
Hip-hop gangsta or most deserving of victims? Transnational migrant identities and the paradox of Tibetan racialization in the USA

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Abstract. This ethnographic paper examines the complex cultural politics of Tibetan transnational migration by examining racialized everyday practices in Tibetan communities in the San Francisco Bay Area and Boulder, Colorado. After providing an overview of Tibetan migration to the USA, we discuss migrants' contradictory insertion into American racial bipolarism. On the one hand, Tibetans' racialized class positions place them at the lower end of a spectrum of moral deserving and worth. On the other hand, the discursive practices of the transnational Tibet Movement and the traveling of Tibetan Buddhist institutions to the USA 'whitens' Tibetans by making them seem particularly worthy and deserving of sponsorship. After exploring the production of Tibetan migrant subjectivities through white sponsorship, we examine how the successful articulation of Tibetan identities for a transnational political struggle is a double-edged sword which has unintended, and sometimes violent consequences. These play out in various ways, including intergenerational struggles over hip-hop and internalized racism.

Introduction

With one hand holding his baggy khakis hanging on his thighs, Tendola⁽¹⁾ makes his way through a crowd of Tibetans who have gathered at the Masonic Center in Berkeley, California, to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC). Founded in 1970, and now listing more than 20 000 Tibetan members, mostly in South Asia, Europe, and North America, the TYC organizes numerous cultural exhibitions and festivals to promote its political message for *rang btsan tsang ma* or 'complete independence' from China. To celebrate TYC's anniversary tonight, teams of Tibetan women and men are competing on stage in a cultural competition by singing and dancing to Tibetan folk songs. The backdrop includes a large framed photograph of the Dalai Lama, draped with a ceremonial scarf and placed on a throne; a Tibetan national flag, depicting two snow lions springing toward the sun; and the TYC flag. The latter appears to be a disembodied green blob; it represents the territorial boundaries of the 'three provinces of Tibet', the total geographic area for which TYC and the Tibetan government in exile demand recognition as 'Tibet', but which is far larger than the 'Tibet' recognized by China. The green shape floats in a featureless yellow rectangle, and has no surrounding coordinates or place names—no referents to the existence of other nations. As a technology of the geobody of the imagined Tibetan nation in exile, the flag is a metonym for the fervent patriotism of TYC, whose members must pledge not only to "work for the preservation and promotion of religion and Tibet's unique culture and tradition" but also to "struggle for the total independence of Tibet even at the cost of one's life". This is the Tibetan diaspora with which most Americans and Europeans are familiar, and the one which has captured the imagination of scholars of transnationalism.

⁽¹⁾ All names used are pseudonyms.

The audience's attention is directed toward the fiery political speeches and the colorful regional costumes worn by dancers on stage, but this attention is momentarily disturbed by Tendola, as he makes his way through to join his friends lurking in one corner of the room. His hair is tightly braided, his forehead covered with a shiny black bandana, and a long silver necklace with a heavy locket hangs from his neck. Tonight Tendola is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, hiding the Chinese characters 'money', 'power', and 'respect' which he has recently had tattooed onto his forearms and chest. While on his way to join his friends, he hears an elderly Tibetan woman saying "Your pants are falling down—hold them really tight", followed by sounds of giggling. A Tibetan man calls out:

"Hey, Tendola, can I borrow your pants for a second? I need to pick up some laundry. Your pants will work just fine."

More laughter, but he ignores it all and makes his way through. Tendola, who moved to California from a Tibetan settlement in South India four years prior, is used to such remarks at community gatherings. Tibetans young and old often exclaim upon seeing him:

"He's just like a black person!"

For many of the younger West Coast Tibetans, both men and women, it is a compliment—Tendola is the epitome of machismo, of the stylish and subversive. But many older Tibetans see his hip-hop style as an imitation of African Americans; as a result, to them, he epitomizes downward mobility and the loss of an authentic Tibetan identity. Indeed, it is the association of his bodily stylization with African-American subculture, more than his educational status as a high school dropout, or his class status working in valet parking and house cleaning, that symbolizes to some community leaders the apparent failure of the transnational Tibetan struggle.

Diasporic politics and transnational identities

We begin with this event to highlight the importance of recognizing the multiple and often competing forms of identification, community, and belonging that characterize transnational communities. Diasporas have been called "exemplary communities of the transnational moment" (Tololyan, 1991, page 5) and the Tibetan diaspora in particular has been widely celebrated for the apparent success of its transnational mobilization of supporters in the struggle for the national homeland. Despite the relative neglect of the Tibetan diaspora in major theoretical statements about diaspora, exile, and transnationalism (Korom, 1999), scholars have used the Tibetan case to argue that trans-national movements speak not to the demise of the nation-state, but to the continued pervasiveness of the nation-state ideal. Indeed, geographers have noted that whether through the figure of the Dalai Lama, the Beastie Boys, or Hollywood, "Tibetan nationalism and nation building operates by necessity as a transnational force" (Houston and Wright, 2003, page 218).

Because of both its visibility and its association with a progressive politics of resistance and human rights, research on Tibetans living in the USA has paid particular attention to the transnational Tibet Movement—the coalitions, organizations, and strategies used by Tibetan refugees and their non-Tibetan supporters to produce and assert a Tibetan political presence in the international arena (McLagan, 1997, page 69). This movement is characterized by networks such as TYC and the International Tibet Support Network. The latter was officially established in 2000 to help coordinate campaigns among the more than 300 Tibet support groups which have been founded in over fifty countries since the late 1980s. With a combined membership of well over 100 000 people, these Tibet support groups are found not only in Europe and North America, but also in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the former Soviet Republics. In addition to these

political networks, understandings of Tibetans are also conditioned by the appropriation of Tibetan Buddhism in the New Age movement (Korom, 1997a), and the West's long-standing view of Tibet as a symbol of purity, spirituality, and utopia. Scholars have attended to the ways in which, for the West, Tibet is less a geographical place than a repository of myths, tropes, and images (Bishop, 1989; Dodin and R  ther, 2001; Korom, 1997a; 1997b; Lopez, 1998).

However, far less attention has been paid to the racialized politics of everyday practices and identities of Tibetan transnational migrants. In explicitly recognizing not just TYC, but also the hip-hop fragment of its audience, and in exploring the connections and disjunctures between them, we hope both to deepen our understandings of the Tibetan diaspora and to extend recent theorizations of transnationalism. Our approach responds to several recent interventions in the literature on geographies of transnationalism, including critiques that the field has tended to treat "cultures" as unified, discrete, pre-existing social entities", ignoring the fact that "culture" is itself contested within, that social networks, relationships and identities change radically over generations" (Nagel, 2001, page 252). Thus we follow recent suggestions, of feminist writers in particular, to "push the transnational gaze deeper into the 'stuff' of everyday life" (Mahler, 1999, page 713).

The next section provides an overview of Tibetan transnational migration, with a focus on the Tibetan US Resettlement Project. We then turn to an ethnographic examination of race, class, and identity among Tibetan migrants in the USA. We engage extensively with Ong's (2003) recent work on racial bipolarism—the black–white continuum of status and dignity in the USA, in which the "relative positioning of a (sub)ethnic group determines its perceived moral claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage" (page 11). Ong argues that, whereas some cosmopolitan and wealthy Asian Americans have become 'honorary whites', others, particularly Cambodian refugees, are positioned at the 'black' end of the spectrum by their class position and perceived economic ability.

"The bipolar racializing scheme is a social regulatory scheme that situates such at-risk subjects along the continuum of more or less likely to succeed. They become racialized not simply because of perceived skin color... but because they have been assessed as belonging to a category" (Ong, 2003, page 14).

