

## Chapter One

### Introduction

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Clinging to the Himalayan mountainside, midway between the Indian market town of Dharamsala and the former British hill-station of McLeod Ganj, is a cluster of low buildings: the headquarters of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. A bell rings and several dozen people drift out of a two-storey building, the women in traditional Tibetan *chubas*, the men either in dark *chubas* or in maroon monks' robes. They mingle on the veranda, sipping tea, flicking through budget reports and catching up on the political gossip. The second bell sends the Members of Parliament scurrying back to their seats, where the newly installed cable-TV camera is trained on them, broadcasting their every word into Tibetan homes in McLeod Ganj.

Crossing the square in front of the parliament building, I enter the Department of Home, where the mildewed walls and peeling layers of paint are evidence of decades of monsoon rains and attempted repairs. The office of the Additional Secretary is typical of Tibetan Government offices throughout India. There's a photograph of the Dalai Lama, a map of Tibet and one of India, a panorama photograph of the Tibetan capital Lhasa and a promotional calendar from a local Indian printer hopeful for a renewed contract. The Additional Secretary explains to me over Tibetan tea and Indian biscuits that he is currently evaluating agricultural yields from settlements in Orissa, liaising with the Department of Health over a TB awareness programme, and heading a committee to oversee locally elected assemblies. Next door, the Department of Security is screening applications for 'Indian Registration Certificates for Tibetans', with batches of forms ready to be dispatched to the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi. At the Department of Information and International Relations the Minister is preparing for a press conference on recent events inside Tibet, and over at the Department of Finance applications are being filed for the 'Green

Book', the exile Tibetan identity document that every 'bona fide Tibetan' must hold, but which neither permits the holder to travel, nor offers any legal security.

There is both a familiar mundanity to this scene of bureaucratic busyness, and a sense of 'out of place-ness' (Cresswell 1996). Tibetans in the monsoon rains of India, Members of Parliament in monastic robes and individuals 'playing' at being state bureaucrats and foreign ministers. This might catch our attention as a somewhat intriguing set-up, but it is also one that is easy to dismiss. No government or state legally recognises the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGiE).<sup>1</sup> This institution has no legal jurisdiction over territory in Tibet or in exile, it operates within the sovereign state of India, and it is vilified as a 'separatist political group campaigning against the motherland' by the Chinese Government (Zhu Wei-qun cited in Aiming 2011: 8). At first glance, therefore, this government-in-exile appears to be both a powerless pawn in Asian geopolitics and simply another political 'oddy' on the margins of the inter-state system.

But this book is a call to pause a little longer, and to consider both the everyday practicalities and the wider repercussions of what is going on here. In what follows I consider how this exiled and unrecognised government is able to function, what the hopes and goals of its leadership are, and what this case might be able to tell us about the nature of state-like governance more generally. For, though their legal authority is extremely limited, the over 3000 staff of the TGiE are nevertheless attempting to play the state game. And it is the metaphor of play, in the theatrical as well as the ludic sense, that I want to suggest can offer a revealing lens, both for viewing the particularities of this state-like non-state, and for examining the nature of everyday state practices and the pedestal upon which statehood continues to be placed.

Two questions are at the core of this book. First, *how* does the TGiE enact state-like functions from its situation of exile in India and a lack of legal recognition? And, second, *why* is such work put into emulating, or mimicking (cf. Bhabha 1984), this particular form of political organization? In order to address these, the chapters that follow are an exploration of this state-in-waiting; a set of institutions, performances and actors through which the exiled community is practising stateness with the broader aim of one day employing it 'for real' back in the homeland. Or, to frame it in another way, this is a 'rehearsal state', complete with playwrights (the Dalai Lama and, increasingly, the elected Tibetan Prime Minister), designated roles amongst the Tibetan civil service, a dedicated rehearsal space in the exile settlements and audiences ranging from the host state India to the Chinese government and the international community more widely. Through chapters that take aspects of rehearsal in turn – settings, roles, scripts and audiences – I argue that this metaphor speaks to the situation of exile stateness in important ways. First, rehearsal has an inherent but ambiguous temporality: rehearsal is done in anticipation of the 'real' event, but could be indefinite. Second, rehearsal depends on participation, on practice, and on developing

expertise, but it also presents the challenge of how to keep people engaged with the broader project. Finally, contingent on belief in a script, in the playwright and in there actually *being* a final performance, rehearsal denotes a deliberate and self-conscious political project.

