁹ So far, the journeys of people in transit have been studied the most in the fringes of Europe

²⁴ G. BenEzer & R. Zetter, "Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys", 297-299.

²⁵ E. Lyytinen, "Refugees' 'Journeys of Trust': Creating an Analytical Framework to Examine Refugees' Exilic Journeys with a Focus on Trust", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 30(4), 2017, 489-510.

²⁶ M. Nardone & I. Correa-Velez, "Unpredictability, Invisibility and Vulnerability: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Minors' Journeys to Australia", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(3), 2016, 295-314.

²⁷ J. Freedman, "Engendering Security at the Borders of Europe: Women Migrants and the Mediterranean 'Crisis'", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29(4), 2016, 568-582.

²⁸ G. BenEzer & Zetter, "Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys".

²⁹ F. Düvell, I. Molodikova & M. Collyer (Eds.), *Transit Migration in Europe*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2014; A. Missbach, *Troubled Transit: Asylum Seekers Stuck in Indonesia*; A. Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou, *Transit Migration: The Missing Link between Emigration and Settlement*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; see also e.g. J. Carling, "Unauthorised Migration from Africa to Spain", *International Migration*, 45(4), 2007, 3-37; J. Schapendonk &

and the United States. Bredeloup³⁰, Collyer³¹ and Stock³², for instance, have studied Sub-Saharan African migrants' experiences of Trans-Saharan transit and their stay in Morocco, whilst Infante & al.,³³ Servan-Mori & al.³⁴ and Terron-Caro & Monreal-Gimeno³⁵ have studied migrants' decision-making or experiences in transit in Mexico. Moreover, Collyer³⁶ highlights the meaning of the journey as the most important analytical category in understanding the migration of his Sub-Saharan interviewees who belonged to "yet to be recognised refugees", "previously recognised refugees" or "those with other protection needs". According to him, their experiences on the journey are more important in understanding their migration than their origins or destinations as the origins might feel distant for them, and their destination might not be clear. As Collyer states, also the protection needs are the same for all of these groups.³⁷

Some studies that focus on refugees and their journeys use the concept of "transit", bridging the conceptualisations of refugee journeys and transit migration, although the choice has not necessarily been conceptualised very far. Kuschminder,³⁸ for example, uses the concepts of "transit migration", "journey" and "refugee" simultaneously in her study on the journeys and migration-related decision-making among Afghan refugees in transit in Turkey and Greece. Additionally, Gerard and Pickering³⁹ focus on refugee women journeys from Sudan to Malta, stating that they consider "transit" describing the period from the point when the women exited their home country to the point of arrival in the EU. Although I acknowledge that the concept of "transit" has state-centric and politicised connotations particularly in Europe where the phenomenon has been studied the most,

G. Steel, "Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104(2), 2012, 262-270.

³⁰ S. Bredeloup, "Sahara Transit: Times, Spaces, People", *Population, Space and Place*, 18(4), 2012, 457-467.

³¹ M. Collyer 2007, "In-Between Places: Trans-Saharan Transit Migrants in Morocco and the Fragmented Journey to Europe", *Antipode*, 39(4), 2007, 668-690.

³² I. Stock, "Gender and the Dynamics of Mobility: Reflections on African Migrant Mothers and 'Transit Migration' in Morocco", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(9), 2011, 1577-1595.

³³ C. Infante, A.J. Idrovo, M.S. Sánchez-Domínguez, S. Vinhas & T. González-Vázquez, "Violence committed against migrants in transit: experiences on the Northern Mexican border", *Journal of Immigration and Minority Health*, 4(3), 2012, 449-59.

³⁴ E. Servan-Mori, R. Leyva-Flores, C. Infante Xibille, P. Torres-Pereda & R. Garcia-Cerde, "Migrants Suffering Violence While in Transit through Mexico: Factors Associated with the Decision to Continue or Turn Back", *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health*, 16(1), 53-9, 2014.

³⁵ T. Terron-Caro & M.C. Monreal-Gimeno, "Mujeres migrantes en tránsito en la Frontera Norte de México: motivaciones y expectativas socioeducativas ante el sueño americano (Migrant Women in Transit on the Northern Border of Mexico: Motivations and Expectations Socioeducational Before the American Dream)", *Papeles de Poblacion*, 20, 2014, 137-66.

³⁶ M. Collyer, "Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey", 279.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

³⁸ K. Kuschminder, "Afghan Refugee Journeys: Onwards Migration Decision-Making in Greece and Turkey", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2017, first published online.

³⁹ A. Gerard & S. Pickering, "Gender, Securitization and Transit: Refugee Women and the Journey to the EU", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 27(3), 2014, 338-359, 339.

alike Gerard and Pickering,⁴⁰ I do not follow “value judgments that ‘transit’ migration is ‘wrong’, ‘illegal’ or ‘irregular’”. Refugees or migrants tend to have reasons to choose certain routes because they are considered the easiest or the best possible options available and thus some countries become countries of transit.

Although I call the diaspora Tibetans as refugees together with numerous other scholars,⁴¹ I agree with Crawley and Skleparis⁴² who argue that the categories of refugees and migrants should not be seen as conflicting. They demonstrate that these categories are highly politicised, and that media and various institutions try to point out who are the “real” refugees and who are “migrants” or “economic migrants”, which easily serves the interests of the policy debates rather than their use as analytical categories in scientific enquiries.⁴³ Moreover, the separation does not meet the realities of people who live months or years in countries other than they originate from, a situation which requires us “to engage with the complex economic, social and political realities of the ‘in between’”,⁴⁴ which resonates with the situation of migrants in transit and often also with the Tibetan-born Tibetans in Dharamsala. Yet, in practice, the volition-related elements of migration of paperless or vulnerable people and asylum seekers need to be discussed carefully as they need protection; it is important to be aware of the possibility that research may inform state actors.⁴⁵

Determining strictly who are “real refugees” and emphasising only their protection needs could even harm the Tibetans and make them more vulnerable during their journeys because the states they cross and enter have different interpretations of their refugeeness. Although the Tibetans are commonly called refugees and they use the term about themselves in India, their refugee status is blurred in official terms; besides the fact that the PRC does not recognise Tibetans as refugees, Nepal

⁴⁰ M. Collyer & H. de Haas, “Developing Dynamic Categorisation of Transit Migration”, *Population Space and Place*, 18(4), 2012, 469–481.

⁴¹ D.M. deVoe, “Keeping Refugee Status: A Tibetan Perspective”, *The Center for Migration Studies Special Issues*, 5(2), 1987, 54–65; S. Dolma et al. “Dangerous Journey: Documenting the Experience of Tibetan Refugees”; M. Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors: Citizenship and Belonging in the Tibetan Diaspora*; F. McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile*; A. Prost, “The Problem with ‘Rich Refugees’ Sponsorship, Capital, and the Informal Economy of Tibetan Refugees”; E. Rolfe “Refugee, Minority, Citizen, Threat: Tibetans and the Indian Refugee Script”, *South Asia Research*, 28(3), 2008, 253-283; T. Yankey & U.N. Biswas, “Life Skills Training as an Effective Intervention Strategy to Reduce Stress among Tibetan Refugee Adolescents”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25(4), 2010, 1–23.

⁴² H. Crawley & D. Skleparis, “Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe’s ‘Migration Crisis’”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(1), 2018, 48-64.