We use this framework to examine the racial implications of the various transnational discourses by which Tibetans are interpellated. On the one hand, we show that Tibetan class positions are quite similar to those of Cambodian refugees. Cambodian and Tibetan urban youth also embrace a very similar hip-hop subculture identified with African Americans. On the other hand, the romantic image of Tibetans in the Western popular imagination, which has frequently been celebrated for 'giving Tibetans a voice', converges with a long history of private Western sponsorship to essentialize Tibetan identities and interpellate Tibetans in the West as particular kinds of subjects. We argue that this produces a set of contradictions, played out in inter-generational struggles over Tibetan hip-hop youth styles, which are shot through with internalized racist assumptions. In other words, Tibetans see themselves as uniquely deserving of white support and thus as more 'white' than other Asians, at the same time as they are also positioned economically at the 'black pole' of a persistent racial classificatory spectrum.

This discussion demonstrates the need to reconsider the implications of transnational migrants' identity production. The visibility of transnational networks like the International Tibet Support Network and their political mobilization for a national homeland has strongly favored the articulation of a particular type of Tibetan identity. Yet, as Butler (2001, page 333) reminds us, "identity categories tend to be

instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression.” We show how the articulation of a Tibetan identity that is potentially liberatory at the transnational scale is simultaneously a potential instrument of oppression, with material consequences for communities, households, and individual bodies. In doing so, we critically examine the claim that, “Like the concept of ‘diasporic identities’, transnational understandings of identity formation ‘disavow[s] essentialist and unchanging notions of identity and emphasizes interconnectedness across borders’” (Yeoh et al, 2003, pages 212–213) highlighting the notion that identities are simultaneously embedded in multiple societies (Huang et al, 2000, page 392). Although theorizations of transnational identity formation do indeed highlight fluidity, actual practices through which transnational identities are articulated may be essentialist, emphasizing only some forms of border crossings (for example, connections to Tibet and South Asia) and some forms of embeddedness, while disavowing others (such as the transnational flows of hip-hop subculture) despite their political potentialities.

Our ethnographic approach stems from the conviction that a textured ‘thick’ description based on observation and participation in community life is one of the most effective ways to uncover the politics and ‘stuff’ of everyday life (Bailey et al, 2002). Thus, we are just as concerned with observed everyday practices as with responses to standardized questionnaires. The analysis we present we draw from over four years of participant observation and interviews, by both authors, among Tibetans in the San Francisco Bay Area of California and in Boulder, Colorado. One of us (Kunga Lama), whose ‘insider’ status as a transnational Tibetan migrant from Nepal and a community activist has both helped and hindered the research, also conducted a written survey of Tibetans in the Bay Area on youth styles.

An overview of Tibetan migration to the United States

The failed 1959 uprising in Lhasa against control by the Peoples’ Republic of China and the subsequent escape of the 14th Dalai Lama to India marked the beginning of the Tibetan diaspora. By the end of that year, about 80 000 Tibetans had followed the Dalai Lama into exile, settling in India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim. Another wave of Tibetans arrived in India in the early 1990s after crackdowns following a series of Tibetan nationalist demonstrations in Lhasa. A few thousand Tibetans continue to escape illegally to India every year; of these, roughly one third are children (CTAC, 2002, appendix 6, page 2). By 2002, there were an estimated 140 000 Tibetans living in India and Nepal, and 10 000 in North America among whom roughly 8500 were in the USA (CTAC, 2002, appendix 7, page 4). Continuing arrivals and the undercounting of undocumented Tibetans in surveys suggest that the current Tibetan population in the USA may be around 10 000.

The first Tibetans to visit the USA came as part of a trade delegation sent by the Tibetan Government in 1947. In the next several years, a few leading scholars and clerics, including Telopa Rinpoche and the 14th Dalai Lama’s elder brother, Thubten Norbu, settled in the USA to teach Tibetan Buddhism in university settings. After 1959 a number of Tibetans were sent to Colorado by the Central Intelligence Agency for military training for guerilla warfare against China from bases in northern Nepal. In 1960, the Rockefeller Foundation invited seventeen Tibetan lamas and established eight centers for Tibetan studies in the USA (CTAC, 2002, appendix 8). By 1964, when the Dalai Lama established the Office of Tibet in New York, there were still only a handful of Tibetans in the USA; many of them were religious teachers who became very influential in the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism in the USA. The Office of Tibet reported 524 Tibetans in the USA in 1985, and 1100 in 1992 (CTAC, 2002, page 4).

Large-scale movement to the USA came only after the Dalai Lama's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. After protracted negotiations between Dharamsala and Washington, the US State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs agreed on implementation of the Tibetan US Resettlement Project (TUSR), as Section 134 of the 1990 Immigration Act. The project granted permanent-resident status to 1000 Tibetans from South Asia. Significantly, in order to avoid angering Beijing, they were granted 'immigrant' rather than 'refugee' visas, and the recipients were explicitly not to receive federal funding or other refugee benefits. The project established twenty-one resettlement clusters in eighteen states, and secured employment for the 1000 resettlers, who were to be picked by lottery throughout India and Nepal (see Hess, 2003, pages 181–182 on the specifics of the lottery). Because they became 'immigrants' rather than 'refugees' all of the participants were assigned sponsors, who were volunteers coordinated by Tibet support groups in the resettlement-cluster cities. In April 1992 the first group of Tibetan resettlers arrived at their designated sites, where they lived with host families until they were able to make enough income to live on their own. From 1996 the 1000 participants became eligible to bring their immediate family members from South Asia, which led to a dramatic increase in the Tibetan population. There are now thirty Tibetan communities in North America, with the largest being (in descending order) New York City/New Jersey, Toronto, Minneapolis, Northern California, Madison, and Boston (CTAC, 2002).

The rationale for the TUSR was expressly for participants to serve as "cultural ambassadors for the future survival of Tibet", who would "raise the voice of Tibetan freedom and independence; be a force to make the [world] aware of what is happening to the Tibetan people in Tibet; [and] develop communities in the United State[s] of America that are authentic expression[s] of Tibetan Culture" (CTA, 1992, back cover). Stated goals included:

"(1) to preserve Tibetan culture and identity (2) support the Tibetan refugee settlements in India and Nepal and (3) prepare for the liberation of the Tibetan homeland" (CTAC, 2002, appendix 3, page 3).

Thus, the four-day orientation for participants, stressed their role as cultural ambassadors, and an exercise entitled 'I am a Tibetan' included, in which participants were asked to think about their identities as 'cultural preservers' (Hess, 2003). Not surprisingly, Tibetan self-representations to journalists, scholars, and Tibet Movement activists revolve around the notion of cultural preservation. As one Tibetan in Minneapolis told a reporter:

"The Chinese [destroyed] our culture in Tibet, and the Tibetans living in India have been Indianized. The United States is the only place left that encourages our culture, and Minneapolis may be our best hope" (Levy, 1997).

However, he also added:

"Some people predicted [the USA] might be some paradise. I didn't think it would be paradise, but I thought it would be better than India" (Levy, 1997)

thus hinting at economic forces that encouraged migration. Indeed, according to the Dharamsala-based *Tibetan Review*, at a conference of American cluster site coordinators in 1993 one American sponsor complained that "some of the Tibetans' seeming preoccupation with money and disinterest in promoting the cause of Tibet is bad for public relations" (*Tibetan Review*, cited by Hess, 2003, page 194). This remark reveals that Tibetans in the USA have experienced pressure not only from the government in exile but also from their American sponsors to be active in the Tibet Movement (Hess, 2003, page 195).

The project sparked a flood of transnational movement; in the twelve years since implementation began, the US Tibetan population has grown roughly tenfold—far

more than the TUSRП originally planned for, even taking family reunification into account (CTAC, 2002, page 11). In many cases, extended kinship networks with TUSRП participants has made migration possible: for example, a cousin of a project participant could now find some family support in the USA, even though they would not be eligible to migrate under family reunification. Both the structure of the lottery and maneuvering during its implementation skewed program participation so that a disproportionately high number of former government officials, teachers, and other skilled professionals were involved, leading to concerns about a brain drain. Partly as a result, migration to the USA has come to be seen as a sign of success, highly desirable not only for remittances, but also through the accumulation of social capital.

