A Cross-Cultural View on Well-Being:
Children's Experiences
in the Tibetan Diaspora in India and in Germany

A Dissertation
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by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores children's (6-8 years old) perspectives and experiences of well-being in two different cultural contexts: in a Tibetan day-school (India) and in a German day-school (Germany). Ethnographic research was conducted with participants of a second-grade class (mixed gender) for six months at each site, 3-4 days a week in 2012. Participant observation was complemented by interviews with the children as well as with the staff of the school, documented by fieldnotes and sound recordings. Data was collected in line with postmodern grounded theory methodology and preliminary analysis accompanied the process of the fieldwork.

The thesis explores the children's views and social practices related to well-being which prove to be different in both cultures: the Tibetan children emphasized being skilful as a basic condition for well-being, while friendship with peers was most important at the German school. At both sites, the children would establish these conditions for well-being through competitions. Furthermore, the children's different views and the social practices are considered against the backdrop of two 'transcultural' indicators of well-being: self-confidence and resilience. These indicators were not selected randomly but chosen inductively during fieldwork, as the difference in self-confidence and resilience between the children's groups at each site was noticeable. The thesis demonstrates how these differences in self-confidence and resilience are likely to have been related to a) the children's particular views and social practices linked to well-being b) the manner in which childhood is constructed within the children's societies and c) particular basic beliefs and worldviews prevalent within the children's societies. The results emphasize the usefulness of researching well-being cross-culturally and suggest that (socio-culturally specific) self- and worldviews significantly influence children's well-being.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or equivalent institution, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Carla-Maria Cribari-Assali

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

The present study explores children's perspectives and experiences of well-being in two different socio-cultural contexts: at a Tibetan school in India and at a German school in Germany. Both the subject matter of the dissertation as well as the research design are highly topical and address areas which are yet to be explored in more depth by Childhood Studies.

The cross-culturality of the research responds to recent appeals urging for a more global approach to childhood (Panelli et al 2007; Punch 2015b; Punch and Tisdall 2014). Especially within Childhood Studies, cross-cultural research on children's lives spanning both Majority and Minority Worlds[1] is still rare. The present research is, to my knowledge, unique in so far as it presents findings from both Majority and Minority World settings within a single thesis. I had chosen the two sites Tibetan and German because they are very different from one another in terms of basic ontological understandings held by the members of each culture. Myself having grown up in Germany, I had an interest in getting a better understanding of German children's peer cultures, while Tibetan society in Exile, renowned as the 'most successful refugees' worldwide, has always fascinated me.

A commonly held perspective by researchers of childhood is that children are "a minority social group, whose wrongs need writing" (Mayall 2002:9) – a view

[1] The terms Majority and Minority World is used in Childhood Studies to refer to 'Western' and mainly to Africa, Asia and Latin America countries, respectively, acknowledging therewith that the majority of children do *not* live in 'the Global North' (Panelli et al 2007). The terms moreover point to the fact that, although being a minority, Western countries are privileged over a majority of the poorer world population (Punch 2015a; Punch 2003). There is the danger of over-homogenising the global diversity of children's lives when using those terms, however, most of the literature on childhood tends to be about either one or the other 'World' (Punch 2015b; see also Tisdall and Punch 2014). Furthermore, childhoods in Majority World countries have frequently been approached from 'Minority World researchers' in an ethnocentric manner (Benwell 2009) and a conceptual distinction can be a heuristic tool to avoid that. As Punch writes, "this is not to deny the considerable inequalities and differences between childhoods, but rather to use them as critical tools to expose assumptions and provide new possibilities for learning across Majority and Minority World contexts" (2015b: 3).

which contains a concern for children's well-being. Children's well-being (the topic of the thesis) is therefore an especially well-suited area for Childhood Studies.

However, only recently has Childhood Studies begun explicitly to research children's well-being (Ben-Arieh et al 2014b; Fattore et al 2007; Punch 2013), a development taking place alongside wider public, political and academic discourses where well-being has become an increasingly popular subject-matter (Bartram 2011; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a). Likewise, public interest in children's well-being has increased over the past decades, reflected in the establishment of international treaties on children's rights, like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), and in activities by major international organizations, such as WHO, UNICEF and Save the Children (Panter-Brick 2013; Punch 2013). Reports from different parts of the world testify to the challenges children and young people still face in terms of their well-being (see Minujin and Nandy 2012; Montgomery 2013c; Ridge 2002), some indicating an increase of mental health problems, such as depression and suicidal preoccupation (Focus 2010; Hartras 2008; Humanium 2012; Missoulian 2011; NPR 2013; NSPCC 2014; Santosh 2012). These reports highlight the importance of researching children's well-being for Childhood Studies.

The present study offers insights into children's understandings of well-being from two different socio-cultural settings (Tibetan/German) and engages these findings in a cross-cultural dialogue. The philosophical underpinning of this project means avoiding seeing difference and sameness as dichotomous. Instead I understand "similarity and difference as relative terms that presuppose each other" (Fay 1996: 241). The children's experiences of well-being are therefore investigated both in their socio-cultural uniqueness as well as from a more 'transcultural' perspective. My aim in this dissertation is to give a holistic view of children's well-being by mirroring its diversity and, simultaneously, its shared experience, and, moreover, to explore practical implications.

The questions guiding research were the following:

1. What do the children at both schools consider as most important for their well-being? What are the social practices related to achieving this well-being?

2. How do these conceptualisations of well-being and their social practices relate to wider socio-cultural constructions within the children's societies?

3. How do these particular conceptualisations of well-being and their social practices relate to other aspects of well-being evident in the children's lives?

4. What kind of 'transcultural indicators' for well-being are especially salient across *both* sites within the children's peer cultures? In comparison, what are the differences related to these indicators across both sites?

5. How do these differences in the findings from both sites relate
a.) to how childhood is constructed within the generational order and
b.) to constructions of self and world prevalent within both societies?
What does this tell us about the children's well-being across the two settings?

The thesis begins in Chapter 1 by introducing relevant literature, theories and current debates. The section on *Researching Children's Experiences* presents theoretical frameworks for research and analysis and draws a conclusion about the pros and cons of these approaches. The second half deals with how to approach children's well-being in research and considers existing literature and accounts of the topic. Methodologies for researching children's well-being ethnographically are still rare and the chapter concludes by offering a synthesis of contemporary approaches as a theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the cross-cultural *Research Setting* and explains how cross-cultural research may be a means of generating richer and deeper accounts of children's lives. The socio-cultural backgrounds of both sites are presented by describing the two different schools, the structures and curricula, public profiles and ethical standards. Discourses prevalent within both societies (Tibetan in Exile and Germany) that have proven relevant for the thesis are briefly discussed.

Chapter 3 expounds on the *Methodologies and Methods* that were used for research. The overall framework for research was ethnographic, sustained by interviews and by postmodern grounded theory methods for data collection and

analysis. Ethical considerations were an especially important part of research with children and needed to be given much thought.

Chapter 4 is the first analysis chapter and explores the children's understandings of well-being at each site. These proved to be very different at each school and were thus investigated in terms of their unique social practices and structural frameworks. Interestingly, the structural frameworks for establishing well-being within the children's peer cultures were centered around competition at both sites, albeit in their unique manifestations, and analysis considers why this may have been the case.

Chapter 5 considers the children's well-being from a more transcultural angle. Cross-cultural analysis of the data from both sites showed a difference in the level of children's self-confidence. Why this may be the case is considered by investigation of: a.) the children's social practices related to their particular understandings of well-being (explained previously) and b.) their experiences within the generational order (that is, their interactions with adults). During the process of this analysis it becomes clear that there was also a cross-cultural difference in the level of the children's resilience.

Chapter 6 explores these cross-cultural differences in self-confidence and resilience in more depth by examining the influence of socio-cultural factors. It is illustrated how the children's social interactions reflect particular constructions of childhood, self and world that are prevalent in both societies and shows how these are likely to have co-shaped different levels of self-confidence and resilience.

The conclusion in Chapter 7 ties the findings of the thesis together and reflects on its potential implications for future research on and analysis of children's well-being.

1.2. Researching Children's Experiences

The Social Constructivist Approach

Social constructivism tells us that individual experiences (of self, well-being etc.) are shaped by their socio-cultural context. Various important ethnographic studies have elaborated on this (for example, Geertz 1973; Lutz 1988; Lutz and White 1986; Mead 1934; Rosaldo 1983), similarly an understanding of childhood as a social construction rather than as a naturally given category, appreciates the variety of forms childhood takes cross-culturally and across time (Christensen and James 2008a; Corsaro 2011; James and James 2012; Mayall 2002; Montgomery 2003). For instance, Ariès (1962) argued that in Western medieval society the notion of childhood, the idea of a 'childhood nature' distinct from adulthood, did not exist the way it does today.

More importantly, a constructivist view acknowledges how children, as a social group who are subject to the same economic, political and social forces as any other social group in society (Mayall 1994a; Qvortrup 1991), are also marginalized, stripped of agency and exploited (Alanen 1994; John 2003; Mayall 2002; Thorne 1993). According to this viewpoint, children's marginalization is embedded in the widespread conception of children as rationally not developed, as unfinished beings and children's existence is considered merely against the backdrop of their future lives as adults (Alderson 1994; Engelbert 1994; Mayall 1994a; Oakley 1994). As a consequence of this 'forward-looking' view, social science research has tended to ignore children's present lives, needs and desires until fairly recently (Corsaro 2011; Mayall 1994a; Qvortrup 1993).

The view of children as immature implies that they are limited in their ability to make rational decisions and thus reinforces adult authority. Mayall (1994b) explores this rigidity of adult-child power relations at school, where adult authority is usually significantly less challengeable than at home.

> If children challenge school norms, teachers find it irrelevant to attend to the points underlying the challenge. Since the school is a model environment, the fault must lie with the children – or their homes – if they dislike it (...) With each year-group, therefore, the teacher's task is to

> socialize the children, since (according to the teachers I have interviewed) she faces poorly socialized children at the start of the school year and ends it having moved them further along the road. This vision compounds with adult knowledge of the school as ideal environment to ensure that children have no legitimated voice. They never reach maturity or independence at school. (Mayall 1994b: 122)

Although they usually have little to say in terms of their living conditions, children generally play an important role in economies. Most children in preindustralised societies used to work in fields, factories or on city streets, whereas nowadays children's work often consists of schooling (Corsaro 2011; Mayall 2002; Oldman 1994; Qvortrup 1991; Wells 2009). Children attending school is of significant economic value to societies at large as it generates *childwork*, "work done by adults on the organization and control of child's activities" (Oldman 1994: 155). Oldman (1994) illustrates the exploitative character of schooling by showing how children's time and space in school is organized mainly in the interests of adults.

Traditional social constructivist accounts of schooling emphasize school's socializing function (for example, Bilz 2008; Durkheim 1956; Fend 2006). According to Mannheim, for instance, education has "always wanted to mould the rising generation according to some conscious or unconscious ideal, and always sought to control every factor of personality formation" (1936: 230). It makes sense to assume that school has a significant influence on people's beliefs and desires as they effectively spend most of their childhood and youth there (Bilz 2008; Rutter et al 1980). Yet, as the following section will explain, the notion of children's socialization is limiting when it comes to researching children's life-worlds (Corsaro 2011; James et al 1998; Qvortrup et al 2009).

Children's Interpretative Reproduction

Social constructivist approaches have been invaluable in uncovering how children are marginalized and stripped of agency in their daily lives. Likewise, models of children's socialization have been helpful insofar as they acknowledge how social ideologies and inequalities are reproduced within education-systems (Bourdieu and

Passeron 1979). Yet the notion of socialisation tends to obscure the innovative and creative quality of children's *agency* (Corsaro 2011; James et al 1998). "Socialisation has an individualist and looking-foward connotation that is inescapable" (Corsaro 2011: 20).

Corsaro (2011; 2003; 1993) suggests replacing the idea of children's socialisation with the notion of *interpretative reproduction*. Children reproduce aspects of the societies that they are part of, however, these reproductions do not simply mirror society's paradigms, but they are creative interpretations. Children's cultures are therefore not mere products of their societies, but are unique cultures in their own right, means by which children actively participate in and, at the same time, shape society (Alanen 2003; Corsaro 2011; Qvortrup 1991). This approach

> …takes as a starting point the idea that children are worth studying in themselves 'in their own right' and from their own perspectives. Children are social actors in the social worlds they participate in, and research should focus directly on them and their living conditions, activities, relationships, knowledge and experiences. (Alanen 2003: 28)

At the same time, research with children needs to acknowledge how children's lives, experiences and agency is shaped and constrained by their socio-cultural environment (Alanen 2001a; 2001b; James and James 2004; James and Prout 1990; Mayall 2002; Mayall and Zeiher 2003b; Qvortrup 1994; Qvortrup et al 2009). This non- dualistic nature of structure and agency (Giddens 1984) is inherent in the idea of interpretative reproduction, which captures the creative nature of children's agency ("interpretative"), on the one hand, and the constraint and influence of their socio-cultural environments ("reproduction"), on the other. The present thesis has adopted this notion of interpretative reproduction as a basic framework for research with the children.

The Symbolic Interactionist Approach

A purely constructivist approach to childhood research is problematic not just for underplaying children's agency, but also because it implies a view of people as

isolated individuals. In a constructivist view, appropriation and creative refinement of culture takes place within the individual who thereafter participates creatively in society. 'Public' culture, in other words, determines 'private' emotions.

It is therefore important to enhance a social constructivist approach with a symbolic interactionist view where self is social in every respect and culture is created, interpreted and reinterpreted by individuals within social activity (Burkitt 2008; Corsaro 2011; Mead 1934; 1913). Blumer concludes that interactionism rests mainly on three premises:

> The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them (…) The second is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in or modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters (Blumer 1969: 2).

Likewise, children appropriate and reinterpret culture collectively in social interaction with each other and adults, rather than within their private, isolated selves (Corsaro 2011; James et al 1998; Kelle 2001; Skånfors et al 2009).

From a certain age onward peers[2] usually play a significant role in children's lives, often even more significant than adults (Corsaro 2011; Harris 1998). Creatively appropriating information from the adult world, children generate unique local cultures which are produced and shared predominantly through face-to-face interaction and which contribute to the wider cultures of other children and adults. Children, in other words, have cultures of their own (James et al 1998; Montgomery 2000; Punch 2003) and studying their peer cultures is a valuable empirical method (Corsaro 2011; Corsaro and Eder 1990; Corsaro and Molinari 2008).

[2] As it has been used much (and often with a negative connotation) within psychological and developmental literature on childhood the term *peer* may imply a psychological approach. This is not what is intended here. *Peer* is used here in line with Corsaro's work where children are acknowledged to have 'cultures' in their own right, something which he calls 'peer cultures'. The term peers therefore "specifically refers to that group of kids who spend time together on an everyday basis" (Corsaro 2003: 37) and the term peer culture to "a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that kids produce and share in interaction with each other" (Corsaro 2003: 37).

Interpretive reproduction takes place within the collective frameworks of children's peer cultures rather than in processes of private internalization. Like Blumer above, Corsaro (2011) explains how three processes happen simultaneously in children's social interactions: creatively appropriating information from the adult world, generating a series of peer cultures and contributing to the reproduction and extension of adult cultures (from which children's cultures are inseparable). This collective activity, he suggests, occurs "both within the moment and over time" (2011: 44), similar to the process of appropriating, generating and expanding of languages. Some scholars have focused on researching these processes. Kelle (2001), for example, shows how 9- to 12-year-old children in a German school construct and simultaneously negotiate various types of identities ("childish" vs. "further developed") within their discourses. Skånfors et al (2009) illustrate how pre-schoolers collectively negotiate the skills of withdrawal strategies in their everyday interaction and play. They explain how these strategies are means of controlling how, when and where peers join shared activities and who is able to participate.

An essential aspect of children's peer cultures is play. As these are moments where children have the freedom to create what they wish this provides a unique opportunity for the social scientists to get a better understanding of what matters to them (Maynard and Thomas 2009). Play presents opportunities for studying children's lives and is an important part of researching children's interpretative reproduction. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the dichotomy 'work – play' is artificial and more typical of a Western understanding (Montgomery 2001; Schwartzman 1982; Strandell 1997). Play needs to be understood as a "mode, as opposed to a category, of activity" (Schwartzman 1982: 328; see also Mayall 2002). Moreover, children´s play has an immediate, generative and transformative quality (Mayall 2002; Schwartzman 1982; Winnicott 1971). As Strandell notes,

> Instrumental interests in children's play tend to shut children up into a play world, and *separate the play world from real life*, from the social reality that surrounds the play situation. (…) In play, children are seen as practicing or *simulating* real actions and relations between people. Play is regarded as coping with reality – but reality in a very distanced and abstracted way (…) play is regarded as a preparation for a future reality. (1997: 4; emphasis in original)

Rather than viewing play as purely expressive, research emphasizing children's agency needs to pay particular attention to the immediate transformative quality of play. For instance, children creatively appropriate symbols from cultural routines with adults and infuse them with their own meanings in play such as Clark (1995) illustrates in her analysis on children's and parent's common rituals and myths like Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny.

Plurality Thesis vs. Singularity Thesis of Childhood?

The usage of the term "children" or "childhood" needs to be given some thought against the backdrop of contemporary discussions in Childhood Studies (such as Alanen 2011; Balagopalan 2011; James 2010) which seem to posit childhood as *either* a 'plural' *or* a 'singular' category.

In the singular thesis, childhood is understood as a universal category which is constructed by *all* societies, in various forms, yet universally. In this view "childhood is a permanent structural form or category that never disappears even though its members change continuously and its conception vary historically" (Corsaro 2011: 4). This position contrasts to, for example, Aries' analysis of the historical emergence of the notion of childhood (mentioned above) and, more generally, to the relativistic stance of other constructivist approaches in Childhood Studies which emphasize socio-cultural plurality. According to such a relativistic paradigm, childhood as a singular category does *not* reflect a social reality. Instead, the term childhood*s* (as a plural) is used, and a growing body of research underscores this multiple nature of childhood (Christensen and James 2008a; James and James 2004).

The latter stance, emphasizing the socio-cultural relativity of social phenomena, is a fundamental part of my theoretical approach. At the same time, however, the approach to childhood as singular (childhood as a universal category) is also a valuable perspective, as it draws attention to children's marginalization and exploitation worldwide - one of Childhood Studies' main 'raison d'êtres' (Corsaro 2011; Qvortrup et al 2009). Its proponents argue that a focus on the multiplicity of

childhoods may undermine the generating of general ethical standards necessary to improve children's living conditions worldwide. Elaborating on children's lives in India, Balagopalan (2011) echoes these concerns by suggesting that "though ethnographic readings of children's lives in India reveal the intricate designs of culture, they also often work to render these lives as isolated, i.e. lacking critical threads that would tie their lives to ours" (2011: 294). Similarly, Alanen calls for the establishment of universal normative foundations in Childhood Studies in order "to specify what constitutes a good, or at least a better life for children and for human beings in general" (2011: 150). The fear of a relativist approach in social science collapsing into "a depoliticised irresponsibility" (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 157) has its grounds and is, in fact, an issue which applied social science philosophy has addressed time and again (Fay 1996). It is these for these reasons, therefore, that children need to also be considered a *singular* category, universally present, as a minority group like any other (Mayall 2002; Qvortrup 1987).

I agree with James (2010; see also Punch 2015a) who suggests that the two takes on childhood, singular and pluralistic, need to be reconciled rather than conceived dualistically. The focus of my research was the children's *unique* experiences of well-being and how they dealt with (experience, resist etc.) the unique standards set by their socio-cultural environment (i.e., applying childhood as a singular category). At the same time, I avoided a 'depoliticisation' by having investigated how childhood is constructed and children are constrained by the *generational order* (Alanen 2014; 2001a; 2001b; James and James 2012; Mayall 2002; Mayall and Zeiher 2003a) (i.e., applying childhoods as a pluralistic category). Constructed in relation to adulthood, childhood is a relational phenomenon and the generational approach is an important part of researching children's well-being (Alanen 2014; Qvortrup 2014).

This project has therefore acknowledged both, the micro-level (children's experiences and agency) and the macro-level (how children's experiences were shaped and constrained by their socio-cultural environment). In other words, the singularity and plurality approaches to childhood are actually fruitful when applied dialectically (James 2010). As will be explained in the following chapter, it is the

combination of the two strands, unique experiences of childhoods embedded within transcultural aspects of childhood, which makes a cross-cultural investigation of childhood fruitful (Punch 2015a).

1.3. Researching Children's Well-Being

Children's well-being has not always been of public interest as is nowadays the case in most countries. Only as late as the sixteenth-century did a public concern for children begin to develop in Europe when churches and charities drew attention to lives of orphans and street children (Doek 2014; Montgomery 2013b). A second wave of interest in children's well-being arose during the era of industrialization where a concern for child laborers sparked several children's rights movements. The activists were able to enforce child-protection laws which ultimately led to children's right to primary education becoming compulsory in many countries by the turn of the century (Doek 2014; Fyfe 2009). Since the second half of the twentieth century, governments' policies around the world have increasingly addressed children's well-being issues, such as health care and education (Punch 2013). These developments culminated in an international agreement in 1989 called The Convention on the Rights of the Child (short, CRC or UNCRC), a treaty which "made well-being a right of the child" (Doek 2014: 188). Nowadays, the topic of children's lives and well-being is commonly discussed in politics, by media, charities and parents around the world (Montgomery 2013a).

The notion of well-being has become especially popular in social science over the past two decades (see Buchanan 2000; Christopher 1999; Diener and Suh 2000; Layard 2005; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a). However, as well-being is a "fluid, holistic and ambiguous notion which is difficult to define" (Punch 2013: 226; see also Lewis 2001; Morrow and Mayall 2009), theoretical and methodological frameworks for researching well-being are still variable and often conceptually muddled (Alanen 2014; Fattore et al 2007).

Social science research can be roughly categorised as accounts either of subjective or objective well-being (Bartram 2011; Gasper 2007). The former

investigates people's experiences and conceptualisations of well-being, while the latter focuses on outer factors considered relevant for well-being, such as income, social relationships, health, political freedom etc. Objective well-being research has produced quite an extensive body of work, especially in the field of economics. Most accounts of children's well-being also deal mainly with the influence of objective factors, such as parental care, access to education, wealth, political rights etc., (see Crouse 2010; Jolley 2011; Mapp 2010; Maudeni 2000).

Even though of some value, studies which focus solely on objective well-being are insufficient (Bartram 2011; Ben-Arieh et al 2014b). It has been found, for instance, that subjective experiences of well-being do not necessarily correlate with high levels of objective well-being (Easterlin 2001; Easterlin et al 2010; Gasper 2007; Newman 2002). A study by Easterbrook (2004; see also Schwartz 2005) suggests that well-being may even decrease parallel to the rise of affluence within a society – an objective factor usually considered basic to well-being. According to his analysis, unipolar depression "has been rising in eerie synchronization with rising prosperity" (Easterbrook 2004: xvi) in the United States over the past fifty years. Similarly, social-psychological disorders in children are reported to have increased in most wealthy countries over the last half of the century (Newman 2002). "Even countries with such widely admired social welfare systems as Sweden have not escaped these trends" (Newman 2002: 2).

From a social constructivist viewpoint it makes little sense to assume that objective factors will universally determine people's well-being (Kitayama et al 2000). People experience and construct their world according to their unique socio-cultural conditioning and history (see Lutz 1988; Lutz and White 1986; Mead 1934; Rosaldo 1983) which accounts for the phenomenon that individuals can be happy in the most challenging circumstances or depressed even though all objective factors for happiness seem to be present. Accordingly, subjective well-being researchers have defined happiness "as a positive emotional state that is most general and, thus, not restricted to any specific circumstances or events" (Uchida et al 2004: 226).

Subjective well-being approaches do not deny the significance of objective factors for well-being. However, they hold that focusing on these cannot generate

holistic accounts of human well-being. Social science has therefore begun exploring subjective well-being (see Alderson 2000; Diener and Suh 2000; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a) and recently more explicitly in children's lives (see Casas 2011; Fattore et al 2007; Main 2014; Veronese and Castiglioni 2013). Yet accounts of children's subjective well-being are few (Casas 2011; Huebner 2004; Main 2014) as it still is "often taken for granted that children need not be asked, because they do not know (are not yet capable or competent to know) what is good for them" (Ben-Arieh et al 2014b: 10). The present thesis demonstrates how well-being was understood and 'practiced' by Tibetan children in India and by children in Germany and thereby contributes to filling this gap.

While the first part of the thesis begins by exploring the children's subjective views on well-being, the second half considers these against the backdrop of two *transcultural indicators* for well-being: self-confidence and resilience. These indicators were not randomly chosen but elicited inductively from the data of both sites and investigated thereafter within a cross-cultural dialogue. The findings from the transcultural approach are thereafter considered against the backdrop of the children's unique understandings of well-being – one perspective enriching the other.

Children's Views on Well-Being

One of the main aims of this work is to generate a socio-culturally rich account of the children's understandings and experiences of well-being at the two sites. The focus of this study is on children's well-being in the here and now (Qvortrup 1999) rather than on their future-lives as adults. Although not denying its value, a forward-looking view that postpones children's well-being "until adulthood" (Ben-Arieh et al 2014b: 16) or children's "well-becoming" (Qvortrup 2014) is not of interest here.

Designed as a cross-cultural study, a definition of well-being needed to be broad enough to allow for the socio-cultural diversity of both sites. How to define well-being in a socio-culturally sensitive way? A growing body of work in social sciences usually referred to as "Subjective Well-Being" (SWB) (Anderson et al 2012;

Diener 1996; Diener and Diener 1996; Diener and Suh 2000; Eid and Larsen 2008) investigates well-being cross-culturally by documenting people's cognitive appreciation of their quality of life. In this approach, "subjective well-being is a person's evaluative reactions to his or her life—either in terms of life satisfaction (cognitive evaluations) or affect (ongoing emotional reactions)" (Diener and Diener 1995: 653).

The definition of well-being adopted in the present thesis differs from the psychologically oriented SWB approach. As a sociological study, this work does not rely on the participants' verbal evaluations of their well-being[3] but is based on empirical research on their social interaction. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the use of the term subjective well-being throughout the thesis is merely an analytical term and does *not* refer to the SWB movement.

Well-being is understood as an umbrella-term that embraces any form of social action that people (explicitly or implicitly) relate to maintaining or creating "a good life" (Izquierdo 2009: 68; see also Ben-Arieh et al 2014b; Buchanan 2000; Heil 2009). 'Social action' refers to Weber's (1922; see also Geertz 1973) conceptualization which implies any form of human action that is subjectively meaningful.[4] While

[3] Relying merely on participants' cognitive evaluations of themselves is limited (Bartram 2011; Thin 2009) as people's views are always situational and socio-culturally 'tainted' (Geertz 1973) and socio-cultural knowledge is to a large degree "tacit" (Polanyi 1966). Instead of relying solely on interviews, this project has explored children's sense of well-being through observing and participating in their social interaction. Through ethnographic participant observation socio-cultural patterns and tacit knowledge is more easily accessible as it "allows us to understand nonverbal communication, to anticipate and understand responses (…) shapes the way we interact with others and, in a more fundamental way, it shapes the way we interpret what we observe." (deWalt and deWalt 2010). Secondly, unlike SWB approaches, the present study on subjective well-being does *not* attempt "measuring" levels of well-being. In my view, the notion of measuring well-being may be considered somewhat problematic as it presupposes universally valid criteria for social phenomena (Alderson 2000; Christopher 1999; Izquierdo 2009). Against the same backdrop, some have criticized SWB research and analysis for being based on ethnocentric individualistic understandings of personhood that cannot account for socio-culturally distinctive notions of self (Christopher 1999; Izquierdo 2009; Thin 2009).

[4] The anthropologist Clifford Geertz has elaborated on how the ethnographer may get at larger socio-cultural structures through attending to social action: "it is through the flow of (…) social action that cultural forms find articulation. They find it as well, of course, in various sorts of artifacts, and various states of consciousness; but these draw their meaning from the role they play (Wittgenstein would say their "use") in an ongoing pattern of life, not from any intrinsic relationships they bear to one another." (1973: 5)

ways of maintaining or improving a good life are a part of social action everywhere, they are experienced, presupposed and conceptualized in various socio-culturally specific ways and may therefore even be contradictory (Buchanan 2000). I argue that ethnographic research allows for the socio-culturally sensitivity that is needed in order to capture this diversity.

Yet how to identify social action specifically related to maintaining or creating 'a good life'? This thesis explores '*what mattered most*' to the children at both sites, as 'what matters most' must be considered an essential condition for a good life by the person concerned – why otherwise strive for it? Moreover, researching 'what matters most' is more concrete than 'what makes up a good life' and can be observed in real life situations rather than having to rely on thoughts and views expressed verbally by the participants. Chapter 4 of the thesis illustrates how 'what mattered most' proved to be very different for the children at each site.

Transcultural Well-Being: Self-Confidence and Resilience

It is argued here that, while exploring children's understandings of well-being is an important part of well-being research, a richer account should also acknowledge aspects of well-being that people are not always aware of. For example, while the children at each site had different understandings of what mattered most to their well-being, other phenomena indicating their well-being, such as strong self-confidence, for example, was not something they would necessarily conceptualise. The second half of the thesis therefore sets out, via cross-cultural analysis, to investigate some of these aspects of the children's well-being at both sites.

In the light of this transcultural approach, the definition of well-being adopted for the first part of research ("a good life") did not serve anymore and required a different approach. Yet, how to identify local aspects of well-being without relying exclusively on the participants' understandings? Some social science research on well-being has been tackling this dilemma by investigating transcultural *indicators* for well-being (Alanen 2014; Ben-Arieh 2014b). Social indicators for well-being are usually associated with objective factors, however, have recently been applied to

subjective well-being as well (Ben-Arieh and Frønes 2011). Many of these accounts, such as the SWB studies (Delle Fave et al 2011; Diener and Suh 2000; Kitayama and Markus 2000; Uchida et al 2004) and others (Bartram 2011; Layard 2005; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a) focus on *happiness* as an indicator, arguing it to be an emotion which is universally present. Childhood Studies, on the other hand, has frequently focused on children's *resilience* as a potential indicator of well-being (Camfield and McGregor 2009; Punch 2013; Ungar 2005) even when studies do not mention the term well-being much at all (Daniel and Wassell 2002a; de Berry and Boyden 2000; Gilligan 2009).

Focusing on transcultural social indicators for well-being has the potential of becoming socio-culturally ethnocentric - the pitfall of any transcultural approach in social science (Camfield and McGregor 2009; Markus and Kitayama 1991). There is always the danger that we end up "judging others according to our benchmark" (Fay 1996: 3). It is argued here that a way of reducing this danger is by choosing transcultural indicators for well-being *inductively* from the analysis of the data. The present thesis includes research on children's resilience because it proved to be a relevant topic during cross-cultural analysis (whereas happiness did not). Rather than selecting an indicator (such as happiness or resilience) *prior* to field-entry, the topics were 'elicited'[5] from preliminary data-analysis and thereafter pursued. In grounded theory methods (see the following chapter), where data are collected at first in accord with what seems relevant and conceptualizations are thereafter formulated, this preliminary eliciting of indicators from the data was possible.

The present thesis focuses on two indicators for well-being that have been found to be relevant: *self-confidence* and *resilience*. In cross-cultural analysis there was

[5] I have set the term 'elicit' in inverted commas to indicate that topics can never be 'discovered' within data as if they were independent truths but are always a creation of the ethnographer. A common reaction to this relativistic stance within the philosophy of social science has been a nihilistic view and therefore an epistemic problem. Fay suggests overcoming the Cartesian anxiety by applying *perspectivism* – a moderate form of relativism. He illustrates this approach by drawing an analogy between a researcher and a cartographer: just as it is *not* the cartographer's objective to discover a pre-existing map, there is no pre-existing reality to be discovered in social science. There is no 'one best map' of a particular terrain, but different maps highlight different aspects of a terrain. However, just as "maps may be better or worse (more reliable, more explanatory, more detailed, more inclusive, more serviceable)" (Fay 1996: 211), social science research may be more or less 'objective'.

a noticeable difference in self-confidence and resilience at both schools as the Tibetan children displayed a comparably higher level. Chapters 6 and 7 explore these differences and consider how they may be related to the children's subjective notions of well-being ('what mattered most'), on the one hand, and to the socio-culturally constructed worldviews, on the other.

Self-Confidence and Agency

Self-confidence or self-esteem is often linked to well-being in social science literature (Casas et al 2007; Daniel et Wassell 2002a) especially in social psychology (Branden 1995; Brown and Marshall 2006; Diener and Diener 1995; Harter 1999; Huebner 2004). Some trends have tended to present self-esteem as a psychological 'panacea' against mental illness and unhappiness. This has rightly been criticized (Baumeister et al 2003; DuBois et al 2002; Tatlow 2010). Taylor, however, notes that:

> No one would doubt that self-esteem is beneficial, that people with low self-esteem suffer from psychological difficulties and tend to struggle through life, and that higher self-esteem generally equates with greater psychological health. However, this only applies to self-esteem when it is secure, and doesn't depend on constant reassurance from others. (Taylor 2013)

Self-esteem has been defined in various ways, either as a cognitive assessment of one's self-worth, an emotional experience, persistent over time, or as fleetingly arising within situations (Brown and Marshall 2006). Here, self-esteem is understood as a form of *confidence* through which individuals experience themselves as "competent to cope with the basic challenges of life" (Branden 1995: 26). Consequently, the use of the term *self-confidence* is preferred throughout the thesis. Moreover, the term self-confidence may imply a sociological approach ('a self-confident social interaction'), rather than an individual's psychological quality.

Self-confidence seems to be tied to a sense of strong agency (Punch 2007a). "(Success of) agency would appear to be related to an individual's perceived sense of being able, and to his or her confidence" (Robson et al 2007: 142). This thesis therefore explores the children's situated agency in relation to their self-confidence. Children's agency, "the 'capability' to 'make a difference'" (Morrow 2003: 113), is

frequently mentioned in direct relation to children's well-being both in academia and in policymaking. Several studies, for instance, have explored children's agency with reference to their overall well-being (see Hecht 1998; Klocker 2007; Panter-Brick 2002). An enhancement of agency has been associated with a higher level of well-being in children and young people (Christensen and James 2001; Fattore et al 2007; Veronese and Castiglioni 2013) whereas limited agency is often accompanied by frustration and unhappiness (Klocker 2007; Matthews and Tucker 2007). Fattore et al found that children defined

> …well-being as the capacity to act freely and to make choices and exert influence in everyday situations. This was not necessarily being independent from others. Children articulated the social relations upon which autonomy was premised, including stable, secure relationships with adults. Agency also included the capacity to act in ways consistent with being oneself. Again the capacity to act morally – make moral decisions with some degree of autonomy, was crucial to a sense of well-being. (2007: 18)

Childhood Studies has contributed to raising public awareness of children's agency. Acknowledging that children not only influence their own lives and those of other children, but moreover participate in shaping adults' lives and the society they live in (James et al 1998; Qvortrup 1991) has contributed to dismantling the common portrayal of children as 'human becomings' and has helped to promote children's rights (Tisdall and Punch 2014).

Meanwhile, children's rights movements are engaged in fostering children's agency in order to improve children's lives. Parts of the international agreements on children's rights introduced by the CRC, such as articles 12 – 17 (CRC 2014), for example, are aimed at establishing more agency within children's lives.[6] UNICEF and Save the Children promote children's participation as part of their work (Save the Children 2010; UNICEF 2003) and governments have been responding to these trends. England, for instance, has recently launched a series of sociological studies consulting children and young people "on matters of national significance and

[6] Despite its importance in terms of children's rights, the UNCRC agreement has also faced criticism from within Childhood Studies, for an overview see Montgomery 2013b; Tisdall and Punch 2014.

through which they have been able to influence policy and practice" (UN Human Rights 2014: 80).

The potential value of children's agency for children's well-being is indisputable, however, the interrelationship between the two is not clear cut. Recent voices within Childhood Studies have been challenging the status quo of children's agency research, urging a deeper exploration of the subject matter (Prout 2011; Tisdall and Punch 2014). Bordonaro's (2012) work with street children in Cap Verde, for example, shows how local moral norms and ideals render the children's agency an obstacle to their "being saved". His work illustrates how children's agency may be perceived "ambiguously" by children's socio-cultural environments and rejected as inappropriate when it collides with moral standards. Researching children's agency therefore needs to deal with "the cultural, social and historical categories employed to assess and evaluate children (…) behaviour, and with the measures used to deal with those whose behaviour is apparently unfit, according to mainstream moral codes" (Bordonaro 2012: 423). Bordonaro's work mirrors Prout's (2011) criticism that children's agency is often portrayed as a person's trait; this, however, ignores agency's interrelation with structure. Children's agency needs to be investigated *in situ* and in relation to the socio-cultural context and constraints at hand (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis 1998; Oswell 2012; Tisdall and Punch 2014).