In tracing out this idea of rehearsing stateness, the book draws on and brings together a series of conceptual debates from political geography, political anthropology and critical international relations. At the core are intersections between post-foundational literature on the everyday state – including the idea of state performances and the relationship between the state and territory – and geographies of temporality. The latter bring into dialogue work on exile and prolonged waiting on the one hand, and ideas around anticipating and imagining futures on the other. Such engagement with theoretical interests around the state, performance, space and time is premised on the assertion that, whilst certainly an unusual political configuration, the exiled Tibetan polity is certainly not unique. As such, the discussion that unfolds in the following pages is set against two key contexts. First is to situate the role and functioning of the TGiE within what is a diverse range of non-state polities, from protectorates and leased territories to de facto states and virtual nations. Second, in focusing on a community that resides *in* but is not *of* South Asia, the following chapters tack between this case and questions of governance, territory and statehood within the Tibet/China/South Asian regional context.

## The Case of Exile Tibet

Controversy surrounds the legal, territorial and political status of Tibet. In broad brushstrokes, Chinese authorities maintain that Tibet has been and remains an inalienable part of China's territory (People's Republic of China 1992), whilst Tibetans and their supporters assert that Tibet existed as an independent sovereign state prior to the Chinese occupation in 1949 (DIIR 1996; McCorquodale & Orosz 1994). Tibet is also a nation and territory that has long captured the Western imagination and, to a lesser extent, international media headlines. While the focus of recent attention has been on Chinese government crackdowns on unrest inside Tibet, international 'Free Tibet' protests and the Dalai Lama's meetings with world leaders, this book turns critical attention to a key but often overlooked player in the 'Tibet issue': the Tibetan Government-in-Exile.

In 1950, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Chamdo in eastern Tibet, and by 1951 had declared Tibet's 'peaceful liberation'. Eight years later, the PLA crushed the Tibetan national uprising in the capital Lhasa, and the Dalai Lama and around 80,000 Tibetans crossed the Himalayas to seek refuge in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Today, the Tibetan diaspora numbers over 128,000, with 74% residing in self-contained settlements and scattered communities in India (Planning Commission 2010).<sup>2</sup> On 29 April 1960 the Dalai Lama re-established the

Tibetan government in the north Indian town of Dharamsala, with the twin task of restoring freedom in Tibet and rehabilitating the Tibetan refugees. Over the following decades the exiled Tibetan community, under the leadership of the Dalai Lama and more recently the democratically elected Tibetan 'Prime Minister', has developed, expanded and institutionalised the TGiE, an exilic political structure that is widely regarded as one of the best organised in the world.

A series of changes have been implemented to restructure the TGiE according to democratic principles and, following reforms in 1991, the government has developed a participatory democracy for the first time in Tibet's history. The Dalai Lama's retirement from political life in March 2011 and his transfer of political authority to the elected exile Tibetan Prime Minister (*Sikyong*) have heralded what is widely seen as a distinct new era of exile Tibetan politics. Meanwhile inside Tibet political tensions have been high since street protests across the plateau in 2008 and over 140 cases of self-immolation.<sup>3</sup> Any resolution to the 'Tibet issue' currently seems a distant dream, especially as the dialogue between Dharamsala and Beijing, begun in 1979, ground to a halt in June 2012 with the resignation of the Dalai Lama's two envoys. With the research for this book conducted between 2006 and 2012, it is against such a backdrop of political change and uncertainty that the following narrative unfolds.

Operating under the constitution-like 'Charter of Tibetans in Exile', the TGiE consists of a legislative parliament with members elected from the diaspora, a judiciary (albeit with limited powers) and an executive body (the *Kashag*) in charge of seven governmental departments. The exile administration's state-like functions include the organization of democratic elections, the provision of health and education services for Tibetans in India and Nepal, a 'voluntary' taxation system and the establishment of quasi embassies abroad. Such claims to legitimacy as the official representative of the Tibetan population are thus made despite being internationally unrecognised, having highly limited judicial and policing powers, and lacking de jure sovereignty over territory in Tibet and in exile. Analysing this situation of legitimacy without legality means going beyond the lenses through which the exile Tibetan case has been viewed to date: those of identity and nationalism (Klieger 1992; Yeh 2007), cultural preservation outside the homeland (Harris 1997; Korom 1997) and socio-cultural adaptation (Goldstein 1978; Subba 1990). Rather, *Rehearsing the State* places the institution of the TGiE centre stage, approaching this polity from a political geography perspective, and focusing on the under-researched issue of its state-like governance strategies within the sovereign space of India. As such, in disrupting conventional binaries of state/non-state, sovereign/non-sovereign and citizen/refugee my aim here is to suggest critical interventions both into how statehood is conceived of spatially and temporally, and into understandings of so-called anomalous polities striving to function in international politics today.