Outside of the TUSRП, an increasing number of Tibetans from Nepal and India now arrive in the USA on tourist visas. Other entry channels include student visas obtained through sponsors who are willing to pay for a college education in the USA, and romantic relationships with Western travelers. Western sponsorship has been a fact of life and a part of everyday consciousness in Tibetan refugee settlements in South Asia for several decades. Since 1959 Tibetans in South Asia have received extensive material support from Western individuals, and schools run by the Tibetan government in exile arrange for foreign sponsors to help pay for educational and other costs.⁽²⁾ But whereas Tibetans in South Asia have long looked to sponsors to assist them financially, they now also look increasingly for sponsors who will bring them to the USA. In addition, of those who have arrived on tourist visas, many have flocked to New York City, where it is easiest to find informal employment. In recent years many have successfully applied for political asylum, often by claiming to be from Tibet. Others have resolved their status through marriage or by moving to Canada.⁽³⁾

Racial bipolarism

Analyses of Tibetan transnational migration have tended to follow Tibetan diasporic elites' framing of the transnational question, asking: Is the movement of Tibetans to the USA 'good for the Tibetan struggle?' Will Tibetan youth in the USA be able to 'preserve their culture'? Hess (2003) argues that Tibetan youth in the USA are increasingly at home with their diasporic identities and that, as cosmopolitans, they are increasingly engaged with 'diasporic consciousness'. Thus, she concludes optimistically:

"Tibetans' statelessness has enforced a certain set of parameters in terms of articulating a case within the boundaries of nation-state discourses, at the same time, they are also free, or rather they are forced to go beyond these boundaries. Tibetans have been compelled and have the liberty to think 'outside the box.'" (page 378)

By contrast, in our analysis we explore how a new racialized 'box' is formed as a response to the parameters of Tibetans' statelessness, and how this limits and deflects other potentially transgressive elements of Tibetan migrant subjectivity. These limits are structured in part by racial bipolarism, a hegemonic and classificatory logic in the USA which "works to create distinctions within racial categories, so that stratifications have emerged within the diverse populations of Asian ancestry, separating those new Asian Americans who get to become white from those who do not" (Ong, 2003, page xvii; see also Okihiro, 1994). In other words, class position is racialized by a

⁽²⁾ See for example, the Tibetan Sponsorship Project, <http://www.tibetaid.org/sponsorship.htm>.

⁽³⁾ Note that in recent years a small but important fragment of the Tibetan population in the USA has traveled directly from Tibet itself to the USA. Because of lack of space, however, we do not discuss the politics of authenticity between these Tibetans and those who have lived in South Asia in this paper.

national dynamic of the political unconscious that projects worthy citizens as inherently 'white', and that turns ethnic cultures into race-based traditions (Ong, 2003, page 266).

Poor Asian immigrants, such as Cambodian refugees, have been inserted into the globalized economy at the bottom of the class hierarchy: into low-wage labor positions with little opportunity for mobility, and welfare dependency. The coding of these class positions as 'unsuccessful' in turn positions them at the black pole of the spectrum, "identified with inner-city African Americans and set off clearly not only from whites, but also from other Asian groups such as Vietnamese and Chinese Americans" (Ong, 2003, page 14). In contrast to the elite figures of the rich Hong Kong businessman, or the 'model minority' Japanese and Chinese, they are interpellated as undeserving citizen-subjects. Ong explores how the converging rationalities of neoliberal markets, US citizenship as a set of self-constituting practices, and racial bipolarism, reinforce social biases and inequalities, and shape Cambodian identities and subjectivities.

Noting both striking similarities and differences in the ways in which recent Cambodian and Tibetan transnational migrants have cultivated themselves as particular kinds of subjects, we ask: how and why do Tibetans in the USA get to 'become white' and, conversely, in what ways are they pushed to the 'black pole' of the spectrum of racial bipolarity? What are the consequences of these positionings?

Employment, class position, and the state

Ong (2003) argues that one of the first places in which new Asian immigrants are subjected to the techniques of self required by flexible capitalism and its modes of governmentality is the welfare office. The welfare system, social workers, public housing, churches, refugee service agencies, and health clinics together constitute a system of paternalism and subordinating care which subjects immigrants to a process of becoming more 'worthy' citizens. The 'refugee love' of feminist social workers is a form of 'compassionate domination' which reinforces unequal ethnic citizenship and pushes the subjects of state welfare towards the black pole of the spectrum (Ong, 2003, page 167). In contrast, as noted above, the TUSRP explicitly did not allow Tibetans—as 'immigrants' rather than 'refugees'—to receive federal aid, though they did receive immediate work authorization. As immigrants, they were each assigned volunteer sponsors whose guaranteed assistance would keep them off welfare. Thus, unlike Cambodians who were made citizen-subjects through a dependent relationship with the state, Tibetans were subjected to dependency through private, middle-class or upper-class, and almost always white, sponsors.

Despite these differences in relations of dependency, the implications of which are discussed below, the class positions of recent Cambodian and Tibetan migrants are quite similar. A small number of Tibetan migrants are quite wealthy; most of these were successful businessmen in Nepal or India, and have used their accumulated capital to open restaurants or antique and carpet businesses in the USA. A few recent migrants also work in white collar corporate jobs, or in higher education. But the large majority of new Tibetan migrants are concentrated in low-paying service jobs in hotels, as back-room workers in restaurants, supermarkets, grocery stores, construction, and low-wage factory work. Most women work in house cleaning, child care, nursing, and elderly care. Many take second and even third jobs to make ends meet, working sixteen or more hours a day. In a recent survey it was found that in the vast majority of Tibetan families in the USA, both parents work, and most work well over forty hours a week (CTAC, 2002).

The case of 46-year-old Ngawang is typical. A former Tibetan government official in Dharamsala, he was one of the first Tibetans resettled in Northern California. He is still in the job that was first arranged for him, more than a decade ago, by the local

TUSRSP sponsor—working full-time as a housekeeper in an upscale hotel. He stays with the hotel partly because he views it as a way to show his allegiance to the government in exile and the Dalai Lama, and partly as a way to stay together with his Tibetan friends who were also assigned to work in the same hotel. In addition, however, he also works the night shift at a nearby ‘7–11’ store as a cashier. Many Tibetans in the Bay Area have spent years working more than eight hours a day, often for minimum wage, alongside Cambodians, in donut shops. In urban centers across the USA, Tibetans frequently pick up some Spanish from their places of employment as Mexican migrants are often their primary workmates. In Berkeley, California, for example, chefs and backroom workers at many sushi restaurants and upscale pizza joints are almost all either Mexican or Tibetan.

Many Tibetans who have earned undergraduate (or even postgraduate) degrees in South Asia have nonetheless accepted menial jobs in the USA to make ends meet. Tashi, for example, has an MA and was a high school English teacher in India, but was given a job in a factory in the USA. After the factory closed, he worked in a hospital as a porter until an injury caused him to quit. He now sells jewelry from a street stall and at weekend flea markets. Very few Tibetan migrants, even those who have been relatively successful economically, are able to use the skills in which they were originally trained. In this also their positioning resembles that of Cambodian refugees, who were subjected to state training that “reflected the official perception that regardless of their former backgrounds, the majority of Southeast Asian refugees were going to be members of the working poor in the United States” and thus “prepared refugees for low-level jobs as janitors, hotel maids, and domestic workers” (Ong, 2003, page 83). In the case of Tibetans, though, it was the assumptions made by the volunteer sponsors of the TUSRSP about what kinds of employment would be suitable for Tibetans, rather than a state agency, that positioned them to work in ‘flexible’ ‘underclass’ jobs. Intense pressure to send a continual stream of remittances to families in South Asia, and thus a fear of losing these jobs, however low-paying, without finding new ones, has also kept many Tibetans in these jobs.