In order to get an in-depth understanding of children's situated agency it makes sense to view agency within a continuum (Robson et al 2007; Tisdall and Punch 2014). For this purpose, Klocker's (2007) notions of 'thicker' and 'thinner' agency have been applied throughout analysis. "'Thin' agency refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives. 'Thick' agency is having the latitude to act within a broad range of options" (Klocker 2007: 85). Chapter 5 explores the 'thickness' or 'thinness' of the children's agency at both schools and identifies 'thinning' or 'thickening' factors by analysing the children's peer interactions in relation to their their socio-cultural background. It is demonstrated how a higher level of self-confidence was related to a 'thicker agency' in the daily life of the children while illustrating that the levels of agency are intimately tied to the

children's confident (or less confident) sense of self. Moreover, both self-confidence and agency are shown to be linked to different levels of resilience, and vice versa.

Resilience

Children's resilience is another indicator frequently related to children's well-being (see Daniel 2010; Daniel and Wassell 2002a; Gilligan 2009; Luthar 2003; Panter-Brick 2002). Its proponents argue that research on resilience may be helpful in fostering children's well-being (Daniel et al 2009). Shifting focus away from 'problems' towards a more positive, optimistic approach (Gilligan 2009; Punch 2013) resilience can be considered an important part of well-being research. As Ungar notes, "when we investigate what makes someone strong instead of what causes weakness, we are more likely to identify that which bolsters health" (2005: xix).

Resilience is generally taken to be the ability to deal positively with adversities and therewith experience a certain level of well-being *despite* challenging circumstances (Luthar 2003; Gilligan 2009). Put in another way, resilience is related to *how* we respond to adversity. A majority of the research on children's resilience investigates how and why some children deal better with adversities than others (Punch 2013). Several protective factors, such as supportive social relations and environments, have been found to be beneficial for the development of children's resilience (Beardsall and Dunn 1992; Elder et al 1993). However, resilience cannot be based on eliminating risk factors as it is the ability to cope with such challenges that is the very definition of resilience (Newman 2002). Moreover, research has shown that children and young people may develop resilience despite a lack of protective factors, such as parental care. For instance, Backett-Milburn et al's (2008) research on ways of 'getting by' in families with substance use problems shows how being resilient is a much more complex and, possibly, even an ambiguous phenomenon in children's lives.

> Although respondents strongly valued the ideal of family and needed to feel they had parents who cared about them, the ability to hold on to these views seemed often severely compromised by their recollections of neglect and sometimes abuse. Perhaps the need to

> exercise love and care was just as important for 'getting by' in these challenging childhoods as was the need to receive these. (Backett-Milburn et al 2008: 477)

On the other hand, some of the young participants suggested that manners of coping with challenging circumstances might prove to be physically and emotionally disruptive in the long term. Studies such as these illustrate how researching children's resilience is a multifaceted process and needs to be approached with much sensitivity to the individual situations. Moreover, over-focusing on children's resilience may end up veiling the reality that children are also vulnerable and in need of protection and thereby actually harming children rather than contributing to their well-being (Este et al 2009; Punch 2013).

Well-Being and Ontological Assumptions

Our socio-culturally shaped conceptions of self and world "influence, and in many cases determine, the very nature of experience" (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 224) and consequently also our well-being.

Several cross-cultural studies have demonstrated the significance these ontological assumptions, such as about illness, emotions or personhood, have in relation to people's health and well-being (Jacobson 2007; Kleinman 1986; 1980; Kleinman and Good 1985; Obeyesekere 2005). Heil's (2009) ethnographic research, for example, shows that when reference to a person's well-being is made by Australian Aboriginal people of New South Wales, it is based on an understanding of one's self as a social rather than as an individualized agent. Similarly, for the Matsigenka of Peru, well-being is "embedded in notions of productivity, goodness, and maintaining harmony with the social, physical and spiritual environment" (Izquierdo 2009: 75) rather than in concepts of individualized fulfillment. In a cross-cultural comparison of children from US Middle class, Matsigenka and Samoan households, Ochs and Izquierdo (2009) demonstrate how the children's ideas about what constitutes well-being differ significantly in relation to their socio-culturally constructed sense of self. For the Peruvian as well as the Samoan children, self-

reliance proves to be a key component to their sense of well-being, which was not the case for the American children, who were accustomed to being given significantly fewer responsibilities by their parents in their daily life.

Chapter 5 and 6 of the thesis include considerations on how basic ontological understandings held by the children at both sites may have influenced their well-being. It is explored how some of the differences in the children's concepts of childhood, self and world may have been of significance for a greater or lesser development of self-confidence and resilience. Underlying self- and worldviews co-determine how we respond to life's adversities and how confident we feel in our ability to deal with these situations. Similarly, Punch proposes that "a further level to consider [for investigating resilience] is the extent to which expectations of children, and the ways in which they are treated, are culturally defined" (2013: 220). Analysis of the children's ontological understandings in relation to well-being therefore include the generational level in Chapter 5, that is how adults would approach children and what messages this would convey to the children in terms of their sense of self. Chapter 6 explores self-concepts prevalent in both of the children's societies. Both analyses, however, are based on empirical data from the children's interactions.

Reconciling Diversity and Sameness

Recapitulating, two main approaches are combined within the present work in order to investigate children's well-being in a Tibetan community in India and in Germany: (a.) researching the children's particular understandings of well-being and (b.) investigating transcultural indicators for well-being within the children's interactions. This may seem strange at first as a relativistic stance is usually considered contradictory to a transcultural[7] approach and vice versa. According to perspectivism, however, these two approaches are not dichotomous.

[7] The dilemma is usually described as 'particularistic versus universalistic'. However, I prefer the term 'transcultural' to 'universal' because while I hold that some social phenomena occur transculturally this does not imply they are necessarily universally present. It can be demonstrated that something is common to two or more socio-cultural contexts, yet it can never be shown that

Still benefiting from useful aspects of relativism, perspectivism acknowledges that every cognitive activity is predispositioned by and emerges within a particular conceptual frame. As opposed to relativism, however, it does *not* hold that all perspectives are equally valid or equally invalid. A strong relativism introduces an epistemic problem which ultimately renders social science per se an impossible undertaking. "If others live within their own framework and we live within ours, how can we understand them?" (Fay 1996: 4). Relativism goes beyond acknowledging the existence of different conceptual schemes and assumes that people live in totally different, incommensurable realities. Perspectivism disagrees with an ontological relativism[8] and explains how diversity can take place *only* on the basis of sameness (Davidson 2001; Fay 1996; Gadamer 2004).

> Others recognizably operating with a particular set of concepts must share with us certain basic capacities, beliefs, and principles of thought. If they did not we could not understand them and so we would have no basis for declaring that they were employing a set of concepts in the first place. To identify others as different thus requires that we also identify the ways we are similar. Another way of putting this is that difference can only exist against a background of sharing. (Fay 1996: 88)

Fay warns of applying rigidly dualistic categories in social science and explains how, if considered over-hastily, human difference can be misunderstood as representations of reality. In the worst case, such an understanding can lead to a process of dehumanization of others who are different, in the mildest case these others seem incomprehensible to us.

Based on Fay's elaboration of an 'engaged multiculturalism' (1996) the present work has adopted a perspectivist approach for exploring the cross-cultural differences in children's well-being at two sites. By marrying two seemingly contradictory approaches to well-being (relativist and transcultural) it therefore

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something is present *everywhere*. Even if a large number of observations have been made indicating that swans are white, it is impossible to ever confirm that *all* swans are actually white (Popper 2002).

[8] An ontological relativism differs from a methodological relativism. The *methodological* relevance of relativism for social science does not deny appreciating both similarity and uniqueness when it comes to understanding social phenomena (Geertz 1984).

offers a novel framework for cross-cultural research on children's well-being. Children's understandings of well-being differ cross-culturally even though common experiences are likely. There is no 'one way' of investigating children's well-being globally, nor must there be (Ungar 2005). However, acknowledging these two sides of human experience within a single study may allow for a rich account of children's well-being.

1.4. Summary

The first part of the chapter has provided an overview of relevant literature from Childhood Studies, significant debates and theoretical frameworks for researching children's experiences. It has illustrated the value of social constructivism for Childhood Studies and that it is important to combine this approach with a symbolic interactionist stance. Constructivism reveals that childhood is a social construct shaped by the socio-cultural context within which it emerges. Conceptions of childhood and children's experiences therefore vary according to the socio-cultural environment.

However, social constructivism neglects children's agency in the process of creating culture and, moreover, implies a view of people as isolated individuals. Symbolic interactionism balances this dualism of structure and agency by proposing that people create their cultures, their world, and thus their experiences within social interaction. In an interactionist view, self is social in every aspect, which, moreover, means that children's experiences can be researched by studying their social interactions. Much of my methodology is based on Corsaro's notion of studying children's peer cultures. This suggests that children, in social interaction with their peers, create their own unique 'cultures' which reflect their experiences with the adult world. Corsaro speaks here of *interpretative reproduction*.

This chapter has also dealt with recent debates on whether childhood needs to be considered as a singular or plural category. It is suggested that both perspectives have their value and need not be considered as binary opposites. Childhoods (as

plural) are multiple because they are constructed and perceived differently in different socio-cultural contexts, yet an acknowledgment of childhood as a singular category allows for a development of general ethical standards that can help improve children's lives.

The second half of the chapter has elaborated on the topic of researching children's well-being. As well-being research is still in its infancy in Childhood Studies, holistic theoretical frameworks for researching children's subjective well-being are rare. I have offered a synthesis of different approaches in this chapter which, in total, may be considered a coherent framework for researching children's well-being.

First, the children's specific understandings of well-being need to be investigated. Well-being in this approach is defined as 'what makes a good life' for the research participants; in order to make this researchable, I have suggested exploring 'what matters most' to the children.

Second, transcultural aspects of the children's well-being also need to be acknowledged and this can be done by researching indicators for well-being. However, rather than choosing indicators in an a priori fashion, they may be selected during fieldwork according to what seems to emerge as relevant. I have explained how in my cross-cultural research two indicators for well-being proved to be particularly salient: self-confidence and resilience. Elaborating on the definitions, advantages and potential pitfalls of both indicators I illustrate how various studies on children's well-being have already dealt with these topics. In this context, I have emphasized the importance of investigating basic ontological assumptions when researching children's well-being. Concepts of childhood, self and world held by the children and their socio-cultural environment will significantly determine the children's self-confidence and resilience and therefore also their well-being.

It is unusual to combine, as I have done here, a relativistic stance towards children's well-being with a transcultural approach; they are usually considered to be opposing methodologies. I have explained, however, that perspectivism allows for such an approach which makes use of a methodological, rather than of an ontological relativism.

The following chapter *Setting the Scene* begins by expounding on my methodology for cross-cultural work and explores its benefits and potential pitfalls. After having established this methodological framework for a *Cross-Cultural Dialogue*, the rest of the chapter illustrates the socio-cultural backgrounds of the two research sites (Tibetan and German) and gives an overview of the sampling.

Chapter 2

Setting the Scene: A Cross-Cultural Ethnography

2.1. A Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Socio-cultural contexts play a key role in how people experience the world (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1963; Lutz 1988) and unsurprisingly, therefore, children's cultures vary significantly across the globe (Corsaro 2006; Montgomery 2009; Panelli et al 2007). Until rather recently, however, research had been overwhelmingly on Minority World childhoods (Chen et al 2006b). Several studies have begun to shift this one-sided focus (see Hinton 2000; Montgomery 2001; Punch 2003) yet cross-cultural accounts are still rare (Chawla 2002; Punch 2015a). Some discourses on research from different parts of the world (Montgomery 2009; Punch 2015b; Schwartzman 1982) and cross-cultural collections of different empirical accounts (Aitken et al 2007; Brown et al 2002; Chawla 2002; Chen et al 2006a; Panelli et al 2007; Punch and Tisdall 2014) are available. Only a few sources (Chen et al 2004; Katz 2004; LeVine 2003; Whiting 1963) include research from both Majority and Minority Worlds. The present work aims to fill this gap, by engaging research from Germany (Minority World) and a Tibetan village in India (Majority World) in a cross-cultural dialogue.

The previous chapter has explored theoretical frameworks around singular and pluralistic categories of childhood and concluded that these must not be considered binary views (James 2010). It is argued that, in fact, the intertwining of the two approaches can be of methodological value for cross-cultural research on children's lives. As Punch explains, "the two strands weave together creating a particular pattern in the cloth and integrating the perspective of childhood as a singular social category with the diversity perspective of many childhoods" (2015a: 5). The present thesis is an example of how this may be done. The two settings have offered interesting opportunities for cross-cultural research on children's experience of well-being from socio-cultural backgrounds that differ strongly from each other. Punch (2015a) points out that comparing Majority with Minority childhoods may be

less problematic when drawing on samples of children from similar social backgrounds. Also transcultural themes, such as identity and agency or leisure and play, can serve as a framework for cross-cultural comparison. Likewise, the present thesis draws from samples of similar situations at both sites (e.g., in class and during play) and investigates common themes at both sites (e.g., "what matters most to the children", agency, resilience etc.).

However, it is argued here that the idea of (cross-cultural) *comparison* is generally problematic in social science – at least in the strict sense of the word. The notion of comparison presupposes an existence of "social facts" that can be compared and implies a positivistic stance (see Durkheim's (1997) comparison between suicide rates among Protestants and among Catholics). As opposed to natural phenomena, social phenomena are not reproducible in experiments, are continuously changing and, most importantly, multicausal (Weber 1991; 1949). According to Weber's philosophy of social science, the infinitely complex nature of social phenomena is abstracted by the researcher's likes, interests and views and does *not* reflect any independently existing social reality. The data selected at the different sites are 'value-oriented' rather than 'naturally given' and therefore cannot be compared as if they were facts (Ringer 2000; Weber 1949). As Geertz puts it, data within the social sciences are,

> …whatever their empirical validity may or may not be, not "scientifically tested and approved" hypotheses. They are interpretations, or misinterpretations, like any others, arrived at in the same way as any others, and as inherently inconclusive as any others, and the attempt to invest them with the authority of physical experimentation is but methodological sleight of hand. (1963: 7)

According to the Weberian approach to comparative sociology the researcher merely generates "ideal types", abstractions of a highly complex, abundant social reality, and thereafter reveals "elective affinities" between these ideal types. The present study explains, for instance, how certain conceptualizations of well-being are held by the children at each site and how they seem to relate to aspects within their wider socio-cultural backgrounds. However, both the children's conceptualizations

as well as particular socio-cultural patterns within their societies, are *not* social facts but ideal types that the author has constructed within analysis. Without claiming to mirror facts, the Weberian approach does allow for limited conceptual generalizations through the usage of ideal types.

> Limited generalizations point to different patterns of process and structure in history, but the scope of generalizations never approaches that of natural scientific laws. Ideal types thus occupy a middle ground between the uniqueness of historical events and the generality of laws. Comparison between ideal types and individual causes aids understanding of divergent historical developments. Central to this methodological strategy is Weber's understanding that social reality is sufficiently complex as to be unknowable in absence of theoretical interests that guide construction of one-sided type concepts. (Ragin and Zaret 1983: 731)

At times, the present thesis may give the impression that comparisons are being made. Yet what is being compared are not snippets of a social reality but merely my own observations. The term (cross-cultural) comparison is misleading insofar as it does not capture this fine but significant difference.

Therefore, instead of an ethnography where 'a Tibetan situation' is compared to a 'German situation' this work may be considered (what I would call) a *dialectical ethnography,* where socio-cultural diversity interpreted by the ethnographer serves as the basis for cross-cultural dialogue. In a dialectical ethnography, there is no claim to comparing Tibetan with German or vice versa, but merely an effort to 'paint a cross-cultural picture' of children's experiences; the picture is my creation and not a mirror of any social reality 'out there'. While 'dialectical' suggests a discussion between different (cross-cultural) views, 'ethnography' is nowadays often associated with postmodern approaches that reject the aim of representing any objective reality in social science (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1963).

Furthermore, it is argued here that cross-cultural projects can be especially rich precisely because of the subjective nature of social science research. By dealing deliberately with human difference the researcher may develop entirely new perspectives on the subject matter. As cross-cultural research can "make the exotic familiar, and the familiar exotic" (Sax 1998: 292) the ethnographer may begin to see

issues, aspects and socio-cultural patterns that would have otherwise remained unnoticed. Or to put it in Fay's words:

> Changes in our understanding of others lead to changes in our self-understanding, and changes in our self-understanding lead to changes in our understanding of others (...) Epistemologically all understanding is comparative: there is no self-understanding if no other-understanding. (1996: 229)

As will become clear throughout the thesis, the cross-culturality of this research is not only a topic of the work but also an important heuristic tool for generating several of the insights.

2.2. Background: the Tibetan TCV and the German "Ganztagsschule"

The Tibetan Children's Villages (TCV)

Half of the one-year fieldwork was conducted with children at a Tibetan school in India, at one of the so-called 'Tibetan Children Villages' (TCV). Tibetan institutionalized forms of secular lay schooling have only emerged more recently in exile (Fremerey 1990; Gyatso 2001; John 1999; Nowak 1978) and therefore accounts of *Lay*-Tibetan education practices are rare. After Tibet's violent invasion in 1950-1951 by the Chinese People's Liberations Army and its continuing occupation, hundreds of thousands of Tibetans fled their homeland, establishing refugee communities worldwide but mainly within India, Nepal and Bhutan (Welck and Bernstorff 2004). Traditionally, in homeland Tibet, Buddhist monasteries had served as educational institutions and lay children (meaning non-ordained children) would only occasionally receive formal education by private teachers and even more rarely privately organized groups of classes taught by scholars (John 1999; Roemer 2008; Taring 1994; Yuthok 1995). These structures changed with the establishment of Tibetan communities in exile.

In order to provide shelter and education to refugee children coming from Tibet, the 14th Dalai Lama founded the first Tibetan Children's Village in Northern India in 1960 which has since generated several branches throughout India. According to the TCV website, TCV schools now enroll over 16,726 Tibetan children in total (TCV 2004). TCV schools are financed almost entirely by international aid agencies (TCV 2004) and, additionally, students are individually sponsored by donors from all over the world. Children still continue to arrive from Tibet, often sent by their parents with other refugees so their children can receive a Tibetan upbringing and education. However, the number of Tibetan refugees has decreased dramatically in the past years as Chinese border-control policies have made it more difficult to cross the borders to India and Nepal (Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, Interview, Headmaster, March 2010).

Thus, in addition to orphans, semi-orphans and refugees coming from Tibet, TCV has also begun enrolling Tibetan children born in India in their school. TCV now officially accepts children whose parents are unable to fully attend their needs or children of the staff of the school.[9] All of the children of the class within which I conducted research had been born in India and had not experienced the often traumatic journey through the Himalayas to India. None of these students were orphans, although five children had their parents living and working in other villages in India, while two children's parents were working within the same village. These seven children lived in *Kimsangs* [Tib. for "homes"] located on the compound of the school, where a so-called 'home-mother' took care of about 30-40 children of different ages. They would get to see their parents either on weekends or only during holidays. The rest of the children from the class lived with their parents who were employees (teachers, chefs, janitors etc.) in houses that were also within the compound.

TCV had been founded in response to Tibetan refugee-children's needs for home and education, however, the institution considers itself an arena for the preservation and maintenance of Tibetan culture and identity in exile (John 1999;

[9] Some of the Tibetan children born in India also attend the so-called Central Tibetan Schools which are run by the Ministry of Human Resource Development by the Government of India. According to their website, a total of about 10,000 students are currently enrolled across India (CTSA 2009).

Nowak 1978; TCV Head Office 2007). Certain structural measures within TCV's educational policy mirror this mission. For example, the *Language Instruction Policy* ensures that primary school education takes place primarily in Tibetan (TCV Head Office 2009). From the Middle school onwards, English is introduced as a second, 'academic' language and, thereafter, Hindi. Instead of relying on Indian or Western school books, the TCV Education Development and Resource Centre (EDRC) designs and regularly revises school books for the primary level, oriented towards Tibetan culture and language and designed to evoke a sense of the Tibetan cultural heritage (Nowak 1978). As the school manual explains, each TCV branch is mandated to "design programs and activities to develop a clear understanding and appreciation of our rich culture so that the children have a familiarity of our philosophy and way of life to internalize in their personal lives" (TCV Head Office 2009: 20). According to the late Jetsun Pema, the patroness of TCV and the 14th Dalai Lama's sister, "the foundation of TCV Education must be Tibetan in character – relevant and fit for the Tibetan child" (quoted in TCV Head Office 2009: 36).

Statements on 'Tibetanness' frequently emphasize the uniqueness on the basis of Tibetan Buddhist culture. As Jetsun Pema puts it:

> There are millions of refugees in the world. There are so many people who are worse off than us. But we continue to get the support. Why? This is because we Tibetans have a rich cultural heritage. Why is it that so many people come from all over the world to listen and receive teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama? People around the world find the Tibetans different and special. We as Tibetans need to wake up to this fact and take care of what we have. We must realize what we have. (quoted in TCV Head Office 2007: xi)

Tibetan identity, both in homeland Tibet and in exile, is therefore inseparable from the Buddhist value system which permeates everyday life. Tibetan Buddhism can therefore be considered an "ideological force" shaping Tibetan culture in exile (Goldstein 1998: 5; see also Ekvall 1960; Shneiderman 2006) including Tibetan ideals on children´s education and upbringing (John 1999; Maiden-Brown et al 2008; Nowak 1978). TCV curricula are infused with Buddhist references, values and practices and Buddhist teachings for all classes are obligatory, often guided by a

"qualified Religious Instructor" (usually a Buddhist monk) (TCV Head Office 2009: 22). Teachings by the Dalai Lama and other famous Buddhist scholars are integrated into teaching materials for languages and social science subjects (TCV Head Office 2007) and the day at TCV schools always begins and ends with Buddhist prayers and short meditation practices.

Tibetological accounts have suggested that Tibetan identity construction in exile is mainly based on *Buddhist modernism* (Anand 2006; Bishop 1989; Buruma 2000; Dodin and Räther 2001; Korom 1997a; Lopez 1998), a comparatively recent form of Tibetan Buddhism, emerging in reaction to Western domination around the end of the 19th century (see Dreyfus 2005; Huber 2001; Lopez 1998). A modern Buddhist view reflects encounters with Western paradigms, for example, by emphasizing its affinity to science rather than to religion and to empirical investigation rather than to dogmatic aspects of Buddhism (Lopez 2008; McMahan 2008). Yet although Western paradigms have been incorporated into Tibetan identity in exile, it is nevertheless rooted in its unique socio-cultural background.

> When Tibetans borrowed Western ideas, as they did increasingly after 1963, they turned to notions like democracy[10] and human rights, not to the disempowering stereotypes that are the hallmark of orientalism. Thus, when the Dalai Lama or young monks and nuns in Tibet articulated their vision of Tibet, they grounded their views in a mixture of traditional Tibetan Buddhist ideas – such as compassion, karma, and the unique relation between Tibetans and Avalokiteśvara[11] and Western ideas such as human rights and democratic values. (Dreyfus 2005: 14)

Similarly, TCV's philosophy and mission statements include references to democratic values which are combined with traditional Buddhist values, such as compassion and taking responsibility for others. The *TCV Educational Manual*, for

[10] Dreyfus speaks of "visions for Tibet" in relation to democracy. Whether or not the Tibetan Government in exile is actually exercising democratic values is not discussed by Dreyfus and would also go beyond the scope of this paper. It should be mentioned, however, that claims have been made challenging the exile-governments policies' support of democratic values (Norbu 1993; Roemer 2008; Sangay 2003; Venturio 1997).

[11] Avalokiteśvara is the Sanskrit name for the Buddha of Compassion whom the 14th Dalai Lama is considered a manifestation of.

example, postulates that "programs and learning activities should be created in our schools to enable them to understand democratic principles and values" (TCV Head Office 2007: 53). However, it is considered "a *dual* task of providing a modern scientific education and keeping the Tibetan language and culture alive and relevant" (TCV Head Office 2007: 15; emphasis added). TCV mirrors the synthesis of 'traditional' Tibetan culture and elements of Modern philosophies and structures common to Tibetan societies in exile.

The German "Ganztagschule"

Most German public schools usually end class around 1pm, however, "Ganztagschulen", meaning 'all-day-schools', are structured differently and finish late in the afternoon. According to proponents of this style of schooling, this longer time-frame makes a more "open" form of schooling possible (German School, Fieldnotes, Interview, Headmaster, Oct. 2010; German School Booklet 2007). Rather than following set times, for instance, teachers could adjust the schedule according to the topics at hand and, as the school manual suggests, to the children's "biorhythms" (German School Booklet 2007: 14). After lunch there would be some time for supervised homework and the late afternoons would offer a variety of activities to choose from, such as music, theatre, sports and experimental classes on nutrition and diet.

Approximately 30% of the children attending the German primary school in which the study was completed were of non-German descent, as the school was situated in an area which had a high percentage of immigrants. Internationality therefore determined the school's profile which was referred to by the school as an "enrichment" (German School Booklet 2007: 6). As the manual states: "we enjoy our diversity and appreciate our differences" (German School Booklet 2007: 12) as they offer "opportunities for 'multicultural cross-fertilization'" (German School Booklet 2007: 6).

However, the international make-up of the students also had its challenges. For instance, as families of children from non-German backgrounds often had only a

rudimentary knowledge of the German language, some children would have difficulties following the classes being taught in German. Statistically speaking, the area within which the school was situated had the highest concentration of socio-economically disadvantaged families in town. [12] Many students were therefore considered in need of additional classroom assistance (German School, Fieldnotes, Interview, Headmaster, Oct. 2010; German School Booklet 2007). Moreover, children from similar cultural backgrounds would often "band together" which would give rise to cross-cultural conflict and ethnic discrimination (German School, Fieldnotes, Interview, Headmaster, Oct. 2010; German School Booklet 2007). Social work conducted both by teachers and external social workers on a regular basis tried to meet these challenges. Classes 1 to 4 included a 'social curriculum' dealing with issues like integration, equality, "otherness" and the "ethics of nonviolence" (German School Booklet 2007: 23) and a fixed contact point specialized in dispute settlement and "conflict de-escalation" would offer violence-free alternative solutions for disputes.

"*Leistung*" [German for "performance/achievement"] has become central to public German discourses which debate how to render children "*leistungsfähiger*", "more performance-capable" (see Kerstan 2008; Stöckli 2008). The German "Ganztagsschule" where research for this thesis was conducted emphasized the importance of developing the student's ability to be "performance-capable", however, in the context of the children being "happy" and "open-minded" human beings (German School Booklet 2007: 12). According to the school's philosophy, performance and work needed to be balanced with creativity, play and relaxation. Moreover, the developing of the children's *social* skills was very much emphasized at the school. Part of the concept of an all-day-school-structure was also that it would allow enough time for the students to establish social bonds, so that children could "experience what it is like to be part of a stable group" (German School Booklet 2007: 9). The headmaster revealed to me in an interview (German School, Fieldnotes, Interview, Headmaster, Oct. 2010), that they, as staff, were well aware of the

[12] An increasing number of the children, however, also came from a developing area nearby which were home mostly to social-economically more advantaged families, such as young academics.

expectations from the government and public in terms of children's performance-abilities. Yet, he explained, the school's mission was first and foremost to respond to the needs at hand which required dealing with the educational and social challenges that came with the multicultural make-up of the students and their social backgrounds.

The fact that the school did not yield to mainstream discourses on education that suggest focusing on students' performance seems to be unusual for public schools in Germany. As the following section will show, children in Germany have been increasingly exposed to a pressure to perform at school, referred to in German as "*Leistungsdruck*", something which is criticized as having negative effects on the children's well-being (for example, Czermak 2011; Hanckel 2002; Taffertshofer 2007; Vollmer 2010).

Competitive Structures and Well-Being at Both Sites

Findings presented in Chapter 4 suggest that competition was part of the children's social practices around well-being at both sites. This is not surprising given that, as the following will show, competition is considered a means to achieving well-being in both of the children's societies. The economic structures of both German society and Tibetan society in Exile, promising wealth and well-being, are based on competitive principles.

Competition and Well-Being in the Children's Societies

Germany, one of the largest and most successful economies in Europe, follows an economic system called *Soziale Marktwirtschaft* (social market economy), a moderated form of neo-liberalism, but competition-based, nonetheless. Thus, it is considered one of the German government's main functions to safeguard economic competition by regulating the national market (Bundesregierung 2014; Höft 2013). The ability to engage successfully in competition is often quoted as a main condition for

"*Wohlstand*", German for "(material) well-being"[13] for citizens in Germany [German: *Wettbewerbsfähigkeit*] (Bundesregierung 2014; Höft 2013; Steingart 2013). In his milestone of German economic literature after Second World War *Wohlstand für Alle* [German for "(material) well-being for all"], the former chancellor Ludwig Ehrhard, for instance, famously concluded that "(material) well-being for all and (material) well-being though competition are inseparable" (Erhard 1957: 297; my translation).

The Tibetan diaspora's host-country India is one of the fastest growing and most highly competitive economies of the world (Pushpangadan and Balasubramanyam 2012) and fully embraces neo-liberal educational policies (Morrow 2013). Since its settling in India over fifty years ago Tibetan society in Exile has adapted many of India's neo-liberal economic and educational paradigms (John 1999; Roemer 2008) and, as explained earlier, also incorporated many 'Western' paradigms into their culture (see Anand 2006; Dodin and Räther 2001; Huber 2001; Nowak 1984). The ability to participate in the global economic competition is considered moreover essential for the survival of the Tibetan culture in Exile - especially in the face of the eradication of Tibetan culture in their homeland by the Chinese invaders (CTA 2013; Roemer 2008). The new generations of Tibetans are therefore trained to be adaptable to the competitive global employment conditions. On the Tibetan Government's website it is stated that,

> His Holiness the Dalai Lama's dream is to nurture Tibetan students who are not only sharp intellectually, but also responsible community members and world citizens. (…) Many alumni of Tibetan schools (…) are now serving the Tibetan community in various capacities—as parliamentarians, civil servants, teachers, doctors, journalists, activists, lawyers and so on. (…) One of our goals is to significantly expand the base of Tibetan professionals holding advanced degrees in fields such as medicine, science, mathematics, engineering, law, business, etc. This group of educated professionals have a vital role to play in our struggle to restore freedom in Tibet. (CTA 2013)

[13] In German there are two terms for well-being: "Wohlstand" refers mainly material well-being (but not excluding other forms of well-being) and "Wohlbefinden" refers mainly to bodily and emotional well-being (but not excluding other forms of well-being).

As Tibetan leaders have been encouraging their Lay-communities to become 'world citizens', modern, financially independent Tibetans, Tibetan diaspora has become increasingly internationalized (Bernsdorff and Welck 2004; CTA 2013; John 1999; Roemer 2008). "It would appear that Tibetan diasporization in the West has proven successful. They have succeeded in many small business enterprises and are resourceful in adapting foods, goods, and services to cater to local needs" (MacPherson et al 2008; see also Bernsdorff and Welck 2004).

Both Tibetan diaspora in India and the German society therefore embrace economic liberal and free-market policies where individuals engage in educative and economic competitions. Material wealth and one's physical and emotional security often depends on one's individual success within these competitions and paradigms link well-being to competition in public discourses. Competition is thus seen as a doorway to societal and personal well-being in Germany, as well as Tibetan society in Exile.

Competition and Well-Being in both Schools

The basic structure of the children's schools was also shaped fundamentally by competitive guidelines. Quantitative grading structures and ranking systems, where excelling over others was an objective and where failing is possible, were part of daily life at both schools.

The German school made a point of introducing the students gently to the competitive demands of the grading. Students in second grade were thus graded only on a scale from 1 ('excellent') to 3 ('sufficient'), rather than the usual 1-6 grading. Moreover, the final school certificate of the term did not include any grading but merely contained a text evaluating the students' abilities and weaknesses written by the class-teacher. Nevertheless, it was also possible – if rare – for second graders to fail their year.

Due to structural changes in educational policy, the education system in Germany has become increasingly competitive in the last decade. These recent developments have been ascribed to the lately established "*Bildungsstandards*", a standardisation of education requirements, introduced nation-wide (see Klieme et al

2009). The establishment of the *Bildungsstandards* was mainly a reaction to results of internationally conducted empirical studies by the OECD, called the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which classified the quality of German school-systems as mediocre (OECD 2011). Accordingly, more importance has been placed both by schools and parents on social competition and performance, resulting in higher performance requirements for the students involved (Bilz 2008; Hotappels et al 2002). As of the second grade, teachers are required by the ministry of education to assess children's abilities and progress (Kultusministerium Baden-Wuerttemberg 2011). Number grading, ranging from 1 ("excellent") to 6 ("fail"), is usually given for core subjects such as Math and German, whereas grading for other subjects can be given either verbally or in written form.

Especially in the recent decades pressure on teachers in Germany has increased to evaluate and assess their students more diligently (Czerny 2010; Wehaus 2010). Public discourses in Germany have recently begun discussing possible 'unhealthy' aspects of competition. Scholars and parents find the increase of competitiveness within the German schools worrisome (see Fend 2005; Jahnke 2008; Liessmann 2006). For example, the German media reported about the father of a second-grader in *Tübingen* who complained about the strict grading system at his son's school first to the head of the school and then to the Ministry of Education (Wehaus 2011). His complaint was dismissed by the government's statement that a detailed assessment of second-graders is justified given the international education standards.

These trends in Germany reflect popular debates in several other Minority World countries about 'healthy versus unhealthy competition' in relation to children's well-being. Descriptions of healthy competition usually describe competition as a motivational force for learning, which, however, needs to be balanced with the ability to remain relaxed in the face of one's own failure (Fülöp 2002). Tips for parents on how to encourage a healthy competitive attitude in their children include advice such as "stress the basics of fair play, good sportsmanship, putting forth good effort and winning or losing gracefully" (Johnson 1993: 3) and "while they [the children] should put forth their best efforts, when they do lose, they

must learn to congratulate the winners and not pout or complain" (Rimm 2009). More generally, it is suggested that a healthy competitive environment should generate positive responses towards children's performance irrespective of their success (see Howard 2009). While some ponder how a healthy competition can be maintained, others hold that competition can never be anything but unhealthy. To Alfie Kohn, for example, competitive conditions always have detrimental effects on children's well-being. In his opinion, the notion of a healthy competition is "a contradiction in terms" (1987: 5; see also Kohn 1992).

Public discourses in Tibetan society in exile do not tend to question competition in terms of its effects on children's well-being. Interviews with teachers and the head of the school presented a view of competition as solely beneficial for the students. As one teacher put it: "when there is competition, they have the willingness to study more. If they don't have competition, then they won't." (Tibetan School, Recording, Interview, Male Teacher, Nov 2012). In personal conversations with other Tibetan adults I found a similar stance to be prevalent within the community.

The Tibetan schools in India have adapted a large part of the highly competitive Indian school standards into their educational structure in order to keep up with international standards of education. Fremerey speaks of the developing of an "education elite" at Tibetan schools who, as "cosmopolitans", are trained so that they can compete in the global markets (1990: 18).

Similar to the German school, children in first and second grade were treated 'more gently' at the Tibetan school with lessons based on Montessori methods and shorter time in class than children from higher grades. However, compared to the German school's curriculum, a student's day of the second grade at TCV included two additional hours of studying and allowed much less time for play.[14] The daily time table for children as of grade 3 may illustrate the high standards of the Tibetan school:

[14] At the same time, the children's physical movement and social interaction was significantly less constrained during class at the Tibetan school than at the German school (see Chapter 5).

Good morning rising bell	5.30 a.m.
Breakfast	06.15 a.m.
Cleaning and washing	06.30 a.m.
Morning prayer	07.00 a.m.
Self Studies *(in the class)*	07.30 a.m.
Recess	08.30 a.m.
Morning Assembly	08.45 a.m.
First Period	09.00 a.m.
Second Period	09.55 a.m.
Short Break	10.45 a.m.
Third Period	11.05 a.m.
Fourth Period	11.50 a.m.
Lunch Break	12.40 a.m.
Lunch *"On holidays"*	12.00 noon
Fifth Period	01.40 p.m.
Sixth Period	02.25 p.m.
Reading Period	03.10 p.m.
Rest/Evening tea	03.40 p.m.
School activities	04.00 p.m.
Dinner	05.45 p.m.
Recess	06.00 p.m.
Evening Prayer	06.30 p.m.
Self studies *(in the class)*	07.00 p.m.
Preparation for bed	08.30 p.m.
Good night and light off	09.00 p.m. (TCV Head Office 2010: 28; emphasis in original)

Grading and other structures at the Tibetan schools also reflected the competitive standards. While students who were considered in danger of failing would be given a 'warning letter' from the principal which eventually "may lead to forfeiture of educational opportunities" (TCV Head Office 2007: 150), students who excelled could receive "a certificate of good conduct" or win a prize (TCV Head Office 2007: 58). Other non-academic prizes would be awarded on a regular basis and included areas such as "health and hygiene", "conduct", "games and sports", "creativity", "leadership", "school service", "community service", "co-curricular participation", "exceptional attendance", "talent", "personal growth" and "any

unique contribution" (TCV Head Office 2007: 61). Several programs and activities offered were also designed as competitions, such as the Inter-TCV Athletics, Inter-TCV Literary Contests, Inter-TCV Cultural Festival (where several groups perform and win prizes), Inter-TCV Creative Writing Contests, All-TCV Art and Painting Program, All-TCV Common Examinations and Tibet-Our-Country Project.