⁴³ Ibid.; see also B.S. Chimni, “The Birth of a ‘Discipline’: From Refugee to Forced Migration Studies”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 22(1), 2009, 11–29; K. Long, “When Refugees Stopped Being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection”, *Oxford Journal of Migration Studies*, 1(1), 2013, 4–26; A. Scalettaris, “Refugee Studies and the International Refugee Regime: A Reflection on a Desirable Separation”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 26(3), 2007, 36–50.

⁴⁴ H. Crawley & D. Skleparis, “Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe’s ‘Migration Crisis’”, 49.

⁴⁵ M.B. Erdal & C. Oeppen, “Forced to leave? The discursive and analytical significance of describing migration as forced and voluntary”.

does not take them in as refugees anymore.⁴⁶ India has not signed the UNHCRs refugee convention and it does not have an internal refugee law. India takes in Tibetans based on humanitarian grounds⁴⁷ and has a non-binding mutual agreement with the CTA to consider Tibetans as refugees *de facto*.⁴⁸ Yet, those who seek refuge are handled under the Foreigners Act and are subjected to the Foreign Registration Act, which means in practice that the Tibetans need to get a Registration Certificate (RC), a certain type of a residence permit in India, in order to get protection.⁴⁹ As the journeying Tibetans would need protection particularly before reaching Kathmandu's Tibetan Reception Centre, their protection en route should not be based on the refugee label only because it would subordinate them to the policies of the PRC and Nepal, which do not recognise Tibetans as refugees.

I also agree with Ehrkamp⁵⁰ that it is important to create a fuller understanding of the refugee agency and refugee subjectivities as they are still often considered too unilaterally as victims in scholarly writings. Several studies on transit migration have been successful in discussing the agency and the difficulties that (vulnerable) people in transit encounter during their journeys.⁵¹ Stock,⁵² for instance, emphasises the agency of the African transit migrant mothers in Morocco and demonstrates that they are not mere victims but use their womanhood or motherhood to seek better opportunities, including physical and social mobility for themselves and their children, despite the serious (gender-related) hardships during their journeys. Taking the refugee agency seriously is important in the context of Tibetans because, as Chen⁵³ states, humanitarian or advocacy groups and media often “address the victimhood and passivity of ‘Tibetan refugees’”, whilst some (scholars) still consider Tibetans as victims of the Western propaganda against the PRC.⁵⁴ These views do have something in common: they do not see Tibetans capable of being autonomous subjects or having their own

⁴⁶ A-S. Benz, “Being a Tibetan Refugee in India”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 31(1), 2012, 80-107.

⁴⁷ N. Choedup, “Tibetan Exile or Diaspora: India as a ‘Second Homeland’”; Routray, “Tibetan Refugees in India: Religious Identity and the Forces of Modernity”.

⁴⁸ M. Hess, “Statelessness and the State: Tibetans, Citizenship, and Nationalist Activism in a Transnational World”, *International Migration*, 44(1), 80–103, 81-82.

⁴⁹ A-S. Benz, “Being a Tibetan Refugee in India”; N. Choedup, *From Tibetan Refugees to Transmigrants: Negotiating Cultural Continuity and Economic Mobility through Migration*; Routray, “Tibetan Refugees in India: Religious Identity and the Forces of Modernity”.

⁵⁰ P. Ehrkamp, “Geographies of Migration I: Refugees”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(6), 2016, 813–822.

⁵¹ See for instance S. Bredeloup, “Sahara Transit: Times, Spaces, People”; E. Servan-Mori, R. Leyva-Flores, C. Infante Xibille, P. Torres-Pereda & R. Garcia-Cerde, “Migrants Suffering Violence While in Transit through Mexico: Factors Associated with the Decision to Continue or Turn Back”.

⁵² I. Stock, “Gender and the Dynamics of Mobility: Reflections on African Migrant Mothers and ‘Transit Migration’ in Morocco”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(9), 2011, 1577–1595; see also J. Schapendonk, I. van Liempt & B. Spierings, “Travellers and their journeys: A dynamic conceptualization of transient migrants’ and backpackers’ behaviour and experiences on the road”, *Migration Studies*, 3(1), 49–67, 2015.

⁵³ S. T. Chen, “When ‘exile’ becomes sedentary: on the quotidian experiences of ‘India-born’ Tibetans in Dharamsala, north India”, *Asian Ethnicity*, 2012, 13(3), 263–286; see also N. Choedup, *From Tibetan Refugees to Transmigrants: Negotiating Cultural Continuity and Economic Mobility through Migration*.

⁵⁴ E.T. Yeh, Tibet and the Problem of Radical Reductionism, *Antipode*, 41(5), 2009, 983–1010.

sociopolitical goals;⁵⁵ examining Tibetan refugee journeys contradicts those views and together with the concept of transit migration highlights the strategic Tibetan agency en route despite that they face difficulties and structural challenges, such as Chinese and Nepalese border controls which may use violence against them.⁵⁶

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is an outcome of a wider study that concentrates on Tibetan migration via Nepal to India and further. I conducted around ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in Dharamsala and made 57 semi-structured interviews among Tibetans from Tibet and the CTA or NGO officials in 2009–2015. Five interviewees were interviewed twice and three interviews were done in Europe in order to be informed even though I was not in Dharamsala (the last one of these interviews was made in 2018 with one of those I had interviewed in 2015). Although I refer to some interviews with the Tibetan diaspora officials, this article is based particularly on my re-readings of the 34 interviews of the 31 young adult or middle-aged Tibetans (three of them were interviewed twice) with a focus on their journey narratives from Tibet to Dharamsala.

My interviews concentrated on the “refugee narratives” of Tibetans from Tibet, and the interviewees could choose what to emphasise. I did not collect similar detailed facts about every step of their journey and I let the interviewees choose what to highlight. Therefore, no generalisations about what happens during the journeys can be drawn from these interviews at least without connecting them to wider knowledge about the Tibetan journeys. However, I asked all participants such journey-related questions as why and when they left Tibet (approximately) and how was the journey to India. Because the questions about the journey were set like this, the interviewees understood the concept of the journey referring just to their journey from Tibet to India. However, it is important to notice that studies of BenEzer and Zetter⁵⁷ and of Nardone and Correa-Velez⁵⁸ have found out that the journey does not necessarily end in the minds of the refugee’s in their (first) destination particularly if they want to migrate further or return.

All interviews of the Tibetan-born Tibetans enhanced my knowledge about the Tibetan journeys, but some described the actual journey via the Himalayas very shortly. Nevertheless, several

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Dolma & al. “Dangerous Journey: Documenting the Experience of Tibetan Refugees”.

⁵⁷ G. BenEzer & Zetter, “Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys”.

⁵⁸ M. Nardone & I. Correa-Velez, “Unpredictability, Invisibility and Vulnerability: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Minors’ Journeys to Australia”.

of the more talkative interviewees who could speak English (11 interviews were conducted with an interpreter) gave detailed descriptions about their journeys. From these, I have selected four journey narratives for further discussion, conducted on my latest fieldwork in Dharamsala in December 2015. They are selected because they represent different types of journey narratives of Tibetans from various backgrounds, covering different time periods. Because these interviews were held in English, the interviews should be read against this background; more details may be missing from the journey descriptions than would be the case if I had been able to conduct the interviews in Tibetan (I have only had a beginner's course in Tibetan language).