Another important element of ‘underclass’ Tibetan labor relates to the increasing number of Tibetans who have arrived in the USA on tourist visas, without direct connections to the TUSRSP. These people are the most likely to be exploited through low wages, long hours, dangerous work conditions, lack of benefits, and job instability. As noted above, many of them flock to major metropolitan areas, particularly New York, where some Tibetan entrepreneurs with legal status act as middlemen to find employment for other Tibetans—for a fee. Their class status and positioning in the fluid, flexible, low-wage economy identifies these recent transnational Tibetan migrants—as it codes Cambodian refugees—with inner-city African Americans, rather than with whites or other Asians.

Sponsorship, subjectivity, and whiteness

And yet, Cambodian and Tibetan positionings are not equivalent. Historical, geographical, and institutional specificities of transnational mobility are particularly important in understanding the differences. Ong (2003) documents the processes through which Cambodians were inculcated into new modes and techniques of selfhood and citizenship, including “implicit norms of subservience for nonwhites” (page 61). Particularly important sites of subject formation for the Cambodians were the refugee camps and the welfare office. It was through refugee camps that educated Cambodians who had learned English could increase their chances of being selected for resettlement in the USA, and thus become “enmeshed in a system of dependency on American and other Western supervisors, and this hierarchy of white patronage”

(Ong, 2003, page 56). Like Cambodians, Tibetans became enmeshed in a system of dependency and a hierarchy of white patronage—but one centered squarely on private, individual, white sponsors rather than on state welfare institutions. This system of sponsorship produces particular types of migrant subjectivity.

Most Tibetans living in refugee settlements in India and Nepal (for example, the Jwalakhel camp in Kathmandu, founded by the Swiss Red Cross) have foreign sponsors; these transnational links are established through the camp administrations, as well as through other Tibetan government institutions such as factories and schools. Parents living in cities such as Kathmandu also request Tibetan schools to find sponsors for their children. Sponsors, who pay tuition fees and sometimes send money and gifts, are also found through unofficial channels. Several Tibetan migrants in California and Colorado recalled finding their sponsors by striking up casual conversations in popular tourist destinations in Nepal. Indeed, most Westerners who spend time in the Tibetan communities in Nepal and India (and, increasingly, Tibet) are approached numerous times with requests for sponsorship. Sponsorship is so common among South Asian Tibetan communities that the ability to acquire one (or more) sponsors is often interpreted as a sign that one is resourceful and industrious. Increasingly, Tibetans in South Asia also pressure their relatives in the USA to look for sponsors for siblings and other relatives still in Nepal and India.

DeVoe (1987), Klieger (1992), and others have interpreted contemporary sponsorship relationships with Westerners as a familiar cultural form, a reconstitution of the patron–priest (*von – mchod*) relationships that go back to the 13th century in Tibet. In this cultural form, the act of offering is correlated with prestige: the more one offers as a sponsor, the higher one's prestige. Examining the donor–recipient relationship between Tibetans and Western sponsors in this light, DeVoe argues that this history of sponsorship creates beneficial conditions for long-term associations, and that donors find Tibetans “both deserving and likeable” (1987, page 58). Although DeVoe concludes that Tibetans are thus ideal aid recipients, these relationships of sponsorship are not frictionless. Many stories circulate among Western visitors to South Asia about those who were duped into becoming sponsors for Tibetans who were not nearly as impoverished as they had claimed. Tibetans tell such stories too—of relatively well-to-do families who have three or four sponsors, and of families who put away their carpets to make their houses look as threadbare as possible when a potential or actual sponsor comes to visit. On the sponsor's side, the sometimes jarring difference between the image of Tibetans projected by Hollywood, Buddhist institutions, and the Tibet Movement, and the behavior of the Tibetans they sponsor, can also be a source of disappointment:

“The extension of Western fantasies about Tibet onto Tibetans themselves—expectations of enlightened behavior and nonmaterialist lifestyles, for example—are largely responsible for the outpouring of support for these refugees. This transference has also frequently resulted in severely disappointed *Injis* [literally, ‘English’, but frequently used to refer to Caucasians], many of whom feel betrayed when the Tibetans they have helped turn out to be rather ordinary and fallible human beings” (Diehl, 2002, page 153).

Nevertheless, these sponsorship relationships create “a deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to *Injis*. They also instill in some an expectation of continued support from Westerners and a comfort with dependence and favor seeking, in one form or another” (Diehl, 2002, pages 159–160).

Although we recognize how sponsorship fits into predisposed Tibetan conceptual categories through a long history of patronage, what we want to emphasize here is how this old cultural form encounters and is remade in the new US context, and what the implications of that encounter might be. Whether in South Asia or the USA, virtually

all of the sponsors assigned to or sought by Tibetans are white. This phenomenon of sponsorship subjects the Tibetan diaspora to a process that instills the superiority of ‘whiteness’, as displayed on the bodies of their mostly wealthy sponsors. Indeed, the term for sponsor (*sbyin-bdag*) as used in the diaspora carries with it the implication of whiteness: a black or Asian *sbyin-bdag* is basically unimaginable.

Produced by encounters with sponsorship in South Asia, these racialized imaginings are reinforced in the United States. In Boulder, Colorado, for example, about ten local families—all white, mostly upper middle class—volunteered as immigrant sponsors for the TUSR. As with participants in the Resettlement Project elsewhere, in Boulder Tibetans lived in their sponsors’ homes for several months, depending on them for transportation, food, finding employment, and adjusting to life in the USA. In many cities, Tibetan participants traded babysitting services for English lessons, or studied English while living in their sponsors’ homes. As a result, they are understandably and very genuinely grateful to their sponsors. Because of the continued economic need for sponsors in the community, however, the larger effect is that, whether in South Asia or the USA, virtually every white person is seen as a potential sponsor. Thus, Tibetans find themselves being deferential, polite, and generous to the white people they encounter, because of the possibilities of private sponsorship, as well as of recruitment as supporters for the Tibetan cause.

Western sponsors are attracted to supporting Tibetan refugees through a combination of romantic Western images of Tibetans, the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism has traveled to the West, and the discursive practices of the Tibetan government in exile and the Tibet Movement. The Tibet Movement presents Tibetans as the most deserving of victims, and as the true and authentic bearers of Tibetan culture—a culture (or, at least, a certain interpretation of it) that is now in great demand among those disillusioned with contemporary Western society. Moreover, Tibetans are acutely aware of the disappointment of some of their erstwhile sponsors (as explained above by Diehl, 2002), and strive both consciously and unconsciously to present themselves as more deserving subjects, through the forms of representation and identification that have been designated as ‘successful’ by Tibetan Buddhist institutions and the Tibet Movement.

These discursive practices of the transnational Tibet Movement and Tibetan government in exile, and the growing fascination with Tibetan Buddhism in the USA, encourage Tibetans to understand themselves as superior to other kinds of transnational migrants. When Jetsun Pema, younger sister of the 14th Dalai Lama, spoke at a Tibetan community gathering in Boulder, Colorado in 2003, she remarked that no matter where Tibetans have gone, host communities have always appreciated Tibetans more than any other group of migrants, because of their religion and their inherent likeability. She gave the example of Switzerland, where she claimed, “they don’t usually like immigrants that much, but they appreciated us Tibetans being there.”

With Tibet and the plight of Tibetans couched by the Tibetan government in exile and the Tibet Movement for so long as a case of ‘violated specialness’ (Barnett, 2001), it is not surprising that Tibetans come to think of themselves in those terms. Thus, in stark contrast to Cambodians, for whom “the negative associations of the term refugee (welfare dependent or welfare cheat) have become so strong that some Hmong and Cambodian Americans have taken to denying their national origins in casual encounters with mainstream Americans, claiming some other ancestry, such as Thai” (Ong, 2003, page 86), Tibetans are rewarded for articulating their Tibetanness.