2.3. Sampling Overview

Research was conducted for the length of approximately six months at each school (one year in total), in 2012. The sample consisted of children attending the second grade in both schools (Tibetan and German) and of some members of school staff. Whereas the German class hosted 24 children, the second-grade at the Tibetan school was significantly smaller with 14 children.

In order to consolidate the familiarity and relationship between me and the children I limited myself to researching one school class of second-graders in each school, attending classes, breaks and the afternoon-activities for 3-4 days a week. Both TCV and the German school were all-day schools which enabled me to effectively spend most of the day with the children.

The children's ages in the second-grade of the Tibetan school ranged from 7-10 years while the second-graders in the German school were more homogenous in this respect, ranging from 7-8 years. I spent time with all of the children of each class, working with both boys and girls from different backgrounds. Yet over time, I chose particular peer-groups and their individual members to be my key informants; or rather, they chose me, as an important criteria for sampling was individual children's willingness to share their time with me. The sample of staff-members consisted of the children's second-grade teachers and, at the German school, of care-takers and an interview was conducted with the headmasters of both schools. School documents, such as official statements in curriculum and education guidelines, the websites and school magazines, were also part of the sample.

Most of the data were collected during class, on the playground and school yard. At a later stage of fieldwork I conducted several interviews. Even though the

class at the Tibetan school was significantly smaller than at the German school, I ended up taking nearly as many interviews. Interviews with boys were fewer at both schools because they were less interested in giving interviews, the Tibetan boys in particular. Also the teachers at the Tibetan schools were not particularly interested in being interviewed and therefore only one interview with each teacher was possible. Following tables provides an overview:

Both Sites: Participant observation

Context	Days in total	Hours in total
In class	Approx. 84 days (3-4 days/week for months)	Approx. 420 hours (5 hours/each day)
Playground/free play in class	Approx. 84 days (3-4 days/ week for 6 months)	Approx. 168 hours (2 hours/ each day)

Tibetan school: Interviews

Interviewee(s)	Same interviewee two-three times	Group interviews	**Interviews total**
girls	7	10	**28**
boys	5	8	**20**
mixed gender	-	5	**5**
teacher	-	-	**4**
headmaster	-	-	**1**

German school: Interviews

Interviewee(s)	Same interviewee twice	Group interview	**Interviews total**
girls	15	8	**33**
boys	6	5	**21**
mixed gender	-	3	**3**
teacher	3	-	**7**
headmaster	-	-	**1**

2.4. Summary

The beginning of this chapter has elaborated on how cross-cultural research offers a unique opportunity for generating in-depth research accounts of children's lives. As some have urged, a more global approach to childhood is needed within Childhood Studies in order to account for the diversity of children's experiences around the world. Moreover, as I have suggested, cross-cultural research may generate fresh insights by 'making the exotic familiar and the familiar exotic'. Cross-cultural research can therefore also be a valuable heuristic tool in addition to its substantive value. I argue, however, that the concept of cross-cultural *comparison* is not appropriate when it comes to social phenomena as it implies a positivist notion of social facts. I have therefore suggested replacing the term with *dialectical ethnography* instead.

Secondly, this chapter has provided relevant background information about the two settings where research was conducted. I have illustrated how the Tibetan Schools in India (TCV), aside from providing education to Tibetan children in exile, are also considered a means of preserving Tibetan tradition and culture in the face of Chinese occupation in homeland Tibet. Establishing a sense of Tibetanness in the students is part of the school's mission, within which Buddhist values play a significant part. Tibetologists suggest that this Tibetanness in exile has incorporated several Modern elements (*Buddhist Modernism*), something which also seems to be the case for TCV's school structure and educational values.

The second site, the German 'Ganztagsschule', was not a typical German public school insofar as it is was an all-day school with a high percentage of non-German students. Recent public debates in Germany have raised the level of competitiveness at schools, attempting to make the students more 'performance-capable'. As explained, I found, however, that the German 'Ganztagsschule' valued the children's well-being over their ability to perform and emphasized developing the children's social skills alongside their academic abilities.

I have moreover explained how competition was linked to well-being at both schools and in their respective societies. Both, Tibetan society in exile and Germany

participate in global competitive economic structures and public discourses suggest that wealth and well-being is achievable by engaging in these competitions. While both schools made a point of introducing the children gently to the competitive grading and ranking structures, they were based on competitive guidelines, nevertheless.

The final section of this chapter has provided an overview of the samples taken at each site and by which method these were taken. The following chapter will explain the methods and methodology applied during research and analysis and will reflect on the challenges and limitations this project had to face.

Chapter 3

Methods and Methodology

As explained in Chapter 1, part of the conceptual framework for research was based on a symbolic interactionist approach which views reality as socially in interaction with others (Corsaro 2011; 2006). Children's well-being was therefore explored by ethnographically researching the collective activities of the children within their peer cultures. My primary method for research was participant observation, sustained by interviews conducted with individuals and groups. The data were gathered and sorted in preliminary analyses during fieldwork according to contemporary grounded theory methods.

3.1. Methodology

As elaborated in Chapter 1, much of my methodology is based on William Corsaro's (2011; 2006; 2003; 1993) approach to studying children's peer culture routines. The term culture is notoriously difficult to define but generally describes an eclectic range of shared beliefs, values and concepts (including ambivalent and conflicting ones) which are constantly changing and essentially "permeable" to other 'cultures' (Fay 1996: 55; see also Sax 1998). From a symbolic interactionist point of view (see Blumer 1969; Mead 1934; 1913), children (like adults) digest, negotiate and generate experiences and conceptualizations within this social activity. Studying children's social interaction therefore offers an opportunity to get an insight into their experiences (Corsaro 2011; 2003; 1993). I explored the children's peer cultures at both schools via ethnographic research which consisted mainly of participant observation and some interviews.

Ethnographic Research

Ethnography is considered a key methodology for research with children (Corsaro 2006; James and Prout 1990; Mason and Watson 2014). Compared to most other

methodologies, ethnographic research has the advantage of generating especially rich and detailed data. Geertz has famously elaborated on this issue by referring to ethnography as a "thick description" (as opposed to a "thin description") (Geertz 1973). Human social life is highly complex, dynamic, ever-changing and often contradictory (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008) and ethnography, as a flexible, open method, is well equipped to capture this 'messiness' of social reality.

The main critique of ethnographic research, in particular, and qualitative study, more generally, is the lack of generalisability of findings. In depth research only allows for small scale samples and a limited number of research sites, and the data elicited in participant observation are therefore limited in terms of gender, age, the particular socio-cultural context and so forth. Interviewing generates an even narrower scope as it refers only to a "specific and refined context" (Mason 2002: 83; see also Hammersley 2005). Consequently, findings of such research cannot be considered representative of larger social contexts (Hammersley 2013).

Face-to-face research and spending long periods of time at the sites are core features of ethnographic fieldwork and can enable the researcher to get deep insights into people's experiences and lives. The anthropologist Malinowski, one of the founding fathers of ethnographic research, suggested that once the ethnographer has been able to achieve a certain level of familiarity with the culture under study, he or she will be able to see matters "from the natives' point of view", which he considered the aim of ethnographic research (Malinowski 2002). This paradigm has remained central to ethnography until today, however, significantly modified. The postmodernist turn made clear that fully representing others' views and experiences is not possible (Marcus and Fisher 1986). Fifty years after Malinowski, Clifford Geertz suggested that creating accounts of other people's 'subjectivities' instead comes from

> …the ability to construe their modes of expression, what I would call their symbol systems, which such an acceptance allows one to work toward developing. Understanding the form and pressure of, to use the dangerous word one more time, 'natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an allusion, seeing a joke—or, as I have suggested, reading a poem—than it is like achieving communion. (Geertz 1974: 45)

Children's perspectives have rarely been given attention in traditional social science (Alderson 1995; Alderson and Morrow 2004; Christensen and James 2008b) and research was usually conducted with children's caretakers rather than with the children themselves (Scott 2008). In line with contemporary approaches in Childhood Studies, the present work is therefore based on research conducted "*with*, rather than, *on* children" (Christensen and James 2008b: 1; emphasis in original). Children are acknowledged as active agents and authorities on the subject of study and therefore *their* understandings of well-being is an important part of this thesis (see also Fattore et al 2007; Mayall 2002). This work therewith contributes to the growing body of work in social science exploring children's lives by acknowledging them as mature informants (Christensen and O'Brien 2003; Emond 2013; Montgomery 2001; Punch and Tisdall 2014; Wilson and Milne 2013). Beyond a mere interest in children's experiences such an approach credits children "with knowledge, rather than with the relatively transient and flimsy 'perspective', 'view' or 'opinion'" (Mayall 2008: 109). We can and should rely on children's knowledge and reflexivity during research and analysis (Christensen and James 2008c).

Ethnographic research for this thesis was conducted for approximately six months in each school and included various situations such as class time, during assignments, meals, lunch and recess. Of particular importance to my research were moments of leisure and play, where children were least inhibited by adults in their social interaction.

3.2. Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork presupposes that the researcher's approach should be guided mainly by the local conditions encountered in the field. Rather than basing fieldwork on apriori assumptions, ethnographic research usually adheres to a "phenomenologically oriented" paradigm (Fetterman 1998: 5) which presupposes an 'open mind' on the part of the researcher and a considerable degree of flexibility with regard to the research design. Gallacher and Gallagher's notion of *methodological immaturity* (2009: 511) explains such an approach. According to this

notion, what matters most is the methodological attitude taken, while methods should be applied depending on and in relation to what the researcher encounters in the field.

> Good research practice cannot be reduced to ingenious techniques, planned in advance and carefully applied. Research is inherently unpredictable: the best laid plans are liable to go awry. Methodological immaturity privileges open-ended process over predefined technique. It does not aim to discover or uncover a pre-existing world, offering instead experimentation, innovation and 'making do'. (Gallacher and Gallagher 2009: 513)

My main method of research was participant observation, a flexible and open-ended method. At a later stage of field-work, once rapport with the children had sufficiently been established, interviews were conducted with the children. Data gathering and sorting was conducted in line with post-modern variants of grounded theory, methods that enabled flexibility while concurrently giving the research process structure and grounding.

Participant Observation

Data were collected mainly through participant observation - interacting with the children in various contexts while paying close attention to their verbal and bodily expressive actions. Participant observation enabled me to gain an intimate familiarity with the children and their peer cultures through attentive observation and close involvement with them over a longer period of time. By participating not only in their formal activities at school, but also in their activities outside of the classes as much as possible (meals, excursions, leisure time, etc.) I was able to build rapport with the children and at the same time, get a better understanding of their cultures. Combining participation with observation is essential for obtaining data. As Fine and Sandstrom (1988) note, assuming a purely observational stance will prove counterproductive.

> Because the observer is seen as an adult, they [the children] will hide those behaviours to which they think anonymous adults might object. (…) when children wish to engage in socially

> deviant acts, they often retreat to private locations where a stranger cannot follow. The pure observer is granted little more right to witness their behaviour than any member of the general public (…) Even if the observer witnesses normally "hidden" behaviour, its meaning may remain opaque, and the children involved have little incentive to explain it. (Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 16)

Participating in children's activities requires a high sensitivity to what is appropriate at the current moment. Children's peer culture, as any other culture, has its culturally specific language, ethics, rules and modes of conduct to which the researcher must adjust his or her behaviour in order to build rapport (Corsaro 2011). As Christensen (2004) has suggested, the "act of looking" and an ability to "listen attentively" is indispensable. Achieving rapport with the children also presupposes that one has been able to deal with the adult-child power imbalance inherent in the researcher-child relationship (Bucknall 2014; Christensen 2004; Corsaro 2011; 2008; Corsaro and Molinari 2008; Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Holmes 1998; Mandell 1991; Mayall 2008; O'Kane 2008). This was especially crucial to me at field entry (Corsaro and Molinari 2008) because even if the researcher is willing to approach children on a level playing field this does not presuppose a similar understanding on the part of the children (Holmes 1998). As Mayall concludes from her experience in research with children, they "usually think otherwise: a central characteristic of adults is that they have power over children" (2008: 110). I thus relied on what Corsaro (2011; see also Corsaro and Molinari 2008) calls a *reactive method* for field entry, letting the children take the lead in first encounters, having physically placed myself in the midst of them.

By being as atypical an adult as possible in my social interaction with the children, I feel I was able to reduce the adult-child gap between us to a certain extent. It is unlikely, however, that generational power issues can ever be fully eliminated (Christensen 2004; Mayall 2008; Montgomery 2009) and it is questionable whether becoming an "observer-friend" (Fine and Sandstrom 1988) to children during research is possible. Following Mayall's (2008; see also Bucknall 2014) recommendation I explained to the children that I was hoping to learn from them as my being an adult meant I lacked knowledge about childhood. At the same time, I

found it important to emphasize commonalities between us, rather than differences. At both sites, establishing relationships with the children proved to be successful over time by showing a genuine interest in their interests, knowledge and views, enjoying their presence and engaging in their activities. This presupposed also, as Holmes puts it, "having no qualms about acting 'silly' according to some adult standards of the term" and being prepared "to experience manipulation and domination by children willingly, particularly at playtime" (1998: 17). However, in order to keep the relationship 'authentic', I would not do or say things I did not feel comfortable with (Fine and Sandstrom 1988).

A few situations demanded that I be more of a typical adult, for example when children would hurt themselves and need some attention and reassurance. Most of the time, however, I tried to avoid taking on typical adult-roles as much as possible. Unlike other adults, I would not get involved in quarrels, act as a mediator or punish children for transgressing rules but rather I would simply ask them to go talk to a teacher. During class I would sit with the children at one of their school desks and, during lunch, would share their meals. After some time the children were used to my atypical behaviour and only rarely was I approached as an adult authority. Overall, I felt that I was able to establish relationships with the children which were significantly less marked by the power-imbalance they experienced with other adults. This became especially evident on occasions where the children would do "forbidden things" in my presence or even deliberately share such experiences with me; in moments where individuals would share secrets "which they would usually not tell other adults" and, moreover, when I became the subject of mocking that would usually be common in child-child relations. Nevertheless, the form of my relationships to the children varied depending on the individual and some children seemed more comfortable with and closer to me than others. As Montgomery writes,

> Some children might accept a non-adult adult in their midst (…) but not all children will. Children may want to be friends and collaborators (…) Alternatively, they may choose not to be friends or may be embarrassed, confused or even intimidated by an adult sitting in the sand pit with them or sitting next to them at school. (2014: 12)

While most of the time, the children signalled to me that they appreciated and enjoyed my presence I noticed how, on a few occasions, children did not feel comfortable with me around. Most of these occasions were with boys at the Tibetan school and I made sure to respect their wishes. Generally speaking, it was much more difficult to rid our relationships of generational structures at the Tibetan school than at the German school. The children at both sites seemed to regard me as an a-typical adult, however, while the children at the German school did not seem very concerned with categorising me within any generational order the Tibetan children began to address me (and my interpreter) as *Acha* [Tib. for "older sister"]. This was not surprising given that people in Tibetan society are generally addressed in relation to their position within the generational or hierarchical order, rather than with their names [e.g., *pu*, *Tib*. for "young boy"/son; *Momola*, *Tib*. for "elderly woman/grandmother" etc.] while elaborate generational structures are not common in Germany.

Interviews

As crucial as participant observation may be for qualitative field-research on children's perspectives, it is a broad approach; interviews were an important method for focusing on the topic of research. Participant observation was therefore combined with conducting interviews – complementing one another. In interviews, I could encourage the children to engage more directly with the research topic and share their views, meanings and experiences verbally (Corsaro 2006) while participant observation captured and documented their social action related to these. Combining these two methods also responds to Jackson's (1989) call to move the 'individual's constitutive part' back into ethnographic inquiry, reminding us that lived experience and conceptualisations are not the same.

> While I agree with (…) eschewing any notion of the individual subject as the primary source and final arbiter of our understanding, I do not want to risk dissolving the lived experience of the subject into the anonymous field of discourse (…) In my view, notions such as Culture, Nature, Language, and Mind are to be regarded as instrumentalities, not finalities. (Jackson 1989: 1)

I conducted both semi-structured and unstructured interviews in formal as well as in informal settings. Semi-structured interviews ensured that relevant topics were covered inside the limited timeframe available for fieldwork while the unstructured interviews enabled participants to determine the direction of the interview. Taking on the form of a conversation, unstructured interviews often provoked issues relevant to the children that I had not foreseen (Mayall 2008). As often as possible, I interviewed the children in an informal setting, such as during free play in the classroom or at recess. As Holmes suggests, this strategy is most conducive as it is more enjoyable, less artificial, and experienced as less threatening by the children (1998: 23). On other occasions we agreed on a separate time and place for more formal interviews and participants were interviewed alone, in pairs or in groups, depending on what the situation demanded (Corsaro 2011; Hagerman 2010; Mayall 2008). Especially in these formal situations, a relationship of mutual understanding and trust between interviewer and interviewee is essential. Therefore, formal interviews were conducted at a later stage of the fieldwork once a sense of familiarity had been established between myself and the children.

Mode of Documentation

Taking ethnographic notes, both during and after periods of research, was the basis of documentation during fieldwork. Additionally, I kept a field-diary where I recorded and reflected upon my personal and emotional involvement in the research-process. As Punch (2011) elaborates, this method can significantly enhance the reflexive dimension of research and analysis. Much of the documentation was conducted also by sound-recording, which proved to be invaluable because it captured much more detail of the verbal interaction.

Data Collection Method: Postmodern Grounded Theory

Recently developed versions of grounded theory methods proved to be very helpful for the gathering and sorting of data during fieldwork and preliminary analysis.

Traditional grounded theory methods (Glaser 1987; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1998) have been improved by contemporary approaches with a constructivist and interpretivist leaning (Bryant 2003; Charmaz 2006; 2000; Clarke 2005).[15]

In grounded theory, preliminary analysis guides and shapes fieldwork from the very start (Charmaz 2006; 2000; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Early data are sorted through *qualitative coding*, a process of labelling parts of data that describe what each part is about. Once data are coded one can begin to make comparisons with other parts of data and generate a first analytic impression. Through studying and comparing the data in this manner, *categories* that best fit and interpret the data can be created. The next step is to compare these categories with other data and other categories. These processes of coding and comparing, generating categories and comparing, and the emergence of analytic ideas and reflections are documented and developed in so-called *memos*. With these preliminary analyses, questions and gaps become visible and can be pursued when still in the field. The process of going back into the field to collect data for developing the categories is called *theoretical sampling*.

Research in the grounded theory method therefore begins with the data itself rather than deducing a testable hypothesis from existing theories. Once categories begin to emerge through analysis, data are collected with the mere purpose of developing these categories. This is why grounded theory is commonly described as reflecting both inductive and deductive reasoning. Central to the grounded theory method is a flexibility, a letting the processes 'unfold'. The analysis is meant to evolve, and concepts, drafts and ideas may be discarded in the course of research. The process is not straightforward, nor linear.

> Grounded theorists stop and write whenever ideas occur to them. Some of our best ideas may occur to us late in the process and may lure us back to the field to gain a deeper view. Quite often, we discover that our work suggests pursuing more than one analytic direction. Thus, we

[15] For instance, the possibility of "discovering data" has been called into question by these contemporary constructivist approaches (Charmaz 2006). As explained, presupposing that there is a reality to be discovered implies an objectivist outlook. The postmodern approach holds that researchers construct their data and that whatever they observe, analyse and bring to paper, are as much subjective interpretations as are the views of the research participants themselves.

> may focus on certain ideas first and finish one paper or project about them but later return to our data and unfinished analysis in another area. (Charmaz 2006: 10)

While maintaining a flexibility to follow leads that emerge, the constant involvement with analysing data helps to stay focused during research. The aim is to collect rich "detailed, focused, and full" (Charmaz 2006: 14) data, an approach in line with more traditional ethnographic approaches, such as "thick description" (see Geertz 1973). To achieve a thick description of situations, observational notes need to be as detailed as possible and comments or quotes by participants included. Especially at the beginning of grounded theory research, "all is data" (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1978) although "data vary in quality, relevance for (…) emerging interests, and usefulness for interpretation" (Charmaz 2006: 16). Following the lead that 'all is data' does not rule out preliminary focus on areas of interest, such as children's well-being. As Charmaz points out, these sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1969) or parts of departure (Charmaz 2006: 17) can help give research a loose framework.

In ethnographic research there is always the danger of collecting extensive amounts of data that, in the end, are difficult to connect to each other (Charmaz 2006). Grounded theory method reduces this risk as analytical work during fieldwork urges disciplined focus. Thus, after a short period of data collection, I began to conceptualize 'what was happening', to select the situations I had observed and to apply a focus in the field. This meant taking a slightly different approach than the traditional ethnography, where researchers usually begin with analysis only after fieldwork is completed. In contrast, in grounded theory ethnography, researchers

> 1) compare data with data from the *beginning* of the research, not after all the data are collected
> 2) compare data with emerging categories, and
> 3) demonstrate relations between concepts and categories. (Charmaz 2006: 23)

The grounded theory methods proved to be invaluable to my research and early stages of analysis as I was able to become much more familiar with the data initially during fieldwork. I applied the grounded theory methods to both sites

(German/Tibetan) separately, as well as in combination. Thus, after I had completed fieldwork with children in the German school middle of 2012, I tried to work with the Tibetan children without at first establishing much analytical relation to the data collected from the German school. Written preliminary analysis during this time would deal with the data from the Tibetan school only. Once I had the impression that the research with the Tibetan children stood on 'firm ground' (after about 4-5 months) I began comparing the data from both sites in a grounded theory manner and new leads that emerged in this cross-cultural analysis were followed up by conducting theoretical sampling at TCV.

3.3. Special Considerations and Challenges

As a cross-cultural, ethnographic research project conducted mainly with participants under the legal age of majority, several potential pitfalls needed to be taken into account previous to, as well as during fieldwork. An important part of this was becoming aware of one's own ethnocentric preconceptions, one's way of relating to the participants. Since children were involved, special ethical considerations were needed, such as acknowledging their vulnerability as a group, legal standards and negotiating access. Having to rely on an interpreter at the Tibetan school posed some further challenges discussed below.

Reflexivity

I tried continuously to uphold a critical reflexivity throughout research in order ensure fruitful and ethically sound ethnographic fieldwork. Becoming aware of one's preconceptions, examining and working at these throughout research and analysis has become a methodological necessity in social science research (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986) and is likewise vital for research with children (Christensen and James 2008c; Corsaro and Molinari 2008; Mason and Watson 2014; Punch 2002). Preconceptions of children and childhood, for instance, will significantly shape the research process (James et al 1998) and reifying children's

cultures into something static and fixed, researchers may erroneously assume that they already 'naturally' have some form of insight into children's worlds because we have passed through childhood ourselves (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). It is important to be aware of how one selects information and how one listens to the children; how one tends to document particular situations while ignoring others, and then to question these preferences (Hohti and Karlsson 2014).

Reflexivity during fieldwork was therefore a continuous process of regularly reflecting on how my preconceptions, ethnocentric understandings and my emotions and feelings were possibly mediating my observations. For these purposes, I would regularly take time at home to enter a "reflexive space" (Hohti and Karlsson 2014: 559) where I could question my course of action and intentions. For this it was helpful to keep a personal field diary in addition to the field notes (Punch 2012). Another critical part of reflexivity during fieldwork required being aware of how my socio-cultural conditioning, in particular, and my presence, more generally, was actually influencing the children and their social interaction. As a general rule for ethnographic fieldwork as such, it is therefore advisable to regularly 'step back' and re-consider how the researcher-researched relationship has developed and reflect on how this may have influenced certain situations and participants' behaviour (Marcus and Fischer 1986). As a part of my weekly reviewing of research design and data, I would consider how my relationships to the individual participants were developing, how they appeared to experience these encounters and whether or how I could alter or improve my conduct. This process was supported by discussing these reflections and observations with my supervisors in the monthly supervision-meetings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations take on another dimension when working with minors and before beginning fieldwork I spent some time contemplating the actual and potential challenges of this project and how to address them. In November 2011 I completed the obligatory 'ethics-paper' which passed the ethics committee at Stirling

University, Scotland. The most basic principles of ethics are to avoid inflicting harm on the children involved (physically and emotionally), on the one hand, and to protect them from harm, on the other (Alderson and Morrow 2004; Hill 2005; Holmes 1988). Again, a continuous critical reflexivity during fieldwork was essential in order to ensure this. For instance, it was important to be aware of when my role as an adult was influencing my relationship with the children negatively. As mentioned, inherent power-inequalities between myself and the children needed to be acknowledged as such and, as much as possible, undermined in order to avoid the children feeling pressured to do things they did not want to. As Hill puts it, "the interpersonal style adopted by researchers and the settings for research should aim to reduce and not reinforce children's inhibitions and their desire to please" (2005: 63). Situations where this power-imbalance was not successfully addressed called for a heightened sensitivity (Christensen 2004; Mayall 2002). For instance, encouraging children's participation and agency during research may also result in overburdening children with responsibilities they do not wish to take on (Brownlie 2009). Therefore, especially at the beginning of fieldwork, I would repeatedly emphasize to the children that it is my main concern to respect their wishes and preferences in terms of my presence and interaction with them. I would repeatedly reassure the participants that their saying "no" to me (i.e., wishing *not* to respond to my questions or participate or letting me join them) was respected and highly appreciated, and would not be held against them in any way.

Achieving the Children's Consent

Before starting fieldwork the children's formal consent to participate needed to be requested and parameters clarified. For logistical reasons, I addressed the children collectively as a class. In order make clear that I respected their "no" I conducted an interactive exercise with them where we practiced saying "no" to the researcher and "declining her requests" (Alderson 1995). This took place in a short, but fun role play situation where a volunteer got to play the researcher and I mimicked a child participant being approached. As the 'child-participant', I demonstrated how to politely, but clearly tell the 'researcher' when I did not want her to watch me, follow

me or when I did not want to respond to her questions. Then I asked the pretended 'researcher' whether she still felt fine. The answer was (as expected) "yes" and demonstrated to the class that even after participants declined my requests, I would feel 'fine' and not hold a grudge.

Other aspects of the formal consent process in class included explaining to the children what my research was about, what this involved and potential outcomes. There have been some discussions about not fully airing the purpose of the research and even though obtaining informed consent is an imperative, too detailed explanations of the research purpose may fundamentally alter the children's behaviour (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). I tried to achieve a balance between informing the children about the aims of the project, on the one hand, and not over-influencing data provided by the children, on the other. I explained that I was interested in their experiences at school, in order to contribute to a better understanding for adults of children's wants, needs and likes and that the same research will be done (or has been done) with children in another school (i.e., Tibetan or German).

Moreover, I elaborated on what research would effectively involve (time and commitment) and promised confidentiality, re-emphasizing that it was possible to withdraw at any given time from any part of the research. This process was complemented by child-friendly information and consent forms that I had handed out previously (see Appendix A). All the children at both schools gave their formal consent to participate in research. The consent forms included options to indicate whether one would generally be open to being interviewed or whether one would consent to be audio-recorded. At the German school, two children decided that they did not want to be recorded.

While ethical research means avoiding causing distress to or inflicting harm on the participants involved, it also involves protecting them from potential harm that may be caused by themselves or others (Alderson and Morrow 2011). In order to protect children's interests, it may be difficult for the researcher to completely avoid any interfering (Christensen and Prout 2002). As Holmes (1988) points out, fieldworkers need to intervene when it is clear that not doing so will result in a child being harmed (by other children or adults etc.). I found, however, that

distinguishing 'harmful' from 'harmless' was not always clear cut, especially not in a cross-cultural context. Part of the Tibetan education, for instance, involved physical punishment and forms of public chastisement. While I personally do not agree with physical disciplining of children, these are legitimate means of education according to most Tibetans. In these cases, rather than an imposing my ethical standards on others, sensitivity to the socio-cultural conditions at hand was called for.

Negotiating Access

Another major issue involved achieving consent from the so-called gatekeepers. As children have fewer rights accorded to them, consent for their participation in research also needs to be given by the adults in charge (Alderson and Morrow 2004; Corsaro 2011; Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Hill 2005; Holmes 1988). Consent for research at both schools needed to be obtained from the following persons/ institutions:

1. from the head of the school for conducting research
2. from the adult participants (members of staff)
3. from the children's guardians and the children participants (more or less simultaneously)

At the German school, parents were the legal guardians of the children involved, whereas the Tibetan students were considered to be under the guardianship of TCV itself. Legal consent was therefore obtained from the school board of TCV and signed by the headmaster. Additionally all the members of staff at both schools agreed to participate in the project after having been informed about the project in personal conversations and by information sheets. In Germany the children's guardians were addressed individually through a letter informing them about the research and explaining that they have the option to opt their child out of research within a week (see Appendix B). The decision to take an opt-out approach to parental consent was made after discussing the possibilities with the teacher who was responsible for the class, and to whom I had been referred by the head master. Opt-out approaches to parental consent were already common at the school. In fact, the teacher mentioned that parents are used to not being informed at all when

academic observers and psychotherapists sit in on class as parents often ignore 'opt in' requests. Moreover, the opt-out approach to parental consent gave more decision making power to the child. An opt-out version encouraged parents to consider their decision more carefully and helped to avoid situations where the child's wish to participate is overruled by the guardian who makes a hasty decision or none at all.

Opt-out approaches to parental consent have been successfully employed in UK research with children and young people and indeed are now not uncommon (see Ormston 2007; Punch et al 2007; SALSUS 2008). In part this is so because of a growing recognition within the research community in the UK that opt-in frameworks are often not workable especially in large scale classroom based research given the low response rate. Morrow (1999) argues that researchers can let themselves be guided by the heads of schools who are used to dealing with parental consent processes in their own manner, who "are technically *in loco parentis* and assume responsibility while children are in school" (Morrow 1999: 211; emphasis in original). An opt-out approach to parental consent, in other words, can be justified on the basis of involving another responsible adult in giving consent.

Except for one boy, the children of the class at the German school were all allowed to participate in research. I did not include this boy's activities in my fieldnotes, nor did I record his voice, however, I was careful to ensure that he did not feel socially excluded because of this. Two children had not been given permission to have their voices recorded and in those cases I resorted to taking notes during documentation.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

In line with the UK Data Protection Act (1998) and the ESRC ethical guidelines (2010) the identities of the participants have been held confidentially. Part of preserving children's confidentiality was safeguarding their anonymity which involved using pseudonyms for transcripts and analysis and eliminating as many identifiers as possible from research records and analysis. All data records have been stored in line with data-protection guidelines and have not been shared before

having been anonymized. The names and location of the two schools have also been kept confidential for publication.

As Clark (2006) points out, research practicalities and epistemological issues make it impossible to guarantee 'blanket anonymity'. The Tibetan Children's Village is the only 'purely' Tibetan school in exile and it will be impossible to disguise its identity completely. As there are several Tibetan Children's Village's throughout India, however, the children's anonymity can nevertheless remain relatively safeguarded.

Working with an Interpreter

As my Tibetan language skills were still limited, I needed to rely on an interpreter when conducting research at the Tibetan school. Working with an interpreter always has further implications for the research-process. There is not much literature on the on the subject matter (Temple and Edwards 2002), however, it is generally agreed that interpreters play a very active role in co-shaping the process and results of research (Emond 2010; Sanderson et al 2013; Temple and Edwards 2002; Wong and Poon 2010). Interpreters are not 'neutral translators' but may be considered "cultural brokers who balance language proficiency with cultural knowledge to provide a meaning-based translation, with the best conceptual equivalence" (Sanderson et al 2013: 511). The interpreter therefore needed to be carefully chosen in terms of several criteria.

First, it needs to be assessed how the interpreter's presence may potentially affect, alter or even hinder research with the people involved. Berreman (1962), for instance, describes how, during his fieldwork in Northern India, the social status of his two interpreters (first, a Hindu Brahmin and then an Indian Muslim) determined what informants were willing to share with him, and, moreover, how and with whom the interpreters themselves were willing to interact.

> Sharma [the interpreter] was a Brahmin of the plains. As such he felt obliged to convey an acceptable definition of himself in this role to the villagers among whom he worked and to the ethnographer for whom he worked. Before villagers he was obliged to refrain from extensive

> informal contacts with his caste inferiors. He was expected to refuse to participate in such defiling activities such as the consumption of meat and liquor, and was in general expected to exemplify the virtues of his status. He was, in this context, acting as the sole local representative of plains Brahmins, a group with which he was closely identified by himself and by villagers. (Berreman 1962: 13)

Even though social status in Tibetan culture in Exile is not nearly as stratified as in the caste system of Indian cultures, this factor did play a role in my choice. For example, it would have been counterproductive to employ a *Lama* (an ordained scholar) or somebody of significantly advanced age, as ordained and elders are usually objects of worship and respect. I decided that a woman was more adequate when working with children as men may be perceived as more authoritative. Moreover, in order to not further enhance the 'generational gap' I wanted to find a woman who did not convey too many 'motherly' attributes, not only in terms of age but also with regard to appearance. Of utmost importance for my choice, however, were the interpreter's social skills, more generally, and with children, in particular: she needed to be sensitive, socially skilful, self-reflective and ethically responsible.

By asking around the Tibetan village I was extremely lucky to have been referred to a very gifted, young Tibetan woman named Lhaze. She was not only fluent in English but also academically experienced, having achieved a bachelor's degree in English literature at a university in India. Lhaze proved to have a high degree of social sensitivity and at the same time, a willingness to apply critical self-reflexivity. Before we began, I briefed her extensively on the project, the research-design and the ethical and academic concerns (Emond 2010). Like the researcher, the interpreter needs to develop an ability to be reflexive during the research process (Sanderson et al 2013). During the course of our collaboration Lhaze made a genuine effort to become aware of her own socio-cultural conditioning, trying not to act out preconceived Tibetan 'roles' towards the children and to remain conscious of whenever her basic assumptions might significantly influence the translation – thereby being able to achieve a translation as 'objectively'[16] as possible. Last, but not

[16] By using the term 'objectively' I am *not* referring to *objectivism*, proposed by a positivist stance implying that it is possible to achieve a 'neutral' blueprint of reality. The translation of the interpreter

least, Lhaze and I were able to develop a friendly relationship on a personal level which was, needless to say, essential for a successful collaboration.

Despite the overall positive experience in working with Lhaze, working with an interpreter has obvious disadvantages in terms of the research process. As interpreters are rarely trained in social science research and are not familiar with the common pitfalls and challenges of fieldwork, 'mistakes' are made especially at the beginning of fieldwork. Naturally, it took some time for Lhaze to develop an awareness of when and how her own socio-cultural conditioning was determining her social interaction with the children. Especially in the first weeks of our research I needed to remind her several times to not interact with the children in her 'usual fashion'. Once, for example, when she was annoyed with Rinchen (a girl) who continued to jump on our backs despite our pleas to stop, Lhaze told Rinchen to "stop behaving like a child". Although a common way for Tibetan adults to deal with "naughty children", this comment was inappropriate in the context of our fieldwork as it reflected not only a higher authority on our side (an impression which we were trying to undermine) but also because the term child was used derogative manner. Also Lhaze's interviewing-skills needed to be improved at the beginning, as she would translate my questions inaccurately and make comments that would lead the interviewees' responses.

It was important to reflect on all these happenings on a daily basis after fieldwork (Sanderson et al 2013) which we usually did over a cup of tea. Luckily, Lhaze was very open to constructive criticism, eager to learn and developed remarkably good research-skills during our work in a short period of time. In fact, she has subsequently successfully conducted sociological research with members of the Tibetan diaspora in England and has started a master's thesis at a university in London.

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is never "an objective and neutral process in which the translators are mere 'technicians' in producing texts in different languages" (Wong and Poon 2010: 151). Yet objectivity can be understood as a method in the process of research and analysis which is achieved via a critical self-reflexivity and accountability as its core criteria (Fay 1996).