International politics is replete with examples of state-like functions being enacted in non-state-like places. From the Palestine Liberation Organization's

state-within-a-state in southern Lebanon in the 1970s, to the functioning of the Irish Free State from 1922 to 1937, and Libyan rebels building a parallel state in Benghazi in spring 2011. In placing the TGiE alongside such examples I am not seeking to compare like with like. Nor does this book engage in a project of categorising or classifying geopolitical ‘anomalies’. Not only is a systematic comparison of different polities beyond the remit of this case study-based research (cf. Caspersen 2012; Talmon 1998) but such an exercise arguably does not elucidate broader questions posed here about how and why such ‘anomalies’ enact distinctly state practices. Where points of comparison *are* made the focus is on parallel practices of ‘stateness’: the state-like performances, narratives and spaces that are common across communities denied legally recognised statehood. This book is therefore grounded in the perspective that, despite their relatively small population and territorial size, polities such as dependencies, stateless nations and de facto states can provide a valuable window on the nature of international politics. Following the argument that the ‘exceptional’ has something to tell us about the ‘normal’, an ethnographic focus on such polities’ everyday articulations of statehood exposes the contingent practices that underlie political power in so-called ‘conventional’ states.

### **The State as Aspirational: Thinking Across State Spaces, Temporalities and Performances**

These broader assertions are considered towards the end of the book; my task here is to sketch out the conceptual framing for the chapters that follow. This book is written from a political geography perspective, by which two key approaches are implied. First, that the relationship between power and space, and how this is articulated in different contexts, is of core concern. In this case, attention is focused on how an ostensibly territory-less polity is able to articulate a degree of sovereign authority and act in state-like ways and, in turn, on how this very ‘out of place-ness’ facilitates experimentation in governing strategies. Second, writing as a (political) geographer means adopting an integrative approach to theory and methodology. Human geography, in its contemporary guise, is in many ways an outward-looking discipline, and the arguments made in this book draw on, bring into dialogue and seek to speak back to a series of theoretical debates and approaches that have preoccupied scholars in political anthropology, critical strands of international relations and South Asian and Tibetan studies, as well as political geography.

The first of these sets of debates concerns understandings of the state. The state is certainly not the most intuitive conceptual lens through which to view the case of exile Tibet. For a start, this is a situation where the existence of a legally recognised state in the past is disputed and where a state in the future is not only inconceivable under existing political conditions, but is not currently

being demanded by the exiled elite. Indeed, if we are to follow legal definitions of the state as a juridical entity of the international system and a government as the exclusive coercive organisation that represents a state (Robinson 2013), then what Tibetans in exile have brought with them and have (re)constructed within India simply counts as neither. However, as the following chapters demonstrate, when viewed through the lens of everyday state practices, the seeming disjuncture of the conventional institution of the state and the case of exile Tibet shed valuable light on the contemporary nature of the state. Such a dialogue needs to be facilitated carefully, and a particular route through state theory has been chosen for this task.

The conventional collapsing of territory, authority and population into a 'single unproblematic actor: the sovereign state' (Biersteker & Weber 1996: 5) has been critiqued from many quarters. Inspired by post-structuralist, feminist and Marxist approaches, a range of scholars have challenged the ontology of the state, drawing on Foucault's ideas on governmentality to posit the state as an emergent ensemble of institutions (Corbridge et al. 2005; Scott 1998), and exploring the plural strategies through which political legitimacy is sought. Speaking to geographical scholarship on the everyday and prosaic state (Gill 2010; Mountz 2010; Painter 2006) this book asserts that, by thereby conceiving of the state not as something concrete there to be observed but rather as a structural effect (Mitchell 1991), then the TGiE does appear to have distinctly state-like attributes and functions. For, while the limitations of applying the concept of the state to this unrecognised exile polity will be woven through the book, central to the argument that follows is the power of 'the state' as an idea and an ideal to aspire to.

Such an assertion in and of itself is arguably not particularly original. Arguments for the 'death' of the state have been roundly challenged in recent years not only by geopolitical events, but also by geographers and political anthropologists, amongst others, who argue for the continued salience of the state model. However, by focusing on a case that is denied legally recognised statehood but nonetheless invests considerable time, effort and resources into enacting a series of state-like functions and practices, this book offers a novel lens onto this endurance of the state model. In addressing the question of why the idea of the state is so appealing to communities who are legally outside of the official state system, I develop the notion of statehood as aspirational. This speaks to, and contributes an original perspective on, debates around the state and affect (Aretxaga 2003; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Stoler 2007). For, whilst the affective qualities of the state have predominantly been understood as dominated by negative experiences (of fear, anxiety, suspicion), the case of the TGiE demonstrates a counter set of affective qualities focused around hope, aspiration and cultural security. Moreover, by focusing on the aims and ambitions of TGiE bureaucrats, the exile settlements as spaces of experimentation in state techniques and the TGiE's constitution and planning documents, the chapters that follow expose how the state as an idea is inherently interwoven with the state as a set of materialities (see Corbridge et al.