Tibetan Buddhist institutions, particularly the institution of the Dalai Lama himself, also attract a great deal of respect for and curiosity about Tibetan culture. This in turn helps to confirm both an affinity for white people within the USA and a feeling that Tibetans are the most deserving of all refugees, immigrants, and minorities.

These understandings are pervasive and ingrained in everyday consciousness. In Boulder, Colorado, for example, a steady stream of visiting lamas gives teachings at Naropa University and the Shambhala Center. In a conversation with the authors about Tibetans in the USA, one visiting religious teacher stated:

“The Dalai Lama has earned a good name for us Tibetans. No matter where we go, people respect us, thanks to the Dalai Lama’s reputation and efforts. If Tibetans do not behave properly, sooner or later they will kick us out of their country. It’ll be our own fault.”

He further added:

“The only thing we Tibetans can be proud of possessing is Tibetan Buddhism.”

These understandings also work through institutions like Naropa and Shambhala, both of whose clientele are almost exclusively wealthy and white, and which proliferate and magnify the image of spiritual Tibetans. Tibetans recognize that the patrons of such institutions work to increase the visibility of Tibetans, painting them in a favorable light as deserving of respect as well as assistance. Tibetans also view these institutions as playing a crucial role in promoting their own political interests. This is the case despite the social distance between local Tibetans in Boulder and the institutions of Naropa and Shambhala, which stems partly from religious sectarian politics as well as from the fact that these institutions were founded long before the arrival of most Tibetans now living in Boulder, and are structured to appeal specifically to a white audience. Nevertheless, such institutions ‘whiten’ Tibetans by making them seem like more deserving subjects. But, at the same time, Tibetans are subjected to a process in which they view their own self-worth through the spectacles of white patrons. To qualify as especially deserving in their eyes, Tibetans must be superior to other minorities and migrants. In this way, Tibetans are pushed to internalize their own ‘whiteness’ in contrast to other minority groups.

We hasten to emphasize that our argument is not merely that Tibetans consciously manipulate their ‘presentations of self’ in a Goffmanesque way while ‘onstage’ in the presence of white people who are read as potential sponsors, Buddhists, and political supporters (Goffman, 1959). Although this rational and calculated form of self-representation does indeed occur, as we explore further below, perhaps even more important are the ways in which the repetition of such performances itself constitutes subjectivity, and how this subjectivity is inscribed on the body. In other words, it forms a series of bodily dispositions, or habitus. As Bourdieu writes:

“The social world is full of calls to order which function as such only for individuals who are predisposed to notice them and which... trigger deep-rooted bodily dispositions without passing through consciousness and calculation” (2000, page 176).

Bourdieu’s emphasis on the body as a structured medium which is predisposed to subtle and unconscious forms of habits, gestures, and orientations has not been adequately explored in the analysis of transnational migrant subjectivity. Our point in calling attention to habitus here is that Tibetans are produced as seemingly more ‘deserving’ subjects not just through their own conscious agency or that of their sponsors, but also through the unconscious dispositions created through repeated interactions. Though these bodily dispositions are often unconscious, they are also the product of constraints which result from Tibetans’ subordinate positioning. Indeed, they can be understood as the product of compulsion in the sense that “all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat” (Butler, 1999, page 185). Interpersonal relationships between a Tibetan migrant and his or her sponsor, like all interpersonal relationships, are “never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships” as “the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction” (Bourdieu, 1977, pages 81 – 82). Instead, sponsor – Tibetan relationships carry with them

present and past structural positions of domination and subordination, and are the product both of individual and of collective practices and histories (Bourdieu, 1977, pages 81–82).

Hip-hop, blackness, and Tibetan youth

Habits of deference and respect are particularly noticeable at Tibetan community gatherings. Whether in Colorado or California, white friends and patrons are always treated with elaborate politeness and given front-row seats at community events. While the smiles and gestures of deference may be unconsciously inscribed on the body, Tibetan community leaders also very deliberately deliver speeches in English, rather than Tibetan, so that guests can understand. At least, this is the case as long as what is to be said relates to traditional Tibetan culture or the Tibetan political struggle. A particularly interesting example of this selective presentation was observed at a gathering on 10 December 2002, at which the Northern California Tibetan community came together to celebrate the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Vice-President of the Tibetan Association of Northern California, a prominent community leader and former principal of a Tibetan school, welcomed the audience in English and spoke at length about the patriotism of several former political prisoners in Tibet. Then he switched to Tibetan to warn about the loss of Tibetan culture, particularly among youth. In Tibetan, he stated:

“Whether or not Tibet dies depends upon the Tibetan youth. If they imitate the ‘black-heads’ (referring to African Americans) and practice hip-hop, then there is no difference from the death of Tibet.”

After a series of warnings, which remained untranslated, he switched back to English to discuss the significance of the Dalai Lama's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize. Whether conscious or not, the English-language performances worked to feed romantic Western images of Tibetans as particularly deserving victims.

Just as significant as the selective presentation to the white audience, however, are the racial undertones of this community leader's speech. His interpretation of the younger generation's embrace of hip-hop style as an imitation of black culture in the USA, and the conflation of this with the death of the Tibetan struggle, and thus with the death of Tibet itself, shows some of the unintended consequences of the process of whitening. The speech was particularly ironic given that this community leader is also the father of a young man who, like Tendola, is well known for highly visible hip-hop attire: tremendously baggy pants, gold chains, Phat Farm shoes, and so forth. The adoption of these styles generates a great deal of intergenerational tension among Tibetans in the USA, as it seems to embody a visible rejection of traditional Tibetan appearance and behavior. Community leaders, and those who take seriously the task given to them by the Tibetan government in exile to act as cultural ambassadors, routinely mock Tibetan youth—the men for their large trousers and the women for their skimpy outfits (for example, “Cloth must be in short supply these days!”) According to Tendola:

“Although I don't do anything bad, I have a bad reputation among Tibetans... Some people stare at me and laugh behind my back. But I don't really give a shit.”

The strategic deployment of Tibetan ‘culture’ for the mobilization of political support leaves little space for these youth. As a result they are virtually invisible in Tibetan self-representations. No photographs of these youths are found on Tibet support group websites, or those of Tibetan associations across the USA. They are ignored by the TYC. Instead, because they seem so far removed from the idealized and romanticized image that is believed to be needed for the ‘Tibetan cause’, they are marginalized and seen as a source of embarrassment to the community.

Transnational discourses of Tibetan cultural preservation, which work through the speech and actions of community leaders (including the parents of hip-hop-styled youth), construe these youth as inauthentic, despite the fact that these same youth claim in interviews to identify strongly as Tibetan, and despite their frequent active participation in Tibetan demonstrations and protests.

This discourse of authenticity, and its associated fear of nontraditional cultural and artistic expression, also constrains Tibetan youth identity in South Asia, as shown in Diehl's (2002) study of Tibetan rock musicians and Harris's (1997) work with modern Tibetan artists. In Dharamsala particularly, "the Tibetan government-in-exile's hegemonic public representation of the group's identity... [and] a hyperliteral understanding of the concept of 'cultural preservation'" leads to the "devaluation or dismissal by many Tibetans of the potential for culturally syncretic or nontraditional forms of expression" such as Tibetan rock and roll (Diehl, 2002, pages 266–267). However, whereas the objection to rock and roll in India grows out of a broad reaction to anything that is not construed to 'preserve culture', the embarrassment over hip-hop in the USA is also shot through with specific racialized understandings. When asking older Tibetans about hip-hop, we found that their first response was almost always to question the appropriateness of 'imitating blacks'.