I also volunteered for several months in an English conversation class in one of the biggest NGOs in Dharamsala that focus on the Tibetan newcomers, and we often discussed their journeys to India, which gave me background information about the topic. However, I never refer directly to our discussions in the classes in order to protect the rights of the participants.⁵⁹ Moreover, I have familiarised myself with visual and literal materials about the Tibetan journeys in order to take in the representations that the Tibetans themselves produce about the journey in diaspora. These include the exhibitions of the Dharamsala-based Tibet Museum, books, movies, documentaries, websites and music that include descriptions of the journey. Most of them are produced by the Tibetans, but documentaries and movies are often Western productions with partly Tibetan actors that the Tibetans tend to screen in Dharamsala to promote their message to wider audiences.⁶⁰ Drawing also from this type on material is a rather common method in ethnography.⁶¹ According to Clarke,⁶² for example, it is important to analyse cultural products, such as symbols, magazines or films, as qualitative research is not only bound to field notes and interviews anymore. The researchers and the participants of their studies are all “producing and awash in seas of discourses” and qualitative research should pay attention also to them.⁶³

Overall, I analysed the interviews and other materials by loosely using selective coding. I selected journey-related discourses from the materials, the fluid main category being the “journey

⁵⁹ R. Chambers, *Revolutions in Development Inquiry*, Earthscan, London, 2008.

⁶⁰ 360 Degree Films, *Tibet: Murder in the Snow*, available at : <http://360degreefilms.com.au/productions/tibet-murder-in-the-snow> (last visited 29. Oct. 2018); Tenzing Choedup, *Journey to Exile*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnE-A2iTuYY> (last visited 20. Oct. 2018).

⁶¹ G. Gobo, “Ethnography”, in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research, Issues of Theory, Method and Practice* (3rd ed), London, Sage, 2011, 15–34; B. Mikkelsen, *Methods for Development Work and Research: A Guide for Practitioner*, New Delhi, Sage, 2005.

⁶² A.E. Clarke, *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Postmodern Turn*, London and New Delhi, Sage, 2005.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

from Tibet to India”.⁶⁴ I also consider fieldwork ethics crucial and protect the anonymity of the interviewees; all names used are pseudonyms.⁶⁵

4. COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATION OF THE TIBETAN JOURNEYS

For the Tibetans escaping directly after the Dalai Lama and the cultural revolution, the strongest reasons for what the Tibetans commonly call “escape” in English, i.e. leaving Tibet paperless and illegally from the perspective of the PRC, were often political and cultural persecutions, or a fear of persecutions, and the will to follow the 14th Dalai Lama.⁶⁶ The major reasons to leave for the interviewees of this study, as well as for those who escaped in 1990 or after, are commonly still the willingness to see the Dalai Lama but also to receive education from Tibetan premises, or study English. As Vasantkumar⁶⁷ states, although the post-Mao era has been less violent towards the Tibetan culture, religious restrictions and restrictions to free speech or movement are still common in Tibet. Since the Dalai Lama is banned from entering the PRC, for example, the Tibetans are forced to leave the country in order to see him or follow him. As Schapendonk and Steel⁶⁸ state in the context of highly skilled Sudanese: migration should be connected with societal circumstances such as civil wars or authoritarian regimes that trigger it, even if motives connected to voluntary choices exist simultaneously.

The majority of the Tibetans who came during 1990s or 2000s, like the Tibetan-born interviewees of this study, often originate from eastern border regions of cultural Tibet, areas that they call Kham (eastern Tibet) and Amdo (northeastern Tibet), administratively divided between the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan – in contrast with those who came before the cultural revolution and who were particularly from central Tibet, an area that the diaspora Tibetans

⁶⁴ K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.), London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 2014; A. Strauss & J. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Sage, New Delhi, 1990.

⁶⁵ A. Ryen, “Ethics and Qualitative Research”, in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research* (3rd ed), London, Sage, 2011, 416–438.

⁶⁶ See for instance N. Choedup, *From Tibetan Refugees to Transmigrants: Negotiating Cultural Continuity and Economic Mobility through Migration*; F. McConnell, “De Facto, Displaced, Tacit: The Sovereign Articulations of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile”, *Political Geography*, 28(6), 2009, 343–352.

C. Vasantkumar, “Tibetan Peregrinations: Mobility, Incommensurable Nationalisms and (Un)belonging Aftward the Himalayas”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39(2), 2013, 219–235.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁸ J. Schapendonk & G. Steel, “Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union”.

tend to call Ü-Tsang and the PRC calls Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).⁶⁹ The interviewees most often crossed the Himalayas at least partly on foot illegally from the perspective of the PRC; two had passports and could use “legal” routes, but they also headed to the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu and transited Nepal. The majority who walked over the Himalayas usually first booked a guide who took them onwards from Lhasa or at least over the highest mountains and sometimes there were different guides who assisted them during the different legs of the journey.⁷⁰ They tried to hide from the border guards and reach the Tibetan Reception Centre as soon as possible. The interviewees did not pay much attention to their stay in Nepal as such beyond the Reception Centre, unless something special or exceptional happened; they were in transit and heading to India.

The journey over the Himalayas is often difficult, people get frostbites, suffer from altitude sickness and some may even die en route. The Tibetans without documents tend to end up in jail on China’s side of the border if they get caught, and some of the interviewees of this study were put in jail in Nepal after crossing the border. Nevertheless, they were freed and could enter the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu afterwards. As it provides the Tibetans papers which are checked after arriving in India, they enter India legally. If everything went smoothly, the journey from Tibet to India often took around one month for the interviewees, including the time at the Reception Centre in Kathmandu. The final Tibetan Reception Centre is located in the Dharamsala area, and all newcomers are also able to receive the blessing of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, an opportunity much appreciated among the interviewees of this study. Lay Tibetans who do not go to the Tibetan boarding schools or monasteries around India often settle in Dharamsala as many other Tibetan settlements are agricultural and there is not much land available to accommodate them.⁷¹ Moreover, Dharamsala, which is often called the capital of the Tibetan diaspora because the 14th Dalai Lama lives there, and because the CTA has its headquarters in town, offers organisational support, (low paid) working possibilities in the tourism sector and international networks also for the Tibetan newcomers.⁷²

The respect that the journey to India gains among the Tibetans is crystallised in the interview of a young man called Jigme whom I interviewed because of his work in an NGO that assists Tibetan newcomers. His journey narrative is different from the other journey narratives discussed in this article as he arrived in India so young that he hardly remembered the journey, and it reflects the

⁶⁹ R. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising*; C. Vasantkumar, “Tibetan Peregrinations: Mobility, Incommensurable Nationalisms and (Un)belonging Athwart the Himalayas”.

⁷⁰ For comparison see Collyer 2007, “In-Between Places: Trans-Saharan Transit Migrants in Morocco and the Fragmented Journey to Europe”.

⁷¹ Routray, “Tibetan Refugees in India: Religious Identity and the Forces of Modernity”.