2005). I therefore seek to make a conceptual link between the idea of state effects (Mitchell 1991) and state affect.

Underpinning many of these post-foundational approaches to the state is the notion of performance, and I take inspiration from both sociological models of dramaturgy (Goffman 1959; Turner 1974) and work that draws on Judith Butler's (1990) understanding of performativity to explore how the image of a stable state is produced through everyday actions (Campbell 1992; C. Weber 1998). Building on this scholarship, this book adds the idea of rehearsal to other theatrical metaphors used to portray political relations at a range of scales such as mimicry (Bhabha 1984), the stage (Anderson 1996) and improvisation (Jeffrey 2013). By invoking the notion of 'rehearsal' this is therefore an exercise in representing the role and functioning of this exile polity in a way that brings to the fore the provisional and pedagogical dimensions of state practices and performances, and adds weight to assertions that states are in a continual situation of emergence (Jones 2012).

The framework of rehearsal developed in this book also brings to the fore the spatial and temporal contingency of the idea of the state. In terms of the former, this book contributes to debates around the relationship between the state and territory, and the idea of 'state-space' (Brenner et al. 2003) more specifically. As a polity with no jurisdiction over territory either in the homeland (Tibet) or in exile (TGiE operates on land leased from Indian federal states), this case opens up the key question of the extent to which territory is an essential prerequisite to the enactment of state functions and practices. This is a novel approach to examining territorial politics and the relationship between territory and the state as, rather than attending to issues of territorial disputes, conflicts or invasion/occupation, this is a case where territorial limitations have been creatively and innovatively worked around. This will be demonstrated most fully in Chapter 4, where I examine the TGiE's series of tiered government hierarchies, its networks of governmental technologies across India, and the material and symbolic importance placed on the exile settlements.

Finally, the idea of rehearsal developed in this book is a framework that encourages a convergence of thinking on the state and performance with questions of temporality. With the split mandate of dealing with immediate needs in exile and continuing the struggle for a future back in the homeland defining exile communities, cases such as the TGiE have a very particular and acute sense of political temporality. A key feature of exile is being stuck in limbo, of waiting. *Rehearsing the State* engages with a growing body of scholarship examining people's experiences of chronic waiting (e.g. Mains 2007) and, in doing so, it charts the Janus-faced nature of prolonged 'timepass' (Jeffrey 2010). On the one hand the debilitating disillusionment of being 'stuck' in exile, and on the other hand the productive aspects of waiting: of experimentation, preparation and reflection. Central to these more positive attributes is how the temporality of the future shapes the exile present. The exiled Tibetan leadership has, in

the past, explicitly stated that the purpose of the time in exile is to experiment with state practices in anticipation of implementing these within a future Tibet (Planning Council 1994). A very particular relationship between the state and temporality is thus being articulated here, and it is one that speaks to a growing body of literature on anticipatory action (Anderson 2010; Collier 2008). In the discussion that follows I set this focus on the forms of imagination, performance and calculation through which futures are made present alongside issues of prolonged waiting and the situation of exile. I thus ask what happens to these anticipatory logics when the time frame is extended indefinitely, and how futures are anticipated and acted upon at the scale of the nation.

### Researching a State-That-is-Not-a-State

The TGiE as an institution is, at first glance, a neatly definable entity. It has physical headquarters in Dharamsala with the material attributes of statehood (from a parliament chamber to courtrooms, shelves of official reports and letters headed with the government's emblem), its top bureaucrats have decades of experience, and it has an active media and online presence. Yet, at the same time, this is an often elusive polity. What is particularly challenging in this case is the fact that, especially in its relations with the host state India, the TGiE's authority is rarely openly declared, identified or officially sanctioned (McConnell 2009a). As such, it is methodologically challenging to get a handle on how this polity actually functions on the ground, how it constructs relationships with 'its' people and how it is perceived by external audiences.

Whilst arguably more expedient in this case given the TGiE's lack of recognised status, the challenges of researching the 'everyday state' more generally have been the topic of much debate (Corbridge et al. 2005; Das & Poole 2004). Of particular relevance to the research undertaken here has been the shift within political geography towards ethnographic approaches. In an oft-cited paper on this topic Nick Megoran (2006) argues that engaging with a more sustained focus on agency and on how formal political structures operate and are experienced on the ground requires shifting attention away from the discursive, representational and dramatic aspects of statehood and towards mundane political interactions at the micro-level. A growing body of work has been undertaken in this vein in recent years, notably by anthropologists (Gupta 2012; Hansen & Stepputat 2001, 2005), sociologists (Billig 1995) and geographers (Mountz 2010; Nevins 2002; Secor 2001). Crucially, in enabling a productive 're-peopling' of political geography (Megoran 2006: 625), such attention to the micro-politics of everyday state-making uncovers 'the contingent nature of state power, and the various tensions, fractures and incommensurabilities that characterize state institutions themselves' (Herbert 2000: 554). As such, ethnographic approaches to the state are relevant for starting to address the questions of where and at what level is the state?<sup>4</sup>