Why, then, do some young Tibetans participate in hip-hop subculture—itsself a transnational movement that is arguably more visible and certainly more profitable than the Tibet Movement? First, place matters. Although found across Tibetan communities in the United States, the consumption of hip-hop music and style is particularly popular and visible in large multiethnic urban areas such as San Francisco and New York. In San Francisco young Tibetans' forms of dress and behavior resemble those described by Ong for Cambodian teenagers. She notes that Cambodian and other minority 'gang'⁽⁴⁾ members do not draw their repertoire of symbols and signs from white gangs. Instead, for them, "at stake are the material and symbolic forms that sustain individual and community in opposition to dominant white cultural prescriptions and meanings... . There was a recognized ethno-racial ranking of powerful outlaw symbols, with African American gangs supplying most of the original naming forms, sartorial styles, language and gestures that constituted a constellation of aggressive and subversive meanings" (Ong, 2003, page 240). In contrast, in the smaller and much whiter community of Boulder, a significantly smaller proportion of young Tibetans have adopted hip-hop style. Indeed, Tibetan residents of Colorado reported being 'shocked' after visiting San Francisco for an annual West Coast gathering in 2004. According to one Tibetan in his early thirties, "compared to the ones in San Francisco, Boulder area [Tibetan] teenagers are angels."

Second, Tibetan hip-hop stylists are for the most part those young enough to have arrived as family members of participants in the TUSRP. As a result of their families' immigrant status, these youth are significantly less concerned with the search for sponsors than are other Tibetans. More importantly, arriving in the USA at a younger age, they have encountered racial issues through a very different set of structural circumstances than their parents had. In particular, they have experienced junior high or high school in the USA, where they have been negatively stereotyped as new Asian immigrants, and at the same time been pressured to emulate the dominant style in the schools they found themselves in. Tendola says of his own early days in the USA that he "used to look like 'an F.O.B.' ['fresh off the boat']" but that he has dramatically changed his appearance since then. Similarly, a recent high school graduate referred to other Tibetan women who wear 'normal' clothes and do not dye their hair blonde as FOBs; she viewed herself as more American in comparison—someone who knows how to dress.

⁽⁴⁾ Ong uses the term 'gang' here to describe loose networks and same-sex social groups, not necessarily connected to criminal activities.

Thus, for these youth, as for the many South Asian Americans who have adopted hip-hop music and style, “their ethnic and national identification processes use cultural commodities in ways peculiar to the racial politics and late capitalistic economy of the US” (Maira, 2000, page 331). As a multibillion dollar industry, used to sell soft drinks, cars, and clothing, hip-hop has been accused of “merely display[ing] in phantasmagorical form the cultural logic of late capitalism” (Rose, 1994, page 22). Indeed, young Tibetans like Tendola spend upwards of US \$500 for a set of brand-name shoes, jerseys, pants, chains, and accessories, an expenditure particularly out of proportion with their income (though not, we would note, so different from the proportional expenditures for stylish clothing among young Tibetans in Kathmandu or Lhasa, or even the purchase of pelts and precious stones for jewelry throughout Tibet). Hip-hop, in other words, cannot be understood simply as an antihegemonic and authentic African-American art form (Weheliye, 2001, page 292). Nevertheless, it does continue to be associated with black nationalism (Decker, 1993), and for these particularly positioned Tibetan youth, hip-hop speaks to the ability to ‘fit in’, to be stylish and cool, and, in many cases, to express frustration at what they complain of as older Tibetans’ excessive subservience to ‘white society’.

These associations and meanings can be seen at two basketball courts in Berkeley which serve as key hang-out places for young Tibetan men. On any given evening between 7 and 9 pm, some dozen or more Tibetans in their late teens and early twenties gather to shoot baskets. Of course, the courts are not just places to play basketball: they are also places to meet their friends, share stories, break dance, talk about music, show off their clothes, and engage in activities unacceptable to their parents and other authorities—smoke marijuana, drink hard liquor, urinate in public, and use plenty of Tibetan and English obscenities. As with the Cambodian ‘gangs’, these young Tibetan men’s expressions of masculinity and cultural vibrancy “cannot be dissociated with the disruption, delinquency, and violence in public life that increase their ‘nuisance power’ in the eyes of authorities” (Ong, 2003, page 241). Basketball court activities are also associated with other behaviors of concern. A number of Tibetan parents across the USA recently expressed “deep concern about patterns of delinquency among a growing number of Tibetan youth since moving to North America ... in particular among boys ... challenging parental authority, gang involvement, substance abuse, school truancy, and dropping out of school” (CTAC, 2002, page 13), and, we would add, encounters with authorities around motor vehicle violations. Though quite different in their practical effects (for example, violent behavior versus swearing a lot), all of these behaviors tend to be conflated with each other and with hip-hop. For the youth, all are powerful rebuttals to the deferent behavior of other Tibetans; at the same time, they all further ‘blacken’ the youth in the eyes of their elders.

In addition to the physical space of the basketball court, these Tibetan teens also meet in the virtual spaces of Tibetan websites, where they ‘battle’ one another. The Bay Area teens identify themselves as ‘West coast rappers’, a brand name which they take very seriously, to distinguish themselves from Tibetans on the East coast. Each rapper adopts a pseudonym. For instance, one is known as ‘Money money’ because he so frequently sang a rap song with the lyrics, “Money, money, money”. Teenage females have also picked internet names, like “Bootylicious”, named in this case after their favorite female singers’ lyrics. As Cornyetz (1994, page 120) has argued in relation to hip-hop, racial desire, and fetishized blackness in Japan, such self-naming is a means of inscribing self-articulation: “from the indeterminacy of the mix of self and other, the naming proclaims subjectivity”.

On the internet ‘battlefield,’ the rhymes attached to these names tend to be misogynistic and full of obscenities. They also frequently glorify liquor, marijuana, violence, and

fast cars. One basketball court regular raps on an Internet space known by its users as '5-10' (after the area code):

"drinkin Oe and sip Bacardi that's a 510 thang // smoke weed and get pussy thats a 510 thang//We aLwayz Stay blued up Cuz THats wat we bang // BLunTs Filled with KiLLa Duv chu can even hang // ...if dont get it then likpa sa // cuz we use words like pango and that girl got a fat lai // nigga dont know than ask mahh nigga tai..." (9 November 2001).

In addition, the Tibetan teens explicitly identify in some ways with African-American culture, referring to each other as 'nigga', or sometimes 'black' (*nagpo*) and having discussions about the appropriateness of Ebonics:

"Hi WasSup Paranoid ... // welz, i m one of da ppl. in da chat room who usez ebonics...n i honestly don't think dere ish anything wrong w/it. I noticed dat a few ppl. had problem w/meeh usin' Ebonics but I juss don't care wat dey say... / wel, ebonics duzn't abuse English language... Dat'z it fo now..." (24 October 2000).

A few, however, rap explicitly about racism, expressing a much more accepting view about Tibetan belonging in the larger category 'Asian Americans' than do older Tibetans who were not raised in the USA (who emphasize Tibetan uniqueness):

"ThiS l is for all my asains..... StanD uP and FiGht if u eva call me a chink // i'll drown u in my kitchen sink // ... // half of u poeples are jus stereotypical // ... // to all my azains get up stand up // like Bob Marely cuase we fed up // and we aint gonna let up // ask me agian if i know kung fu // i'll take out my blade and cut // cut u up into peices like pizza and deliver u before 30 minutes is due // ... // we got cars that can't even match up to yur price// girls so hot they melt ice// as long as im asian im reppin my pride // ain't got nuttin to hide // always got a phat ride // and grls world-wide // this is an asian invasion // got lov weather u tibetan or malayasian // so we don't need no hateration // cause we the next generation // ... muthafukaz.....recongize and respect.....thas a wrap" (24 November 2001).