3.4. Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methods and methodologies of research. I have explored children's peer cultures via ethnographic research, a methodology considered key in Childhood Studies. Despite its limitations in terms of the generalisability of the findings, ethnographic research is considered an effective means for generating particularly rich data. I have argued that ethnography is a way of conducting research '*with*, rather than *on* children' and of getting an understanding of their perspectives.

The main method applied was participant observation and I have elaborated on the value of combining observation with participation when conducting research with children. The method is open-ended in its nature and allows for a flexibility ('methodological immaturity'). I tried to be as atypical an adult as possible and participated in the children's activities as long as it was appropriate and enjoyable.

Participant observation was sustained by taking formal and informal interviews at a later stage of fieldwork, once rapport had been achieved. The interviews enabled me to focus on the research topic and allowed the children to verbally express their views and opinions. I documented my observations by taking fieldnotes and sound recordings.

I have explained how postmodern versions of grounded theory methods have significantly contributed to a successful collection of data. Contemporary grounded theory does not claim to discover data, however, benefits are obtained from the effective methods of preliminary analysis during fieldwork, sorting data via coding and establishing categories which can be then pursued while still in the field.

The section *Special Considerations and Challenges* has explored issues that were especially pressing when working with minors and the challenges of a cross-cultural setting. I have elaborated on the importance of upholding a critical reflexivity throughout the research in order to guarantee a fruitful and ethically sound fieldwork. This meant actively being aware of my behaviour, attitudes and

preconceptions, reflecting on how the relationships with the children were developing, and regularly questioning my course of action.

A continuous reflexivity was therefore key to ethical considerations concerning the children. I needed to be aware of the power-imbalance between me, as an adult, and the children and ensure that they were acting with me on a free-will basis. This was especially important at field entry and when formally asking for the children's consent to participate in the project. Ethical standards also required that the children would be sufficiently informed before they would decide to participate which I fulfilled by an official introduction and information session in class, handing out information sheets and by a short interactive game. Consent also needed to be achieved from the so-called gatekeepers of the children which I attained successfully for all children except one boy at the German school. Another important aspect of ethical considerations concerned guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants in line with UK Data Protection Act and the ESRC ethical guidelines.

The final section of this chapter has outlined the challenges I experienced when working with an interpreter. The interpreter needed to be chosen carefully in terms of her qualifications but also in terms of her social status and potential relationship to the children. As illustrated, although I was very lucky with employing an exceptionally capable Tibetan woman, working with an interpreter had some disadvantages, nevertheless. Interpreters are basically in the position of a research assistant, however, usually without any previous training and qualifications and are therefore bound to make 'mistakes', especially at field entry.

The remaining chapters of this dissertation present my findings from analysis based on my research with the children at a Tibetan school in India and a school in Germany. The first chapter of research analysis (the following chapter) elaborates on my findings related to the children's particular understandings of well-being. As will be illustrated, these proved to be very different at each site.

Chapter 4

Well-Being from the Children's Point of View

Emphasizing well-being's socio-culturally relative aspect, an objective of the research was to investigate what well-being actually meant for the children at each site. Assuming that whatever we consider as enhancing our well-being is what matters most to us, I explored 'what mattered most' to the children in order to get an insight into their understandings of well-being. The groups of children at the two sites proved to have very different ideas of 'what mattered most' to them. While the Tibetan children were concerned with demonstrating individual skilfulness in various areas, to the children at the German school belonging to friends was most important. Interestingly, the social practices around 'what mattered most' were forms of competition at both sites.

4.1. 'What Matters Most': Being Skilful and Belonging

Being Skilful at the Tibetan School

What mattered most to the children at the Tibetan school was the public display of their individual skilfulness. I therefore argue that, *from the Tibetan children's point of view, being skilful was a main condition for well-being*.

Tibetan boys and girls spent most of their time either developing or displaying their skills in social interaction. Depending on individual preference, the Tibetan children would demonstrate proficiency in a variety of different of skills. However, there were noticeable differences with gender. Childhood Studies has expounded on gender segregation in children's social interaction and play and proven it to be a very common phenomenon (see also Adler et al 1992; Morrow and Collony 2008; Thorne 1993). The manner in which the Tibetan children displayed their skilfulness was often simultaneously a performance of masculinities by the boys and of feminities by the girls (Frosh et al 2002; Mac an Ghaill 1999; 1994).

Much of the boys' proficiency was related to physical strength (see also Mac an Ghaill 1999; 1994) and they would compete with each other in wrestling, boxing, kicking and other physical forms of fighting. Boys were often quite skilful at playing marbles, engaging in competitions drawing large crowds of boys from other classes and grades. They would show themselves skilful by flinging stones up to hit beehives hanging on the palm trees, or demonstrate fearlessness by running through a little overgrown valley where there were said to be cobras. The girls' skills were generally a lot less related to physical strength. Their ways of establishing feminities was often related to good academic performance (Arnot et al 1999; Frosh et al 2002): they would sing songs to one another learned in class, demonstrate their knowledge of the English language or recite mathematical formulae. Skilfulness was also displayed during activities such as swing-competitions, Chinese jump rope and a popular game where several flat stones were balanced and flipped on one's hand's palm and back while singing.

The manner of displaying one's skills was also markedly gendered. Boys would tend to 'show off' their abilities very straightforwardly, almost boastfully. Girls, on the other hand, would not talk directly about their own skills but have their friends do so. It was very common between girls to highlight each other's skills to others (such as to me and my interpreter Lhaze, for example). When confronted with their friends' praise the girls would often deny their abilities ("*No, I'm not good – she is much better!*"), displaying humility, a highly valued trait in Tibetan society.

While the type of skill and how it was presented was frequently gendered, Tibetan boys and girls had in common the unmistakable enjoyment of displaying their skills publicly. Adults (such as teachers, parents or older children) were a popular target audience. My interpreter Lhaze and I were considered 'older sisters' [Tib. *Acha*] by the children and would often be asked to watch them perform. When visiting the playground at the school, for example, several children would immediately scatter on the different climbing frames, swings and slides, yelling out to us to watch them 'hanging upside-down', 'going down the slide head-on' and 'swinging high while sitting in a lotus(-meditation) position'. Singing and dance performances were clearly a favourite of both girls and boys, and spontaneous

musical performing during break-time took place frequently. The children's eagerness to perform and the self-confidence related to their presentations would always strike me as remarkable.

> Chime [boy]: *All of us will sing together…one, two, three!*
> They sing the song 'Thumbelina'.
> Then, Nyima [boy]: *I will sing!*
> He steps forward and sings a modern Tibetan song.
> When Nyima is finished, his friend Sonam [boy] steps forward and performs the same song that Nyima has sung. After, Sonam and Nyima decide to sing another song together.
> When they are finished Nyima says: *Thank you…Acha, now you guys sing*! [meaning me and my interpreter Lhaze].
> Sonam, interrupts: *No, I want to sing [again]!*
> Dawa [girl]: *No, we will sing next.*
> Dawa, Yangzom and Lhamo [girls], step forward and start singing a traditional Tibetan song while making some accompanying dance movements.
> Once they are finished, they bow and say: *Thank you*.
> Immediately, Nyima starts singing again. He sings a modern Tibetan song while laughing at the same time. Once he is finished, he says: *Thank you to all*.
> After, Sonam starts singing the same song as Nyima.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Recording, During Break, Sept. 2012)*

Expressing thanks to the 'audience' for listening ["thank you to all"] was common after the Tibetan children had demonstrated skills to a larger audience. It illustrates the *performative* nature of the Tibetan children's being skilful: the public display of one's skill was at least as important as the possessing of the skill itself.

That individual skilfulness was key to the Tibetan children's sense of well-being was also confirmed in interviews. Merely making casual conversation, I had begun asking individual children about their favourite subject at school. Their explanations of why they favoured a particular subject over another was interesting: all interviewees, without exception, stated that their favourite subject was "the one they are best at". This was surprising to me because I had expected the children to choose their favourite subjects according to a fun factor, something that was common with the German children. Rinchen, for example, stated that her favourite

subject was Tibetan, even though her love for drawing during art-classes was unmistakeable. During an interview, we asked her about this.

Interpreter: *But do you not like drawing?*

Rinchen: *Yes, I do…but I don't know how to draw that well. I'm better at Tibetan.*

(*Tibetan School, Recording, Interview, Girl, Sept. 2012*)

The children's statements concerning their favourite subjects speak of the central status that being skilful had in the Tibetan children's experience and also of the enjoyment associated with it. Basically, the interviewees were saying that whether or not they enjoyed a particular subject at school depended more on their level of proficiency at that subject rather than on the activity itself.

One might argue that individuals tend to be especially good in what they enjoy most. Moreover, it is debatable whether or not the children were *actually* enjoying the subjects 'they were best at' more than the 'fun' subjects (such as arts, music and sports). It can be questioned whether the children's statements in the interviews actually reflected their inner states. As Mason warns, "it is important to remember that qualitative interviewing has limitations (…) generated through the rather specific and refined context of the interview" (2002: 83). Limitations of interviewing are even more significant when conducted with children as, due to the inherent adult-child power-imbalance, they are more likely to respond in ways they believe may be expected from them (Holmes 1998; Mayall 2008; Woodhead and Faulkner 2008).

While I cannot be sure that the Tibetan children actually enjoyed the subjects they were best at most, nevertheless, the children's responses speak of the importance skilfulness had in Tibetan peer cultures. I have briefly illustrated that individual skilfulness was also what mattered most in the Tibetan children's social interaction. This chapter will elaborate on this observation in more detail later on. One may conclude, however, that having or acquiring individual skills was perceived a key condition for well-being by the children at the Tibetan school.

Friendship at the German School

The children at the German school proved to have very different understandings of what mattered most: friendship was the central concern of their social interactions. I therefore argue that, *from the children's point of view at the German school, belonging to peers was a main condition for well-being*. This theory accords with several studies that elaborate on the importance of friends for children and young people in Minority World countries (see Alderson 2000; Corsaro 2003; Dunn 2004; Emond 2014; 2003; Greenwood 1998; Mayall 2001; Morrow 2003). Hartras, for instance, suggests that "happiness is the cornerstone of children's well-being and is closely related to the presence of friends" (2008: 73). I found this also to be the case for the children at the German school where establishing, maintaining, negotiating and reaffirming these friendships took up most of the time of their social interaction.

Belonging is also performative (Schmitt 2010) and the negotiating and confirming of friendships was often attached to public displays, such as gestures of affection (see also Ahn 2010) or sharing. During 'breakfast-time' in class, the children had time to eat and share the food they had brought from home while the teacher was reading to them. Especially if somebody had special treats to share, such as sweets and candy, who got to have some was of special significance. In these situations, friends would publicly be favoured over non-friends and the shared food would serve as "symbols of belonging" (Jenkins 2008; see also Nsamenang 2011; Corsaro 2011). Other symbols of belonging were more specifically related to the particularities of the peer groups. A group of boys, for example, often played games related to the movie *Star Wars* and would make comments, gestures or movements related to *Star Wars* to demonstrate their group identity. At one point, most members of the group had acquired miniature *Star Wars* figures from the brand *LEGO* and spent much time displaying and talking about these figures. *LEGO* thus became a strong symbol of belonging for this group. The example below shows how even small remarks would serve to re-confirm belonging:

After breakfast-time, Wolfram comes running up to Nico [*'the head' of the Star Wars group*] and says, laughingly: *Hey Nico, when she [the teacher] said 'now you can start having your breakfast' I almost took a bite of my Lego! Haha!*

(German School, Fieldnotes, In Class, May 2012)

Another common situation where belonging was negotiated was when class activities required working with partners or choosing peers for activities. During educational games in class, for instance, students were allowed to solve the task at the black board and thereafter get to choose the next person to come up front. By making socially meaningful choices, these situations would serve as platforms for demonstrating loyalty, friendship and belonging. In order to avoid a favouring of same sex friends, teachers would request the student up front to pick somebody of the opposite sex. This did not make the event less meaningful, however.

This picking 'who gets to go next' is always such a social event! The children up front getting to choose who comes next often take so much time making their choices that the teacher will urge them to 'hurry up'. The rest of the class is watching carefully who picks whom and make comments to one another.

This time Lisa is up front. She picks Levin [boy]. Levin hesitates for a long time, so the teacher asks him to hurry up. Levin chooses Nicole.

Ardan [boy] turns to Susanna [his deskmate] and says: *Hah! Who would have expected that! I was sure he was going to pick Monika!* [looks around to find Monika, then:] *Oh, thats right…she is not in class today…*

Nicole picks Ardan and Ardan picks Sylvia. After Ardan picks Sylvia and is on his way back to his seat, Gherib [Ardan's friend] makes gestures to him with his hands signalling 'kissing'.

Sylvia picks Dominik.

(German School, Fieldnotes, In Class, June 2012)

Ardan's comment on Levin's choice confirms that the children's picks were far from random. He had expected Levin to choose the girl Levin officially was 'in love with' (Monika) who then however chose her best friend (Nicole) because Monika was absent at that time. Lisa also made a public statement by choosing Levin. A week previously, Lisa and Levin had officially 'married' and 'divorced' within one hour during the lunch break. Sylvia had often spoken about her 'liking' Dominik. By

choosing him she re-confirms this publicly. The example illustrates how belonging was also established across gender differences. Moreover, by publicly stating a 'liking' of someone of the opposite sex, the children manifested masculinities and feminities, respectively and confirmed their belonging to their particular gender. As research has shown, gender is often one of the main grounds on which identities are established within children's peer groups (see also Corsaro 2011; 2003; Mac an Ghaill 1994, 1999; Thorne 1993).

That belonging to peers was what mattered most to the children at the German school was also confirmed in interviews with the children. Almost all child interviewees (13 out of 15) stated that friends are what makes them 'happiest', a finding that goes in line with outcomes of other studies that conducted interviews with children in Minority World settings (Hartras 2008; Mayall 2001). In a large-scale survey with primary and secondary school children in England, for example, 63% of the children stated that friends are what make them most happy (Hartras 2008). Following excerpts from my interviews with the children at the German school are two out of many examples.

Nico [boy]:

Carla: When are you happiest?

Nico: When I can play with my friends - go on tours and go hiking and stuff.

(…)

Carla: When are you not so happy?

Nico: When I have pain – a headache or so. Sometimes I have a headache and that is really annoying if I want to do something.

Carla: What do you want to do?

Nico: When I am playing with my friends during breaks and recess and then have a headache – that is often really annoying when we're playing and doing stuff and then my head hurts and then I cannot play.

(German School, Recording, Interview, Boy, July 2012)

Anette [girl]:

Carla: What makes you happiest in your life?

Anette: To play with friends and stuff like that...without friends I can't really live. And horseback riding.

(German School, Recording, Interview, Girl, May 2012)

Both interviewees stated that friends are the main condition for their happiness and that the absence of, distance from or conflict with friends makes them unhappy. Nico said that playing with friends are his happiest moments. The painful experience of a migraine seemed to bother him less than the fact that these headaches would keep him from playing with his friends. Anette stated that she cannot live without friends. Several other children had mentioned something similar to me. This statement points to the emotional urgency behind the need for friendship so common with the children at the German school.

The Diversity of Well-Being

The children's understandings of well-being at the German school differed significantly from those of the Tibetan children. Also the children at the German school would occasionally highlight their being skilful, such as their academic, artistic or physical skills during class or free play. However, displaying and negotiating skilfulness was significantly less common at the German school than displaying and negotiating friendship and, in fact, displaying one's individual skills was often a means of impressing one's friends. Unlike the Tibetan children, the most popular individuals in class were not necessarily those with the highest skills (academically or otherwise). Although one might argue that maintaining friendships requires a particular social skilfulness, 'being skilful' in itself was *not* given much importance by the children at the German school – in contrast to the Tibetan children.

Conversely, although friendship between Tibetan children was also an issue at times, it generally did not have the same significance it did with the children at the German school. In interviews, 4 out of 8 Tibetan children, when asked if they considered friends important, answered with "no" and one of the boys with "sometimes". Rinchen, a girl who was especially skilful in collecting snacks (see following section), informed us that the snacks are more important to her than friends. An informal interview that we recorded illustrates this absence of emphasis on peer friendship among the Tibetan children. During his social interactions,

Chewa [boy] had appeared to be good friends with Sonam and Nyima and thus we asked him about this friendship.

Interpreter: *Are Sonam and Nyima your best friends?*
Chewa: *No. I have one close friend.*
Interpreter: *Who?*
Chewa: *I have two favorite heroes and one heroine* [i.e., movie actors]. *Can you guess who?*
Interpreter: *Salman Khan, Hritik Roshan and Kareena Kapoor* [Bollywood actors].
Chewa**:** *And you are right!*

(Tibetan School, Recording, Interview, Boy, Sept. 2012)

It appeared as though Chewa did not have much interest in the topic of friendship and therefore changed it quickly. We found a similar disinterest in the topic with almost all of the Tibetan children. It seemed as though family relations were valued much higher by them.

All in all, well-being was understood very differently by the children at each site. While not ruling out that aspects of well-being may apply to children's experiences transculturally (see following chapters) it points to the fact that conceptualisations and experiences of well-being are inseparable from the socio-cultural context in which they appear.

The following section continues to illustrate this point by investigating the children's social practices around 'what mattered most'. The overall structure of these social practices was similar at both sites (competitive) but, as will be shown, would manifest very differently.

4.2. Social Practices around Well-Being: Competition

Some have mentioned competition as a common part of children's social interaction (Berentzen 1984; Corsaro 2011). Similarly, I found that 'what mattered most' to the children at *both* schools was often embedded within competitive frameworks: individual skills at the Tibetan school and friendships at the German school were

negotiated and established mainly via competitions. Well-being and competition, in other words, proved to be linked for the children at both schools.

Yet what is competition? Competition is frequently understood as a form of rivalry (Plamenatz 1975). However, competitive conditions may, but must not necessarily, include rivalry, which, as opposed to competition, is "essentially personal" (Plamenatz 1975: 420). Rivals need not be competitors and competitors may be indifferent towards each other (Plamenatz 1975). As a consequence of confusing some of the social effects of competition with competition itself, many definitions of competition are muddled, presenting competition as an attitude or form of social interaction (Pepitone 1980; Plamenatz 1975).

Here, competition is regarded as *a condition,* defined by its typical goal and activity-structure (Deutsch 1949; Pepitone 1980). Competitive conditions presuppose an exclusive goal – meaning that achieving this goal requires that nobody else can. Considered in matters of degree, goal exclusivity may include a range of situations where A's goal attainment is more or less relevant to B's goal attainment and vice-versa. Likewise, activity structures in competitive conditions are generally marked by the requirement to outdo others. Cooperating participants, by comparison, depend on each other's success in order to succeed and aspire to a common goal.

Research showed that competitive conditions, with their typical goal- and activity-structures, were being created by the children at both schools around 'what mattered most' to them. The shape these competitions took, however, was different from one another, reflecting the unique socio-cultural environment of each site. The Tibetan children's competitions were direct and 'out in the open', with designated "winners" and "losers" while competitions at the German school were less obvious and manifested more indirectly in what I call *othering*-activities. This section begins by exploring these different competitive social practices around issues of well-being within the children's peer cultures at each site and then explains how these may have related to particular assumptions around well-being present within the children's societies.

The Tibetan School: Competitions for Skills

Academic Skills Competitions

The Tibetan children's social practices around well-being - presenting, negotiating and establishing one's skilfulness - usually took place within competitions. Two or more children would compete with each other by displaying their skills in the presence of others, the winner therewith tacitly being established as skilful. Competition was therefore part of the Tibetan children's experience around well-being.

One of the most common ways to display skilfulness at the Tibetan school was academically, for instance during class. Based on traditional forms of monastic education in Tibet, a common teaching-style at the Tibetan school was having the students "imitate and memorize" (Fremerey 1990: 8; my translation; see also John 1999; Nowak 1978) and children would be asked to loudly recite in front of the class whatever they had learned. These occasions were an ideal arena for presenting one's academic skilfulness.

In particular, the girls of the Tibetan class displayed their academic proficiency and liked to present themselves as 'a good student' [Tib.: *puggu yagpo*]. Tibetan girls' competitions around completing assignments 'first', 'best', 'faster' or 'better'; reciting texts and songs 'louder' or 'clearer' or playing the *dranyen* [=Tibetan guitar] 'most skilfully', were therefore especially pronounced. A girl named Yangzom was considered the 'best student' by all; she was often the winner of these competitions and it was no coincidence that she was the most popular girl in class. Together with her friend Dawa, another 'good student', she enjoyed a special treatment by her peers and the teachers. Another girl, named Tseten, however, displayed a similar level of academic excellence and a rivalry had developed between Yangzom and Tseten. Their competitions during class were hard to miss: the two girls would carefully observe each other's academic performances, scrutinizing and evaluating; occasionally, they would smile about the other's mistakes or make comments to their friends and often, when one of the girls' had

finished reciting or singing, she would glance over to her competitor, checking to see if she had been watching.

Most of the other academic competitions between the Tibetan children in class were less attached to specific social relationships, however: children would compete with 'whoever was available'. All children in the class would engage in these academic competitions from time to time. They would watch each other's presentations, comment on these to others, make fun of them, challenge and discuss them while highlighting their own skills or those of their friend. All students would occasionally present themselves as academically skilled – even if they, technically, were not. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrates this:

> The children were asked to write about their best friend. Nyima [boy] had written about Sonam [boy] and was told to read his report in front of class. One of the first lines Nyima read was: "*Sonam is a good student*". Everybody knows that Sonam is the weakest student in class so I was quite baffled that nobody commented or reacted in any way.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, During Class, Nov. 2012)*

Nyima's statement "Sonam is a good student" is a social gesture rather than a claim to a social reality. He was publicly valuing his friend by accrediting Sonam with academic skilfulness. Nyima's statement illustrates the high status academic skills had within the Tibetan children's peer cultures.

Over time it became clear to me that the different types of skills were hierarchically structured and academic skilfulness was leading. Accordingly, the academically most skilled students, Yangzom and Dawa, were considered leading figures by their class-mates, including the boys. The high valuing of academic skilfulness by the Tibetan children can be explained by the fact that their socio-cultural environment places great emphasis on the importance of education of young Tibetans for their well-being, as well as for the "'preserving and promoting Tibetan culture'" (Nowak 1978: 133; see also Fremerey 1990; John 1999) in Exile. As the headmaster of the school explained to me in an interview,

> We always tell the student (…) that the present children are the future seeds of Tibet. H.H [the Dalai Lama] has a very high hope on [sic] the aspiration of school children. So we always try to rest the responsibilities on their shoulders and tell them that 'you are the future seeds of Tibet, we have very high hopes on you, and so you should be studying very hard'. We lost our country because at that time our people were uneducated. We were not open to the Modern education. We led a very secluded life [in Tibet]. We never had any connection or relations with the outer world. We lived a very secluded life [in Tibet]. Now in this present world, in this 21st century, we should equate [sic] with our culture and modern education. Without these two, we cannot survive also, nation on this world. We try to rest that responsibility on these small children. That is [in order] to develop patriotism.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Recording, Interview, Male Headmaster, Dec. 12)*

Given the high status academic education has within Tibetan society, it is not surprising that the Tibetan children made academic skilfulness hierarchically most superior within their peer cultures.

Interestingly, however, while all Tibetan children in the class displayed a valuing of academic performance this did not compel all of them to *actually* improve their academic skills. Several students, the majority of the boys (who made up nearly half of the class) seemed to 'care less' about academic achievement: they would try to avoid studying or paying attention during class as much as possible, spending most of the time socializing and engaging in other activities.

Given the Tibetan children's high valuing of academic skills in their peer culture this seems contradictory at first. Less so, however, when considering that individuals display various presentations of self according to a particular environment. Goffman (1959) explains how individuals exercise a form of 'impression management' in order to appear as a moral, sound character. This does not suggest that some presentations of self are more authentic than others, but rather that self is a collection of several performances taking place relative to a particular time, place and context. Like theatre-performances, moral presentations of self ("front region") may seem to be contradicted by the "backstage" - "a place, relative to a given performance where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (Goffman 1959: 114). In Childhood Studies, Punch has illustrated how these seemingly contradictory performances of

self take place when children are with their siblings. Children find a backstage at home with their siblings, an arena where "behaviour that would usually be suppressed emerges" (Punch 2008: 335). As with many of the Tibetan boys, who would publicly value academic skilfulness at one moment but then not show any interest in what was being taught in class at the next, I found that front and backstage-performances would frequently take place at the Tibetan school not only within the same location (e.g., in the class-room) but also within very close temporal proximity.

As common to East Asian cultures (Kádár and Mills 2011), observing proprieties was very important within particular social situations and all the more noticeable was the apparent contrast when the polite form of conduct was suddenly abandoned. All Tibetan children in the class would value academic success, their teachers and school at some moments and then at the next moment, some would display a 'backstage' self that had no interest in academic skills. Neither did these students seem particularly bothered by their low grades and would react in a relaxed and indifferent manner when receiving bad marks.

Throughout my six months of fieldwork I never observed any of the weaker students showing distress about low grades or about being criticized by teachers for poor performance in class. It is not possible to know for certain whether the children's outer appearances actually correlated with their inner emotional state - especially given the fact that emotions, as is common in many other cultures of East Asian-descent (such as Briggs 1970 for Inuit; Penn 2001 for Mongolia), tend to be expressed much less in Tibetan society than in many 'Western' countries. However, if these students were secretly suffering from their lack of academic success such a visible disinterest in academic matters, as mentioned above, would be unlikely.

I tend to believe that the Tibetan weaker students were *not* particularly distressed about their lack of academic success. In the following I argue that a reason for this relaxed stance may be that these children were *successfully participating in other competitions* of their peer group which was compensating for the lack of academic success. The 'academic realm' of competition, in other words, proved to be

only one of many competition-realms valued by Tibetan peer culture - 'success' was possible in more than one competition.

Physical Teasing Skills Competitions

While girls were predominantly excelling in academic skills-competitions, the Tibetan boys would engage much in what I call 'physical teasing' competitions. As mentioned, mainly boys would compete with each other for physical dominance by wrestling, pushing, punching, kicking or throwing objects at one another. Tibetan girls would also not hesitate to slap, punch or kick their peers, yet, as the girls were generally more petite, it was easy for most boys to physically dominate them. These power-relations sometimes shifted when "Godzilla" decided to enter the scene. Godzilla was Dawa's nickname which she had earned for being daring and physically strong, able to dominate some of the smaller boys.

> It is break-time. Chime [boy] comes into the class-room and while walking by Rinchen [girl], he takes away the rubber-band she is playing with and throws it into the corner.
> Rinchen [annoyed]: *Chime-Pime!!*
> Chime turns around and grabs Rinchen by the throat.
> Yangzom [girl], nearby: *Diki-la! Diki-la!* [=the name of the girl Chime is said to have a crush on]
> Chime takes a chair and begins pushing Yangzom and her friend Lhamo [girl] into a corner with it. Yangzom calls to Dawa ["Godzilla"] for help.
> Dawa, sitting at her desk, eating crisps: *No. I'm hungry…*
> Then she changes her mind and gets up. Chime immediately puts down the chair and leaves the classroom.
> Dawa: *Chime Gopso* [Tib. for "head with thick hair"]!
> Yangzom to Dawa: *Oh, I get it. Chime is jealous of you because your drawing was the best in class. That's also why he stamped on your paper earlier.*
>
> *(Tibetan school, Recording, During Break-time, Oct. 2012)*

The excerpt illustrates one of the boys' attempts to demonstrate physical skills of strength by physically teasing some of the girls in class. The girls collectively resist Chime's physical assaults and Dawa's ["Godzilla's"] decision to get involved makes Chime back off. Chime has thus admitted to the fact that his physical skills are less

than those of Dawa, however, he has been able to demonstrate physical superiority over Rinchen and Yangzom, thereby having established himself as skilful in terms of physical teasing. Yangzom's final comment is revealing: she suggests that Chime's motivation for the physical assault must have been compensating for previous lack of academic success ["Chime is jealous of you because your drawing was the best in class"]. Her comment supports the argument elaborated earlier, namely that a lack of skilfulness in one area of competition (for example, academia) was being balanced by success in another area (for example, physical teasing) within the Tibetan children's peer cultures.

Physical teasing skilfulness was a worthy substitute for academic skilfulness within the children's peer culture. If one was not able to engage successfully in academic competitions (like most of the girls), physical teasing-competitions were an alternative (which most boys did). The undisputed leaders of physical teasing competitions, Nyima and Sonam, also happened to be the weakest students of the class while the two physically weakest boys of the class, Chime and Tsering, were academically most skilled amongst the boys.

Some of the boys had explained to us that, when they were teasing girls, for example, they were being mischievous and that it is "fun to be mischievous". One day, we probed into this statement and recorded the following:

Interpreter: You said that you guys like being mischievous…right?

Tsering: It is fun.

Sonam: Yes. I like to be that.

Tsering: No, I don't like [being] mischievous. I like [being] good in studies.

Sonam: It is not 'good in studies' first. It is actually 'good manners'.

Interpreter: What does it mean to be mischievous?

Tsering: It means bad children who play rough.

Carla to the interpreter: Please tell them to not throw stones at the girls. Tell them to throw at the beehives instead.

Interpreter: Sonam, don't throw it at girls. Better throw it at the beehive. Yes, over there…

(Tibetan School, Recording, In the Yard, Dec. 2012)

Tsering, a physically petite boy but comparably successful student, contrasts 'being mischievous' to 'being good in studies' and values the latter more highly. Sonam, an 'expert' in physical teasing but weak student, responds by devaluing 'being good in studies' ["It is not 'good in studies' first"]. Sonam is quoting Tibetan adults who often emphasize the importance of behaving well to children and suggests that 'good manners' are more important than 'being good in studies'. Immediately thereafter, he begins throwing stones at the girls and Tsering joins him - something which would be considered quite the opposite of good manners. With this gesture, Sonam and Tsering collectively express a valuing of physical teasing and 'being mischievous'.

The physical teasing between the Tibetan children, especially when displayed by the boys, could appear quite brutal at times. At a school in Germany this would have probably been considered 'violent behaviour'. A German handbook on children's education in the primary school, for example, suggests that "children and young people also occasionally use violence as a means of dealing with or avoiding a critical situation" (Beck 2000: 250; my translation). However, to describe what I observed at the Tibetan school, I use the word *teasing* instead of *violence* because the term is closer to the Tibetan children's view. Girls would often tell boys who were physically assaulting them to "stop teasing [Tib.*: nyego*] me!". My choice of terms is not intended to downplay the pain, upset and frustration that children would experience when being physically dominated. Yet to speak of violence would be an ethnocentric approach. As Montgomery writes, "in one sense (…) it is impossible to define violence absolutely as definitions depend on personal ideology and social context. Ideas about what constitutes violence change" (2013: 159).

The Tibetan children's behaviour was *not* considered violent, neither by the Tibetan children nor by the adults but was seen as a normal part of children's social interaction in Tibetan society. Kicking, arm-twisting, pulling hair and 'head-nudges' [= using one's knuckles to hit someone on the head] were an integral part of chasing games between Tibetan boys and girls, for instance. In role play, such as "Tibetans and Chinese" or "Crocodiles and Humans" the boys would be the perpetrators pursuing the girls and once a girl was caught, she would receive some kind of

(sometimes quite painful!) physical punishment. Physical teasing was therefore sometimes also a part of the agreement on both sides by the pursuer and the one being pursued.

Verbal Teasing Skills Competitions

The third very popular form of competition within the children's peer cultures at the Tibetan school was a displaying of *verbal* teasing skills. Verbal teasing competitions seem to be widespread also among peer groups of other cultural backgrounds. The anthropologist Marjorie Goodwin (1990) explored this phenomenon with African-American children and coined it "oppositional talk". Corsaro (2003) observed oppositional talk in pre-schools with Afro-American children, as well as with Italian children where it was referred to as "discussione" by the participants. He writes about the African-American children's interactions that

> …although the source of these group debates was often related to competitive relations (…), the debates themselves revealed much about the children's knowledge of the world and *served as arenas for displaying self* and building group solidarity. (2003: 173; my emphasis)

Likewise, the verbal teasing competitions at the Tibetan school were mainly about displaying oneself as skilful. Showing solidarity with one's friends seemed to play a significantly smaller part.

More directly than the Afro-American children in Corsaro's account, the battles of the Tibetan children focused on verbally ridiculing one another by name-calling and repartee. Name-calling was, in fact, common throughout all age groups at the school; some of these names were related to people's looks, such as "owl" referring to large eyes, or "bread" implying a particular head-shape, and were considered more insulting. Other nicknames referred to people's favourite foods or other preferences and were considered less provocative.

Within the class where I conducted research, verbal teasing and name-calling was a popular activity for all children. They would compete in joking about one another's (real or invented) looks, attributes or disabilities and create new, funny or insulting names. When displaying their verbal teasing skills the Tibetan children

were always especially competitive. On several occasions one of the children grabbed my voice-recorder and began calling someone else names who then tried to get hold of the recorder in order to retaliate. Other children would listen and comment, laughing about the things that were being said. Again, the *performative* element, a witnessing audience to one's skilfulness, was key (see also Corsaro 2003; Goodwin 1990). Competitive teasing battles between boys and girls were often especially elaborate.

During break-time, in the classroom.

Yangzom [girl] to us: *Once Nyima [boy] kissed Chime's [boy] cheek. His cheek got all wet.*

[making fun of the fact that Nyima sometimes drools]

All laugh.

Tsering [boy] comes to sit with the group.

Lhamo [girl], referring to Tsering: *Get away from the TB patient!!*

[making fun of the fact that Tsering is very skinny and physically resembles people who have Tuberculosis - a rather widespread illness with Tibetans in India]

Yangzom to us: *When Tsering teases us, we call out to Godzilla. He gets scared.*

Carla: *Who is Godzilla?*

They point at Dawa [girl].

Sonam [boy], referring to Yangzom: *Thorn, Thorn! So good!*

["*Thorn*" and "*so good*" are Yangzom's nicknames given by the boys. "*Thorn*" as in rose-thorn and "*so good*" was a slogan from a Kentucky-Fried-Chicken commercial on TV].

Sonam gets up and hits Dawa on her back. Chime gets up and punches Lhamo's shoulder.

Lhamo, upset, to Chime: *Everyday you are teasing me! No shame. You are scared.*

Sonam to Yangzom: *You are a thorn!*

Yangzom to Sonam: *Bhaklep! Owl!*

["*Bhaklep*" is the Tibetan bread which is usually oval, similar to the shape of Sonam's head , and "*Owl*" refers to his comparably large eyes]

Yangzom to us: *Every day he [Sonam] has a stomach ache because he puts a lot of flour in his Bhaklep.*

Chime says something and Yangzom calls Chime "*Bonda*". [Bonda is Chime's favorite snack]

Sonam calls someone "*Idli*". [Idli is Tamarind and eaten as a sweet].

Dawa [girl] to us: *Acha, when your ink pen is empty, you can use Chime's head. His head is a gel pen!*

They all laugh.

Yangzom: *Bonda! Acha, you can squeeze Chime's head and use it as gel pen. But both of you* [meaning my interpreter and me] *have to hold his body and write with his head!*

(Tibetan School, Recording, During Break-Time, Sept. 2012)

As in the example above, gendered group teasing competitions usually involved only particular individuals of the class: the majority of the boys with the most popular girls. The boys would usually not engage extensively in verbal teasing with the other girls in the class. Only Yangzom and Dawa, the most popular girls in the class, had been given nicknames by the boys identifying them as skilful: "so good", probably referred to Yangzom's academic skilfulness, and "Godzilla" referring to Dawa's physical teasing skill. Verbal teasing competitions were clearly an important way for displaying and acknowledging skilfulness within Tibetan children's peer cultures.

The German School: Competitions for Friendship

Friendship, the main condition for the children's well-being at the German school, was also negotiated mainly within competitive frameworks. Like for the Tibetan children, competition was therefore a part of the children's experience related to well-being at the German site, albeit in a much more indirect form than at the Tibetan school. The competitions around friendship were much less explicitly competitive and not easily noticeable at first glance. For this reason my first impression of the children's social interaction at the German school was that competition was actually not an issue. In a preliminary analysis paper at the beginning of fieldwork I had noted the following:

> Competition does not seem to play a central role in the children's peer cultures at the German school. The situations I was able to observe where the children were engaging in competition a central concern always seemed to override the importance of winning: friendship. My view is that, while the children seem to appreciate and even enjoy competitive conditions at times, competitions are usually instrumentalised as means of demonstrating and negotiating belonging. Instead of competition, therefore, *negotiating friendship* is the key thread I see throughout all of the data collected so far.
>
> *(German School, Preliminary Analysis, June 2012)*

Only in post-fieldwork analysis did I realize that the social practices around negotiating friendship actually were embedded in competitive frameworks, however, in more indirect, less obvious competitions. As explained, a competitive condition is identifiable mainly by its exclusive goal- and activity-structure. Achieving the goal in a competition requires that somebody else cannot and the exclusive activity-structure is marked by the requirement to outdo another. According to these criteria, the social strategies of the children at the German school for achieving belonging were clearly competitive. The exclusive goal, in these cases, was the confirmation of one's friendship. As I will show, the establishing and confirming of friendship at the German school frequently involved establishing someone else as the opposite, as the 'non-friend'. The following situation documented during class will help to illustrate my argument.