Central to this has been a multi-sited approach (Marcus 1995), not only in terms of undertaking research in different Tibetan settlements across India, but also in focusing on a range of different governmental institutions operating at various scales. With regards to the former, qualitative research was undertaken in Dharamsala (Himachal Pradesh), Lugsum Samdupling (Karnataka), Sonamling (Ladakh), Majnu-ka Tilla (Delhi), Clementown and Dekyiling (Uttarakhand) Tibetan settlements between 2006 and 2008, with further interviews conducted in 2010–2012 in Delhi, Dharamsala and London. Discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, these particular settlements were chosen to provide insights into how the TGiE operates and is perceived on the ground in what are physically, socio-economically and institutionally quite different Tibetan spaces within India. In the early stages of this research, an official at the Department of Home stressed the importance of soliciting non-Dharamsala perspectives on the TGiE:

we don't always see the whole picture. We have nine to five jobs and don't visit the settlements much. We don't get a chance to speak to our people, to see the work of other offices, departments. But it's important to get the big picture, to see we are going in the right direction and what our weaknesses are. For you it is important to speak to our staff on the ground – they will have different opinions, different ways of presenting their thoughts on how this... on how we work (March 2006)

Over 150 interviews were conducted with TGiE officials, staff of Tibetan non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and a cross-section of exiled Tibetans in these settlements. The latter included both male and female, and monk and lay interviewees, and a range of age groups, occupations, those born in exile, and individuals who had sought refuge in India at different periods in their lives.<sup>5</sup> Indian lawyers, local government officials and journalists were also interviewed, and Indian press archives and parliamentary debates on Tibet consulted to build up a picture of how the TGiE is perceived and engaged with by key actors in the host state. Underpinning this research is an appreciation that the Tibetan community in exile should never be read in the singular. Like any self-defined 'community' this is one with a multitude of experiences, opinions and differences, and that is cross-cut by regional, sectarian and class divisions. A range of perspectives on and experiences of the exile government were sought throughout this research, and the interview quotations in the chapters that follow should thus be read as highly situated accounts. However, at the same time, this is ostensibly a study of the TGiE and its operations in India, and so there is necessarily a focus on members of the India-based diaspora who engage with this polity. As such, it follows in a growing tradition of institutional ethnographies that attend to everyday practices, internal tensions and institutional cultures, and employ an extended case method to draw broad conclusions. Particular inspiration is taken from Yael Navaro-Yashin's (2012) work on statecraft in northern Cyprus, Merje Kuus's (2014) study of European Union

bureaucrats and Iver Neumann (2012) on the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Multiple periods of residential fieldwork in India not only allowed me to conduct follow-up interviews with a number of exile government respondents in Dharamsala and Delhi but also meant I was able to be present at key political moments within the community. These included the run up to and polling day for elections to the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and the post of Prime Minister in 2006 and 2011, the Dalai Lama's retirement from political life and statement on his reincarnation in 2011, a number of sessions of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, and commemorations for 'Tibetan National Uprising' on 10 March and 'Democracy Day' on 2 September. I also attended the World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet in Edinburgh in 2005, and accompanied a delegation of British MPs to Dharamsala to meet with their Tibetan counterparts in 2011. Taken together, these ritualised performances of statehood, nationalism and diplomacy represent key moments in TGiE's attempts to construct itself as a legitimate polity.

However, in order to get a handle on how this legitimacy is reiterated and sustained, as well as gain an insight into the messiness and contingency of both state politics, and the research process itself (Cook & Crang 1995), attention also needs to focus on mundane, everyday practices of stateness. Following Nigel Thrift's persuasive argument for a shift towards the 'little things'; the "mundane" objects like files, "mundane" people like clerks and mundane words like "the" – which are crucial to how the geopolitical is translated into being' (Thrift 2000: 380), some of the most revealing insights into the functioning of the TGiE came from unexpected encounters and informal conversations on buses, in cafés and simply from engaging with people's everyday routines in the settlements. Particularly revealing from such informal observations were examples of the inconsistencies of bureaucratic practices, and the everyday hassles of negotiating across Tibetan and Indian administrations: from misspelled names, to paperwork lost between offices and uncooperative local officials. Reflections on such everyday encounters and exchanges, as well as the more ritualised state events noted above, were documented in extensive field journals, excerpts from which appear in the following chapters.