⁷² Anonymous, 2015; D. Anand, *Tibet: A Victim of Geopolitics*.

collective meaning that the journey has among the Tibetans. Jigme told me that he admires the exilic journey so much that he would seriously like to go back to Tibet and “escape” again.⁷³ As adults had taken care of him during his journey, he had a limited agency, and he wanted to experience the journey as an adult who would vote with his feet against what he considered the PRC’s oppression in Tibet. This way he felt he would become a true refugee who had embedded experiences of the journey to share with others. Jigme explained:

What I want to do is to like go back and then come as like other people, you know. Cause I really want to have that experience. I think that was one thing that I really missed[...]. Its like when I ask my other friends, they came to India when they were around 16, 17, 18[...]. Then its like, they have so many things to tell, you know: ‘when I came from Tibet like this, this this happened, like this, this this happened[...]’. For me, like nothing happened. So I was like I had the same trip but nothing happened. So I want to have that experience. Because I think that if I had this experience, it would make me more stronger. That’s what I think. So I really envy those people who made that trip when they were 15, 16, 17[...]. Yeah, I need that. I want to go back to Tibet and then try to escape again. And then like see everything by myself. And I think it would be good that now I can speak English, write English like, something like write a diary. It would be cool. But it is very risky.

Jigme contributed to the “journey nostalgia” through an NGO he was involved in; they collected stories of the journeys of the Tibetan newcomers during the times of our interview. Later, they printed a booklet with 20 stories, but all of them were already sold when I tried to buy one in my last fieldwork trip to Dharamsala in 2015.⁷⁴

Jigme first planned to go to the U.S. where part of his family already lived, make some money there, and get a U.S. passport. After this, he dreamed of going back to Tibet, documenting what happens there and then escape again. It was sometimes thought particularly among the Tibetan-born Tibetans who escaped without proper documents that it is easier and more secure to travel to Tibet with a Western passport than try to get a passport from the Chinese embassy in India or walk back through the Himalayas without travel documents. Hence, Jigme was not the only interviewee who aspired getting a Western passport with which to travel back to Tibet although his will to do the journey again seemed rather unique to me. As one Tibetan-born interviewee, who came to Europe because he married a European woman, stated, getting the European passport was perhaps the best

⁷³ Personal communication, 25 Mar. 2011.

⁷⁴ Personal communication, 25 Mar. 2011.

thing that had happened to him in Europe. Later, he also travelled back to Tibet with his passport but did not move back permanently because he had started a business in Europe.⁷⁵

The risky journey over the Himalayas is a phenomenon that has gained lots of attention in Tibetan diaspora also beyond the narratives of the journeying individuals. There are lots of photographs, movies, documentaries and literature about this part of the journey. The first and perhaps the most famous journey description is found in the Dalai Lama's⁷⁶ widely-spread autobiography "My Land and My People", which has been translated into many languages. Although the book does not concentrate on the journey as such, it includes description and pictures of his journey to India. The Dalai Lama's journey has a great historical meaning for the whole Tibetan diaspora as so many Tibetans followed him to exile.

Also a German movie called "Wie zwischen Himmel und Erde", translated as "Escape from Tibet" in English, tells a story about a fictive successor of the Dalai Lama and his flight to exile.⁷⁷ It includes Tibetan actors and it has been shown in the Tibet Museum's movie nights in Dharamsala, for example. The English trailer of the movie can be found on YouTube,⁷⁸ and it is filled with typical Western exoticisation of Tibet.⁷⁹ However, the movie has a rather political pro-Tibet message so it is no wonder that it is screened in Dharamsala for the wider audiences by the Tibetans. Interestingly, there is also a book⁸⁰ and a documentary⁸¹ with almost the same English title "Escape from Tibet: A True Story", made by a British author, which follows two Tibetan brothers during their journey to India before the most difficult parts of the journey when they crossed the Himalayas and again on the other side of the border after they managed to reach Nepal.

I participated in many screenings in Dharamsala where movies and documentaries about the Tibetan situation were screened by Tibetans, and some of them included descriptions about the Tibetan journey to exile. These films and documentaries often emphasise the dangers of the journey and highlight that the Tibetans vote with their feet against what they consider the repressive politics of the PRC by escaping. The fact that these productions are available in English and that Tibetans are showing these to wider audiences shows that they want to share the journey narratives with the world. For example, a documentary called "Tibet, A Murder in the Snow" demonstrates how vulnerable the Tibetans truly are if caught by the Chinese border guards en route to Nepal. It addresses the so-called

⁷⁵ Personal communication, 15 June 2015; Personal communication, 12 Oct. 2018.

⁷⁶ Dalai Lama, *My Land and My People: Memoirs of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama of Tibet*.

⁷⁷ See for example: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1793915> (last visited 29.Oct. 2018).

⁷⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRha78izunI> (last visited 29. Oct. 2018).

⁷⁹ D. Anand, *Tibet: A Victim of Geopolitics*; D.S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁸⁰ N. Gray, *Escape from Tibet*, Toronto, Annick Press, 2014.

⁸¹ See <http://www.annickpress.com/Escape-from-Tibet> (last visited 29. Oct. 2018).

Nangpa La shooting in 2006; a Tibetan nun was shot dead and several others arrested by the Chinese soldiers in the Himalayas during their journey to exile. A group of mountain climbers managed to make a video footage⁸² of the shooting and a documentary⁸³ that has been produced based on the shootings circulate in film festivals around the world, demonstrating the dangers of the journey.

It is impossible to discuss all visual or written materials about the Tibetan journey here as they are plenty, but one of the best places to explore how the Tibetans themselves represent and reproduce their refugeeness, including their exilic journeys, is the Dharamsala-based Tibet Museum, and I visited it several times. It holds exhibitions that include descriptions and photographs of the journey and it has a collection of black-and-white pictures of the early journeys to exile, including pictures taken during the Dalai Lama's flight in the 1959. The Tibet Museum also has an online exhibition about the life of the Dalai Lama and some of the pictures present his journey to exile.⁸⁴ As museums serve as memory of the nation and provide arenas for self-representation, these exhibitions reflect the importance of the journey for the diaspora Tibetans as a part of their collective exilic experience. Moreover, museums are platforms to share representations with wider audiences and hence places of influence.

It is rather easy to find Tibetan representations of the journey on the internet. As an example, Tenzing Choedup's song called "Journey to Exile" is available on Youtube.⁸⁵ The video includes a simple picture of a Tibetan refugee group crossing the Himalayas in the snow and additional vocals are sung by artists from the Dharamsala-based Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) that I visited several times during my fieldwork.

Interestingly, as the Tibetans currently often continue their migration to the West if possible,⁸⁶ I was able to find an autobiography about the journey that was published by a Tibetan woman Nyima Yangchen⁸⁷ in Norwegian, as she now lives in Norway. She escaped from Tibet with her family in 1959 and arrived in India via Bhutan as Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu was not established yet and crossing Nepal had not become the major route to exile. The family ended up in Bhomdila in the state of Arunchal Pradesh, an Indian state where the Dalai Lama also first arrived after his journey to India. Although Nyima's journey over the Himalayas via Bhutan to India is a rich description, her migration to Norway from India is only mentioned in the book; it seems that there was not anything to highlight journey-wise.

⁸² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0crsgrAzsY> (last visited 29. Oct. 2018).

⁸³ <http://360degreefilms.com.au/productions/tibet-murder-in-the-snow> (last visited 29. Oct. 2018).

⁸⁴ Tibet Museum, Online Exhibition, "Early Live and Responsibility": <https://tibetmuseum.org/early-life-and-responsibility> (last visited 29. Oct. 2018).