> Susanne, Monika and Sylvia are sitting at one of the tables in class. Susanne shares some of her sandwich with Monika.
> Sylvia to Susanne: *Can I also have a piece of your sandwich?*
> Susanne: *No.*
> Sylvia: *Why don't you like me?*
> Susanne turns to Monika: *Because I don't give her [Sylvia] food does that mean I don't like her or what?* Monika: *No.*
> Sylvia: *But you don't like me despite that.*
> Susanne: *You don't like me either.*
> Sylvia: *Yes I do. I like you.*
>
> *(German School, Fieldnotes, During Recess, Feb. 2012)*

By sharing her sandwich with Monika, Susanne was confirming their mutual friendship. Sylvia, usually one of Monika's best friends, on the other hand, was ignored by Susanne. Sylvia then demanded to be part of Susanne and Monika's group by asking for some of the sandwich. Susanne denied Sylvia's request, therewith denying her belonging to her and Monika's group.

By sharing her sandwich with Monika but *not* with Sylvia, by excluding Sylvia, Susanne indirectly initiated a competition with Sylvia for Monika's affection. Competitions for Monika's affection were very common within the girls' group of

the class. Sylvia accepted the challenge for competition by provocatively asking Susanne "why don't you like me?" (Alternatively, Sylvia could have walked away, thereby not engaging in the competition). As Monika decided to support Susanne's opinion [S: "…does that mean I don't like her – or what?" M: "No."], and not Sylvia's, Susanne was the tacit winner and Sylvia lost the competition.

This example illustrates two aspects of these indirect competitions I found common within the children's peer cultures at the German school. First, competitions were indirect because nobody would speak openly about the fact that particular social interactions were actually a competition for friendship. Both, Susanne and Monika denied that Susanne's gesture of not sharing the sandwich bore any social meaning [S: "…does that mean I don't like her – or what?" M: "No."]. Secondly, competitions for friendship at the German school were indirect because they manifested in the form of *othering*-practices: Susanne and Monika implicitly made Sylvia a 'social other' – an outsider to their group. Othering-practices, when considered more closely, *are* actually competitions because of their exclusive goal- and activity-structure. The 'belonging to the desirable friend or group' were the exclusive goal of othering-practices. Individuals (such as Sylvia in the example above) would be established as 'the other' and by definition excluded from achieving this goal. The activity-structure therefore included denying peers being part of the group. As with the Tibetan children, the competitions at the German school served to negotiate 'what mattered most' to the children. What I call othering-practices would establish belonging: by defining a social other, one's 'sameness' would become highlighted (by excluding Sylvia, Susanne and Monika strengthened their social bond).

In social sciences, the term othering was most notably coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *The Rani of Sirmur* (1985) where she outlines how the British established their identity and legitimized their colonial power in India through othering. Her post-colonial critique, however, reaches farther and addresses the subaltern in academia and public discourses, more generally. She writes that

> …to think of the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation helps the emergence of 'the Third World' as a signifier that allows us to forget that 'worlding', even as it expands the empire of the discipline. (Spivak 1985: 247)

Spivak's account responds to academic debates on otherness that were prevalent at that time, sparked most notably by Edward Said's work. In *Orientalism* (1978) Said demonstrates how the West creates a social other, the Orient, in order to establish a common European identity and consolidate colonial power. *Orientalism* draws attention to the fact that "the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either" (1978: 4; emphasis in original). *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 deals with the othering of women by men. De Beauvoir writes that "what singularly defines the situation of woman is that (…) she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other" (1949: 17). Drawing on Hegel she suggests that othering may be part of human social reality as "a fundamental hostility to any other consciousness is found in consciousness itself" (de Beauvoir 1949: 7). She points out that *any* form of identity-construction always contains an excluding of those who are 'other', who 'do not belong' (see also Fay 1996; Gadamer 2004; Jenkins 2008).

Yet de Beauvoir's usage of the term "hostility" suggests a particular kind of other-construction, and not every construction of other is necessarily (what has been referred to by Spivak as) othering. Illustrated by the works of Spivak, Said and de Beauvoir, othering includes a creating of difference mainly by rendering the other inferior, antagonistic, or both. Through this process the self becomes highlighted and empowered.

Similarly, not always when children exclude peers are they othering them. It therefore makes sense to distinguish othering-practices from other social practices within children's peer cultures. For example, much of children's exclusion of peers may be considered a "protecting of interactive space" where children are trying to secure the often fragile space they have created for their social interaction (Corsaro 2003; 2011; Svahn and Evaldsson 2011). At times, however,

> …when stable core groups emerge in peer cultures, children are most often rejected simply because they are not members of the group; the rejection often has nothing to do with the protection of interactive space. *The actual process of restricting membership often serves to solidify the core group.* (Corsaro 2011: 213; my emphasis)

I would argue that when children exclude peers from their group in order to, as Corsaro puts it, "solidify the core group" one may speak of othering. 'Usual' forms of exclusion thus differ from othering-practices in terms of their focus. When children exclude peers in order to protect their interactive space the focus is on the commonalities of one's group. In the othering-practices, on the other hand, the construction of otherness becomes the centre of attention: individuals are deliberately sought out in order to make them into a 'social other' (which, in turn, strengthens the sense of a 'social us').

I would like to propose that othering-practices may be a common way to achieve a sense of belonging and therefore a common form of social interaction both for children and (as Spivak and others have shown) adults. At the Tibetan school, othering-activities were not as prominent with the children, for, as explained, the main concern of their social interaction was *not* negotiating belonging to peers. As this thesis has focused on what mattered most to the children, I did not investigate any of the Tibetan children's othering-activities, which, however, does not mean they did not exist. Thus, for instance, the verbal teasing-competitions of the Tibetan children, elaborated above, clearly had elements of othering.

Other accounts have also documented othering-processes, albeit without identifying them as such. For instance, Corsaro (2003) reports a situation at a pre-school in Berkeley where Linda wants to play with her friends Barbara and Betty who, to Corsaro's surprise, declare her a 'non-friend':

> "No you can't [play],"responds Barbara [to Linda]. "We don't like you today."
> "You're not our friend," says Betty in support of Barbara's exclusion of Linda.
> (…)
> "She can't play, Bill" says Barbara, "'cause she's not our friend."
> "Why not?" I ask. "You guys played with her yesterday."
> "Well, we hate her today," snaps Betty. (Corsaro 2003: 39)

The social interaction between Barbara, Betty and Linda documented by Corsaro resembles the situation between Susanne, Monika and Sylvia mentioned above: two girls are othering their friend in order to highlight their belonging to one another. While the 6-7 year old German girls othered Sylvia indirectly, the pre-schoolers were establishing their sense of belonging to each other by othering their friend quite openly ["Well, we hate her today"]. Also Emond describes othering-activities at a school in Ireland where "sameness (…) appeared to have even greater emphasis when illuminated by another child's difference (…) [and] heighten the children's sense of connectedness to peers in school" (2014: 197).

As was the case for the children at the German school, Emond suggests that peer friendships played an important role in children's lives in Ireland. It is not surprising that othering-activities would be common to children's cultures where belonging to peers is considered key to well-being. The following sections illustrate some of the variety that these indirect competitions took at the German school.

Othering-Competitions as Bullying

Hardly a day went by where a group of girls in class around the most popular girl Monika were not, as they would put it, "fighting" [German*: streiten*]. As will be illustrated, these conflicts were actually means of establishing a sense of belonging via othering. Usually, one girl of the group was singled out and then shunned for something she had 'done wrong'. Monika was most often a leading figure in these processes, deciding who this girl would be. In the following example taken from a recording in the school yard, Nicole initiated an othering-competition by confronting Alara (in the presence of the other girls) about allegedly having damaged her property. At first, Monika supported Nicole by getting Alara for her to "clarify the issue". At one point, however, Monika suddenly decided in favour of Alara and Nicole became the social other.

In the school yard, during the lunch break.

Nicole, Monika and the other girls are standing in a group, talking. Nicole waits while Monika, followed by the other girls, goes to get Alara. When Monika and the girls return with Alara, Monika announces that Alara "*is now ready to talk*".

Nicole to Alara: *Susanne told me that you just took my CD and shoved it across the table.* [meaning that she damaged it]

Alara: *No, I did not.*

Nicole: *Yes, you did. I believe Susanne.*

Sylvia: *No. It can't be true – I was watching Alara the whole time.*

Monika: *Ok - stop, stop, stop, stop…*

Nicole to Monika: *Can I say something? I believe Susanne…*

Some girls begin to make comments – mix of voices. Suddenly, Monika, the girls and Alara run away and Nicole remains alone with me.

Nicole, upset, to me: *I'm not THAT stupid!!*

Carla: *What happened now? Why are the girls leaving?*

Nicole: *No idea.*

Monika, calling from some distance away back to Nicole: *Alara wants to be alone with us now!*

Nicole calling back: *No! I want to finish solving the issue with her first!*

Monika, louder: *But what if she doesn't want to?!*

Nicole, upset: *But I want to talk to her!!!*

Monika, yelling: *Leave her alone – she doesn't want to!!!*

Nicole starts running after the girls and Monika and the girls run off with Alara. A cat-and-mouse game begins across the school yard with Nicole following the girls who are running away. Monika holds Alara's arm as if to protect her and calls back to Nicole: *"Leave her alone! Leave her alone!"* Finally, one of the girls, Joyce, turns around and pushes Nicole. Nicole kicks Joyce and Joyce kicks back. The rest of the girls continue running away from Nicole.

(German School, Recording, In the Yard, April 2012)

As Nicole would be excluded on a regular basis it could be considered a form of bullying (see Montgomery 2013d). At other times, however, Nicole, together with Monika and the girls' group, would herself become a bully and turn against other girls. The girls' bullying activities would even extend to children from other classes: once, for example, I observed how Sylvia got some girls from the other class to collectively go against Monika. The conflicts that emerged from these encounters often involved tears and were followed by an official reconciliation, frequently even within the same hour of the lunch break. The next day or next lunch break, another conflict [German: *Streit*] between Monika, the girls and another girl would arise. The bullying amongst the girls at the German school was indirect (as opposed to a more

direct, obvious aggression), a form of bullying which seems to be common with girls (Owens et al 2000; Selekman and Vessey 2004; Svahn and Evaldsson 2011).

The majority of social science research on bullying focuses on individuals as victims or perpetrators (Danby and Osvaldsson 2011; Montgomery 2014). Some accounts from Childhood Studies offer alternative perspectives on bullying (see Davies 2011; Hamarus and Kaikkonen 2008; Mills 2001; Owens et al 2000; Svahn and Evaldsson 2011; Thornberg 2010). Davies, for instance, suggests a view of bullying not as "pathological, but as an excessive and misguided defence of a fixed and dominant normative moral order" (2011: 278). Here the bully is considered a guardian of the normative moral order rather than an aggressor (Davies 2011). This was clearly also the case with Monika who would usually guide the collective othering-activities of the girls.

Mills (2001) investigated violence and bullying between boys and found that it was related to establishing belonging to male peers. He suggests that bullying would serve the boys "to both normalize particular constructions of masculinity while also determining where a boy is positioned within a hierarchical arrangement of masculinities" (2001: 4). Thornberg (2010) found in interviews with children that one of bullying's main functions was to secure friendship to peers. Similarly, I would argue that the girls' bullying at the German school was a means of establishing belonging to their peers. By identifying one girl as the social other Monika and the girls would experience a heightened sense of belonging to each other. In the example above, for instance, the girls who were running away from Nicole were obviously experiencing a strong 'group momentum': collectively shielding Alara from Nicole, running, holding each others' hands and making excited remarks to one another.

I suggest, moreover, that bullying can be considered an extreme form of othering. Like othering, bullying always "focuses on difference" (Hamarus and Kaikkonen 2008: 336), constructing "the group of 'us' and 'them'" (Hamarus and Kaikkonen 2008: 342) and, like othering, bullying establishes and maintains belonging to one's peers.

Gender-Based Othering-Competitions

Othering-competitions at the German school were also common between girls and boys. In my six-month-fieldwork I witnessed at least 10 gender-based quarrels. It was unmistakable how these conflicts served as a platform for presenting oneself as belonging either to the male or female group.

Research with children has illustrated various ways in which boys perform masculinities and girls feminities (Corsaro 2003; Kofoed 2008; Mac an Ghaill 1999; 1994; Thorne 1993). Frosh et al (2002), for example, draw attention to the fact that a main aspect of hegemonic masculinity is the establishing and highlighting of its opposite: the girls. Similarly, boys at the German school were constructing their belonging to the male gender by othering girls and the girls were performing their feminity by emphasizing the otherness of boys. The result was a visibly heightened experience of belonging to either gender. Usually, it was the core girls group of the class around Monika or the core boys group of the class around Dominik that would initiate the quarrel, however, by the end of the lunch break, the majority of the class would be participating in the conflict, taking sides with their gender (see also Corsaro 2003; Thorne 1993). The initial reasons for these conflicts were often fast forgotten within the passionate, public arguing between girls and boys. Discussions, accusations and verbal teasing of one another were elaborate and dramatised. Thorne (1993), drawing on Barth's concept, has described these othering-processes as "borderwork":

> When gender boundaries are activated, the loose aggregation 'boys and girls' consolidates into 'the boys' and 'the girls' into separate and reified groups. In the process, categories of identity that on other occasions have minimal relevance for interaction become the basis of separate collectivities. Other social definitions get squeezed out by heightened awareness of gender as a dichotomy and of 'the girls' and 'the boys' as opposite and even antagonistic sides. Several times I watched this process of transformation (…). (Thorne 1993: 65)

Borderwork at the German school usually resulted in involving an adult (supposedly) in order to solve the conflict. The teachers and care-takers would do their best to intervene, however, would often find themselves relatively powerless in

the face of the complexity of children's social politics. The children were mostly not interested in resolving the conflict but rather in its perpetuation; adult authority was 'used' as a means of intensifying the gendered-based othering which served to publicly highlight one's collective group identity and belonging. Each party would attempt to get the adult 'on their side'. This would, ideally, entail a punishing or scolding of one's competitor or, at least, the adults' sympathy through which one's group identity was additionally highlighted. In this way, intergenerational relations at the German school served the establishing of the children's sense of belonging to peers.

It is not surprising, therefore, that despite the staff's genuine efforts to foster prosocial social interaction between the children, social conflicts between peers was the daily fare. *Streit* [German for "conflict/fight"] was probably one of the most frequently used words (both by the children and the adults) during my fieldwork. *Streit* was also an issue discussed at a school level and a social-worker would offer daily supervised "dispute-settlement" [German: *Streitschlichtung*] after lunchtime. The school's manual states that the high frequency of social conflicts between students is mainly due to the multicultural make-up of the classes (German School Booklet 2007). While cross-cultural clashes were clearly an issue at the school, it is possible that, as in the example above, some *Streits* were also a means of establishing belonging for the children. As belonging was 'what mattered most' to the children, social conflicts that served othering were bound to be frequent.

Othering-Competitions in Role Play

Social others were also often a significant part of the children's role play at the German school. Typically, these social other figures were unpopular roles, antagonistic to and often significantly less powerful than the social us figures. Social others in role play would be both, fictitious or enacted by peers. Individuals or groups playing these roles were usually considered not part of the peer group or were, alternatively, the least popular members of the group.

Some of the common social other-figures were "babysitter" (German: *Babysitter*), "kidnapper" (German: *Kidnapper*) or simply "enemy" (German: *Feind*).

The social other figures were 'the losers' within these indirect competitions for belonging, as they were the outsiders in the storyline of the role play. Unsurprisingly, nobody was keen on enacting these roles, however, sometimes there was not much choice if one wanted to be part of the game.

A group of boys, for example, had made playing *Star Wars* into their daily entertainment during lunch break. Nico and the boys would play the role of what they called the "Nice Ones" who would be fighting the antagontistic "Bad Ones". Nico would usually enact the role of Master Yoda leading a group of 5-10 children against evil figures such as Darth Vader. If necessary, the "Bad Ones" would be imagined by the children during play; yet whenever possible Nico and the boys would engage the Kurdish boys from the class to play the enemy, as their group had also begun to like *Star Wars*. Nico and his group would allow the Kurdish boys to participate in the play exclusively as the "Bad Ones", despite their frequent requests to be given other roles.

They are playing Star Wars at the playground. The only *Bad One* is Gherib.

The *Nice Ones*, Nico, Levin, Maria, Alex, Thomas and Hesam, are on the monkey bars. Gherib, the only *Bad One*, is on the ground in front of them.

Nico: *Gherib! I am doing some magic so that you [have to pretend to] fall asleep…* [Gherib does not react] *Hey, Gherib, you are falling asleep! You are falling asleep!!!*

Thomas: *Hey, Gherib, you are falling asleep!*

Nico: *Ok, Gherib. Gherib, you are not playing anymore anyway!*

Gherib: *Ok, I am a ghost.*

Nico: *No, you are not.*

Alex to Gherib: *You are only air...only air.*

Gherib: *Wait…Wait! Let me think. I am Darth Vader. I am Darth Vader! I am Darth Vader, ok?*

Nico: *I am Master Yoda, I am Master Yoda. Gherib, you are not playing, you can't do anything anymore. If you want to kill me I will hit you dead. We are seven against one. You are not playing.*

Gherib: *Yes I am.*

Nico: *No, you are not.*

Somebody: *Who of us is „bad" now?*

Somebody else: *Not me.*

Gherib: *Me…me!*

Nico: *But then you have to also follow the rules, ok?*

Gherib: *Ok…but only me alone against all of you?*

Nico: *You are able to throw torture-lighting but if you get hit, Gherib, then you will go like "zzzzzzzzzzststststsststs" and if I stop then you can be normal again, ok?*

Gherib: *Ok.*

(German School, Recording, In the Yard, Feb. 2012)

At the beginning, Gherib challenges Nico's authority by ignoring his directions and thus Nico excludes him from the game. Nico's friends confirm Gherib's not being part of the game anymore ["You are only air"]. Later, he is allowed back into the game under the condition that he takes on the role of Darth Vader, the ultimate social other figure in *Star Wars*. Gherib is allowed to re-enter the play quickly because social other figures, such as Darth Vader, were vital in the children's *Star Wars* re-enactments. The plot of the movie *Star Wars* is based on a dichotomous world of good versus evil and thus, the "Bad Ones" were an indispensable part for a re-enactment. "The moral universe of *Star Wars* has two colors: black and white. (…) Every identifiable character in the movie works either for the Light Side of the force or for the Dark Side. It's a world with very few shades of grey" (Dee 2005: 41).

Battling against the "Bad Ones" would produce a heightened experience of shared identity (as "Nice Ones") and it was not a coincidence that "Bad Ones" were almost exclusively enacted by non-members of the peer group; these children were suited to enact a social other to which a 'social us' could be contrasted. As Nico explained the notion "bad" to me when I asked him to: "'Bad'…'bad' is our enemy" (German School, Recording, Interview, Boy, Feb. 2012). As with the girls' bullying and the gendered conflicts between boys and girls, the boy's re-enactment of *Star Wars* would create belonging which was key to the children's well-being at the German school.

Competition and Well-Being

I have shown how, while the children at each site had different understandings of what constitutes well-being (being skilful at the Tibetan school and belonging at the German school), the social practices surrounding these conditions for well-being

were competitive in both cases. The Tibetan children would confirm their being skilful within direct competitions and the children at the German school would establish belonging via indirect competitions (othering-practices).

As discussed in Chapter 1, children are creative agents who interpret, recreate, as well as co-shape their socio-cultural environment (Corsaro 2011; 2009; 2003; 1993; Hadley and Nenga 2004; Qvortrup 1991). Within their social interaction children collectively interpret, digest and establish their experience (Corsaro 2011; James et al 1998; Kelle 2001; Skånfors et al 2009) which is therefore empirically available to the social scientist (Blumer 1969; Corsaro 2011). The fact that the children at both schools embedded their conditions for well-being within competitive frameworks suggests that there must have been an association between well-being and competition for them. Competition was somehow linked to well-being for the children at both schools.

Other data from my research confirm this theory. For instance, both, the Tibetan children and the children at the German school became very enthusiastic whenever competitions were about to take place. Cries of "Yessss!" and other forms of expressing joy were common at both sites whenever teachers announced formal competitions such as tests, exams, games or sports.[17] For the children at both schools there seemed to be a sense that competition was related to enjoyment and fun. Competitions were created by the children not only around individual skilfulness and belonging, respectively, but also within various other situations, and always conveyed the impression of enjoyment.

> At the Tibetan school we [my interpreter and I] are about to have an interview with Nyima [boy]. I notice that his eyes are red and ask him whether he has cried.
>
> Nyima: *No, I just put my head under water. The water went into my nose and it hurt.*
>
> Interpreter: *Why would you do that?*
>
> Nyima: *I wanted to compete and see how long I can stay under water.*
>
> Interpreter: *Compete with whom?*
>
> Nyima, smiles: *No one - I was competing against myself.*
>
> *(Tibetan School, Recording, Interview, Boy, Dec. 2013)*

[17] Whether or not individual children actually ended up enjoying the competitions addresses a different matter, for children would also show distress or upset when losing a competition.

At the German school in fine arts class the children are making 'Eskimo' paintings. A larger group of students is sitting at a table together while painting. The children are continuously commenting on what they are doing and encouraging the others to look. The phrase "*Look here what I am doing!*" is repeated several times.

Hesam: *Hey! My Eskimo has some snowflakes* [on his head]!

Monika: *Mine too! Many more than yours!*

Thomas: *Mine too – on his pants!*

Hesam: *Mine even has some on his socks!*

(German School, Fieldnotes, In Class, Jan. 2012)

The competitions in both examples are related to fun for the children: both, Nyima's 'competition against himself' and the children's competition around painting snowflakes at the German school impart playfulness and enjoyment rather than striving and ambitiousness.

What were the children enjoying in competitions? I found that competitive situations were usually marked by extraordinary emotionality, by an experience of *thrill* for the children. This thrill was especially visible during game-competitions involving larger groups, such as those established by the schools or teachers. As Dawa at the Tibetan school explained when we asked her what she enjoys about competitions: "it makes my heart beat faster" (Tibetan School, Interview, Girl, Oct. 2012). It is likely that competitions included an emotional, embodied experience for the children as a welcome change to the usually constrained manner of being in class. Harden's (2012) study on six and seven year olds in a school in Scotland shows how children's emotions and physical movements are significantly restricted during class (see also Mayall 1998). She writes that "the teacher was continually engaged in regulating the children's bodies and emotions and instilling in them a sense of importance of developing this control for themselves" (Harden 2012: 88). Harden's descriptions resembled more closely the conditions I encountered at the German school, however, the children at both schools were clearly constrained in terms of their emotional and bodily expressions by having to sit, study, be quiet and follow instructions. The intense emotional experience induced by competitions may have been a welcome relief from the monotony of school-life for the Tibetan as well as the children at the German school.

Another explanation as to why competition was so clearly linked to well-being for the children can be found when investigating views within the socio-cultural environments of the children. As elaborated in Chapter 2, both, Tibetan society in Exile, as well as German society, convey an impression that well-being is related to engaging in competition. The children are likely to have integrated these societal values into their social interaction, for children "creatively appropriate information from the adult world to produce their own unique peer cultures" (Corsaro 1993: 64).

Although public discourses in Germany have begun to question competition as exclusively beneficial to children's well-being, the presence of competition within societal structures as well as within the school-systems still implies that well-being and competition somehow 'go together'. Both in German society, as well as in Tibetan society in Exile[18], one must usually engage in educational and economic competition in order to make a living, in order to lead a 'good life'. The children at both schools were well aware of these interrelations. At both schools the children mentioned to me the importance of their schoolwork for 'getting a good job later on' (see also Christensen and James 2001). They were conscious of the need to engage in competition in order to ensure one's well-being as an adult. In the face of the link between well-being and competition within their societies' discourses and economic structures it is not surprising that the children's social practices for achieving well-being were also embedded in competitions.

4.3. Conclusion

I have explored the children's views of well-being and their related social practices at both schools by investigating 'what mattered most' to them. This proved to be very different at each site. What mattered most to the children at the Tibetan school was 'being skilful' and I have elaborated on three main types of skills displayed by the children: academic, physical and verbal teasing skills. There was a hierarchical

[18] A high percentage of the population of Tibetans in Exile are ordained monks and nuns living in Buddhist monasteries where living standards and social norms are very different from those of the lay population. This work solely refers to the non-ordained communities of Tibetans in India.

valuing of the different skills by the children (academic skilfulness was valued highly, for example), yet an individual's proficiency in one area seemed to balance lesser skilfulness in another. Some of the boys' lack of academic skilfulness, for instance, was compensated for by their strong physicality. What mattered most to the children at the German school was friendship. The children spent most of their time negotiating and establishing belonging to peers, and interviews confirmed that friends were central to their sense of well-being. From the children's point of view at the German school belonging to peers was a main condition for well-being.

Interestingly, 'what mattered most' to the children was usually negotiated and established within competitive frameworks at both sites. Well-being was therefore linked to competition for the children at both schools. At the Tibetan school the children would establish skilfulness in competitions and at the German school belonging to peers was negotiated competitively.

Most of the Tibetan girls were especially successful in academic competitions, the majority of the Tibetan boys tended to focus their skills in physical teasing and members of both sexes had developed skilfulness in verbal teasing. Competitions around academic skilfulness, physical teasing skills and verbal teasing skills were, however, only three of many. In fact, competition was *the* central element to the Tibetan children's social interaction, taking place around a variety of topics. Even casual situations would be turned into forms of competitions, for example, "whose biscuit is costlier", "whose hairdo is the nicest" or "which dinosaur (in a book) was more dangerous", to name but a few.

Also the children at the German school negotiated what mattered most to them, namely belonging to peers, within a competitive framework. Yet as opposed to the Tibetan children these competitions were indirect and took place within othering-practices. Different social groups would manifest different forms of othering-competitions: within the girls' group othering manifested as a form of bullying; boys and girls would create gendered-based quarrels and many children would generate social others within role play (as, for example, in the Star Wars re-enactment). The result was a (heightened) sense of belonging: by creating a social

other the social us became highlighted and belonging was confirmed for individuals and groups.

The fact that the children established competitive frameworks for well-being suggests that well-being was linked to competition for the children at both schools. I have suggested that, on the one hand, competition may have been a 'thrilling' experience for the children, a welcome change from school's monotony. On the other hand, the children may have been interpretatively reproducing (Corsaro 2011; 2003) the values of their societies where well-being is inevitably linked to an engagement in economic competition. Within both Tibetan society in Exile and German society achieving well-being is mostly dependent on engaging in (educational or economic) competitions. Accordingly, the Tibetan children, as well as the children at the German school are likely to have creatively integrated competitive conditions as a 'doorway' to their unique understandings of conditions for well-being, that is, individual skilfulness and belonging, respectively.

The children's well-being at both sites has, so far, been explored by investigating their unique perspectives of well-being and the social practices related to these. Chapter 5 analyses the children's well-being from a more transcultural angle by considering differences noticed in cross-cultural analysis. Subsequently, the children's unique understandings of well-being and their social practices, presented earlier, will be explored in the light of these aspects.

Chapter 5

Cross-Cultural Considerations on Well-Being: Self-Confidence and Resilience

This chapter considers the children's well-being from a transcultural perspective by investigating differences that were noticed in cross-cultural analysis. First, it argues that the Tibetan children displayed a higher level of self-confidence than the children at the German school. Self-confidence is taken as a potential indicator for well-being and is explored as such. I ask why there was this difference in self-confidence between both sites by investigating the two major areas of the children's daily experience: social interaction with peers at school (6.1.) and social interaction with adults at school (6.2.). First, my analysis suggests that the Tibetan children were experiencing a higher level of agency in relation to their ability to achieve their key condition for well-being (i.e., being skilful) and that a higher level of self-confidence is intimately tied into this agency. Furthermore, the Tibetan children appeared to show a higher level of resilience towards emotionally and physically challenging situations - another potential indicator for well-being. The second half of this chapter explores how the generational order, the ways in which the children were treated by adults and related constructions of childhood (Alanen 2001a; 2001b; Mayall 2002), may have also contributed to a greater or lesser self-confidence and resilience.

5.1. Self-Confident Agency around Conditions for Well-Being

One of the most conspicuous differences that I noticed in cross-cultural analysis was that the Tibetan children presented themselves as much more self-confident than the German children. The following chapter attempts to analyse why this might be the case and suggests that the Tibetan children had more influence on achieving their sense of well-being than the German children. I will argue that the Tibetan children proved to have a greater agency in terms of their well-being since they were much more easily able to experience themselves as 'being skilful' than the children at the German school could achieve a sense of belonging. This is not to suggest that the

children at the German school were somehow 'lesser agents' than the Tibetan children. The elaborations of the previous chapter on the children's understandings of well-being ('what mattered most' to them) speaks volumes about the children's creative agency *at both sites*. Adding to an abundant body of work in Childhood Studies, the previous chapter has illustrated once again that children are active agents in their own right, even within rigid power-structures (Corsaro 2011; Dunne 1980; James et al 1998; Qvortrup 1991).

As explained earlier (Chapter 1), however, children's agency also needs to be investigated in terms of its situatedness and limitations (Bordonaro 2012; Punch 2007; Robson et al 2007; Tisdall and Punch 2014) particularly when researching children's well-being. The following sets out to do so by exploring the children's agency at both sites in terms of their ability to achieve their main conditions for well-being (i.e., being skilful and belonging to peers, respectively) and shows how the children's self-confidence, a transcultural indicator for well-being, was intimately tied into this agency.

Self-Confidence as a Transcultural Indicator for Well-being

The example of a Tibetan girl named Rinchen may illustrate the high level of self-confidence I found to be present amongst the Tibetan children. Rinchen was probably the least popular girl in class: she was a rather chubby, boyish girl who did not show much interest in being academically skilled. Her grades were usually quite low and, while she tried to keep up in physical- and verbal-teasing competitions with her peers, she was never really able to demonstrate much proficiency in these areas. Accordingly, she was often mistreated by the boys and avoided by many of the girls. Nevertheless, Rinchen displayed a remarkable sense of self-confidence in terms of her individual wants and needs. It did not appear that she was disinterested in being liked by her peers; Rinchen would make efforts to establish friendships like anyone else in class, yet I never found her trying to appease others at the cost of her personal wants or needs. Rinchen was always very clear about what she wanted and would pursue this, even in the face of the disapproval of her peers.

This was not only the case with Rinchen – all Tibetan children were conspicuously clear about what they wanted or did not want, for that matter. The following example from a free-play situation at the Tibetan school may illustrate this phenomenon.

> The children are playing a game where two fields are drawn in the sand. Suddenly, Pasang [girl] decides that she does not like the field and begins to draw a new line, making the squares smaller.
>
> Chewa [girl]: *Hey, this [the square] is so small.*
>
> Tashi [boy]: *Pasang, you've made the box too small.*
>
> Pasang draws a new line and they start playing. Sonam [boy] does not pay attention to Pasang's line but instead plays within the 'old' field. He steps outside Pasang's line.
>
> Pasang: *Sonam, you're out of the game now!*
>
> Sonam ignores her and remains in the game. Instead, Tashi [boy] draws a new line, making the square bigger. Pasang erases Tashi's line and draws another one.
>
> Sonam to Pasang: *What do you think you're doing?*
>
> Tashi: *You are drawing new lines and the box is getting smaller and smaller.*
>
> Tashi rubs off Pasang's line and tells his friend Nyima [boy]: *Nyima, stay within this line, ignore the other [i.e., Pasang's] one, ok?*
>
> Interpreter: *Tashi, which one is the line now?*
>
> Pasang points to her line: *Acha, this is the line.*
>
> Tashi points to 'his' line: *Acha, it's not that line, it's this one.*
>
> Tsering [boy] points to 'Tashi''s line: *Acha, stay within this line.*
>
> Suddenly the whole group moves to a fresh ground a few meters next to the 'old' field and Tashi and Sonam are drawing a new field in the sand. Pasang follows them and starts making their field smaller again. The whole thing begins anew: Pasang makes the field smaller while the boys make it larger.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Recording, In the Yard, Sept. 2012)*

The excerpt illustrates the Tibetan children's self-confidence they would commonly display in social interaction with each other. Several individuals with different opinions on how to create the appropriate game field in the sand directed each other on what to do and how to play. It is notable that the different opinions did not lead to any serious discussion on the matter; instead, individuals simply reasserted their view and the game would continue all the while. It is almost as if the children were

expecting others to have a firm opinion. This voicing of different opinions could sometimes go on for a very long time, each person insisting on the veracity of their view. Often the argument would simply dissolve at one point: either one of the opponents would wordlessly yield or the children would collectively begin doing something else.

The children's manner of social interaction with each other was very different at the German school. Children would tend much more to appease and please their friends. Unlike the Tibetan children, there seemed to be much compromising of individual desires with the children at the German school. These situations usually reflected the hierarchical order, that is, the less popular children would often yield their opinions and interests according to those of their more popular friends. The following excerpt is an example from the girls' group social interaction. Monika, the most popular girl in the class, would like to be called 'Momo' by her friends.

> At a sports-event the children are competing with each other by racing. Monika returns from her go. She has won first place in the race. Her friends are waiting for her.
>
> Susanne to Monika: *I was screaming 'Momo!' so loudly [while you were racing] – didn't you hear me?*
>
> Monika: *Yes I did...*[turns to me:] *Carla, I've won…!*
>
> Susanne to Monika: *As soon as I heard that you won I clapped my hands so loudly that my bladder burst!*
>
> Monika to me, ignoring Susanne: *But I don't think I'm good enough to get into the school-championships…*
>
> Susanne, loudly, to Monika: *Earlier, when we were playing 'The Fox Goes Around' then Mrs. Schmitt [the teacher] said 'Momo'!*
>
> Monika to Susanne: *Mrs. Schmitt? Really?*
>
> Carla to Monika: *Who calls you ‚Momo'?*
>
> Monika: *Many do. Susanne, Doro…*
>
> Doro [girl] interrupts, to Monika: *Wolfram, Nico and Thomas [boys] also call you 'Momo', right?*
>
> Nicole: *Momo!!! You've won!*
>
> Doro: *Momo, when it was my turn she [Mrs Schmitt] was going like 'faster, faster, faster!'*
>
> *(German School, Recording, During Sports-Event, June 2012)*

Later it turned out that Susanne had invented the story about the teacher saying Monika's nickname in order to get Monika's attention. Susanne, Doro and Nicole

were competing for Monika's attention and approval. Monika's self-confidence, on the other hand, is reminiscent of the Tibetan children. Her 'cool' reaction to her friend's flatteries was symptomatic of her hierarchical status in class.

I found that almost all children at the Tibetan school, irrespective of their social status, would display a level of self-confidence similar to Monika's and other popular children's at the German school. Many, if not most of the children at the German school, on the other hand, would focus on appeasing peers much more frequently, often compromising their personal interests.

The following explains how this cross-cultural difference may be related to the children's different understandings of well-being elaborated earlier. It is illustrated how achieving personal skilfulness and belonging are likely to be linked to a greater or lesser self-confidence.

Individualized Selves, Relational Selves and Self-Confidence

The previous chapter has explored how the Tibetan children would regard being skilful and the children at the German school belonging to peers as key to their well-being. I argue that the foci of these two views differ to the effect that achieving skilfulness (Tibetan site) requires a preoccupation mainly with oneself while achieving belonging to peers (German site) depends highly on others. As May writes, "in order to *truly* belong (…) it is not enough for an individual to merely feel that they belong, but this feeling must also be reciprocated by others" (2013: 83; emphasis in original). One may conclude, therefore, that specific constructions of self at each school were akin to the focus on individual skilfulness and belonging, respectively: the former would be more *individualized* and the latter more *relational*. I will suggest that a relational self at the German school is likely to have generated less self-confidence as it needed to rely on others' approval while the Tibetan individualized self created more self-confidence through independence.