Perhaps most interesting, though, is the invocation of Tibet in some of the rhymes. Several of the teens frequently make references to their identities as Tibetans, though through the form of African-American hip-hop. In this example, the author, one of the basketball court teens, portrays himself as a direct victim of Chinese oppression, even though he has never been to Tibet:

"... i remain silence in Tibet cuz of tha chinese regulation // now that i got tha right of speech, i bust our words that can fill out tha whole ocean // now dont try to get into too deep // cuz i smoke you out like smoking weed // scared tha fuuck outta you that you won't even dare to speak" (3 November 2001).

Others make culturally specific Tibetan references, such as to reincarnation:

"... if failed, no option but to digest bullets into ya chest // and rest in peace and follow your fate // n i'll be wishing you to reincarnate // again in tha body of a human being wid a soul of a MC who comes back to battle // but not to regulate..." (3 November 2001),

to Tibetan snow leopards:

"like a mosquito, i suck up your bloods like a juice // gettin your muscles loose // and then i'll finish you off like imma hungry Tibetan snow leopard killin' a moose" (13 November 2001),

to Buddhism:

"Be thankful that I didn't break your girls virginity // and just cause im Buddhist, Imma atleast leave you with some dignity" (28 November 2001),

and to monasteries:

"you lost so jus admit // while yo ass is monastic // my shiet is fantasticno im not sarcastic" (13 November 2001).

Hip-hop subculture gives these younger Tibetans a sense of active engagement in popular culture, projecting an image that is stylish, modern, associated with freedom, and definitely not white. These meanings are quite at odds with the interpretations of other Tibetans, such as community leaders who conflate hip-hop not only with delinquency and encounters with legal authorities, but also with an “embarrassing imitation of blacks” and therefore “the death of Tibet”. Some bemoan that the younger generation “only looks down, not up” and “only imitate the bad, not the good” in US society. For Tibetan youth, on the other hand, as for hipsters in Japan (Cornyetz, 1994; Wood, 1997), second-generation South Asians in New York City (Maira, 2000), and many others, hip-hop means, above all, the ultimate in being ‘cool’. As these Internet raps show, hip-hop subculture is also engaged with essentialized notions of Tibetan identity which stand in “dialectical relation with a cultural complex of ideas about being ‘young,’ ‘urban’ and ‘hip’ that is not without its own notions of authenticity” (Maira, 2000, page 337).

In its association with an authentic ‘coolness’ and its rebellion against dominant white culture, Tibetan youth see hip-hop as an answer to the nostalgic lifestyle that ‘old fashioned’ older Tibetans appear to lead. At the same time, these young Tibetans also see their hip-hop cool as perfectly compatible with their own authentic ‘Tibetanness’. In interviews, these youth, who were educated in particular meanings of Tibetanness through the schools and other institutions of the Tibetan government in exile in South Asia, referred frequently to the goals of the Tibet Movement as their own goals. Many of these youth are very vocal about their politics and enthusiastic participants in Tibet Movement marches and rallies; some are particularly active in protesting and disrupting the visits of high-profile Chinese officials. They also stated that being Tibetan was an essential quality: being Tibetan is “in my blood. You know what I am saying. My parents are Tibetan. They are from Tibet.” One said that he “becomes nationalistic” when “I hear about people suffering in Tibet—for instance, when I hear about destruction of monasteries, logging of enormous amounts of trees, and torture of Tibetans by the Chinese.” One explained that he believed that Tibetan independence would be achieved “because we are very humble, and we have a peace leader like the Dalai Lama and people respect him.” He also thought that “maybe after 3 to 4 years we might have Tibetan rappers who will spread awareness among people [about Tibetan independence] and we will make many fans. Then we might win Tibet back with their support.”

Thus, the identity of these Tibetan teens is truly transnational, through their connections both to the transnational Tibetan struggle and to transnational youth hip-hop culture. Their identities are “(re)worked not in a freewheeling manner but through simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society” (Huang et al, 2000, page 392). However, this particular way of articulating Tibetan identity is not authorized; it is not allowed to speak as Tibetan (the web ‘battleground’ was cancelled by the Tibetan community web forum to which it was linked). This is because it is unrecognizable from the perspective of the Tibetan identity which has served so well as a platform for transnational Tibetan political organizing. The successful articulation of a Tibetan diasporic identity by the Tibet Movement functions for these youth as a constraint, confining and policing the boundaries of dominant cultural representation.

Before turning to other consequences of this particular type of articulation of authentic Tibetan identity, we should clarify that it is not our intention to overly romanticize the Tibetan youth embrace of hip-hop. The misogynistic language of many of the rhymes cannot be ignored, especially because it has drawn much less criticism from other Tibetans than have the racialized aspects of the style and lyrics. One young hip-hop enthusiast said frankly of the lyrics:

“They disrespect girls. Especially in Gangsta rap. They use words like ‘bitch’ and ‘whores’.”

Dominant discourses of masculinity and heterosexuality, particularly in high school settings, pressure young Tibetan men to adopt this language. Tendola explains:

“I used to wear tighter pants in India. But now if I wear such clothes people will call me a fag and stuff... They will tease you saying you look like girl... [Now] I tease other kids... I tell them they look like fags.”

Tibetan female teenagers’ embrace of hip-hop also needs further exploration. Like their Cambodian counterparts, young Tibetan women are heavily pressured to stay at home, do domestic work, and be ‘good girls’; thus they are less visible in the public sphere than are young men. Nevertheless, many also inscribe their bodies with signs of difference by dyeing, braiding, and corn-rowing their hair, and performing hip-hop dances at talent shows. At a Seattle gathering, for example, the use of the Dalai Lama’s throne as a prop for a hip-hop performance by three dyed-blond and scantily dressed Tibetan teens caused quite a stir. As far as we know, though, young Tibetan women have not thus far offered feminist critiques or countered with their own raps in the manner of Queen Latifah, MC Lyte, or Sarah Jones, among others (Bost, 2001).

Transnational political identity as regulatory regime

Tibetan youth who adopt hip-hop styles are rendered invisible and are not authorized by other Tibetans to speak as authentic Tibetans, even though they understand their own Tibetanness to be ‘in their blood’. The authorized articulation of only one authentic Tibetan identity—one which has worked successfully as a rallying point in the transnational struggle for Tibetan independence—has the unintended consequence of acting as a constraint, and even as an instrument of oppression. It denies alternative articulations of Tibetan identities by younger Tibetan migrants in the USA. In other words, identity categories are regulatory regimes: they can have progressive or liberatory effects at some scales and in some arenas while at the same time having effects that are symbolically or physically violent in others. In this last section, we explore three sets of consequences of the encounter between these articulations of Tibetan identity and the US logic of racial bipolarism: internalized racism; representations of mental illness; and community reactions to violence.

In a few short years many Tibetans in the USA have internalized both the stereotype of the ‘model minority’ and the belief in their right to occupy that subject-position. Although some degree or form of ethnocentrism seems manifest in virtually all groups, we argue here that beliefs about Tibetans as particularly deserving are unique in the way that they are encouraged through sponsorship and political and religious representations. This extends, as we have seen, to internalized racism against other minorities in the USA, particularly African Americans, which plays out through myriad everyday ways. An elder brother of a Tibetan hip-hop stylist, for example, frequently made derogatory comments in Tibetan about an African–American worker under his supervision, and was eventually accused of racial discrimination in the workplace, while his younger brother rapped against what he saw as Tibetan subservience to whites.

Many Tibetans are dismayed by, and speak out against, youth hip-hop styles precisely because of their association with blackness. Although Tibetan teenagers express their admiration of African–American classmates in school, saying that they are “not afraid to speak out” and “know how to enjoy themselves”, these teens in fact spend most of their ‘hanging out’ time with other Tibetans. A Tibetan teenager explained to us that she gets along with black men and finds them attractive, but relationships with African Americans are actually extremely rare—unlike interracial relationships between Tibetans

and Caucasians, which are quite common. When Tibetans do become romantically involved with African Americans, they meet with severe disapproval—as in the case of one young Tibetan woman whose family tried to hide the fact that she was dating a black man, going so far as to uninvite her from her own brother's wedding.