⁸⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnE-A2iTuYY>.

⁸⁶ Anonymous, 2017.

⁸⁷ Y. Nyima, *Lille Yonten og familiens flukt*, Oslo, Kolofon Forlag, 2014.

Finally, representations of the Tibetan journey continue spreading inside the Tibetan diaspora and beyond via printed and online media and oral narratives. Nevertheless, as Yeh and Lama⁸⁸ demonstrate, there may be differences in what the Tibetans want to present to the wider audiences and non-Tibetans as the Tibetans often think how to present their culture and Tibetanness in a best possible manner, at least partly because of their dependency on foreign support and sponsorships as stateless people or refugees.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the journey is clearly an element of the Tibetanness that is considered worth representing to foreign audiences. Therefore, the exhibitions, films and literature about the Tibetan journey in foreign languages, mainly English, reflect both its importance in the Tibetan self-representation and its role as something that they want to share with the world. Despite that these representations include the image of Tibetans as sort of victims of the PRC, the journey is simultaneously represented as journey to freedom; it represents an active Tibetan agency voting against the PRC's rule by escaping, balancing the representations of victimhood and agency. Through their journey descriptions, the Tibetans demonstrate the difficulties they are facing, the state borders they need to cross and the stateless position that they have; in a sense, the journey represents their refugeeness.

5. JOURNEY NARRATIVES OF THE WAYFARERS

The four selected journey narratives presented here are selected both because of their representativeness and their unique characteristics that contribute to the understanding of the variations of the Tibetan journeys. All four journeyers escaped with a group of Tibetans illegally from the perspective of the PRC, hired a guide and crossed the Himalayan border regions on foot. They intentionally transited Nepal and headed to the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu. Yet, all of these interviewees had different journey experiences and they faced different obstacles en route. My meaning of focusing on these journeys is not to give detailed descriptions about every step of their journeys as such but rather to contribute to the understanding of the understudied Tibetan journeys by focusing on what the interviewees themselves wanted to reveal about their journeys and what they wanted to highlight.

⁸⁸ E.T. Yeh & K.T. Lama, "Hip-hop Gangsta or Most Deserving of Victims? Transnational Migrant Identities and the Paradox of Tibetan Racialization in the USA", *Environment and Planning A*, 38(5), 809–829, 2006.

⁸⁹ D.M. deVoe, "Keeping Refugee Status: A Tibetan Perspective"; A. Prost "The Problem with 'Rich Refugees' Sponsorship, Capital, and the Informal Economy of Tibetan Refugees".

The first Tibetan-born interviewees of this study arrived in India in the early 1990s after martial law was lifted in Tibet and the PRC allowed more movement outside Tibet again. Among them was Norbu,⁹⁰ a middle-aged man who came to Dharamsala as a young man in 1993. The journey was one of Norbu's favourite topics during the interview and he remembered it extremely well. His interview was the longest as it lasted more than three hours and Norbu paid more attention to the place names, durations and other details during the journey than the other interviewees. He also concentrated on happenings in Tibet before the actual journey more than the other interviewees usually did, which may be at least partly due to that Norbu was one of the few interviewees who had been in jail in Tibet. He was beaten, kicked and given electric shocks during the police interrogations and in jail; these experiences were the major drivers for his escape and he started to plan the journey when freed. He is an example of those lay Tibetans whose major drivers to escape were political, but he did not connect this to the Tibetan riots between 1987–1989 or their aftermaths as such. When he lived in Lhasa, the PRC authorities had found that he was wearing a badge with a Tibetan flag under his jacket, reflecting his commitment to Tibet. He was jailed for four and a half months just because of that and because he did not tell from where he got it.

Norbu did not tell his family that he intended to leave. He managed to find a group of 11 young Tibetan men and a guide with whom to journey to Nepal over the Himalayas as the guide gave him discount; Norbu did not have the 1000 yuan that was the original price. They started from Lhasa by truck, crossed Shigatse where they stayed a day and proceeded towards the border. After they started walking through the border region, the guide once forgot the route but the Tibetan nomads helped them forward and the group finally crossed the border walking through the Jang la mountain range. Although the mountains were very high, Norbu's group managed to cross the border areas between Tibet and Nepal on foot without any particular difficulties within around 15 days (From Saga County to Nepal's side). When the group reached Nepal, they got help from a friend of the guide and managed to catch a bus to Kathmandu, from where they planned to continue to India, a route that Norbu called the "main circle". He did not pay any special attention to the border crossing of the states itself but he emphasised that they were afraid of being sent back to China still on Nepal's side. Although they sat separately in the bus to Kathmandu and did not talk with each other in Tibetan, one of the policemen checking the bus found out that there were 11 people who could not speak Nepali. They were taken to the police station and the group was apprehensive:

⁹⁰ Personal communication, 12 Dec. 2015.

We talk that Nepali police maybe send us to China. We talk this night time, we talk[...]. Maybe tomorrow morning we sent China, China border maybe. Ooo, worry much. Some young people say we, night time, we should see some window. Window we cut, cutting window, then we going to escape to going to Kathmandu[...].

As some of the group members were against the attempt to escape from the police station, they all decided to stay overnight, fearing that they would be sent to China to be jailed. In the following morning, a Tibetan, apparently working for the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu, came to negotiate at the police station and after a couple of days of negotiations, the group was helped to the Reception Centre, but they needed to leave all their Chinese money to the station. Being caught by the Nepali police was the scariest and the most dangerous part of Norbu's journey and something he highlighted during the interview.

After reaching the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu, all members of the group had a hearing; Norbu was interviewed by a Tibetan lady and two foreigners about why he left Tibet, what he did there, where exactly he was from and so forth. He answered that he left because Tibetans tended to have political problems with the PRC, he was from a small village where he could not study English but only Chinese, and that he wanted to see the Dalai Lama; all common reasons why the Tibetans still migrate or escape to India. Also the rest of Norbu's journey was rather typical; he stayed in the Reception Centre in Kathmandu around two weeks, after which he got help in getting a bus to Delhi where he needed to answer a few questions and show the papers made in Kathmandu in order to be eligible to stay in the country legally. After one night in Delhi, he could continue to Dharamsala where he could meet the Dalai Lama and attend the Sherab Gatsel Lobling School (formerly known as Tibetan Transit School) like all Tibetan newcomers under 30 years.

Although Norbu had difficult experiences in the jail en route, his journey over the Himalayas seemed to be easier than Dolma's,⁹¹ who came to India in the late 1990s. She still seemed to remember even the small details very well as the journey had affected her deeply, and the journey was something that she clearly wanted to concentrate during the interview. Her journey is an example of how difficult the journey via the Himalayas can be for Tibetans, and her drivers to leave Tibet offer an example of why so many monks and nuns have escaped to India. Although I have concentrated on lay Tibetans in my wider study on Tibetan refugees,⁹² there were some former monks and nuns among the interviewees, such as Dolma who arrived in Dharamsala as a nun but gave up her robes later in India.

⁹¹ Personal communication, 15 Dec. 2015.

⁹² See for example Anonymous, 2015; 2017.