In these offices, institutions and settlements my own positionality as Northern Irish and non-Buddhist meant that I was an obvious outsider. However, my long-term involvement with Tibetan campaigning NGOs in the United Kingdom and in India was a connection that I did have with many respondents in Tibetan settlements scattered across India. The relationship between activism and academia is one that has received productive critical attention in geography over the years (Blomley 1994; Routledge 1996; Ruddick 2004). Whilst certainly not a panacea for the often unequal power dynamics of ethnographic research, especially in the global south, there are a number of ways that engaging in activism alongside ethnographic research approaches can be productive. Activism is about

collaboration rather than dependency and, with activism continuing ‘back home’, it is a long-term commitment rather than an activity confined to being in the field. There are the beginnings of research fatigue within the exile Tibetan community, and I found that organising information evenings for Western tourists, speaking to Tibetan radio about my involvement with the Tibet movement, and collaborating with Tibetan colleagues to organise demonstrations to be potentially productive ways of engaging with and ‘giving back’ to the exile community. Moreover, having a Tibet activism ‘track record’ meant that I was an accepted part of an already known community, which facilitated my access to individuals and institutions and the establishment of trust. I am acutely aware that these connections were not always reciprocal nor that collaboration meant that differences were erased but, rather, engagements with Tibet activism was a way of starting to negotiate and familiarise my relations in the field. Finally, whilst I was open about my activist work, there were occasions when my role as activist and that as researcher became ‘messy’ on the ground. Although *injis* (Westerners) engaging in the wider Tibetan movement is actively encouraged, I had to tread carefully when it came to domestic exile politics. A phrase several TGIE officials used to describe how they negotiated involvement in pro-independence activism with their job for an institution that was advocating for a different future for Tibet resonated with my own experiences. They spoke of having ‘two hats’. Deciding which hat to put on when and where was a revealing aspect of my fieldwork, sharpening my awareness of the nature of exile politics, and my own positionality.

## Narrating the Rehearsal of Stateness

The argument that develops in the following chapters is not an exhaustive history or indeed a comprehensive overview of the TGIE – for texts that are closer to this see those by the Office of the Dalai Lama (1969) and Stephanie Roemer (2008). Rather, what follows is a series of sustained snapshots of how this institution functions on the ground, how it is received there and how it is presented to the outside world. Emphasis is placed on the period during which fieldwork was undertaken (2006–12), with earlier periods discussed through secondary sources and respondents’ recollections. These snapshots are unavoidably selective and are shaped by the networks I had access to, but the aim is to provide a ‘feel’ for this institution – where it has come from, the challenges that it faces and the directions it might be heading in. Through tacking back and forth between TGIE structures, programmes and functions a broad narrative is built up around the nature of exile politics, the temporalities of statecraft and the idea of the rehearsal state.

The following chapter sets out the theoretical contexts and approaches that underpin this study and sketches out the latter’s contribution to thinking on the state and the role of unrecognised polities. Attention focuses on the questions of *how* such polities operate and *why* they have adopted specifically state-like

discourses and practices. The chapter positions the argument developed in this book in respect to literature in critical international relations (IR) and critical geopolitics on the ‘conceptual unbundling’ of sovereignty, territory and statehood, and post-foundational approaches to the state. The case is made for focusing on and developing the concepts of stateness and statecraft and attending to debates around the relationship between the state and territory. Such approaches to the state are then discussed in relation to literature on the temporality of exile and ideas of preparing for unknown futures. Finally, these bodies of scholarship are brought together through the notions of performance and rehearsal.

In relating the concepts and debates set out in Chapter 2 to the case of Tibet, Chapter 3 engages in a series of historical and regional scene-setting. It begins by introducing the characteristics of the Tibetan polity from the founding of the Tibetan Empire in the seventh century, through to the increasingly consolidated nature of Tibetan stateness at the end of the nineteenth century. Attention then turns from internal Tibetan practices of statecraft to contested narratives of and claims to statehood, territory and political authority that underpin conflicting Tibetan and Chinese sovereignty claims. Along the way the nature of Tibet’s relations with its neighbours is discussed, as is recent scholarship in Tibet studies that seeks to offer alternative conceptualisations to somewhat polarised Tibetan and Chinese accounts of this region’s history. The period of de facto statehood (1911–1949) is discussed in some detail, as is the backstory of the flight of the Dalai Lama and establishment of the TGiE in 1959. In introducing the exile ‘cast and plot’, the chapter ends by outlining the establishment and institutionalisation of the exile Tibetan government since 1960.