Contrasting the notions of an individualized self (Tibetan) with a relational sense of self (German) makes sense for heuristic purposes and is *not* meant to represent the children's experience of self in general. Individualized and relational

self are merely Weberian *ideal types* which are a "one-sidedly exaggerated characterization of a complex phenomena, (…) [but] can be hypothetically posited and then 'compared' with the realities they are meant to elucidate" (Ringer 2000: 5). It is not suggested here that the Tibetan children solely or continuously would experience themselves as individualized or the children at the German school as relational selves. As Burkitt (2008) points out, *all* selves are in fact relational or to draw on Wittgenstein´s (2009) analogy, the eye (the "I") can never see itself, but needs 'other eyes' to actually know it exists. Moreover, self-constructions in social interactions are always "multiple" (Burkitt 2008: 3) - people's selves are a complex 'amalgam' of various self-constructions. For instance, the Tibetan children, even though displaying individualized selves in social interaction, were clearly also experiencing a relational self embedded within the strong collective sense of 'Tibetanness' (see Chapter 2). The children at the German school, as illustrated in the following chapter, were also constructing a modernist sense of self which is based largely on self-reliance and independence. It is mainly for heuristic purposes one could say that an independent self-construction was common within the Tibetan children's peer cultures and a relational self-construction within the children's social interaction at the German school.

An interview I had conducted asking "who are you?" confirmed that the relational construction of self was significant at the German school. I had asked a girl named Alara to define herself and she immediately began to refer to her ability to make friends.

Carla: *So if I would ask you now: 'who are you'?*

Alara: *Then I would say 'I'm Alara'.*

Carla: *Ok. And what else could you tell me about yourself?*

Alara: *Hmm...[that] I like to read…hm, well actually I first would have introduced myself and then ask 'do you want to play with me?' and if he or she then says 'no' then….*

Carla, confused: *If who says 'no'?*

Alara: *If somebody who I had asked [to play with me] says 'no' then I say 'ok' and then…I…well then I would first be friends with him or her.*

Carla, still confused: *Ok…what exactly do you mean?*

Alara*: ...and then I would play with him or her and…yeah.* [pauses] *You know, I'm establishing a club named 'Camera-Kids' and in this club we make films and then I will write down my friends who vote for that [club] and I will give them a tag, and the ones who have a tag get an invitation to a pyjama-party, and all of us are then 'Camera-Kids'.*

(German School, Recording, Interview, Girl, April 2012)

While conducting the interview I was at first confused about Alara's response and suspected that she just did not know what to answer to my rather abstract question; only later did her response make sense to me. Alara had, in fact, responded to my question and was implying that she experienced herself as being defined by her ability to make friends ["…I would be friends with him or her…"] and by being part of a group of friends ["the Camera-Kids"]. Alara's response exemplifies how children at the German school would construct a major part of their self by depending on their belonging to peers. The Tibetan children, on the other hand, would construct an important part of their self in relation to their being skilful – a matter that mainly concerned them as individuals.

Achieving Well-Being

Both forms of self, the 'Tibetan' individualized self and the 'German' relational self required acknowledgment from their peers. As explained, both establishing belonging and individual skilfulness was performative: achieving a sense of belonging or of being skilful would require 'witnesses'. In order to confirm a sense of belonging, however, the relational ('German') self was additionally dependent on the friends' affection. The relational self was therefore more dependent on others' moods, views and emotionalities than the individualized self. For a relational self who, defines him or herself via friendships, a rejection by one's friends would most likely entail an undermining of self-confidence. I argue that this was often the case for the children at the German school.

The children's well-being at the German school was dependent on others' affection yet achieving this affection was in most cases a very shaky matter. It was not always possible for the German children to be approved of by their friends and

once achieved, affection would be easily lost again: yesterday's friend would suddenly decide to prefer others to play with or, in the worse case, end the friendship officially (though usually temporarily). Almost only the popular children at the German school, such as Monika, Dominik and Nico, seemed to entertain stable relationships where friendship was hardly called into question by their peers. Especially less popular children would often find themselves ignored, rejected or, even bullied by friends (see Chapter 4). Belonging was key to the children's well-being at the German school yet the majority of the children in the class were obviously experiencing merely a *fluctuating* sense of belonging, in accord with the fluctuation of their peers' affection. The least popular children in the class, such as Yvonne, Balaban and Joyce, struggled visibly and almost continuously with their friends' rejection.

The following excerpt shows the care-taker Mr Reinhard trying to help settle the aftermath of a situation where Dominik, Gherib and Ardan had been excluding their friend Balaban. Balaban had approached Mr Reinhard searching for help in dissolving the emotionally painful experience of not-belonging. As was so often the case, the care-taker soon discovered that the boys were actually not interested in solving the conflict but that the aim was the othering of Balaban. The othering of Balaban served to strengthen a sense of belonging within the boys' group (see Chapter 4). Balaban was trying to regain his friends' affection by asking an adult to intervene, however, Ardan and the boys were clear about Balaban's momentary social status within their group.

Mr Reinhard, to all the boys: *You've asked me to help solve the conflict and then you don't talk…I ask you to suggest possible solutions and you don't say anything. I don't find this very funny.*

Balaban, upset: *Oh, man…*

Mr Reinhard: *Ardan, you have not said anything so far…do you have any suggestion [how to solve the conflict]*?

Ardan: *I and Gherib and Dominik could vote on whether Balaban can be or friend or not…*

Mr Reinhard, angry, loud voice: *No! That is such nonsense! We have spoken about that at the class council so many times. You want to vote whether someone is your friend or not. And we do not want to hear anything like that!*

Dominik: *He [Balaban] does not have to be our friend!*

Mr Reinhard: *We've spoken about that with Mrs. Schmitt [class teacher] so many times now! This is inacceptable!*

(German School, After Lunch, Recording, Feb. 2012)

For Balaban, like many other children of the class at the German school, achieving belonging was a struggle. Despite the school staff's efforts to eliminate these tendencies, rejection, exclusion and othering by peers was a part of the children's daily social interaction.

As explained, one of the main social practices for establishing belonging for the children at the German school was othering, which, however, *by default* would entail a sense of not-belonging for the children being othered. While some children were more subject to othering than others, almost all children, even the most popular, found themselves occasionally in the position of 'the one who did not belong'. As explained, being deprived of one's sense of belonging to peers meant losing access to the most essential condition for well-being for the children. Understandably, therefore, struggles around belonging were an emotional rollercoaster for many. Rejection by one's friends would mean an undermining of one's sense of (relational) self and one's self-confidence would decrease.

One may therefore argue that achieving a stable sense of well-being was a difficult matter for many children at the German school. Childhood Studies have defined the ability to act to the effect that one's action makes a difference in one way or another as agency (James 2009; Mayall 2002; Punch and Tisdall 2013). The children's agency in terms of achieving their most important condition for well-being (belonging) was clearly restricted for many at the German school. Emond's account at a school in Ireland reports on similar experiences for children and explains how the restricted sense of agency in terms of one's friendships was a cause for distress. She writes that "the contradictory sense of having power over one's inclusion in the peer group, whilst at the same time regarding it as beyond one's individual control, resulted in an underlying tension in children's accounts of their peer experiences" (2008: 198). Similarly, many children at the German school were struggling with a sense of powerless in the face of their friend's othering-activities.

The fluctuating nature of friendship was obviously distressing to many children at the German school.

Well-being was more easily achievable for the children at the Tibetan school as becoming skilful was much more 'accessible' and not necessarily dependent on others' sympathy. I had mentioned the three most important areas where skilfulness was being demonstrated to others (academic proficiency, and verbal and physical teasing), however, there were several other areas where individual children would find opportunities to show their proficiency.

The girl mentioned previously, Rinchen, for example, who was not particularly skilled in any of the three main areas, seemed to have found her 'niche of proficiency' in accumulating and displaying 'edibles'[19] (any form of snack). Among the children at the Tibetan school edibles were of great importance and omnipresent - secretly during class, overtly during break-time, eating, savouring, displaying, arranged in different formations and containers. More than her classmates, Rinchen seemed to have access to special edibles through her parents who owned a restaurant outside of the Tibetan village. During class and at the breaks, Rinchen would openly display, savour and play with her edibles and occasionally share them with others. As my interpreter Lhaze remarked once to me, Rinchen's favourite word seemed to be *nyempa* [Tib. for "edibles"]. While savouring snacks was clearly also an end in itself, edibles were strongly infused with a social meaning (see also Chudacoff 2007; Corsaro 2011). Rinchen was able to beat all her classmates in the 'edible-competition' and, despite her rather low social status in class, she would experience herself as being skilful in terms of acquiring edibles.

Also other areas of presenting herself as skilful were accessible to Rinchen. For example, she was frequently successful in challenging and undermining teachers' authority. She often initiated power-plays with some of the teachers and would be so persistent that the teachers would let her get away with it.

The previous chapter explained how even though all of the Tibetan children publicly valued academic success several students were not genuinely interested in

[19] I've decided to use the more literal translation from the Tibetan word *nyempa* instead of translating it as 'snacks'. The word 'snack' implies a meal in between whereas *nyempa* was much more meaningful to the Tibetan children.

achieving academic success. Similarly, observing proprieties towards adults and teachers was a key part of intergenerational social interaction at the Tibetan school, yet this was seemingly contradicted by an overt challenging of adult authority in some backstage (Goffman 1959) situations. Front stage, Tibetan children would talk about the importance of being "a good student", publicly display gestures of respect towards elders (such as folding hands and slightly bowing, picking up something the teacher has dropped etc.) but at the next moment children might overtly challenge adult authority.

For instance, adults and young people were often ridiculed by children. My interpreter Lhaze had mentioned to me how, as a teenager in school, she would fear the younger children's provocative and shaming remarks in public. I witnessed several occasions at the school where children made teasing remarks about adults or young people. Similarly interesting was the adults' 'laissez-faire' stance towards the children's behaviour: they usually did not react in any way. While the Tibetan school structure ostensibly appeared to be authoritarian in one sense, 'back stage' acts revealed that the children were less dominated by adult authority than expected. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes shows a situation where Tseten [girl] ridiculed a teacher. Tseten was, next to Yangzom, one of the best students in class and therefore usually considered a *pugu yagpo* [Tib. for "good student/child"]. The fact that also 'good students' would engage in 'unruly behaviour' illustrates the front stage-backstage nature of much of the intergenerational social interaction at the Tibetan school.

> The teacher, a young, handsome man, walks by some of the children who are sitting on the monkey bars. Tseten is talking to her friend and, seeing *Genla* [Tib. for "teacher"], says loudly: "*…and Gen Dondupla [his name] has a very ugly face!"* Tseten's friend, Pasang, giggles. The teacher ignores the insulting remark and continues walking.
>
> *(Tibetan School, In the Yard, Fieldnotes, Nov. 2012)*

As many have documented, children find their ways to evade, renegotiate and challenge adult authority over them (Corsaro 2011; 2003; Davies 1982; Schwartzman 1982; Strandell 1997; Zeiher 2003). In the case of the Tibetan children,

challenging adult authority was another form of engaging in a verbal teasing competition – a manner of demonstrating one's proficiency. Like many of the boys, Rinchen was considered 'a bad student' and would therefore engage quite extensively in challenging adult-authority, thereby presenting herself as skilful.

Summarizing, areas for competition within the Tibetan children's peer cultures were multiple and individual children would have many opportunities to experience themselves as skilled. The Tibetan children's agency in terms of the ability to achieve well-being was therefore thicker than the children's agency at the German school. This also meant that their (individualized) construction of self was not being challenged as much as the children's (relational) self at the German school. Therefore, the Tibetan children's sense of self is likely to have been more stable. Against this backdrop it is not surprising that the Tibetan children showed a higher level of self-confidence and it illustrates how children's agency is intertwined with their sense of self and self-confidence (see also Punch 2007; Robson et al 2007).

Children's agency is, however, also always fostered or constrained by the adults in their lives, by the generational order (Alanen 2001a; Mayall 2002). The following section sets out to explore this aspect of childhood by investigating how the generational order at both schools may have manifested as 'thinning' or 'thickening' factors for the children's agency and considers how this may have influenced the children's self-confidence.

5.2. Children's Agency and the Generational Order

The traditional notion of children's socialization (for example, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) mostly neglects children's agency and is therefore limited (Corsaro 2011; James et al 1998; Qvortrup et al 2009). However, children's agency is inseparable from the social structures in which they live and therefore needs to be investigated also within the generational order (Alanen 2001a; 2001b; James and James 2012; Mayall 2002; Mayall and Zeiher 2003a). "In order to detect the range and nature of agency of concrete, living children, the exploration needs to be oriented

towards identifying the generational structures from which children's powers (or the lack of them) derive" (Alanen 2001a: 21).

Children's agency moreover depends on how children are approached as a social group within these 'generationing'- processes, on how they are constructed as 'children' by their socio-cultural environment. Constructions of childhood, which vary across socio-cultural contexts (James and Prout 1990; Mayall and Zeiher 2003a), are not just abstract notions but are "practically effective – and in this sense *real*" (Alanen 2003; emphasis in original).

Adult Authority and the Children's Agency at the German School

The children's curriculum, the school-structure as well as the individual ways of teaching at the German school displayed an appreciation of both children's agency and of children's need for guidance and protection. This mix of ethics around child-care reflects conceptual developments common to contemporary constructions of childhood in West-Germany.

> On the one hand, children were accepted as subjects and actors earlier and more readily; on the other hand, they received more care and support from both private and public sources, and this dependence lasted for a longer period of time. (Zeiher 2001: 39)

Much effort was made at the German school to make the lessons as *kindgerecht* [German for "child-friendly"] as possible. For example, in order to allow the children a 'gentle start', class began in the mornings around 8.30 am in a relaxed manner and whenever the teacher deemed the children 'ready'. There was no school bell at the primary school which gave the teachers the chance to structure their lessons more flexibly "according to the momentary needs of their students". At 'breakfast time' (9.30 am), the teacher would read a story while the children had the sandwiches they had brought from home. The school would provide each class with fresh fruits and vegetables which were sliced, displayed and available for the children in the front of the class. Students were usually expected not to leave their seat in class but exceptions to the rule included breakfast-time (to get some fruit), going to the

bathroom, needing a tissue (which was displayed up front) or when a student needed to share something 'personal' with the teacher.

The children were expected to show some effort with their academic performance, however, mistakes were usually met with patience. The teachers generally showed an understanding that school was also a constraining experience for children and tried to make lessons 'more fun', interactive and entertaining. Children's active decision-making was included within lesson structures. As one teacher explained,

> *We [the teachers] try to give the children a lot of freedom by letting them choose from different worksheets, for example, [we say:]' there are 8 worksheets and you have to do 3 of them'. Or we allow them to choose their 'study-partner', let them decide whether they want to do the study-game on their own or with someone else.*
>
> *(German School, Recording, Interview, Female Teacher, March 2012)*

The teachers and caretakers always showed interest in the children's personal issues, questions or problems. Students were encouraged to raise their hands to express their personal opinions or ask questions during class at any given time, even if these were not related to what the teacher had been talking about. Every Friday morning, the class had a so-called *Klassenrath* [German for "class-council"], which was designed as a platform for the children to discuss personal issues at school under the guidance of the teacher. All in all, the pedagogical emphasis at the German school was on encouraging the students and 'making learning interesting', rather than on authoritarian and disciplinarian methods. Echoing child-rearing practices in the 60s, 70s and 80s of West-Germany (du Bois-Reymond 2000; Zeiher 2003) an authoritarian approach towards children was generally disapproved of by the German teachers. A senior teacher described how children's agency had become increasingly acknowledged in the past thirty years of her career.

> *What has changed a lot is the view of children as a partner to be taken seriously and to be valued. (…) Like now we do not just say 'get a hold of yourself, sit down and shut up' but we say 'oh, yes… your leg*

is hurting - what can we do [to help] and how did that happen?' So I take them [the children] seriously in the way they are.

(German School, Recording, Interview, Female Teacher, March 2012)

One of the main slogans at the German school was 'we are a team' - a team including both adults and children alike. The students would call teachers and caretakers by their sir-names (for example "Mrs Schmitt") but would address them with the *non*-honorific form of "you" ("*Du*") in German. Elders and strangers are usually approached with the honorific "*Sie*" in German society and the fact that the children were allowed to use "*Du*" illustrates the distaste for authoritarianism common at the German school.

Adult Authority and the Children's Agency at the Tibetan School

At first glance, the Tibetan children's agency seemed much more constrained by rules and adult authority than at the German school. Observing proprieties towards adults was a part of daily social intergenerational interaction and the Tibetan children were expected to address adults, especially teachers, with gestures and titles of respect. For example, when encountering a teacher, students would, folding their hands, bow slightly; it was polite to offer adults some of one's snacks and students would not enter a classroom with a teacher present without asking for permission at the door with a humble gesture of folded hands. Teachers would always be addressed with the honorific title "Genla" and students would make a point of 'being of service' to teachers by running to pick up something the teacher had dropped, getting up to help look for chalk etc. The importance of respecting elders and adhering to their demands has been reported as common to childhoods of East-Asian backgrounds (Briggs 1970; Hadley and Nenga 2004; Kornadt 2011; Penn 2001). Mongolian children, for example, are expected to show respect towards adults, closely pay attention to their gestures and words, and to not voice their own opinions and feelings (Penn 2001; see also Onon 1972).

> Inside the ger, children sit cross-legged on the floor and are expected to watch and listen to adult conversation – and they must also learn what not to see and hear. Intimacy is indicated by turning away and speaking very quietly, and when adults speak and act like this, children must switch off their attention. (Penn 2001: 91)

The mornings at the Tibetan school began in the school yard with the 'morning assembly' for all the students where formal behaviour and keeping order was a central concern. The children would line up in queues, and then sit in neat rows on the ground while the headmaster, slightly elevated, would lead the gathering in Buddhist prayers, the national anthem and public announcements. The teachers, standing above the children, would make sure that everyone was standing or sitting 'properly' and paying attention. Students were generally required to wear a school-uniform and would be disciplined for not adhering to this rule.

In class, although teachers tried to make lessons more interesting for the children, 'child-friendly' methods were by far not as elaborate as at the German school. While this was partly due to the fact that the facilities and tools available at the less wealthy Tibetan schools were much more limited, most teaching styles would largely still resemble the traditional manner of Tibetan teaching where children are mainly required to listen, memorize and recite (see Chapter 4). Efforts to develop more child-friendly styles of teachings have been made in the past, however (John 1999; TCV Head Office 2009).

Compared to the children at the German school, where children were disciplined by verbal scolding, 'time-out' or, at worst, by informing the parents, the disciplining of the Tibetan students was harsher, including chastisement and physical disciplining (see also Fremerey 1990; John 1999; Nowak 1978). Although a common disciplinary method in homeland Tibet (Fremerey 1990; John 1999), Tibetan schools in India have begun to abolish corporal punishment of children and have introduced an anti-beating policy. The guideline for Tibetan teachers now states that "there should not be any corporal punishment in our schools" and that "the true teacher does not use corporal punishment – those that resort to such methods are generally poor teachers" (TCV Head Office 2009: 29). Yet many adults in Tibetan diaspora society still considered corporal punishment and public chastisement an

effective method of disciplining children. One teacher pointed out to me that "Tibetan children have their ears in their buttocks" (Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, Interview, Male Teacher, Oct. 2012; see also Fremerey, who quoted a similar saying, 1990), meaning that the children would tend to listen more to adults when being physically disciplined.[20]

Needless to say, Tibetan children would not experience those moments when corporal punishing was being applied as particularly 'happy'. Sonam was probably the most 'mischievous boy' in the class (see Chapter 4) and thus would often receive beating by adults. Being beaten was unsurprisingly something that reduced his sense of well-being as the following excerpt from an interview reveals:

> Interpreter: *Sonam, what does happiness mean for you?*
>
> Sonam: *It means being happy when going for swimming, sometimes, and also during Tsepa Choenga* [religious day/ 15th day of every month] *when no one beats you…do you know why? Because it is considered more sinful.*
>
> Interpreter: *Who usually beats you?*
>
> Sonam: *My grandfather and mother.*
>
> *(Tibetan School, Recording, Interview, Oct. 2012)*

Overall, compared to the German school, child education at the Tibetan school was more authoritarian. Less importance was given to children's agency or participation and the children were more clearly situated within the generational hierarchy. On one level, the Tibetan children's agency was therefore significantly thinner. Yet, as the following will illustrate, there was again a 'backstage arena' of intergenerational social interaction and where generational power-relations manifested somewhat

[20] As in Tibetan society, physical punishment of children is still common in several countries, primarily because adults "see it as part of the training children require to become responsible adults" (Twum-Danso Imoh 2013: 275; see also Frankenberg et al 2010; Montgomery 2009; Morrow and Singh 2014). While I personally agree that children should generally not be beaten by adults, this issue needs to be approached with a non-judgmental socio-cultural sensitivity. After all, corporal punishment was still very common as a disciplining-method of children in most Minority World countries until recently. German law, for instance only abolished parents' right to beat their children completely in the year 2000 (BGB 2000), and until 1973 corporal punishment was still legal at schools in most counties in West-Germany (§ 26a Abs. 3 SchVG). Also, according to recent surveys, 50% of parents in Germany still smack their children and 4% admit to applying harder forms of corporal punishment (Stern 2012; Zeit Online 2012). For similar reports on the UK see Brownlie and Anderson 2006; Montomery 2013.

differently. It will be shown, moreover, that the Tibetan children's resilience to adult domination was remarkably high which, in turn, 'thickened' their agency somewhat and mirrored their overall high level of self-confidence.

The Children's Resistance towards Adult-Authority (both Schools)

While corporal forms of disciplining were clearly unpleasant for the Tibetan children, to say the least, their common reaction to being beaten was interesting. Throughout my six month research I witnessed only once that a student cried when receiving a corporal (very challenging) punishment. In all the other situations, the children did not show much emotional distress even when they were obviously experiencing pain.

Again, it is not possible to know for certain whether the children's outer appearances actually correlated with their inner emotional state. As mentioned (see Chapter 4), it has been found that East Asian cultures do not display emotional states as openly. Yet it does *not* necessarily follow that people are therefore suppressing emotions as some (for example, Matsumoto et al 2008) have suggested. De Leersnyder et al (2013) offer an alternative view by proposing that the regulation of emotions in East Asian cultures may happen during the process of emotion elicitation:

> Response focused emotion regulation, in the form of suppression of emotional experience or expression, may only be one of the many types of cultural regulations of emotions (…) In fact, we submit that cultural regulations is *most likely* to target the elicitation of emotions itself, since suppression of already activated resources is much more effort (…) Our cultural perspective on emotion regulation highlights that emotion regulation is not merely an intrapersonal process. Rather, emotions are also regulated by others in our environment (…) much of emotion regulation often happens outside of the awareness of the individual – through the situations that are culturally promoted and the appraisals that are condoned and activated. (De Leersnyder et al 2013: 9; emphasis in original)

It would be simplistic to conclude that because emotions were publicly regulated in Tibetan society, the Tibetan children were suppressing their emotions or 'secretly' suffering distress.

That the Tibetan children were showing resilience towards physical punishment becomes even more evident when considering that they would resist adult-domination even in the face of physical pain. I frequently observed how children, despite just having received beating by the teachers, would quickly resume back to doing what they had been punished for. Their resistance strategies often proved to be quite successful, as the example below illustrates.

> During class. Chewa [girl] is not sitting but rather kneeling on her chair, almost sitting on her table. The teacher sits down next to her, takes her arm and pulls her down to make her sit. The moment he lets go of her arm, Chewa immediately gets up again and sits back in her kneeling position! As he is busy listening to the children reciting in front, the teacher ignores her. Shortly after, Chewa gets up and goes to sit next to her friend Tseten. They begin fooling around, giggling. The teacher goes over, sits at the table in front of Chewa, takes her fingers and begins twisting them. It must be quite painful but Chewa giggles with Tseten about her fingers being squished while the teacher continues to twist her hand. After a while, the teacher gives up and lets Chewa's hand go.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, In Class, Sept. 2012)*

This situation was one of many moments where the Tibetan children's resilience in the face of the adults' physical domination amazed me. As mentioned earlier, challenging adult authority was one of the areas where the Tibetan children would establish themselves as skilful within their peer cultures. Simultaneously, as the example with Chewa shows, the Tibetan children were thickening their agency by being resilient against adult domination. Resilience against corporal punishment was therefore a thickening factor for the children's agency.

Moreover, while adults were generally dominant on the front stage, a closer look at the backstage presented a slightly different picture. In class, for example, teachers were not controlling as much as one may have expected; the Tibetan children's social interaction and play was directing much of the flow during class. In most of the classes, the children would get up and walk around, relate to friends,

play games, tease or quarrel with one another - comparatively undisturbed by the teacher. Some teachers were stricter and therefore the children's freedom was more restricted, however, even stricter teachers would ignore much of the children's activity in class as long as certain standard proprieties were being observed.

The Tibetan children were exercising a form of agency, that Corsaro (2011; 2003), drawing on Goffman's (1961) term, has described as "secondary adjustments", unauthorized arrangements that children employ to creatively evade established rules (see Hadley and Nenga 2004 for an example from a Taiwanese kindergarden). Children's violations of the rules in the Tibetan class would be overlooked by the teachers as long as these activities were within the acceptable parameters of the backstage. Directly talking back to an adult, for example, was not tolerable as it was challenging adult-authority in a front stage manner. In the backstage arena, however, the Tibetan children's agency was comparatively thicker than during class at the German school. In a cross-cultural comparison between Japanese and German classrooms, Kornadt (2011) found something similar:

> [In the Japanese school] there are many rules at school (…) which include following the principle of veneration of elders (…) In class, however, the relationship to the teacher with all his or her authority as a 'sensei' [i.e., respectful title towards elders] is, by no means, authoritarian – as, more generally, all-day life at school is *much more relaxed, livelier and uninhibited than at our [i.e., German] schools*. (2011: 205; my translation; my emphasis)

At the German school, the children's freedom to move and interact was significantly more restricted during class. However, also they would successfully resist adult authority by applying secondary adjustments. Although it was against the rules, students would still manage to talk to each other, make noises, jump around on their seat or occupy themselves with other activities during lessons. Some resistance-strategies were more subtle. For example, whenever 'silent working' was required, which was something especially challenging for the children, several students would suddenly need to go to the bathroom, get a tissue from the front of the classroom or sharpen their pencils at the rubbish bin.

However, the German teachers and care-takers would tolerate much less than the Tibetan teachers and therefore the children at the German school were more constrained during class. Compared to the lessons at the Tibetan school, where children often walked around, talked, sang and even hit each other without the teacher intervening, the children at the German school would quickly be scolded for talking, not paying attention or just moving around on their seat. Getting up and walking around without permission was never acceptable at the German school and much less any form of physical conflict between children. All in all, the children's agency at the German school was thinner during class. Considering that the children spent most of their time at school effectively in class means that the children at the German school were *generally* experiencing a thinner agency than the children at the Tibetan school.

5.3. Self-Confidence, Resilience and the Generational Order

The following revisits an indicator for well-being that has already been mentioned: *resilience*. I argue that the Tibetan children were not only resilient against corporal punishments by adults (see previous section) but would display a high resilience also in other situations - higher than the children at the German school. The Tibetan children would generally show more tolerance towards adversities, such as being ill or hurt, and towards emotionally challenging situations, such as being teased by peers or receiving low marks in class. Only rarely did I observe strong emotional outbreaks with the Tibetan children. The children at the German school, on the other hand, would respond to similar situations with more distress and upset. Excerpts from both sites may illustrate this difference:

> Rinchen [girl] is visibly sick today – she looks like she has a fever. Rinchen does not complain but lies with her head on the table, her eyes closed. I watch how Nyima looks at Rinchen for a long time, curiously, but does not say anything. Nobody else takes notice of her for a quite a while until the teacher asks her whether she is ill. She says 'yes' and the teacher tells her to go over to the school-doctor and then home to bed.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, In Class, Sept. 2012)*

> On the way to gym hall the children are all running. Anette suddenly slips and falls, head on. She has not hurt herself but is visibly shocked and starts crying loudly. The sports teacher comes over from the hall, investigates whether Anette has injured herself, speaks calmly and pets her gently over the head. After a while of consoling, she encourages Anette to get up and they slowly walk over with us into the gym hall. Anette continues to cry a little while the teacher has her arm around her, leading her into the hall. Waiting for the lesson to begin, I go and sit next to Anette on the bench and she snuggles up in my lap – she has stopped crying now. The teacher asks us all to sit in a circle on the floor with her. Anette is sitting next to Lislie, who continues to console her friend by holding and rubbing her hand.
>
> *(German School, Fieldnotes, In Class, Feb. 2012)*

The fact that emotion regulation is more common in Tibetan society (mentioned earlier) partly explains why the Tibetan children would display fewer negative emotions. Unlike the children in Germany, the Tibetan children would not be encouraged to have emotional outbreaks in public. Expressing joyful feelings was more common but the display of negative emotions would be discouraged. In personal conversations with adults I found that there was a general assumption among Tibetans that expressing any negative emotions, such as anger, upset, or despair, will merely lead to a perpetuation of the feeling. With regard to consoling children who are upset or crying I was told that it was better to encourage them to stop crying as crying will only "fire up" their negative emotions. Encouraging children to not display negative emotions, in other words, was considered a way to raise resilience and well-being by the Tibetans adults.

While the fact that the Tibetan children would show less emotionality in challenging situations is probably related to social norms in Tibetan society around expressing emotions, I would argue that it also reflected the children's resilience. Daniel et al (2010; see also Punch 2013) have justly cautioned against confusing an 'internalising of symptoms' with resilience and this possibility needs to be taken into account. I would suggest, however, that while it is possible that the Tibetan children would often not show their feelings, it cannot be inferred that they were therefore necessarily suppressing their emotions (De Leersnyder et al 2013). Moreover, if the Tibetan children were internalising their symptoms it would follow that probably most children with East Asian backgrounds would be doing the same. This would be

an odd assumption to make, nor was it actually the case, from what I was able to observe. For example, I frequently witnessed Tibetan children, especially boys, publicly showing anger - despite the fact that anger is considered a particularly negative emotion by Tibetan Buddhist society and is highly discouraged.

It makes sense to assume that the Tibetan children were not merely suppressing their feelings (although this may have also been the case) but that they were also being resilient in the face of emotional and physical pain. John (1999) comes to a similar conclusion after having witnessed Tibetan children who had experienced public chastisement at a Tibetan school in India. The thirteen year olds were made to kneel in the school-yard, a form of punishment they visibly suffered. John writes of her astonishment at how quickly these shameful moments were forgotten by the children who, shortly after, seemed as "cheerful as before" (1999: 337; my translation).

I would argue, therefore, that the data from both schools suggest a significantly higher level of resilience on the side of the Tibetan children alongside their higher level of self-confidence. This proposition may not be surprising when considering that self-confidence and resilience are often interrelated or as Daniel and Wassell put it, "self-esteem is one of the building blocks of resilience" (2002: 55).

Adversities and Resilience

The different levels of resilience at both schools can be explored from several angles. Firstly, the Tibetan children were more intensely exposed to physically and emotionally challenging situations than the German children which is likely to account for a greater tolerance of adversity. As explained, half of the Tibetan children from the class were physically separated from their parents much of the time and had to mostly look out for themselves. More generally, Tibetans in India would face more adversities and fewer medical and financial securities than German citizens. Unpleasant illnesses such as dysentery and more serious diseases, such as tuberculosis, were very common in India. Cobras and semi-poisonous insects were present on the school compound. Moreover, Tibetans as a people had experienced

the occupation of their homeland by the Chinese, the ethnic cleansing, the eradication of their culture and the (often traumatic) escape to India and Nepal. Overall, Tibetan children were confronted with more adversities in their daily life (for themselves and the people around them) than children in Germany.

Research on children's resilience has demonstrated that children develop remarkable ways of dealing positively with adverse situations (Apfel and Simon 1996; de Berry and Boyden 2000; Hinton 2000; Punch 2013) and it makes sense to assume that experiencing adversities may raise children's level of resilience. Case-studies have shown how children facing challenging circumstances, such as war, refuge, poverty and terminal illness may even begin to support distressed adults (see Bluebond-Langner 1978; deBerry and Boyden 2000; Hinton 2000). The common assumption that care-giving is exercised only by adults may therefore be questioned (Emond 2010). Arguing that children's potential for resilience is often ignored, de Berry critiques much of the psychosocial support offered to war-affected children:

> There is little recognition of the mitigating impact of children's resilience and ability to cope with a situation with support from other people and coping resources. In reality, not all children who live through terrible events display the symptoms of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], and this is because the impact of trauma may be deflected through a child's resilience and coping abilities. (…) the trauma methodology tends to use event and symptom checklists to assess the state of a child's mental health, rather than more qualitative participatory approaches in which children themselves define their experiences. (2004: 57)

It is likely that the Tibetan children developed a higher level of resilience through experiencing physical and emotional adversity. Having said this, such a conclusion is not meant to downplay children's suffering when experiencing adversity. It is merely highlighting children's strength and resilience, something which is often neglected in Minority World views of childhood. The remaining sections of this chapter explore such views of children and childhood in both schools and explain how these may have contributed to a greater or lesser resilience in the children. It is argued that the Tibetan children's higher level of resilience may have also been related to how adults would approach them.

Constructions of Childhood and Resilience

I found that the children were approached very differently by the adults at both schools, reflecting underlying assumptions about the nature of childhood. These views of childhood and children, I will suggest, are likely to have manifested in the children's own constructions of self; therewith co-shaping the children's self-confidence and, consequently, their level of resilience.

The schools' philosophies, as well as the staff at both schools emphasized the importance of developing the children's prosocial abilities. Both schools and their staff regarded it as their task to develop the children's academic, as well as their social abilities, however, the manner in which the children were approached by the adults differed quite notably. While the adults at the German school regulated the children's social interaction, children's social interaction at the Tibetan school took place relatively uninfluenced by the teachers. The children's vulnerability and their need for protection were emphasized more strongly at the German school while the Tibetan children were much more expected to take care of themselves.

Regulation and Intervention at the German School

At the German school, at least as much time was spent reflecting on, regulating, and discussing the children's social abilities as with developing their academic skills. The children's social behaviour was monitored by the staff, and students would mostly be scolded or disciplined for socially inadequate behaviour. The developing of children's social abilities was considered one of the main tasks by teachers and caretakers. In an interview, the main teacher of the class summarized her work as following:

> Carla: *What would you say is your main task as a teacher?*
>
> Mrs Schmitt: *First the generating [within the children] of the ability to approach what is happening here [i.e., at school] free of fear and with an optimistic outlook. Then, developing the children's commitment and motivation to perform. Then [developing within the children] the whole set of issues of social behaviour: 'we are a team', 'we help each other', 'we stand up for one another', 'we share our snacks if someone else does not have any' ,'we help to find a pen that has gone lost', 'we console one another' and so on…'we go get help if we are not able to be of help ourselves'.*

(German School, Recording, Interview, Female Teacher, March 2012)

Also the school's curriculum mirrored the importance of developing and monitoring the children's social skills. The "class-council", for example, that was held every Friday by all classes of the school, was designed as a platform for the children and teachers to discuss social and ethical issues. Books, worksheets and teaching-styles included many games and assignments designed to foster social abilities, such as exercises demanding cooperating with other students.

Children in Minority Worlds are often considered not fully developed, unfinished beings - human *becomings* (Alderson 1994; Engelbert 1994; James and Prout 1990; Lee 2001; Mayall 2001; 1994; Oakley 1994). This is actually what mostly defines children as 'children'. As Mayall writes, "children's inferior moral status – and more specifically the ascription of moral incompetence – is perhaps the principal focus for their designation as other than adults" (2001: 124). These social constructions are not merely abstract views but are part of adults and children's lived experience. "Both children and adults carry society's patterns of childhood in their heads, though sometimes different interpretations of these" (Zeiher 2001: 38).

The pedagogical approach of the German school and its staff mirrored a view of children in need of development not only academically, but also socially. Implicitly, therefore, children were constructed at the German school as '*social becomings*', a construction which seemed to go hand in hand with the common Minority World view of children as vulnerable and therefore in need of protection (Alderson 1994; Boyden 2003; Daniel 2010; Morrow 2003; O'Brien 2003; Rasmussen and Smidt 2003; Scott et al 1998).

It is undeniable that children are vulnerable and in need of protection, yet it also needs to be considered to what extent children's vulnerability is socio-culturally constructed. Christensen's (1993) research on children's illness in Denmark expounds on this topic and concludes that vulnerability is, in part, a constructed status. Holland (2004) explains how depictions of suffering children in the media have contributed to an image of children as powerless and dependent. She suggests that the construction of the vulnerable child is a form of othering, serving to reinforcing a sense of adult identity.