Dolma left Tibet because the PRC officials had held patriotic classes in her nunnery, accused the Dalai Lama of separatism and restricted monastic life. Sometimes those who rebelled against these practices were beaten and finally so many were forced to leave, including Dolma, that only 17 of the 130 nuns were left. Dolma was not truly capable of working in a family farm, killing animals for food, for example, as it was against her vows as a Buddhist. Hence, she decided to escape to India and vote with her feet against what she considered the oppressive policies of the PRC. As she described: “It was so strong feeling. I said ok, I have to, I have to go, I have to follow His Holiness[...]”. She said she was “feeling very strong” and did not even care whether she would be put into jail or not, which reflects a determinant agency in her migration decision.

Dolma managed to find a guide and a group of 50 to 60 Tibetans. The whole group first travelled around two days by truck, hiding the Chinese police. They ended up in the mountainous border range and started to walk; it took them around seven days to reach the border mountains. Then the journey turned very traumatising for Dolma because of the fast changing weather conditions:

Then, not only night, that whole day was snow just like this [making a sound of a wind]. And then we had to go. And then we just throwing out our blankets and heavy clothes because with the heavy things we can not walk[...]. We sank, we sinking in the snow. So we throwing this and that, and dropping food, this leftover things, just throwing, and walking, walking[...]. Three hours normally, walking, but we were there two nights and three days in the snow. Can you believe that? Oh my god[...]. The guide was shouting us: we have to move, come, come, come, please move, move! Otherwise we all will die here[...]. Then everyone, everyone was pushing each other, ok, go, go, go[...]. And then another night came, so we had to stay. We got one, how you say a rock built, like a rock[...]. Like a cave[...]. So then everyone that night, we didn't have food, we didn't have water, nothing. Then that night, everyone was so cold, of course, already they became wet. Then we didn't have, I mean that time, all thick clothes, already thrown. So everyone shoulders each other, you know, trying to keep warm. So cold. And then, that night, two kids died.

The harsh weather continued and Dolma got left behind because she carried a girl on her back who could not move and, according to Dolma, had “already became ice”. One monk turned back and helped her, but they all got stuck in the snow. They managed to reach their group much later, but it was too cold and windy, and eventually the girl died on Dolma's shoulders. This was extremely traumatising for Dolma who hardly managed to get out of the Himalayas alive herself; she was finally

rescued by mountain climbers who took her into their tent and saved her feet from severe frostbites just before it was too late.

Later in Dharamsala, after Dolma had given up her robes, she got a son with her husband. She told me that the girl who died on her shoulders was reborn as her son. “That was my son’s life”, that she tried to save during the journey, she explained. Hence, she will carry the girl on her mind the rest of her life. Her journey narrative is truly an example of a journey that affects the refugees the rest of their lives.⁹³

Also Tsering,⁹⁴ a woman between thirty and forty years, was somewhat traumatised by her journey. She had arrived in Dharamsala around seven years before I interviewed her. Her drivers to leave Tibet were that she wanted to see the Dalai Lama, study in India and learn more about Western culture, which might be a sign that she knew about the onward-migration possibilities in Dharamsala, but at least she must have known that the town is very international⁹⁵. She did not tell her parents that she was leaving and left with a group of Tibetans. Their first guide was drinking heavily so they needed to change to a better guide en route. Moreover, she got such bad altitude sickness in the Himalayas that she thought she would die there.

Among the most traumatising happenings for Tsering was that their group needed to leave a 13-year-old girl behind. The men in the group had carried the girl for 15 days, but after their food was almost finished and all became very weak and shaky, they could not do that anymore. All the people in the group had cried and left some *tsampa* (Tibetan food made of flour, usually barley) for the girl. The group decided to send her downhill and hoped she would reach a village that they had passed, but no one saw her ever since. She had no family members in the group but a relative of hers tried to look for her in Dharamsala afterwards. According to Tsering, the girl must have died en route as no one had heard from her and her relatives did not find her. The fact that the group left the girl behind was something that Tsering had not forgotten and she clearly felt a need to reason why they could not help the girl. After hearing many journey narratives it became apparent that it is not uncommon that particularly children die in the Himalayas during the journeys.

After Tsering’s group had crossed the border between Tibet and Nepal, the Nepali police put them in jail, just like in the case of Norbu’s group around 15 years before, and the group was very afraid of being returned to China. They begged the police not to do that and after two days the Tibetan Reception Centre paid to get them free. Tsering explained that she was so relieved that she was safe

⁹³ G. BenEzer & R. Zetter, “Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys”.

⁹⁴ Personal communication, 13 Dec. 2015.

⁹⁵ See Anonymous, 2015.

that she was in tears when she reached the Reception Centre, the first place where she got protection en route.

Finally, the journey narrative of Tenzing,⁹⁶ a woman around her thirties, who arrived with a group of Tibetans around three years before I interviewed her, is a rare example of a relatively reasonable journey. Like Tsering, Tenzing did not tell her parents that she was escaping to India. The strongest driver for her was that she wanted to see the Dalai Lama and she thought there would be no problem even if she would die after seeing him: “I come here first time to meet the Dalai Lama[...]. I see Dalai Lama only in TV, you know. Then I think this: I meet Dalai Lama, then [if] I die is no problem. I think this, okay”. Tenzing’s strong commitment to the Dalai Lama was not exceptional among the interviewees, and it is an example of how seriously also many lay Tibetans take the fact that worshipping the Dalai Lama is banned in China.

The price of the journey seemed to get higher during the years; Tenzing needed to pay 10,000 yuan for the guide. Her group used different vehicles but needed to walk three days over a mountain top en route. They walked only during the night in order to avoid the border guards. Tenzing had heard that many people needed to pay more money for the guide or several guides during the journey than what was agreed, but she was not blackmailed en route. She said that the guide was “very kind” and she appreciated the fact that he introduced her to *Dahl*, the popular Nepali and Indian cuisine made from lentils. Tenzing did not face any particular difficulties en route despite that walking over the Himalayas is never easy, and she told me that the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu had taken good care of her like given blankets, good food for free and assisted to India. She seemed grateful that she had got help en route, and she survived the journey without being traumatised by it. Her journey narrative resonates with Schapendonk, van Liempt and Spiering⁹⁷ (2015) who found out that such enjoyment that the travellers often report having may exist during the transitory journeys of migrants or asylum-seekers even though the journey would be risky and difficult in general.

In sum, the journey descriptions of these four interviewees focused on issues that were the most remarkable for them. They often concentrated on describing their reasons to leave Tibet, crossing the Himalayas in the high altitudes particularly if something special happened during that period and the relief to enter the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu. Nepal was commonly considered as a transit country where the Tibetans feared being captured and which they wanted to cross as soon as possible but the Reception Centre became a sort of a place of trust en route for them as it would be difficult for many Tibetans to reach India safely without the help of the Centre. This

⁹⁶ Personal communication, 13 Dec. 2015.

⁹⁷ J. Schapendonk, I. van Liempt & B. Spierings, “Travellers and their journeys: A dynamic conceptualization of transient migrants’ and backpackers’ behaviour and experiences on the road”.

resonates with Lyytinen⁹⁸ who demonstrates how certain places of trust, where the refugees got help, were such that her interviewees highlighted them as crucially important in their journey descriptions. The refugees in Lyytinen's⁹⁹ study commonly trusted that they would not be stopped from entering Uganda and their border crossing was usually rather safe, whereas the Tibetan interviewees of this study mistrusted the Chinese and Nepali border guards, hiding from them during daytime and walking only at night as they may capture Tibetans in the border regions, put them into jail and use violence.¹⁰⁰ However, crossing the actual borderline between China and Nepal seemed not necessarily to be such a relief as entering the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu since they knew that also Nepali police can detain them.