Constituting four approaches to rehearsing stateness, Chapters 4–7 explore key aspects of TGiE’s state-like functioning: *rehearsal spaces* in terms of the exile settlements in India; the various *roles* adopted and prescribed within the exile community; *scripts* developed for the practising of statecraft; and the part played by *audiences* of these performances. It is important to note here how I am approaching the heuristic device of ‘rehearsal’. The use of metaphors in social science writing brings with it twin dangers: that of overextension to the extent that their application is imprecise and obfuscatory (see critique by Jessop et al. 2008: 389), and that of creating too ‘neat’ a way of looking at the world that simply overlooks key issues. Mindful of these pitfalls, as well as the ‘power of metaphor to illuminate the issues with which we work... [and] establish, clarify and analyse connections, comparisons and meaning’ (Howitt 1998: 49), my aim here is to adopt a light touch with respect to this metaphor. ‘Rehearsal’ is perhaps better described here as a lens through which to view the practices of this polity.

This first take at rehearsing Tibetan stateness focuses on the apparent paradox of a stateless nation managing a series of territorialised settlements. I argue in Chapter 4 that it is in these spaces that the exile administration appears most state-like and, in turn, it is the everyday running of the settlements and the important symbolic role that they play, that is central to TGiE’s rehearsal of

governance in exile. For, while the Indian state does have a presence within these official Tibetan communities established on its territory, it is exile Tibetan state-ness that permeates everyday life in the settlements. Not only are the settlements constructed as ‘national’ spaces in exile where connections to the homeland are fostered, but also they have been designated as productive spaces of experimentation by the TGiE, where the exile government is actively rehearsing different modes of governance, and where imagined futures are sought to be made present.

Shifting from territorialised forms of state(like) power to questions of legitimacy, Chapter 5 draws on Max Weber’s tripartite schema of traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority to focus on the various roles adopted and prescribed within this rehearsal state. The first of these is the charismatic authority of the Dalai Lama and his role as ‘playwright’ in this rehearsal of statecraft, particularly in instigating and overseeing the democratisation of exile Tibetan politics. Attention then turns to the TGiE’s bureaucrats, focusing on both the role that they play in reproducing this state-in-exile, and how the political objectives of the TGiE are naturalised through everyday routines. The construction of rational-legal authority in this exile polity is thus explored through the establishment of bureaucratic hierarchies, set procedures, staff training programmes and the TGiE’s organisational culture. However, the productive aspect of waiting demonstrated by this opportunity to experiment, train and seek advice in the art of statecraft is also counterposed with the possibility that we are seeing the TGiE becoming a permanent government-of-exiles.

Chapter 6 builds on the analysis of the TGiE’s articulations of power explored in the previous chapters by focusing on the scripting of the exile population itself. Attending to the forms of power that transform individuals into citizens, this chapter examines the TGiE’s management of lives and livelihoods in exile and the construction of Tibetan political subjectivities. The idea of scripting is explored both in terms of written copy (the surveys and plans through which the TGiE comes to know its population) and the broader act of scripting: of discursively constructing an ideal population and seeking to regulate individual behaviour to achieve this. Three aspects of the making of Tibetan subjects are explored: the construction of the (exile) Tibetan population as an entity to be managed; the development of state-like rights and responsibilities through a welfare state system and nascent economy; and the discursive and material construction of Tibetan citizenship in exile. As such, drawing on Foucault’s understanding of governmentality, I argue that the TGiE’s delineation of distinct domains of governance both creates realms that can be acted upon and distinguishes itself as a government in command of a ‘political’ sphere.

Broadening the scale of analysis, the focus of the final substantive chapter is on how the TGiE positions itself on the international stage: the strategies and discourses it employs and the role that audiences play in these performances of statecraft. Central to this are the enactment of diplomatic practices including the administration of pseudo embassies and the TGiE’s engagement with foreign

parliamentarians. Through such public performances of diplomacy the intellectuals of Tibetan statecraft are conspicuously promoting their script to audiences they hope can help turn their rehearsal into a reality. The chapter delineates three distinct audiences that the TGiE engages with: the host state India with whom it has a complex and ambiguous relationship; Western states for whom the exile government seeks to reflect ostensibly Western norms of good governance in order to seek legitimacy and support; and the omnipresent but elusive audience of China. In addition to outlining the series of thus far unfruitful Tibetan delegations to Beijing, the possibility that the very state-like-ness of the TGiE proves a significant barrier to engagement with the Chinese authorities is also discussed.