> Suffering children appear as archetypal victims, since childhood itself is defined by weakness and incapacity. Children living in poverty, children who are victims of wars or natural disasters, children suffering from neglect or disadvantage: all of these figure in the image of the most vulnerable, the most pathetic, the most deserving of our sympathy and aid. This resonant image shows children who appear to be on the receiving end of an oppression in which they can only acquiesce. As they reveal their vulnerability, viewers long to protect them. The boundaries between adults and children are reinforced as the image gives rise to pleasurable emotions of tenderness and compassion, which satisfactorily confirm adult power. (Holland 2004: 143)

Constructions of childhood of the 20th century onwards in Minority Worlds have witnessed an increasing emphasis on children's need for protection, a trend that has grown especially in the recent decades (Boyden 2003; Daniel 2010; Hartras 2008; Montandon 2001; Rasmussen and Smidt 2003). In a view where the need for protection is highlighted children are regarded as dependent on adults for making 'right' choices necessary for their physical and emotional safety, "since they know less, have less maturity and less strength, compared to older people" (Mayall 2002: 21; see also Matthews 2003).

At the German school adults would protect the children also from one another by disciplining students for unsocial behaviour, such as teasing, exclusion, othering or physical assaults. The following excerpt was taken from a recording from one of the class-councils which shows how this view of the children as social becomings would be established and reconfirmed in interaction between teachers and students. Mrs Schmitt discussed with the children how to deal with peers' socially inadequate behaviour. One of the rules at the primary-school was the "stop! I do not like that!" – rule [German: *Stop, hoer auf, das mag ich nicht!*] which was meant to prevent socially challenging situations between peers from 'getting out of hand'.

> Mrs S.: *Ok. We all said that we like the rule to say "stop, I do not like that!" and the child, who is bothering us then has to stop. But now we just found out: the other [child] does not always actually stop! So what can we do [in those situations]? Alex?*
>
> Alex [boy]: *One can say: 'if you continue to bother me then I will tell the teacher'.*
>
> Mrs S.: *Yes. So if it does not work, one could go get help. What else? Nicole?*

Nicole: *One could just think: 'oh, how stupid: that child does not obey the rule' and if that doesn't work – then leave. If she follows you then you could simply say: 'I would rather obey the rule if I were you, otherwise you will get in trouble because there are several punishments and so on'.*

Mrs S.: *Exactly. (...) There are still children with their hands up. Obviously there are more ideas how to deal with such a situation. Hesam?*

Hesam [boy]: *Well, I forgot whether it was Nico or Levin, but once someone was holding me, and I had to say* three *times „Stop...!" - but I could not get anyone to help me because he was holding me.*

(German School, Recording, In Class, March 2012)

In many, if not in most, of their conflicts with peers the children would involve the adults for 'mediation'. The expression "ich sags!" – "I'm telling!" was a commonly heard phrase throughout class and during recess. As the teachers and care-takers knew how important it was for the children to be accepted by their peers, they tried to help solve the conflicts. As elaborated, however, social conflicts often served to establish belonging within the children's peer cultures and the adults' efforts to mediate were therefore often not very effective.

Regulation and Intervention at the Tibetan School

Similar to the German school, the Tibetan school and its staff also emphasized the importance of developing prosocial behaviour in the children. The school manual's "mission-statement", for example, outlined how educating the children to develop an altruistic attitude and sense of responsibility towards others is a central concern of the school's aims (TCV Head Office 2009). The school's motto was "Others-Before-Self". In fact, the development of altruism in students was considered *the* criteria upon which to determine whether education had been successful or not. The fourth pillar of the mission-statement ("To Become Contributing Members") said the following:

> The success or failure of our work to a large extend [sic] will manifest in our graduates who after their formal education show their caliber as TCV-ians in the true sense of the word through their attitudes, thinking and behaviour wherever they go. In schools, we need to encourage and sensitize children to help others and be mindful of themselves and the environment. (TCV Head Office 2009: 25)

Moral stories emphasizing altruism and 'loving-kindness' were included in the study material of the school, and teachers would talk to the children about virtues and ethics in class. Teachers often referred to Buddhist philosophy, elaborating on how 'virtuous actions', such as helping others and being compassionate can benefit one's own present life and the next. Thus, overall, there was also much talk about social behaviour at the Tibetan school.

Interestingly, however, only rarely did Tibetan adults actually intervene in the children's social interaction or instruct individual children directly about social matters. Usually, if teachers spoke about social or ethical behaviour to the children, they would address the class as a whole. It was extremely rare that individual children were disciplined for 'unsocial behaviour' at the Tibetan school - particularly not during the break-times, where the children were almost entirely left up to themselves. Children at the Tibetan school would be scolded and punished mainly for not paying attention in class, for not doing homework or for disobeying an adult.

As mentioned earlier, the Tibetan children were comparatively 'rough' in their social interaction with each other. Verbal and physical teasing was an integral part of social interaction and often, 'stronger' individuals would dominate 'weaker' peers. However, even in those situations adults would only rarely intervene or say anything. Under the eyes of the teachers, both during class and during break-times, children would tease each other, hit each other and fight. Boys would get up and walk over during class and would pull a girl's hair, punch their desk-mate or steal their friend's pencil. Peers would call each other names, insult each other and engage in verbal teasing competitions while the teacher was present. Unless the children were not overly disturbing the class, the teachers would mostly ignore these happenings. The following excerpt exemplifies such a situation taking place during class.

> Chime enters the classroom and finds "Chime + Tselha" in a heart scribbled on the black board. He walks around class and tries to find out whom to punish for this provocation. He announces that "*who smiles has written it*" and begins asking different children if it was them. When he comes to Chewa [girl] she smiles even though it was not her. Chime says "*it was you!*" takes Chewa's hand and twists it strongly. She covers her eyes with her hand and begins to cry.

Chime walks away and she continues crying. I move over and pat her back, trying to console her. The teacher is at his desk, sees it and says *"ooh"* but does not say or do anything. Nor does anyone else.

(Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, During Class, Oct. 2012)

It was unusual that Chewa began crying after Chime had twisted her hand. Only on few occasions during my fieldwork at the Tibetan school did I witness a child crying and this was one of them. I suspect that Chewa at this point was not crying because of the pain but in order to get my attention. [21] As explained, Tibetans have a very different approach towards emotions and tend to discourage children from crying - concerned that they may otherwise indulge in the feelings. The teacher in the above mentioned example, therefore, was not simply indifferent towards Chime's upset but was reacting in a socio-culturally adequate manner. Tibetan adults would intervene in social conflicts occasionally and would console children if they were hurt, however, significantly less frequently than the adults at the German school.

Teachers would get involved only reluctantly in social issues between children and student's requests to intervene in their conflicts would often be ignored. A further example illustrates how, if Tibetan teachers would get involved in children's social issues, it would be much more indirect. In the following situation, a teacher, working as a substitute that day, asked the students to introduce each other to him. When the children began insulting each other, the teacher only briefly and rather indirectly criticized their behaviour.

Teacher to Tenzin [boy]: *how would you describe her* [pointing to Rinchen]?

Tashi [boy]: *Fat, bald, round belly.*

Tsering [boy] to Tashi: *Say ugly!*

Rinchen to Tenzin: *YOU are ugly!*

Teacher to Tenzin: *You are not speaking in pure Tibetan language, using other words.*

[21] This occasion was the beginning of a series of Chewa crying in my presence. She had experienced me consoling her and giving her a candy once when she had shed some tears after injuring herself. After this experience Chewa would cry more than she had ever before, obviously waiting for me to console her - which I always did. Claiming that Chewa's crying was aimed at 'getting candy from me', the other children made fun of her and told me to not console her. I, however, continued consoling Chewa each time she began crying as my impression was that she was missing her parents' attention who were living in another part of India. It was difficult for me to shake my 'Western reaction' towards crying children, nor did I really want to.

Yangzom [girl]: *Rinchen has bad manners, doesn't listen to teachers in class.*

Chewa [boy] to Rinchen: *You have everything in opposite to me.*

Teacher: *Okay, enough. I know it now. Listen, it seems you all are not studying but observing each other's mistake all the time. You all keep making noise during class, right? You do not seem to be introduced to good manners.*

Then the teacher begins to teach.

(Tibetan School, Recording, In Class, Dec. 2012)

The manner in which adults would approach children at the Tibetan school suggests that Tibetan children were not considered to be in need of adult-protection and were credited with a greater ability to look after themselves. The Tibetan children were expected to care for their own safety and well-being more than the children at the German school. When Tibetan children were ill, for example, and able to walk, they were sent to the local medical station on the school compound on their own or in the company of a class-mate. Children were much less supervised by adults also after class and I was repeatedly impressed with how relaxed the adults were with the fact that the children were playing in potentially dangerous areas without supervision. For example, sometimes cobras appeared on the compound where children were playing and some people had been bitten in the past; a boy had died of a cobra-bite after having been found too late only recently.

Yet there was no continuous adult monitoring during children's free-play as was the case at the German school. Also, unlike the German school, teachers did not protect children from one another; there were no rules at the Tibetan school outlining the 'does' and 'don'ts' of social interaction. All in all, adults at the Tibetan school would not shield children from experiences of emotional or physical pain as much but let them come to terms with these experiences on their own.

The Construction of Childhoods at Both Schools

The lesser adult-intervention at the Tibetan school speaks of a different approach to the nature of childhood. It suggests that children were considered more capable and self-responsible in terms of their social and rational abilities to deal with challenging situations. Often, instead of protecting them from unpleasant experiences, Tibetan adults would encourage the children to handle the situation 'on their own'. On the

following occasion, Karma (a girl) was being teased by her friends for her heavier weight in the presence of a teacher. Karma was visibly suffering the mockery, yet rather than intervening, the teacher encouraged Karma 'to stand up for herself'.

> The four girls are with the sports teacher under a tree for some shade while the other children are playing nearby.
>
> Yangzom: *I don't want to stand with a balloon in the sun during Sports Day [because it will burst].*
>
> Lhamo: *If we stand under the tree, the balloon will burst by itself!*
>
> Yangzom: *It would be fun if the balloon bursts! I will bring a pin and burst the balloon on purpose.*
>
> Dawa pointing to Karma: *Karma does not need a balloon. We can prick her hand with a needle and blow air into it. Then we will make a balloon out of her!*
>
> Yangzom, [laughing] to the teacher: *Genla! We do not need a balloon – we have Karma!*
>
> All three girls laugh. The teacher smiles and does say anything. The girls continue to make remarks and jokes about Karma being a balloon and how they will burst her. It is visible that Karma is feeling uneasy about her friends' making fun of her.
>
> The teacher to Karma: *Karma, do not keep quiet - say something back to them. If not, you will look like a fool.*
>
> Karma [mumbling to herself]: *Ok, then I guess I am a fool.*
>
> Yangzom [laughing] to the teacher: *Genla, Karma said that she is a fool!*
>
> The three girls continue to joke about Karma who does not defend herself. The teacher watches.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, In the Yard, Sept. 2012)*

By encouraging her to defend herself, Karma was instructed by the teacher on social matters. Similar to the German school, this reflects a view of children as socially not fully developed. At the same time, however, the teacher expected Karma to be able to handle the emotional struggle she was experiencing and did not protect her, which implies a view of children as resilient. As they were often left to experience emotionally and physically challenging situations on their own, the Tibetan children were considered resilient enough to survive adversities and capable enough to socially interact with each other without inflicting serious harm on themselves and others. The above example may moreover suggest that Tibetan children would be left to face adversities on their own to encourage the development of resilience (see Briggs, 1970, for a similar proposition for Inuit child-rearing).

The institution of school itself is based on the assumption that children need to be developed by adults, a view of children that was clearly present at both sites. At the German school, however, children were considered much more in need of adult supervision and guidance, especially with regard to social matters. Adults at the German school considered it their task to control and regulate the children's social interaction and shield them from hurting one another. Thus, more so than the children at the Tibetan school, the children at the German school were approached as socially unreliable and morally immature (Matthews 1994; 1984; Mayall 2002; Pritchard 1996). Children were regarded as vulnerable at both sites yet this view was more pronounced at the German school.

The manner in which people find themselves viewed by their socio-cultural environment significantly influences their own constructions of self (Burkitt 2008; Cooley 1902; Emond 2014; Mead 1934). As May notes, "we gain an understanding of our self because our parents and other significant people tell us who we are and who should aspire to be" (2011: 4). Children in Minority Worlds have reported experiencing themselves as not sufficiently perceived as moral agents by their school-environments (Mayall 2003; 2002). Elsewhere, Mayall explains how children themselves seem to reproduce this view: "Some children explain that they were indeed morally unreliable (…) this is a common theme in children's accounts" (2001: 125). By considering how children's constructions of self that emphasize unreliability and vulnerability may relate to self-confidence, agency and resilience, the following section will conclude this chapter.

Constructions of Childhood, Agency and Resilience

Research has shown how children from Majority Worlds are often given much greater social and moral responsibility, not only for themselves but also for other family-members, including adults (Boyden 1990; Hinton 2000; Penn 2001; Punch 2012; 2001). Moreover, many children develop astonishing abilities to deal with adverse situations as a response to these socio-cultural expectations of their environment (de Berry and Boyden 2000). Corsaro (2003), for example, observed how children at an Afro-American school were left to solve their own conflicts and

would skilfully master this challenge. Corsaro compares these situations to conflicts he had observed at a school in Berkeley where adults would more frequently intervene. The conflicts of the Afro-American children differed insofar as

> …the children's disputes were longer, more complex, and often developed from spats between two or three kids to group debates (…) However, any serious conflict dissipated and the kids went on to more general discussion, where they tied their contributions to personal experiences and honed their skills in debate and argument. (Corsaro 2003: 189)

The children given the chance to solve their conflicts were actually able to do so, proving to be morally reliable agents.

Based on such findings I would argue that the children's agency at the German school was thinned by a socio-culturally constructed view of children as morally immature. Approached as vulnerable and in need of adult protection, the children are likely to have constructed a less confident self than the Tibetan children who were approached much more as resilient and entrusted with social responsibility. The German school and their staff were making a genuine effort to foster children's agency, however, their construction of childhood common to Germany was most likely influencing the children's view of self in a 'disempowering' manner. A strong agency is often related to a confident sense of self (Robson et al 2007: 142; see also Punch 2007) and self-confidence is linked to resilience (Daniel and Wassell 2002b). How children are constructed by their socio-cultural environment will co-determine their sense of self, their agency and therefore, "how childhood is understood in any given setting can have a major impact on resilience and coping" (deBerry and Boyden 2000: 33; see also Punch 2013). The different ways in which children were approached at each site may explain the Tibetan children's higher self-confidence and resilience and the lesser self-confidence and resilience of the children at the German school, respectively. Or otherwise put: the constructions of childhood present in both societies are likely to have influenced the different levels of the children's self-confidence, agency and resilience.

5.4. Conclusion

The Tibetan children appeared much more self-confident than most of the children at the German school. Even the 'least popular' children at the Tibetan school, such as Rinchen, showed themselves to be confident in terms of their wants and needs whereas many children at the German school would frequently relinquish their personal wants, in order to appease more popular peers. I have explained how this phenomenon is related to 'what mattered most' to the children at each site.

First, becoming skilful (Tibetan site) presupposes a preoccupation mainly with oneself while achieving belonging (German site) requires others' affection. The Tibetan children would therefore manifest a much more individualized sense of self and the children at the German school a more relational sense of self which could relate to a higher and lesser level of self-confidence, respectively. Moreover, it was much easier for the Tibetan children to demonstrate their individual skilfulness than it was to achieve an experience of belonging for the children at the German school. The Tibetan children had various ways of presenting themselves as skilful and therefore everyone seemed to have access to 'being skilful' to a certain extent. At the German school, on the other hand, achieving a (stable) sense of belonging was difficult for most children – especially since the othering-activity (that served to establish belonging in the first place) would exclude some children from belonging by default. The children's othering-practices were a thinning factor for the children's agency in terms of achieving belonging at the German school and therefore for their well-being.

Second, I explored how the generational order at both schools may have manifested as thinning or thickening factors for the children's agency, accounting for different levels of self-confidence of the children at both schools. The German school and its staff emphasized a valuing of children's agency, intergenerational equality and did not approve of authoritarian methods. Teaching methods at the Tibetan school were more authoritarian, children were expected to show respect towards elders and would receive corporal punishment. In one sense, therefore, the Tibetan children's agency was more constrained by adult authority than the children's

agency at the German school. During class, however, the Tibetan children had significantly more freedom of movement than the children at the German school. The children at both schools would actively resist and evade adult authority during class, yet the Tibetan children proved to have a thicker agency during class. Moreover, the Tibetan children showed a high level of resilience towards physical punishment by adults and displayed a similar resilience when faced with other potentially emotionally challenging situations, more so than the children at the German school. As self-confidence and resilience are often interrelated to one another it is not surprising that the Tibetan children were more resilient and experienced a higher self-confidence.

Other factors may also have accounted for the children's higher level of resilience. For one thing, the Tibetan children's greater daily exposure to adversities is likely to have made them more resilient. Research on children's resilience has sufficiently demonstrated how children are able to deal positively with adverse situations. Secondly, I found that the children were approached very differently by the adults at both schools: children's need for protection was much more emphasized at the German school while the Tibetan children were more expected to take care of themselves. The manner in which people are viewed by their socio-cultural environment significantly influences their own constructions of self. At the Tibetan school, children were approached as more capable and self-responsible which may account for a higher self-confidence and thus also for a greater ability to deal with adverse situations. In turn, the children at the German school are likely to have generated a less confident self as a response to a construction of children as vulnerable and morally immature and which would thus account for a lower level of resilience.

This conclusion echoes literature on resilience in Childhood Studies that challenges assumptions on children's protection as solely beneficial (see Boyden 2003; Daniel 2010 et al; Hartras 2008; Newman 2002; Punch 2013). Children are clearly in need of protection by adults as "the very fact of their physical weakness, immaturity and lack of knowledge and experience renders children dependent on the adults around them" (Lansdown 1994: 34). However, as shown, shielding

children as much as possible from adversities may likewise prove to inhibit the development of a greater self-confidence and resilience towards challenges of life (Punch 2013).

The following chapter continues to explore resilience as an indicator for the children's well-being, however, this time in the light of larger beliefs and worldviews present in the children's societies.

Chapter 6

Resilience and the Socio-Cultural Worldviews

This chapter sets out to investigate how some of the larger socio-cultural self- and worldviews[22] held by the children at both schools may have related to how the children would deal with adversity, thereby generating the different levels of resilience discussed earlier.

Most work on children's resilience focuses on high levels of adversity, such as war, poverty and abuse (see de Berry 2004; Klocker 2007; Luthar 2005). Here the concept of adversity is used in its widest sense, meaning any emotionally and physically challenging situation that one may face. Therefore, certain daily experiences, such as failing an exam, falling in the gym, becoming ill or being beaten are considered to be potential adverse experiences for the children. As will be shown, adverse situations can be perceived as more or less disturbing, devastating and upsetting by the children and can be responded to with greater or lesser resilience.

I argue that the children's underlying assumptions about the reality of self and world are likely to have influenced how they were dealing with adversity. Possible self- and worldviews held by the children are subsequently explored on the basis of the data. As such ontological assumptions are largely socio-culturally constructed, the findings will be analysed in the light of self- and worldviews common to the children's societies.

6.1. The Different Worldviews and their Implications

Basic ontological assumptions determine how we relate to our experiences (Geertz 1973; Lutz 1988; Lutz and White 1986; Mead 1934; Rosaldo 1983). Self- and

[22] The terms selfview and worldview are used interchangeably, as self and world are actually interdependent and inseparable (Fay 1996; Gadamer 2004; Sax 1998). Self and world are understood as dynamic, fluid concepts and, depending on the perspective, may be switched around.

worldviews held by the children are therefore to have influenced how they would relate to adversity, thereby determining their level of resilience.

Some cross-cultural studies have expounded on this interrelation between beliefs and resilience. McCarty et al (1999), for example, illustrate the different coping strategies Thai and American young people had developed in line with their socio-culturally constructed beliefs. Similarly, Rokach (1999) explores how loneliness would be dealt with differently by individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds, and a study with Hong Kong adolescents (Shek 2004) shows how students with a positive belief regarding adversity would generally have a higher level of resilience. Overall, it makes sense to assume that "cultural beliefs provide the basis upon which people experiencing adversity make sense of their experience and develop their coping" (Shek 2004: 3).

Certain issues that were of importance to the children at each site pointed to different underlying assumptions about the reality of self and world. I found that two phenomena were especially contrasting: a demand for *fairness* at the German school (absent in the Tibetan school) and the significance given to *luck* at the Tibetan school (rare in the German school). The following section explains how these social patterns may have mirrored different underlying self- and worldviews. A demand for fairness is likely to be related to a view where individuals are in charge of managing life's circumstance whereas seeing luck as a determining force may suggest a more fate-based notion of self. These different ontological models find their counterparts in belief-structures prominent in each of the children's societies: while Buddhism introduces an element of fate with the notion of karma [Tib.*: tendrel*], worldviews in Modernity have mostly ruled out notions of fate in favour of controlling life's circumstances through risk calculation (Giddens 1991; 1990).

It will be argued that these different ontological outlooks held by the children are likely to have entailed different approaches to adversity, namely a more or less accepting stance. An accepting attitude towards adverse circumstances is said to be beneficial to psychological resilience (Kashdan and Rottenberg 2010) which, I will suggest, was more part of the Tibetan children's Buddhist worldview than of the Modernist view of self exhibited at the German school.

Control (German) versus Chance (Tibetan)

The Demand for Fairness at the German School

At the German school, discussions about 'fairness' were very common: adults made an effort at "being fair", "treating every child equally" and children would draw attention to situations where they felt that this had not been the case. The phrase "that is not fair!" was a common complaint and children would often evaluate how teachers and caretakers were or were not being fair. Their demand mirrored the adults' own expectations of themselves: adults and children alike would emphasize that fair treatment of students was a criteria for being a good educator.

In situations where conditions were experienced as not being fair children would often get upset. This would be the case, for example, when students felt they were being scolded or punished unjustly by teachers or caretakers. Complaints about lack of fairness were also very common after competitive games.

> Two guest-teachers from Ireland are visiting the class for the English-lesson. They do a game with the children where half of the class is competing against the other half. The half who wins gets to be 'the bear' for the next round. The children are very excited and engaged during all of the game. Finally, one side wins. The children of the loser side are clearly upset. Many children are complaining to each other that the game has been "unfair" and that this is why they have lost. Hesam is so upset that he can hardly hold back his tears while complaining to his neighbour Alex about how the teachers did not count the points correctly. "*It was simply not fair!"* he whispers with tears in his eyes to Alex, who nods.
>
> *(German School, Fieldnotes, In Class, June 2012)*

I would suggest that the children and adults' demand for fairness reflects an assumption common to Modern worldviews where individuals are actually 'in control'. The term Modern draws on Giddens' (1991; 1990; see also Beck 1994) notion of Modernity which stands for an ongoing socio-cultural development on the macro-level which

> …alters the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of our experience. Modernity must be understood on an institutional level; yet the transmutations

> introduced by modern institutions interlace in a direct way with individual life and therefore with the self. (Giddens 1991: 1)

Much of Giddens' work elaborates on what he terms *late* or *high* Modernity being characterised by (the action of) *reflexivity*. The reflexivity of high Modernity and especially the ontological anxieties that accompany this phenomenon will be discussed below in the context of the children's insecurities at the German school.

For this present discussion about the children's demand for fairness I would like to highlight another feature associated with an earlier form of Modernity, namely, the view that "human living conditions are controllable by instrumental rationality" (Beck 1994: 10; see also Giddens 1991; 1990; May 2013; Weber 1958). This process of "rationalization" (Weber 1958) that emerged within many societies was a process whereby "one type of certainty (divine law) was replaced by another (the certainty of our senses, of empirical observation)" (Giddens 1990: 48). Within these developments, man, who was now entirely responsible for his or her (heavenly or hellish) fate, instead of God, began to take centre stage (Fend 2006; Landes 1999; Weber 1958). Thereafter, "rationalization allowed humans mastery over the world" (May 2013: 19) and the "self-made man" (Weber 1958: 163), the 'individual in control' was born. The construction of self which became very common in these societies was an autonomous, independent and self-contained individual (Geertz 1975; Markus and Kitayama 1991) who was "entirely responsible for success or failure" (Hartras 2008: xvi).

This sense of self is still prevalent today in Modern societies (Giddens 1991; 1990) such as Germany. Bayer (2010), for instance, examines how the notion of competence is prevalent in academic and public discourse in Germany concerning children's well-being. He explains how these discourses reflect the assumption that being a competent individual (e.g., 'socially', 'methodologically', 'self-competent') is considered a basic condition for well-being and therefore ways are sought to develop competence in children. This view of the individual's competence as regulator for well-being mirrors similar theories from other Minority World countries, such as 'capability' (Sen 1993; 1992) or the 'self-determination theory' (SDT) (Deci and Ryan 1995). All these discourses have in common a view of one's

circumstances as "manipulable" (Bayer 2010: 225) and of individuals as capable of controlling these circumstances (as long as they have acquired competences). It is argued here that this view of self is mirrored in the demand for fairness at the German school: only if humans are assumed to be in control of life's circumstances can there be any expectancy of persons to be fair.

The Significance of Luck at the Tibetan School

In contrast to the German school, discussions around 'fairness' were conspicuously absent at the Tibetan school, reflecting a different worldview. Interestingly, I noticed this cross-cultural contrast initially through my own reactions during fieldwork. As I myself was raised in a German socio-cultural environment, I often found myself judging certain decisions or situations arranged by the Tibetan adults to be 'not fair'. From my socio-culturally conditioned view, I found that Tibetan adults would 'favour' some children and 'neglect' others. From a Modernist point of view, which assumed that individuals are in control of life's circumstances, I was expecting fair conditions.

Unlike me, none of the Tibetan children ever questioned or challenged the adults' decisions, judgments or arrangements and I never witnessed any talk about fairness. The most striking example was a competition which took place on 'English-day' at the school. The teachers had arranged an English-words spelling competition on stage. The words that the students were given to spell were not only of different levels of difficulty but, moreover, conditions were changed and altered within the same round. Some students were given several tries or more while some were given only one chance. However, nobody protested, nor was there any mention of 'fairness of the conditions'. One may consider whether the Tibetan children merely did not dare to challenge adult-authority in terms of 'unfair' treatment. Yet that would not account for the fact that there was also no discussion of fairness between the Tibetan children. Fairness simply seemed not to be an issue at the Tibetan school.

I would suggest that the absence of demand for fairness can be explained by the absence of a Modern worldview at the Tibetan school. The Modern assumption that life's circumstances are fully controllable, the basis for the assumption that life's

circumstances can 'be made fair', was absent. As I shall elaborate below, the Tibetan children were growing up with the view that life's circumstances are ultimately *not* controllable, a view which would render a demand for fairness meaningless.

Giddens (1991; 1990) elaborates on how notions of *fate* often play a central role in everyday life of non-Modern worldviews. Tibetan Buddhism also includes this belief in "pre-ordained determinism" (Giddens 1991: 110) meaning that there is ultimately only little control of life's circumstances. According to Buddhist beliefs, all phenomena are considered to be a continuous interplay of cause and effect and are thus interrelated. So called karmic imprints [Tib.*: leh*] from this, as well as from previous lives, have led to current situations, experiences, personal abilities and even choices. One's current condition is believed to be the inescapable result of infinite previous actions. This belief-structure typically generates a sense of self which is

> …quite literally the (ever changing) sum of our habits. Or we might imagine the self as an extremely complex vector problem, the sort of mathematical exercise where one must identify both the direction and the velocity of different forces operating on an object in order to determine its trajectory from that point forward. In the Buddhist conception of the self, the particular ethical tendency or force of each of the currents of karmic conditioning is playing itself out, influencing and being influenced by each of the others. The self is thus a complicated and ongoing interactive process, the immediate configuration of which determines the overall trajectory of the being, a trajectory that is constantly being altered as each moment brings a new equation of interacting conditionings—some newly created through current activity, others carrying over as the continuing influence of previous actions. (Sponberg 1997: 3)

A common worldview with Tibetans was therefore that control of life's circumstances by human intervention was at least highly restricted. Being 'the sum of infinite previous causes' one would actually have little say in the matter as even one's own choices would be determined by complex karmic conditioning patterns.

The importance given to *luck* within the Tibetan children's peer cultures confirms this view as part of the children's lived experience. "Luck" (bad or good) was a frequently used notion in children's verbal encounters and an integral part of the children's social interaction. With many younger Tibetans in India the English term *luck* seems to have replaced more traditional Tibetan terms referring to good or

bad luck, such as *tro* (similar to "good luck"), *leh* (similar to "karmic effect"), *sonam* (merit earned from previous lives) or *namdok* (similar to "bad omen"). Thus, phrases such as "*kyerang lucky re sha*" (you are lucky) or "*luck mindu*" (you are not lucky) were common with Tibetan children and young people. Also the children's social interactions included much reliance on chance. Many decisions, for example, were made by means of games of chance, such as rock-paper-scissors. The following example shows how the power of chance would be regarded as even more significant than friendship. Nyima and Tsering [boys] both wanted to borrow Chime's [boy] fountain pen. Even though Nyima was Chime's close friend (and Tsering was not) they let chance decide who got the pen.

> Tsering comes over to Chime to borrow his fountain pen and shortly after Nyima arrives and wants the same. Chime counts out both boys: *"OM-MANI-PE-ME-HUNG*[23]*"*!
> Tsering wins and Chime gives him the fountain pen.
> Nyima complains to Chime: *Why didn't you give it to me…*?
> Chime: *Tsering won – what else can I do?*
> Nyima seems to be satisfied with that response and they start talking about something else.
>
> *(Tibetan School, Fieldnotes, During Class, Sept. 2012)*

Tsering wins and gets the pen from Chime. Nyima complains at first but is then convinced by Chime's argument "Tsering won – what else can I do?".

Independent versus Interdependent?

The authority attributed to chance at the Tibetan school, as well as the absence of the demand for fairness, reflects aspects of Tibetan Buddhist worldviews where individuals are ultimately not in control of life's circumstances. This Tibetan experience of self and world contrasts to the Modern sense of self where control is possible. Such findings partly conform with Marcus and Kitayama's (1991) elaborations on interdependent and independent selves. They suggest that the independent construction of self, prevalent in Western cultures, experiences the world very differently from the interdependent construction of self, prevalent in

[23] Tibetan Mantra, used by the children for counting out.

Eastern Asian cultures. These differences manifest in cognition, emotion and motivation of people. For example:

> American parents who are trying to induce their children to eat their suppers are fond of saying "think of the starving kids in Ethiopia, and appreciate how lucky you are to be different to them." Japanese parents are likely to say "Think about the farmer who worked so hard to produce this rice for you; if you don't eat it, he will feel bad, his efforts will have been in vain (H. Yamada, February 16, 1989)". (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 224)

According to Markus and Kitayama, Japanese parents offer their children a construction of self which implies an interdependence with the rest of the world (the food on the table is the result of the farmers' hard work) (see also Lebra 1976; Marriott 1976). Such an interdependent self "cannot be properly characterized as a bounded whole, for it changes structure with the nature of the particular context. Within each particular social situation, the self can be differently instantiated" (Markus and Kitayama 1991: 227). Interdependent selves are more permeable, fluid and flexible and - to return to my previous argument - ultimately *not* in control in a world of endless interdependencies.

Other ethnographic research has shown that not only people from an East Asian background construct interdependent selves. The well-known analysis of Melanesian personhood by Marilyn Strathern, for example, illustrates how people in Papua New Guinea tend to perceive themselves as "dividuals" or "composite" (Strathern 1998: 13). She writes that "the mind (will, awareness), I was told (…), first becomes visible when a child shows feeling for those related to it and comes to appreciate the interdependence and reciprocity that characterizes social relationships" (Strathern 1998: 90). Similarly to Markus and Kitayama, Strathern contrasts the Melanesian self to 'Western' constructions of self which, she suggests, are usually based on the idea of an autonomous individual.

Strathern's and Markus and Kitayama's work link into mainstream social science theories by Giddens and others. In all these accounts, individualization is presented as the characteristic attribute of Modern personhood (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). It is proposed that Modern societies give rise to an

individualized sense of self for, as opposed to traditional societies where members were provided with an identity, there is the necessity to shape one's own self-identity. All in all, interdependent self constructions are usually attributed to 'Non-Western' cultures in social science literature and independent selves to 'Western' cultures.

In one sense, these theories support my findings from both schools where, as I have explained, the children's demand for fairness at the German school seems to suggest an independent sense of self, while the Tibetan children's emphasis on luck may imply an interdependent sense of self. At the same time, however, these theories do *not* sit easily with the data analysis elaborated in Chapter 5 which expounded on a relational construction of self at the German school and an individualized self at the Tibetan school. For example, unlike the 'stereotype' interdependent self, who would typically seek harmony and cooperation (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1989), my data show that the Tibetan children were very self-assertive and individualized in social interaction. Similarly, contrary to typical independent individuals who tend to 'follow their self-interests' (Greenfield and Suzuki 1998; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Suzuki and Greenfield 2002) the children at the German school would relinquish many of their personal desires and wishes for those of their friends. Also other studies have contradicted Giddens' individuation theory, showing that children's constructions of selves in Modern societies are *not* necessarily individualized (Wilson et al 2012).

I would argue, however, that these findings do not imply a contradiction but merely point to the complexity of the matter. Again, constructions of selves are multiple and often contradictory (Burkitt 2008; Mead 1934; 1913) and therefore any view of children's sense of self presented is merely partial. Even though of empirical value, Gidden's generalising theories on Modernity/non-Modernity and Markus and Kitayama's theories on interdependent/independent selves offers a simplistic view of social phenomena and have rightly been criticized for its reductionism (Chen et al 2006b).

It is therefore important to re-emphasize that my findings are *not* to be considered representative of any complete societal reality but rather merely stand for

a particular outlook within the complexities of people's experiences of different cultures. So-called 'cultures' are not a unitary web of socio-cultural traditions but always contain contradictory, constantly changing movements (Geertz 1973; Rosaldo 1993). The present analysis is therefore not claiming that the children at the German school experienced the world as independent selves, or that the Tibetan children were interdependent beings. Human experience is infinitely more complex than that and social phenomena are a dynamic web of causal relations that can never be fully represented in conceptualization (Weber 1991; 1949).

The conceptualizations of the children's understandings of self presented here are, again, meant only as ideal-types (see previous chapter) which serve a particular purpose at a particular time during analysis. Working with ideal types is particularly suitable for cross-cultural research. As Kahlberg puts it, the "capacity of ideal types – to offer clear definitions of the patterns of meaningful action within groupings – appears to *invite* comparative research, whether within or across societies and civilizations" (Kahlberg 2008: 12; emphasis in original). Relationships between phenomena are, in reality, infinitely multicausal and may thus be considered merely as 'elective affinities' (Weber 1991; 1949). By presupposing certain elective affinities, the social scientist suggests that two sets of social phenomena appear to be somewhat causally related, that they 'have an affinity' to each other. However, this does not imply that they are *monocausally* related. As Ringer notes, "only what is *explained* is singular here" (2000: 3; my emphasis).

6.2. Psychological Flexibility and Resilience

The following section argues that the interdependent construction of self at the Tibetan school, as it lacks the demand for control, is likely to entail a more *accepting stance* towards life's circumstances which, in turn, can be linked to a higher degree of resilience. The example cited earlier showing the interaction between Chime and Nyima may illustrate this. In one sense, Nyima is confronted with an adverse situation: he did not get the pen he needed, nor has his friend demonstrated the loyalty he had expected and therefore he is obviously disappointed ["*Why didn't you*

give it to me…?]. However, chance has decided, and *not* in his favour and he accepts the situation, 'makes do', and resolves to chat about something else with Chime. Nyima experiences disappointment but then quickly 'moves on'.

In several other situations where children were facing more significant adversities I witnessed this accepting attitude which was marked by a lesser degree of emotional upset in comparison to similar situations at the German school. I would argue that this phenomenon may reflect the interdependent construction of self that is common to Tibetan culture. Experiencing life's circumstances not predominantly as the result of individual people's pursuits but as a complex web of various conditions and results, personal failure is likely to feel less 'personal'. As Markus and Kitayama write "for example, a given event involving a particular actor will be perceived as arising from the situational context of which this actor is an interdependent part, rather than stemming solely from the attributes of the actor" (1991: 246). In Tibetan society, when something out of the norm happens to people, a phrase very commonly used is "*leh la koe yo sa re*" – "it must have been written in (your) fate/karma".