5.1. After the Transit Journey

Even though my materials do not allow generalisations about when the journeys of the Tibetan-born interviewees of this study exactly ended in their minds and thus BenEzer and Zetter's¹⁰¹ question of the limits or boundaries of the journey remains unanswered, it can be said that for the majority of them, Dharamsala seemed to be a place where they came to stay at least for a while, to see the Dalai Lama and seek opportunities, such as education from the Tibetan premises. However, many young or middle-aged Tibetans who participated in this study wanted to move onwards, which is connected to the wider trend among the Tibetans to migrate from India to the West.¹⁰² Switzerland and Canada took in Tibetan refugees already in the 1960s and 1970s,¹⁰³ but according to Hess, the Tibetan-U.S. resettlement project (TUSRP) first created the "craze" to migrate to the U.S. by granting 1,000 visas for Tibetans in India and Nepal in 1990.¹⁰⁴ These "lucky 1,000" included both Indian-born and Tibetan-born Tibetans and were considered "anchor relatives" who formed a base in the U.S. as their

⁹⁸ E. Lyytinen, "Refugees' 'Journeys of Trust': Creating an Analytical Framework to Examine Refugees' Exilic Journeys with a Focus on Trust".

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ S. Dolma & al. "Dangerous Journey: Documenting the Experience of Tibetan Refugees".

¹⁰¹ G. BenEzer & Zetter, "Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys".

¹⁰² Anonymous, 2017; M. Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors: Citizenship and Belonging in the Tibetan Diaspora*; E.T. Yeh, "Exile Meets Homeland: Politics, Performance, and Authenticity in the Tibetan Diaspora".

¹⁰³ T. Lauer, "Between Desire and Duty. On Tibetan Identity and its Effects on Second-Generation Tibetans", *Asian Ethnology*, 74(1), 167–192, 2015; F. McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile*; J. Raska, "Humanitarian Gesture: Canada and the Tibetan Resettlement Program, 1971–5", *The Canadian Historical Review*, 97(4), 546–75, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ M. Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors: Citizenship and Belonging in the Tibetan Diaspora*, 86; see also N. Choedup, *From Tibetan Refugees to Transmigrants: Negotiating Cultural Continuity and Economic Mobility through Migration*; E.T. Yeh & K.T. Lama, "Hip-hop Gangsta or Most Deserving of Victims? Transnational Migrant Identities and the Paradox of Tibetan Racialization in the USA".

close family members were given the opportunity to join them later.¹⁰⁵ According to McGranahan,¹⁰⁶ many of those who did not win in the lottery envied those who won as they heard their success stories.

The interviewees of this study often aspired to migrate to the West in general. Their possible onward-migration intentions in India usually developed because of the socioeconomic difficulties in India and migration opportunities that Dharamsala offered.¹⁰⁷ If the Tibetans are not lucky enough to be included in any of the programmes between the CTA and foreign countries, such as the TUSR, popular methods to migrate onwards included marriages with foreigners, trying to get a student visa or a fraud visa, for instance.¹⁰⁸ During my fieldwork in Dharamsala, all kinds of information about the best possible migration methods to different countries circulated intensively among Tibetan newcomers, but onward-migration was not easy for those without contacts in foreign countries.¹⁰⁹

After working more than twenty years in India with a minimal salary, Norbu, for example, eagerly waited to get a visa to Australia as he was selected to participate in a programme that helps the Tibetan ex-political prisoners and their families immigrate to Australia. In addition, Dolma was waiting for a family reunification as her husband got a chance to migrate to Canada to study. However, I consider that their journeys still stopped in India where they had been residing and working already for long when I interviewed them, but as an opportunity to get better livelihoods and opportunities in the West appeared, they wanted to take advantage of that possibility. Hence, I do not consider that they were in transit all the time, and also their journey narratives reflect that their journey first ended in Dharamsala although they got an opportunity to migrate again.

For some of the interviewees, however, their journeys did not truly stop in their minds in Dharamsala, and the West seemed to be their (final) destination. Here, the concept of transit migration is helpful again,¹¹⁰ particularly if it is determined loosely as a situation where onward-migration intentions “may or may not develop into further migration”.¹¹¹ As an example, Tsering did not want to stay the rest of her life in India as she thought her position as a woman from Tibet was not good. She felt she lacked opportunities, she was apprehensive about forming a family in India and she was sometimes scared of violence against women. Her migration intentions remind the intentions of those seven interviewees who I know that have managed to migrate onwards from Dharamsala, having characteristics of transit migration particularly if defined by following Papadopoulou-Kourkoula’s¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ M. Hess, “Statelessness and the State: Tibetans, Citizenship, and Nationalist Activism in a Transnational World”.

¹⁰⁶ C. McGranahan, “Refusal as Political Practice: Citizenship, Sovereignty, and Tibetan Refugee Status”, 371.

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous, 2017; 2018.

¹⁰⁸ N. Choedup, *From Tibetan Refugees to Transmigrants: Negotiating Cultural Continuity and Economic Mobility through Migration*.

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ A. Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, *Transit Migration: The Missing Link between Emigration and Settlement*, 5.

¹¹² Ibid, 7.

view that the degree to which people engage with the countries and places where they stay and want to settle or adapt in these places are indicators whether they are in transit or not. Rather than integrating in India, Tsering concentrated in learning English and improving her chances to migrate onwards, an option she seemed to have in her mind already before arriving in India. This is reminiscent of the migrant mothers in transit in Morocco in Stock's¹¹³ study, for example, who use their strategic agency in order to increase their mobility despite the preventive structures and inequalities that they often encounter.

Tenzing was the only one of the four who had a clear plan to return to Tibet after staying close to the Dalai Lama a few months in Dharamsala. This can be compared with the asylum-seeking Afghan youth in Australia in Nardone and Correa-Velez's¹¹⁴ study since although Australia was their final destination, the journey sometimes continued still in their minds because they wished to return. Tenzing had not thought of staying in India long-term, but she realised in India that returning would be very difficult because she had left Tibet paperless and illegally from the perspective of the PRC. Hence, she stayed in Dharamsala and pondered her possibilities to settle at least for a little longer or try to continue her journey to the West after which she thought she could perhaps return to Tibet one day like some Tibetans had recommended her to do. In general, return migration from India to Tibet has become increasingly popular,¹¹⁵ but only three of the Tibetan-born interviewees of this study pondered the option with me in Dharamsala; I now know that at least one of them has returned, but he returned from India.

In sum, the four journey narratives that are discussed more deeply in this study demonstrate that the journey seems to end among some in Dharamsala although they might develop onward-migration aspirations later, whilst for some, onward-migration aspirations or return-migration intentions are either in their minds before arriving or they developed them very fast in India. Their journey seems to continue also in Dharamsala in their minds even when they are physically stuck there, which is reminiscent of BenEzer and Zetter's¹¹⁶ discussion about the sometimes blurred borderlines of the journey. Conceptualisations of transit migration (aspirations) are helpful here as there is plenty of scholarly discussion on how the journey sometimes ends in the transit spot among people who aimed to transit or continues onwards among people who aimed to stay, and migration

¹¹³ I. Stock, "Gender and the Dynamics of Mobility: Reflections on African Migrant Mothers and 'Transit Migration' in Morocco".