The concluding chapter broadens the discussion beyond this case and sets out wider applications of the idea of rehearsing the state. The notion of emergent stateness is discussed in terms of its utility in exemplifying the partial and processual nature of the state, and in bringing to the fore the quotidian as a site of state formation. More generally, the idea of rehearsing the state both opens up the important questions of how and why stateness endures and can be so attractive to those who do not have it, and offers a revealing insight into the contingency of ‘conventional’ states that experiment with political practices as they engage in the global political arena. Finally, I argue that the rehearsal of stateness by communities conventionally excluded from the inter-state system offers a valuable glimpse of possible geopolitical futures. In thus seeking to repluralize our understanding of political space, this examination of a dynamic and innovative polity that is daily articulating aspects of state-ness and forging an alternative space for political authority opens up conceptual space for a more ‘progressive geopolitics’ (Kearns 2008) and a re-evaluation of the political.

## The Politics of Researching Exile Tibet

Researching and writing about most topics related to Tibet is inherently political. Writing about the exile Tibetan government is even more so, and, as such, I want to make the politics behind this book clear at this stage. Not only is it incredibly challenging to solicit the political opinions of Tibetans inside Tibet under the situation in China today, but current Sino-Tibetan relations and future political configurations within Tibet are beyond this book’s remit.<sup>6</sup> Within the context in which the book does speak – that of exile Tibet – this is neither a pro- nor an anti-TGiE book. As I write there are heated discussions within the exile Tibetan community over what have become increasingly polarised positions on the future of Tibet: that of genuine autonomy within China (the ‘Middle Way Approach’, or *Umaylam*, the policy adopted and promoted by the Dalai Lama and the TGiE since 1988), and full Tibetan independence (*Rangzen*). Whilst this fraught political debate forms an important context for this book, *Rehearsing the State* is not a commentary on *Umaylam* vs *Rangzen* per se.

Yet this is not, of course, to say that this is a book devoid of politics. As noted above, I come from a position of political solidarity with the Tibetan cause and, though my work for Tibet support organisations is in many ways distinct from this research, many of the underpinning motivations are shared. As such, the research behind this book may not be a classic example of critical praxis (Wakefield 2007) or critical collaboration (Routledge 2003), but it does share the obligation of treading a fine line between unconditional praise and sustained criticism of the TGiE as an institution. Given the situation of exile, there is an acute fragility to this polity. Thus, constructive criticism is welcomed, but critiques that challenge the foundations of the institution are strongly discouraged. The route chosen here is one of documenting and analysing the achievements, challenges and limitations of the TGiE, and disseminating these to audiences beyond those familiar with this case.

Focusing on what the exile community has established and achieved is certainly not intended to detract attention from the hardships faced by Tibetan refugees over the past decades, or to give a false picture of their security in India. Rather, it is driven by a desire to counter, albeit in a small way, the stereotypes of victimhood, passivity and indeed pacifism that so dominate representations of (exile) Tibetans. The myth of Shangri-La, premised on Tibet as an idyllic yet forbidden land inhabited by peace-loving Tibetans, is a powerful and enduring one. Within it, the Tibetan nation, people and freedom movement are effectively positioned in a series of moral hierarchies: Tibet as utopia, as virtuous, as victim (Hess 2009). This is a set of representations that not only generates unachievable expectations for the lives that Tibetans lead and denies them agency, but also works to silence violent pasts and presents, has internal contradictions, and is contested – and at times resisted – within the Tibetan community. Deconstructing the myth of Shangri-La is, therefore, ‘an ongoing, collective project’ (McGranahan 2010: 34). My contribution to this project is to put the practices, limitations and achievements of the exile Tibetan government firmly centre stage.

## Endnotes

- 1 I use ‘Tibetan Government-in-Exile’ throughout this book rather than ‘Central Tibetan Administration’ (CTA) as the former is how this institution is commonly referred to by external actors and within the community (*Pö shung*, ‘Tibetan government’). The adoption of the term ‘CTA’ in order to avoid ‘offending’ China or causing political discomfort for India is briefly discussed in Chapter 7.
- 2 The figure of 128,000 Tibetans in exile is based on the 2009 Tibetan Demographic Survey undertaken by the TGiE’s Planning Commission. Estimates within the community put the population at around 150,000.
- 3 International Campaign for Tibet website (<http://www.savetibet.org/resources/factsheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans>). See also Self-Immolation as Protest in Tibet in

*Cultural Anthropology*, 9 April 2012; available at <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/93-self-immolation-as-protest-in-tibet>

- 4 The use of the term ‘ethnographic approaches’ here is a deliberate one, for it more accurately represents the methodological strategies employed in this research than ‘ethnography’, a term arguably overused and misused in political geography and critical IR (see critiques by Kuus 2013 and Vrasti 2008).
- 5 Interviews were conducted in Tibetan and English, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Where interviews were conducted in Tibetan (particularly with older members of the community and newcomer refugees), a Tibetan research assistant was present to clarify points.
- 6 The deteriorating political situation of Tibetans living in Nepal is also beyond the scope of this book (see International Campaign for Tibet 2012).