The internalization of whiteness and racism play out in different ways in different places. Upon arriving in Boulder, Colorado, the authors complained to a long-time Tibetan resident about the whiteness and lack of diversity of the town. Tellingly, the long-time resident misunderstood the complaint as a compliment; he smiled smugly and affirmed:

“Yes, that's right. Black people can't afford to live here.”

Another wealthy and long-time Tibetan resident in a predominantly white area complained that his former Hispanic tenants lived “like animals” because they brought so many of their relatives to live in the small apartment—something which, of course, is quite a common strategy for new Tibetan migrants in the USA as well.

Representation of mental health is a second arena in which the process of articulating and maintaining an essentialized, if successful, transnational Tibetan identity can have negative material consequences at other scales. Social services and the ‘helping professions’ constitute a technology of governance through which subjects engage in particular forms of self-making (Ong, 2003). Mental health institutions, especially, have worked as powerful agents of normalization and marginalization in the USA. At the same time, however, the outright rejection of the possibility that some Tibetans might benefit from mental health care, of any type and whether provided by the community or state, is also a technology of control—though of Tibetan elites rather than the state.

A number of Tibetans have suffered from sudden depression, paranoia, and schizophrenia after arriving in the USA. One example is Tenzin, a Tibetan in his mid-twenties, who came to the USA from Nepal as a foreign student through a private sponsor. In 2002, as he was finishing his last year of college while also working part-time to send remittances home, he became ill with schizophrenia. After several months during which his condition progressively deteriorated, his behavior toward his roommates turned violent and he was hospitalized by city police. After he was sent back to Nepal by his sponsor, we found other Tibetans (young and old) who knew him were surprisingly unwilling to talk about what had happened, closing our attempts at conversations on this topic—in contrast to the more typical gossipy nature of talk about one's friends and former schoolmates. Several remarked that it was no wonder Tenzin became ‘crazy’—he had always been someone who ‘studied too much’. This, they said, must have addled his mind.

The possibility of incapacitating and sudden change in mental state does not fit with the representations promoted either by the Tibet Movement or by Tibetan Buddhist institutions. Tibetans are portrayed as iron-willed political activists who fight Chinese oppression, not victims of the vagaries of flexible capitalism and a racialized job market; they should be spiritually pure and mentally advanced, and thus have no need for mental health care. Indeed, when the subject of mental illness arises, some Tibetans refer to a speech that the Dalai Lama gave to a gathering of Tibetans in New York after his teaching in Central Park in 1999. The Dalai Lama advised Tibetans to relax and carry a positive outlook rather than allow themselves to become depressed, telling them that, “If you think you are all alone in the big city [that is, those who are depressed or lonely], all you have to do is go outside and see that you are surrounded by millions of people.” This implied to its listeners that mental illnesses are essentially self-inflicted.

The absence of available assistance for dealing with these conditions in the USA stands in contrast to situations we are familiar with in Tibetan communities, both in

South Asia and in Tibet, where a variety of prayer ceremonies, rituals, and other healing techniques are used. In South Asia, if these techniques fail, families usually consider doctors and government mental hospitals as well. At the very least, mental illness is the subject of talk: it may be stigmatized, but in the open and as a subject of conversation, rather than being repressed and made invisible. 'Allowing oneself to become depressed' is indeed believed by many to contribute to mental illness, but other explanations such as the inauspicious movement of the stars and other external obstacles are considered as well. The reluctance to acknowledge problems in the USA stems in part, then, from the politics of whiteness, which calls for Tibetans to be dignified subjects—deserving, but not needy. Admitting that some might need psychiatric care (given that other forms of care are generally not available) is tantamount to admitting that Tibetans might, in fact, be less 'special' and more like other migrants (and thus, perhaps, less deserving of individual sponsorship or political support) than most would care to believe. It would 'blacken' Tibetans in the sense of coding them as 'at-risk subjects'—at risk of not becoming "self-motivated, self-propelling, and freedom-loving American citizen[s]" (Ong, 2003, page 14). In this sense, the identity which has been so successfully articulated for Tibetans at a transnational political scale has very different effects at the scales of communities and bodies.

Third, a rape case in a Tibetan community in the USA several years ago illustrates the potentially violent effects of these identifications and representations. An adult Tibetan man is alleged to have raped a minor Tibetan girl in her own home while her mother was away. Afterwards, the majority of Tibetan residents in the area, including many Tibetan women as well as the official community association, pressured the victim and her mother not to report the case to the police—explicitly because of intense fear that this would reflect negatively upon the entire Tibetan community. Tibetan men and women supported the Tibetan man and silenced the victim in the service of the ability to continue articulating a particular Tibetan identity.

Conclusion

We have argued that Tibetan migrants in the USA are positioned simultaneously at both the black and the white poles of the racial spectrum of perceived moral claims to privilege and advantage. The hegemonic racialization of class positions suggests that they, like poor Cambodian migrants, are the 'underclass' and thus are placed at the lower end of the spectrum of status and dignity—as undeserving subjects. But at the same time as Tibetans are found in the same jobs (sometimes literally) as Cambodian refugees, the discursive production of Tibetans, both as the most deserving of victims and as repositories of spiritual wisdom, 'whitens' them—making them seem more worthy than other migrants. This process of whitening is strengthened by the need for individual (white) sponsorship; these repeated interactions are inscribed on bodies through habits and dispositions that reinforce the production of Tibetans as particularly deserving subjects. This is why Tibetan youth adoption of hip-hop bodily stylizations seem so objectionable to other Tibetans; their association with blackness positions Tibetans toward the 'black' pole of moral unworth and low status, exactly opposite to the effect that the transnational Tibet Movement has worked so hard to achieve.

This exploration of the identities, subjectivities, and everyday practices of transnational Tibetan migrants in the USA has followed Bailey et al's (2002, page 140) argument that "theorists should reconsider the idea that hybrid spaces are...removed from situated practices" by focusing on daily life and situated daily practices. Our findings contribute to arguments and reminders made by a number of geographers (for example, Mitchell, 1997; Pratt and Yeoh, 2003) that there is nothing inherently emancipatory about

transnationalism; instead, its effects are “contradictory and complex, and must be assessed within specific times and places” (Pratt and Yeoh, 2003, page 259). In particular, the internalization of racist norms through a process of whitening shows that there is nothing inherently progressive about transnational migrant identities, although that potential does, indeed, exist.

Furthermore, Tibetan youth adoption of hip-hop style shows that transnationalism is not a single condition but, rather, can only be understood within specific histories and geographies of mobility. Intergenerational struggles over the ‘blackness’ associated with hip-hop style results in part from the ways in which community elites and young immigrants position their own style codes differently within racialized political–economic hierarchies and within other transnational movements and flows of styles and capital. At the same time, we have argued that the focus of much writing on Tibetan transnational mobilization has been celebratory precisely because it has focused on an identity that functions as a useful platform of struggle at the transnational scale. However, these same articulations of identity, if they rigidly foreclose other significations, can have unfortunate effects. In other words, transnational identities can function as double-edged sword, acting both as enablers and as constraints.

Finally, through the analysis of how the Tibet Movement and Tibetan youth hip-hop styles encounter each other through the logic of racial bipolarism, we have shown that lived places, generation, and agency matter because of the ways in which different migrants are interpellated by different transnational discourses. The complex ways in which Tibetans have been inserted into American racial bipolarism show that there is no singular transnational space, nor any singular local space. Recent work in geography has suggested that efforts to ‘ground’ transnational discourse have been “unhelpfully dominated by an overemphasis in identifying transnational migrant and diasporic communities” (Crang et al, 2003, page 438). However, we hope that this paper, describing the way in which Tibetans’ unique historical positionings have both whitened and blackened them within US racial politics, has opened up some space to continue a conversation about the politics of transnational migration.

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