¹¹⁴ M. Nardone and I. Correa-Velez, "Unpredictability, Invisibility and Vulnerability: Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Minors' Journeys to Australia".

¹¹⁵ C. Vasantkumar, "Tibetan Peregrinations: Mobility, Incommensurable Nationalisms and (Un)belonging Athwart the Himalayas".

¹¹⁶ G. BenEzer & R. Zetter, "Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys".

intentions may not always be clear.¹¹⁷ Some may become “involuntary immobile”¹¹⁸ (Carling 2002), whilst some intended to transit but decided to stay because of opportunities that came up in the transit spot, for instance.¹¹⁹

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that the risky journey over the Himalayas separated diaspora Tibetans from their homeland both spatially and temporarily; it is among “the most significant processes of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ a refugee” for them,¹²⁰ a process that started already when the Dalai Lama escaped to India. The fact that these journeys have continued over 50 years, still having similar characteristics than before, strengthens its collective meaning. The journey reflects the lost homeland and refugeeness of the Tibetans, but it is an embodied experience only for the Tibetan-born Tibetans. However, as also the Indian-born Tibetans are descendants of those who have done the journey, it is present in their lives through their family histories, narratives and the visual, literal and oral representations of the journey that the Tibetans produce and share. These productions about the journey demonstrate that the journey is often represented as a sort of a collective rite of passage, sometimes with heroic overtones, which further strengthens BenEzer and Zetter’s¹²¹ argument that “journeys might have an effect on the way members of a migrating/fleeing society perceive themselves as a group, including their social identity”.

As BenEzer and Zetter¹²² state, the journey can be considered as “the method and process of flight (with connotations of expulsion, enforcement and uprooting) which, after all, is the distinctive indicator of becoming a refugee (as opposed to other forms of migration)”. Simultaneously, the Tibetan journey to India reminds transit migration.¹²³ The fact that all Tibetan-born interviewees of this study intentionally transited Nepal as soon as possible and headed to India, meets even the strictest (but contested) criterions of transit migration; short time spent in the place of transit and clear

¹¹⁷ Anonymous, 2017; S. Bredeloup, “Sahara Transit: Times, Spaces, People”; M. Collyer, “In-Between Places: Trans-Saharan Transit Migrants in Morocco and the Fragmented Journey to Europe”; A. Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou, *Transit Migration: The Missing Link between Emigration and Settlement*.

¹¹⁸ J. Carling, “Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility: Theoretical Reflections and Cape Verdean Experiences”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(1), 2002, 5–42.

¹¹⁹ J. Schapendonk & G. Steel, “Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union”.

¹²⁰ G. BenEzer & R. Zetter, “Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys”, 299.

¹²¹ Ibid, 7.

¹²² Ibid, 299.

¹²³ Anonymous, 2017.

intentions to migrate onwards.¹²⁴ This conceptual resemblance between the Tibetan refugee journey and transit migration highlights the progressive and dynamic nature of their journeys and their strategic agency that is present en route despite the preventive structures, such as Chinese and Nepali border controls that may turn violent against the journeying Tibetans.¹²⁵ Hence, what BenEzer and Zetter¹²⁶ call refugee journeys overlap with transit migration in the case of the Tibetans, which reminds of the overlapping categories of *refugee* and *migrant* in general.

Therefore, rather than trying to form a separate genre of studies on refugee journeys under the refugee studies,¹²⁷ it would be important to examine the journeys of paperless or vulnerable migrants or asylum-seekers who need protection en route regardless of their (upcoming) refugee status. As Collyer¹²⁸ argues, the protection needs are the same for “yet to be recognised refugees”, “previously recognised refugees” or “those with other protection needs”. Moreover, refugee policies may change or definitions may be blurred like in the case of the Tibetans, depending of the place that they stay in or cross. As Crawley and Skleparis¹²⁹ argue, the separation of refugees and migrants does not meet the realities of people who live months or years in countries other than they originate from, a situation which requires exploration of “the complex economic, social and political realities of the ‘in between’”. Hence, in line with Van Hear¹³⁰, who considers it important to see the refugee or forced migration studies as a part of migration studies more broadly, I consider the studies on refugee or forced migrant journeys connected to journey-oriented studies on (transit) migration more broadly. Researching what happens en route for paperless or vulnerable people on the move and combining different conceptualisations fluidly inform us also in which routes or parts of the routes protection is needed the most without categorical limits.

Obviously, the phase of the Tibetan migration that I have focused in this study, i.e. the journey from Tibet to India, has a much greater role in defining the Tibetan refugeeness than their possible migration onwards from India. I have never met Tibetans telling stories on how they fly into the U.S., Europe, Australia or Japan, for example, to such an extent and with such pride that they tell their

¹²⁴ Anonymous, 2017; S. Bredeloup, “Sahara Transit: Times, Spaces, People”; M. Collyer & H. de Haas, “Developing Dynamic Categorisation of Transit Migration”, *Population Space and Place*, 2012, 18(4), 469–481; F. Düvell, “Transit Migration: A Blurred and Politicised Concept”, *Population, Space and Place*, 2012, 18(4): 415–427; M. Wissink, F. Düvell & A. van Eerdevijk, “Dynamic Migration Intentions and the Impact of Socio-Institutional Environments: A Transit Migration Hub in Turkey”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 39(7), 2014, 1087–1105.

¹²⁵ Anonymous, 2018; S. Dolma & al. “Dangerous Journey: Documenting the Experience of Tibetan Refugees”.

¹²⁶ G. BenEzer & R. Zetter, “Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys”.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ M. Collyer, “Stranded Migrants and the Fragmented Journey”, 279.

¹²⁹ H. Crawley & D. Skleparis, “Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe’s ‘Migration Crisis’”, 49.

¹³⁰ N. Van Hear, “Forcing the Issue: Migration Crises and the Uneasy Dialogue between Refugee Research and Policy”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25(1), 2011, 1–24, 3-4.

survival stories about their flight over the Himalayas or seen arts, films or literature produced specifically concentrating on their journey to the West. Escaping from Tibet is often presented as a political act, whilst migrating onward from India reflects socioeconomic and livelihood-related difficulties of (Tibetan-born) Tibetans in India.¹³¹ Many Tibetans were initially hesitant to express that they aspired on migrating further from India, a country that provided them de facto refugeeness after their escape and where the Dalai Lama lives.¹³² Yet, the phenomenon is so visible in Dharamsala that no one truly denied it either, and it is apparent that the Tibetan journeys to the West and wealthier Asian countries, such as Japan, will continue vividly also in the future.¹³³ The fact that the Tibetan journeys over the Himalayas continue despite the economic progress in Tibet and the hardened border controls of the PRC after 2008, and the fact that the Tibetans migrate increasingly onwards from India, would provide a fruitful ground to extend the studies on Tibetan journeys and further discuss the blurred borderlines of where the (refugee) journey ends or why it continues.

¹³¹ See e.g. Anonymous, 2018.

¹³² M. Hess, *Immigrant Ambassadors: Citizenship and Belonging in the Tibetan Diaspora*.

¹³³ Anonymous, 2017; N. Choedup, "Tibetan Exile or Diaspora: India as a 'Second Homeland'"; Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), *Demographic Survey of the Tibetans in Exile*.