Furthermore, Tibetan Buddhist ontology includes the view that adversities are an inevitable part of life. A common Tibetan response to when hardship has struck is "*mi mites re*" – "it's a human life (so what do you expect?)". According to the 'First Noble Truth', posited by Buddha Shakyamuni 2500 years ago, suffering (Sanskrit *dukkha*) suffuses all of existence. This view suggests that even positive experiences will ultimately create suffering because they end. In Buddhism existence is based on suffering, as "fundamentally, anything that is subject to interdependence doesn't have sovereignty; it cannot fully control itself and this dependence creates uncertainty" (Dzongsar Khyentse 2007: 128). While this may seem like a gloomy outlook, proponents of Buddhist psychology argue that it raises emotional flexibility (Choedron 2000; Dzongsar Khyentse 2007; Yongey Mingyur 2008). The American-born Tibetan Buddhist nun Choedron writes about her experience with having integrated such a worldview into her life:

> The first noble truth of the Buddha is that when we feel suffering, it doesn't mean that something is wrong. What a relief. Finally somebody told the truth. Suffering is part of life, and we don't have to feel it's happening because we personally made the wrong move. (Choedron 2000: 37)

It is this accepting attitude towards suffering, the idea that 'nothing is wrong' when one experiences adversity, which has become the basis for much successful treatment in psychotherapy generally referred to as Mindfulness-Therapy. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), for example, helps the patient to develop a non-judgmental acceptance of his or her inner states as a precursor to change (Fulton and Siegel 2005; Hayes et al 2006; Teasdale 2006). ACT proposes that through a non-judgmental way "of relating to all experience – positive, negative, and neutral – (…) our overall level of suffering is reduced and our sense of well-being increases" (Germer, 2005: 4). Through these processes, therapies begin to actually renegotiate the patients' concepts of self (Epstein 2001; Ciarrochi 2006; Muzika 1990; Pickering 2006).

Psychology has extensively elaborated on the link between resilience, mental well-being and an accepting stance towards adversaries (see Carver et al 2000; Hayes et al 1999; Keyes 2005). The term *psychological flexibility* describes a set of reaction-patterns enabling an individual to be accepting towards adverse situations, which thereby become less threatening, less overwhelming and more tolerable. Psychological flexibility has gained recognition as a key factor for well-being (Hayes et al 1999; Kashdan and Rottenberg 2010; Polk and Schoendorf 2014). The term refers to a range of human abilities, such as the ability

> …to recognize and adapt to various situational demands; shift mindsets or behavioral repertoires when these strategies compromise personal or social functioning; maintain balance among important life domains; and be aware, open, and committed to behaviors that are congruent with deeply held values. (Kashadan and Rottenberg 2010: 865)

This description of psychological flexibility could just as well have been a definition of resilience. Unsurprisingly, studies in social psychology have suggested that "a key component of resilience is emotional flexibility – the ability to respond flexibly to

changing emotional circumstances" (Waugh et al 2011: 1059; see also Block and Kremen 1996; Cheng 2001; Kashdan and Rottenberg 2010). In psychopathological states, such as depression and anxiety, this ability to respond flexibly is said to be absent even in the face of positive experiences (Carver et al 2000; Kashdan and Rottenberg, 2010; Keyes 2005). States of anxiety seem to be perpetuated when a person judges certain experiences as unacceptable (Kabat-Zinn 1990).

Tibetan Buddhist self- and worldviews, which imply that there is not much control over life's circumstances and that suffering is part of life, are likely to entail a more accepting stance towards adversities. As illustrated, these views also appear to have been part of the Tibetan children's 'lived experience' and thus may partly account for their higher level of resilience.

6.3. The Burden of the Demand for Control

Unlike the Tibetan Buddhist worldview, the Modern concept of self, being potentially in control over life's circumstances, can imply that one should *be able* to overcome obstacles and avoid hardship and failure. Sociological accounts have addressed the psychologically burdensome aspect of the Modern self where individuals are overwhelmed by the responsibility of juggling life's ebbs and flows in order to attain the ideal 'good life' (Berlant 2011; Bröckling 2007; Ehrenberg 2010; Kury 2010). In a historical analysis, Ehrenberg's *The Weariness of Self* (2010) suggests that the epidemic growth of clinical depression, a phenomenon of Modernity, is linked to a particular identity construction. These ideals of personhood imply that people are meant to be successful, self-sufficient and autonomous individuals, an expectation that may be overwhelming to many. According to Ehrenberg, the prominent sense of self in Modern society is "the creator of action" and suffers this as burdensome, similar to Weber's (1958) self in capitalist society who suffers his or her Protestant ethics:

> Democracy is the social form that gives any given individual a chance to progress and to make something of herself thanks to her own initiative. The Individual who takes her way by herself

> is plagued by the worry that she is concomitant with that kind of life. She is like the Puritan who is continuously harassed by the question: Am I chosen or am I damned? Faced with action, the modern individual is harassed by the questions: Why me? Why not me? Am I up to the demands? Her inadequacy makes her feel guilty, and she begins to doubt her capacities. Illness can follow. (Ehrenberg 2010: xvi)

Ehrenberg speaks of an exhaustion and fatigue resulting from this demand for continuously being in charge; the individual faces a dilemma as he or she can never live up to the Modern ideal self as incessantly successful, self-sufficient and dynamic. After all, even the most successful are confronted with a world that is ever-changing – with possibilities and limitations alike (Berlant 2011; Kury 2010). Similarly, Bröckling (2007) suggests that contemporary identity constructions are often that of an "Enterprising Self" who is confronted with the "the 'never-endingness' of the demand for optimization, the relentless selecting of competition and the always present fear of failing" (2007: 11; my translation).

As I shall argue, the children's social interactions at the German school would often reflect this burdensome experience of Modern self. This may not only explain the lower level of resilience at the German school but will illustrate the depleting effect it had on the children's well-being in general.

Well-Being and the Demand for Control

At the German school, the burdensome experience of the Modern self showed itself in situations where children were expected to perform. As explained, most Tibetan children did not display much concern around academic failure and bad grades, even though academic proficiency was highly respected. At the German school, on the other hand, most children would tend to get upset. Once, Levin received a fairly low grade when I happened to be sitting next to him. He was visibly shocked and cried for the rest of the class. The following excerpt is taken from the recording:

> Carla to Levin: *Oh, dear, your grade is not that bad…don't be upset…things like that happen. Honey, it's ok, don't be upset.*

Levin, crying into his sleeve, mumbles: *It is not fair!*

Teacher, seeing that Levin is crying, to the whole class: *Every time we write a test and the teacher returns it to you there are always children that are happy and some that are a little disappointed. Some children may have expected a better grade [than they got]. Some children may be a little disappointed now, but the most important thing is that now we think about 'how can one do it better next time?'… Who would like to make a suggestion for the others [about how to do it better next time]? If one wants to be better next time – what can one do [to achieve that]? Janina?*

Janina: *For example, if one has made a mistake [in the test] one can go home and practice that again.*

Teacher: *Yes, one can practice the misspelled words again at home. (...) And what else? What else can all children do so that they get a better grade next time?*

Nobody answers.

Teacher: *Ok, if nobody knows, I will just tell you. Simply stay focused and concentrated – stay focused on what you are doing and don't, for example, play little games in between. If you practice the words really well any of you can get an A+. Or an A-!*

(German School, Recording, In Class, Feb. 2012)

Levin was upset about the fact that he had tried his best but received a bad grade. From his perspective, that was "not fair". Levin's demand for fairness seemed to be based on the idea that, basically, he is supposed to be in control: "I have done everything I can but I fail nevertheless – how can that be? That is not fair". He was upset, confused and most likely also ashamed of himself, as, from the Modern point of view (where life is potentially controllable) "failure is merely proof that one could have been more clever" (Bröckling 2007: 283; my translation). The teacher, who was trying to console Levin, reconfirmed that view: "if you practice really well you can get an A+ next time". Her words were meant to encourage her students, yet, as an experienced teacher, she also knew that what she suggested was not always possible. As she told me in an interview "children may study hard and still get bad marks while others hardly study and are leading students" (German School, Recording, Interview, Female Teacher, March 2012). Basically, she was implying that life is *not* always fair and often we are *not* in control. On the basis of a sense of self who is supposed to be in control, however, Levin needed to claim that conditions were not fair since the only alternative would have been to take the full responsibility for his failure. Levin was experiencing a discrepancy between an idealized image and

reality - his concept of self demanded that he should be in control while empirical evidence suggested to him that, in fact, he is not.

Giddens (1991; 1990) addresses this dilemma of the Modern self. He explains how, while early Modern worldviews suggest that control is possible through instrumental rationality, more recent (often referred to as Postmodern) [24] considerations suggest that 'nothing can be known for certain'. "The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of oncoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character" (Giddens 1990: 38). Giddens continues to elaborate how a sense of insecurity is a result. He writes that

> …probably we are only now, in the late twentieth century, beginning to realise in a full sense how deeply unsettling this outlook is. For when the claims of reason replaced those of tradition, they appeared to offer a sense of certitude greater than that provided by preexisting dogma. But this idea only appears persuasive so long as we do not see that the reflexivity of modernity actually subverts reason, at any rate where reason is understood as the gaining of certain knowledge. (Giddens 1991: 39)

In the light of the present cross-cultural analysis it is interesting that late Modernity's conclusion 'that nothing is certain' is similar to Tibetan Buddhist ontology. Yet, in contrast to Tibetan Buddhism, Modern worldviews simultaneously entertain the notion that human rationality can make life controllable – an anxiety-inducing paradox. Theories on child education in Germany mentioned earlier, such as the discourses suggesting that a development of competences are a key to children's well-being, mirror this paradox. As Bayer criticizes, "the success of action [by an individual] (…) lies not in the competent hands of the individual but is the result of 'interdependencies' which cannot or at least cannot directly can be traced back to individuals" (2010: 224; my translation).

[24] Giddens suggests, however, that Modernity has not been overcome by a Postmodernity but has merely developed into a 'Reflexive Modernity'. He writes that "rather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before" (1990: 3).

Against the backdrop of these theories, it is suggested here that the children at the German school were constructing part of their self according to an aspect of the Modern identity which was *not* favourable for developing psychological flexibility and resilience. I have argued that the children at the German school were confronted with an idealized notion of self ('in control') which was at odds with empirical evidence suggesting that they were not always in control. As the example with Levin has shown, this contradiction is likely to have been experienced as confusing and burdensome. The final section of this chapter proposes that the children at the German school may have been addressing and digesting these burdensome aspects of their Modern sense of self in their social interaction and play.

Dealing with the Burden

The Modern sense of self faces the paradox that it is supposed to be in control over uncontrollable circumstances. Ehrenberg (2001) suggests that this dilemma is why the Modern self becomes depressed. Depression, a state where all has come to a standstill, symbolises the "uncontrollable".

> Depression portrays for all of us the style of the uncontrollable in the age of limitless possibilities. We can manipulate our bodily and mental nature, we can push back our limits by all sorts of means, but this manipulation won't save us from anything (…) If, as Freud thought, "a person becomes less neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration a society imposes on him," he becomes depressed because he cannot tolerate the illusion that everything is possible for him. (Ehrenberg 2010: 232)

The depressed individual's "deficiency" (Ehrenberg 2010: 233) is a response to the overwhelming demand of having to continuously achieve, create and steer, to the demand for continuous control. In one way, therefore, the depressed self is the direct counterpart to, almost like a rebellion against, the Modern 'in control' self.

My analysis of the data from the German school suggests that the children might have been dealing with these burdensome aspects of the Modern self in a similar manner by playfully creating identities that were totally helpless.

Temporarily assuming victim-identities was conspicuously popular amongst the children at the German school. The example of Yvonne, a girl having been diagnosed with ADHS, displaying fake 'serious injuries', was particularly salient. She would 'break her leg or her arm' on a regular basis and make this known to all.

> Yvonne approaches me with her arm tied under her shirt.
> Yvonne: *Carla, this time my arm is REALLY broken!*
> Levin, nearby, to me: *No it's not! She is faking it!*
> Yvonne slaps Levin's shoulder and walks away. Levin ignores her.
> Levin explains to me: *Yvonne only does that because Monika once broke her arm.*
>
> *(German School, Fieldnotes, In the Yard, May 2012)*

Although Yvonne's injuries were usually not taken seriously by her peers, the tendency to highlight or exaggerate injuries was common for most children at the German school. Stories about Monika having fractured her arm in first grade, for example, were often retold by the children. Also children would draw attention to the fact when they had hurt themselves, often visibly exaggerating the severity of their injuries. Peers would always respond by showing great concern, consoling or by getting an adult to help. The teachers and care-takers would always respond empathically, attending real and exaggerated injuries alike; even fictitious injuries would occasionally be treated with band-aids. Something similar was found by Christensen (2000; 1993) at a school in Denmark where children would draw much attention to injuries and illness. Christensen concludes that "childhood is constituted as essentially 'vulnerable' in much Western discourse, acting almost as a master identity for children" (Christensen 2000: 40). I shall argue that the children moreover may have been dealing with the burden of Modern identity construction by means of creating victim-identities.

Children collectively digest, deal with and tackle issues they experience as threatening within the routines of their social interaction, as the stability of routines allow them to approach ambiguities in a non-threatening manner (Cosaro 2011; 2009; Cosaro and Eder, 1990). Poveda and Marcos (2005), for example, illustrate how children in Spain would come to terms with the racist conflicts experienced in their

neighbourhoods by means of playful stone fights. Poveda and Marcos describe these rituals as "'exchange' of stones" (Poveda and Marcos 2005: 341). By way of constructing victim-identities, the children at the German school may have been tackling the burdensome experience of living a Modern 'in control' sense of self. Being a victim implies a helplessness and inability to be responsible – quite the opposite of the Modern self construction.

Victim-identities were very popular also within role play games at the German school. Research has shown how children´s play, rather than being merely expressive, has an immediate and *transformative* quality (Clark 1995; Corsaro 2003; 1993; Garvey and Berndt 1975; Mayall 2002; Schwartzman 1982; Strandell 1997; Winnicott 1971). Role play can be an especially effective way of digesting experiences for children where they "confront the objective structures or circumstances of their daily life" (Corsaro 1993: 73; see also 2011; 2003). Children work through issues in role play by commenting about their experiences, their life, their society and themselves on a metacommunicative level (Bateson 1972; Garvey and Berndt 1975; Schwartzman 1982).

> In brief, play is an orientation or framing and defining *context* that players adopt toward something (an object, a person, a role, an activity, an event, etc.), which produces a *text* characterized by allusion (not distortion or illusion), transformation (not preservation), and '*purported* imitation' of the object, person, role etc. (Schwartzman 1982: 330; emphasis in original)

Every action in play contains metacommunicative messages which are not delivered "sequentially but simultaneously" (Schwartzman 1982: 218). Play is therefore a multileveled phenomenon and may be analysed from various perspectives. Generally, however, it may be considered a form of communication (Bateson 1972; Schwartzman 1982) potentially revealing the children's views of their experiences to the social scientist.

The children at the German school often made the victim-identity a central figure of their role play. These victims were always helpless, on the one hand, but,

interestingly, often powerful because totally 'out of control'. The following excerpt from a role play between two friends illustrates this nicely.

Maria, the clown, is screeching wildly.
Alara, commenting: *The clown screams like a crazy little idiot.*
Maria screeches "*dadaaaaaa!"*
Alara tries to kiss Maria.
Carla: *Why do you want to kiss he*r?
Alara: *I just loooove her sooo much!*
Maria's screeching sounds become higher and higher, she is struggling to get away from Alara.
Alara: *She...ah...she is fighting me like a crazy chicken. I'm giving her a shot. But Mrs Clown! She doesn't want a shot…this is no theatre!*
Maria screeches, resisting, but Alara manages to 'give her the shot'.
Carla: *What effect does the shot have?*
Alara: *Then she will be...now finally…no clown no more.*
Maria screeches „*dadadaaaada*" but then slowly falls asleep.
Alara: *She will fall asleep for a few minutes and then she will become a totally normal human…*
Alara to Maria, whispering: *Now you are a totally normal human.*
Maria lies for a little while and then begins to make deep growling noises. Suddenly she gets up and wrestles Alara to the floor.
Alara, laughing: *No! Please, don't!*
Maria has overwhelmed Alara.
Alara, shouting, in pretended anguish: *Craaaazy humaaaan!!!*
Maria begins the crazy screetching sounds again.
Maria, into the recorder, normal voice: *aaand: the end [of the story]!*

(German School, Recording, In the Yard, Feb. 2012)

Alara and Maria's role play is interesting in several respects. First, Maria's clown-character ["a crazy idiot"] is totally out of control [and therefore "needs a shot to become normal again"]. Alara's commentary suggests that being 'in control' is normal while being 'out of control' is not. At the same time, however, the clown figure is an object of strong affection ["I just loooove her sooo much!"] and actually ends up being the more powerful being, the winner of the fight.

Within the children's play at the German school several role play variants with victim-identities as leading figures, such as "retarded children"[25] or "wild animals (oppressed by humans)", were popular. All story-lines would address the same out of control vs. in control dichotomy and the victims were (as the clown) always the beloved protagonists, contrasting to the evil oppressors. The fact that victim-roles were so popular and the way these victims were portrayed in the role plays may be interpreted as a comment on particular struggles in the children's real lives - struggles that seem to speak of a desire for a state free of control and responsibility.

First, children's struggle with being constrained by adult-controlled environments comes to mind, especially at school where children are expected to control themselves and act responsibly. In particular and as mentioned previously (see Chapter 4), sitting quietly through "boring" hours of class at school was and is unmistakably challenging for children (Christensen and James 2001; Harden 2012; Mayall 2002; 1998). Even children's spaces for play and social interaction are becoming increasingly structured and regulated by adults in Minority Worlds (Jamieson and Milne 2014; Zeiher 2001).

Second, I would argue that the children's affinity for protagonists that are out of control, crazy and yet powerful may speak of their experience with Modern identity construction. Maria's clown-identity conspicuously manifested the exact opposite of the common Modern 'in control' sense of self and, interestingly, she overcame the one trying to 'make her normal'. In all the victim-identity role plays, being 'out of control' was something positive and, moreover, visibly enjoyed by the children who enacted it. The children may have been digesting in their play the dilemma of the Modern self who, as Ehrenberg and others have proposed, is overwhelmed by the burden of responsibility and the demand for being in control.

[25] This is a literal translation from the children's name of the game in German ("*behinderte Kinder*").

6.4. Conclusion

By analyzing the common demand for fairness at the German school, on the one hand, and the significance attributed to luck at the Tibetan school, on the other, I have suggested that the children may have been constructing and experiencing very different senses of self and world. While the children at the German school were reproducing a Modern construction of self that was potentially in control of life's circumstances, the Tibetan worldview, shaped by Buddhist ontology, would imply that karmic forces were ultimately determining one's abilities, choices and life's circumstances.

An accepting stance towards life's ebbs and flows, psychological flexibility, can be considered a basis for resilience and ultimately, well-being. I have suggested that the Tibetan children manifested a higher psychological flexibility through their socio-culturally constructed sense of self and world where there is not much control over life's ebbs and flows and, moreover, where adversity is expected to be part of life. The Tibetan children's ontological assumptions may therefore partly account for the higher level of resilience observed during fieldwork. The children at the German school, on the other hand, are likely to have been experiencing part of their Modern self-construction as burdensome and confusing as the demands placed by this construction ('being in control') often did not match their empirical direct experience ('I am not in control'). Modernity's ontological implications seem to leave people with the burden of feeling fully responsible for failure and loss.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, many children would claim that 'things were not fair' or otherwise they would have had to accept that they, as individuals, were at fault (e.g., of not having practiced hard enough for the test). Children like Levin, for instance, are likely to have been experiencing feelings of being overwhelmed by the demands of their socio-culturally induced sense of self. They were, perhaps, experiencing milder versions of Ehrenberg's "fatigued self" and may have been, as Hartras puts it, suffering the "responsibilization" (2008: xvi) imposed by their society. The children at the German school seemed to enjoy taking on victim-identities. These identities, helpless and out of control, are the polar opposite of the

Modern self and I have argued that, by assuming such roles, the children may have been counterbalancing the burdensome demand of their Modern sense of self to be in control of a life that too often proves uncontrollable.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Children's subjective well-being is a promising area of research for Childhood Studies. It is, however, still in its infancy. My research has contributed to this field by investigating children's perspectives on well-being in two different countries and by cross-culturally exploring their different levels of self-confidence and resilience.

The main critique of qualitative research, and thus possibly also of this present work, is the problem of the generalisability of the findings. In my research I focused on children from two second grades and their instructors. With a sample-size of 14 children and 6 teachers at the Tibetan school, and 24 children and 5 teachers at the German school, it is clear that my findings are not necessarily representative of children's experiences in Tibetan societies in India and in Germany in general. While the theories presented in the present thesis may be limited in terms of their generalisability, the data collected through ethnographic methods gave insights into the children's lives that are unlikely to have been achieved with other methods. As Corsaro puts it, "ethnography is an excellent method for studying young children because many features of their interactions and peer cultures are produced and shared in the present and cannot easily be obtained by way of interviews, surveys, or experiments" (2006: 97).

By approaching well-being both as socio-culturally specific, as well as from a transcultural perspective (which, as I have argued, are two sides of the same coin), this work has offered a holistic view of children's well-being. The richness of the cross-cultural findings that have emerged from such an approach may encourage future research on children's well-being to adapt such a non-dichotomising approach to well-being (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009b).

The thesis includes perspectives from several disciplines such as sociology, social anthropology, psychology, geography and developmental studies and is therefore also a multidisciplinary take on children's well-being - an approach considered valuable by many within Childhood Studies (Ben-Arieh et al 2014b;

Punch 2015a; Woodhead and Montgomery 2003). This work addresses gaps in Childhood Studies (Punch 2014) by combining research from Majority and Minority Worlds. Further, to my knowledge, no other ethnographies on Tibetan children's peer cultures have been published to date. It is also one of the first cross-cultural *ethnographies* on children's well-being – an area awaiting further substantive findings and methodological considerations from the Sociology of Childhood.

Children's Perspectives on Well-Being

It has been illustrated how children's understandings of well-being may differ significantly across two cultures: children at a Tibetan school in India emphasized the importance of individual skilfulness, whereas for children at a German school so much revolved around belonging to peers. These findings highlight well-being's socio-culturally relative nature and call for the need to investigate locally specific understandings of well-being (see also Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a; Punch 2013). Studying different socio-cultural contexts in their own right makes visible the abundant nature of human experience, its inseparability from the socio-cultural context within which it appears, and reminds us that we cannot draw conclusions from 'ourselves to others' (Fay 1996). In this way social science research may "enlighten us about other human possibilities, engendering an awareness that we are merely one pattern among many" and thereby "mak[ing] accessible the normally unexamined assumptions by which we operate and through which we encounter members of other cultures" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: x).

In this fashion my findings from the Tibetan school challenge a generalising assumption within Childhood Studies that peers are of central importance to children (see Corsaro 2003; Dunn 2004; Hartras 2008), revealing it to be ethnocentric. I have shown how the Tibetan children did not consider friendship with peers to be particularly important. Unlike the children at the German school, the Tibetan children's social practices did not deal much with the topic of friendship, something which was confirmed by the children in interviews. Secondly, in the light of the cross-cultural data of this research, the common distinction 'Western independent'

vs. 'Eastern interdependent' (see Lebra 1976; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Marriott 1976) proves to be overly simplistic. Parts of these theories resonated with my findings in Chapter 6 where I illustrated how the children at the German school would construct an autonomous, 'in control' sense of self (reflected in the demand for *fairness*) and the Tibetan children an interdependent sense of self (reflected in the emphasis on *luck*). In daily social interaction, however, the Tibetan children actually proved to be much more individualized than the children at the German school, who were more relationally oriented (Chapter 5). All this makes apparent that the relation between socio-culturally constructed self- and worldviews and how these manifest in daily life are much more complex, not necessarily straightforward and clearly not generalisable to a 'Western versus East Asian' model. Pointing to the uniqueness of 'cultures', situations - of the human experience in general – the findings of my research underscore the importance of remaining aware of the complexity of the matter of children's experiences, more generally and their well-being, in particular.

Perspectives on Children's Well-Being

With all due respect to socio-cultural relativity there must, at the same time, be some commonality to human experience, otherwise any form of successfully communicating with others would be literally impossible. As Davidson's Argument of Translation suggests, "different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them" (2001: 184). On the basis of acknowledging our shared experience of 'being human', my research therefore also included a transcultural approach to children's well-being (Chapter 5 and 6). Consequently, conclusions relevant to an applied social science were possible, specifically a consideration of what may have been beneficial or problematic in terms of the children's well-being.

For one thing, the othering-practices of the children's peer cultures at the German school seemed to have posed an emotional challenge for many children in the class. After all, othering would deny to some what mattered most to the children: a sense of belonging. Ironically, othering was the most common means for

establishing and confirming friendship; the very practice used to create a sense of belonging for some would entail the denying of belonging for others at the German school. Hamarus and Kaikkonen have said about bullying that "there is something paradoxical in this phenomenon" (2008: 333). I would consider the same to be the case for othering-practices: as the children's main practice for establishing their condition for well-being (friendship), it was simultaneously a factor that would diminish well-being. The othering-practices at the German school meant an emotional rollercoaster for the children who were regularly bullied, and insecurity inducing for many others whose belonging could potentially be denied at any given time. I would argue that even the most popular children in class may have experienced these practices as somewhat unsettling. Monika, the most popular girl in class, for example, would cry almost every morning when delivered to school by her mother who had reported to the teachers that her daughter disliked going to school. The following interview suggests that Monika did not experience her popularity as exclusively pleasurable.

Carla: *Monika, why do you think you are so popular in class?*

Monika: *I don't know. Somehow everyone likes me and so on, and some know me already from kindergarden and so they like me also a lot and it is nice but it is also not ni…what I mean is not 'not nice' but somehow stressful. It is somehow also stressful.*

Carla: *Why stressful?*

Monika: *I don't know...hard to explain.*

(German School, Recording, Interview, Girl, May 2012)

The othering-practices of the children at the German school are likely to have been unsettling not only to the children being othered, but also to the individuals who were actively othering - such as Monika. Having witnessed several of these othering-conflicts at the German school it makes sense to assume that these practices would feel exhausting to both parties. Further research into othering-practices, their occurrence, their socio-culturally constructed nature and their effects on children's well-being would be very interesting.

The findings related to the Tibetan children's higher level of self-confidence and resilience may offer further practical insight into children's well-being. I have

shown how the Tibetan children have most likely developed a greater self-confidence and resilience not only because they were confronted with more adversities in daily life, but also because adults would not protect them as much from experiencing these adversities. The fact that the Tibetan children were considered to be self-reliant might have further contributed to their higher level of self-confidence and resilience. These results challenge the growing trend in Minority Worlds that emphasizes children's protection as solely useful (see also Boyden 2003; Daniel 2010 et al; Hartras 2008; Punch 2013). Although protection is an indispensable part of children's rights, applied wrongly, it may not be in the best interest of the child concerned (Burr and Montgomery 2003). Newman (2002), for example, reports on a rise in the number of accidental drowning of children in the UK that seems to be related to parents being overprotective which prevents children from learning how to manage risk situations. As Punch wonders,

> …while no one wants children to suffer, there are important questions which need to be asked about whether – in an imperfect world – a life without any form of failure disappointment, grief or pain really is a good one, and whether this truly enhances children's well-being, adding to a good quality of life, either for children in the present or for their future selves. (2013: 232)

I would additionally question whether a world without disappointment, grief or pain is actually realistic and if not – whether it is useful to convey an unrealistic view of life to children? Will this help them deal adequately with the challenges of life, with its unpleasant, painful experiences?

The Significance of Researching Ontologies

A major part of my work was therefore investigating commonly held assumptions about childhood, self and world within the children's socio-cultural environments, and I have demonstrated how these assumptions significantly affected the children's well-being in terms of their level of resilience and self-confidence.

The construction of children as resilient and reliable may have led to a higher level of children's self-confidence and resilience (in Tibetan society in Exile), while a

view of children as in need of protection (in Germany) may have ultimately made them more vulnerable. A view emphasizing children's need for protection may not only have implications in terms of preventing children from learning how to deal with life's adversities in practical terms but also in terms of a more or less resilient sense of self. "A child's cultural context not only provides the necessary resources for coping with hardship but also defines whether or not they are overwhelmed psychologically by their experiences" (de Berry and Boyden 2000: 34).

Furthermore, I have proposed that particular self-concepts prevalent within the different socio-cultural environments of the children (Buddhist and Modern, respectively), may have also fostered or hindered, respectively, the development of psychological flexibility within the children – an ability considered a key to resilience. A Modern view of self that demands the individual to be in control may prove to be burdensome and overwhelming to children in a world where empirical evidence suggests that they are often *not* in control. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the children at the German school often claimed that things were 'not fair', rather than having to take full blame for failure and loss. Ehrenberg has elaborated on how the Modern self experiences total exhaustion (depression), being overwhelmed by "the demands for responsibility and action" (2010: 103). I have argued that such a sense of self may, moreover, be less prone to developing a relaxed stance towards failure and loss and thus lack psychological flexibility. A lesser resilience may be the result.

The generational focus within Childhood Studies has drawn attention to the importance of deconstructing underlying ontological assumptions (about self, world, childhood etc.) present in the children's lives (see Alanen 2001a; 2001b; Mayall 2002). For instance, Morrow and Mayall (2009) have pondered how children's socio-culturally shaped sense of self in the UK may have contributed to children's low scores at school:

> In the specific case of the UK, adults tend to construct children and childhood as a social problem. This construction links in to social class divides. It is entirely possible that media, teachers and even parental concern about childhood affects the children's self-image and may partially account for low scores. If childhood is (objectively) bad and children think so too, could this be because children have internalised their risky and at risk status? What is the

> impact on children themselves of societal denigration of children and childhood? (Morrow and Mayall 2009: 225)

Childhood Studies could benefit from including more research on basic ontological assumptions held by children and adults and how these affect children's lives. This project has illustrated its value in particular in relation to children's well-being.

The Significance of Cross-Cultural Research

A key theoretical thread throughout this project has been the dialectical approach – a discourse on and meeting of different, often seemingly opposing views. I have elaborated on the benefits of cross-cultural research, explaining how it offers not only rich accounts of the human experience but, moreover, can be a heuristic device (see Chapter 2). I found that researching children's views, experiences and perspectives of well-being in two socio-cultural contexts with very different basic ontological assumptions generated insights that would not have emerged in a single-sited research project. Especially at the German school some important themes would have escaped me as they were experienced as 'normal', due to my own 'German' socio-cultural conditioning. For example, the children's demand for fairness at the German school (Chapter 7) would have probably remained unnoticed if it were not for the contrast to my experience at the Tibetan school where this demand was almost wholly absent. The Tibetan children's emphasis on luck (also Chapter 7), on the other hand, was likewise only striking because it was not something children at the German school considered important.

As a cross-cultural account, this work has responded to calls within Childhood Studies for a more global take on childhood (see Panelli et al 2007; Punch 2015b; Punch and Tisdall 2014). At the same time, my research has added another facet to the global childhood approach by having demonstrated not only its substantive but also its methodological value. I have shown how the diversity of children's lives around the globe may not only be the subject of study but simultaneously a heuristic device. Admittedly, human difference is a delicate and

rocky field of study. Yet the "ability to see others as both distinct and yet related is precisely what is fostered by social science" (Fay 1996: 235) - why not explore this potential more deeply?

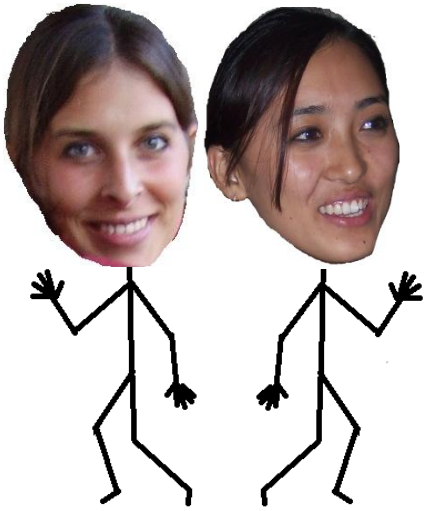
Appendix A:

Child Info and Consent Form (Tibetan School)

Hello

My name is Carla

This is Lhaze who will translate



I am a student at a university in Scotland called the University of Stirling

I am here to do a research project with you

That means: my job is to find out about children's lives

I would like to spend the next 6 months with you at school

Sometimes in your classroom, sometimes at lunch, sometimes in the playground.

Sometimes I would also like to ask you questions

Because I want to find out more about what matters most to children

After, I will write something like a book about it for my university

Do you want to be part of my study?

If you say yes, you can change your mind any time

If you say yes, that does not mean that you have to do something you don't want

It is always OK to say 'no' to me

 I promise: I and Lhaze won't tell anybody else what you tell me and who said what.

 Except: the only time I have to talk to somebody else is if I see or hear that you or another child are in danger

 But: I will try to talk to you first before I do that, unless that would put you in more danger

 I promise: In the book I will not say your real names.

 I promise: Nobody except me and Lhaze will be allowed to hear the tapes.

 I promise: Only you, I and people from the school will see the memory photos.

 I promise: My note books, tapes and photos will be kept in a safe place.

1.

I want to be part of Carla's work.
It is OK if Carla writes things down so she can remember what I said.

YES NO

I'm OK if Carla and Lhaze ask me questions in the school.
I don't have to answer if I don't want.

YES NO

2.

I'm OK if Carla records my voice on tape in the school. Carla will keep the tapes safe.

YES NO

3.

I am OK with Carla taking photos of me in the school. Carla will keep the photos safe.

YES NO

DATE: _____

NAME: _____

Appendix B:

Guardian Info and Consent Form (German School/ Opt-Out Version)

Dear Parent,

I would like to inform you about a research project that will take place in your child's class from **January 2012 – June 2012.**

The research is for a PhD conducted by Ms Carla Cribari-Assali, M.A., University of Stirling, School of Applied Social Science (Scotland) and has been approved of by the Head of the School.

** The Research Project*

The research looks at how children in two different parts of the world (Germany and Tibetan in India) experience life at school, particularly competition.

The results of this research will make up a part of my PhD. Once completed, you will receive a summary of my work.

The research is intended to give adults an insight into children's worlds.

** How will your child be involved?*

I will observe the children and their interaction and sometimes participate in activities. In the last 2-3 months of fieldwork I will conduct a few interviews with groups of children during their free time at school.

I will be taking written notes and will occasionally be taking audio recordings. I will take a few private photos as a memory and as a 'thank you' for the children.

Before conducting research, I will inform your child about the research and ask for his or her consent. If your child does not want to, he or she will not be involved in research (also the child can always change his or her mind at any point).

**Will anyone know what your children said or who the children are?*

No. The identity of your child will be kept confidential at all times: no names will be published, conveyed or passed on to others.

All children will be given false names in the PhD, so nobody will be able to tell who said what. Likewise, the name of the school and the area in which it is situated will be kept confidential.

No recordings will be shared with anyone other than, if necessary, my supervisors. They will not be seen or heard by anyone else. The photos will not be used for research or shown to anyone else.

Field notes and audio-recordings will be stored in a safe place. After the analysis has been completed and PhD has been achieved, the data (field notes and recordings) will be destroyed according to university regulations.

The only time I will pass on any confidential information is if I find out that a child is in danger or being hurt. Then I will have to speak to a person in charge who will be assigned to me by the Head of the School. If possible and unless doing so will result in increasing the risk of harm, I will first speak to the child concerned before informing another adult.

* *The well-being of the participants is my main concern*

According to the ***ethical principles of social science research*** I will try my very best not to cause any annoyance and, or disturbance, not to harm or embarrass the participants in any way.
However, if you feel that my research is upsetting the children or anybody else, please do let me know so I can alter my conduct and apologize. If you prefer to speak to someone else, please feel free to contact my supervisors at the University of Stirling (contact details provided below).

* *For Infos or Concerns…*

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask me. You can talk to me in person, phone or e-mail me at any time:

Carla Cribari-Assali, M.A.
e-mail: carla.cribari@stir.ac.uk
Tel: xxxxxxxx

If you would like to talk about the research with someone other than me, please contact my supervisors:

Dr Julie Brownlie
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e-mail: julie.brownlie@stir.ac.uk
Tel.: 00441786 467980

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* *What happens next?*

If you would like your child to take part in the project described above, you do not need to do anything else. If you do NOT want your child to take part or are happy for them to take part but not be recorded, please return one of the two forms below.

Please tick and fill out this form only

→ if you do ***NOT*** want your child to participate
(Option 1)

OR

→ if you agree to your child participating but NOT to all the conditions
(Option 2)

OPTION 1

☐ "I do NOT want my child to participate in any research"
NAME OF THE CHILD:
NAME OF THE PARENT:
DATE: **SIGNATURE:**

OPTION 2

1.

☐ "I allow my child to participate in research but I do NOT want any interviews conducted with my child"
NAME OF THE CHILD:
NAME OF THE PARENT:
DATE: **SIGNATURE:**

2.

☐ "I allow my child to participate in research but I do NOT want any audio-recordings taken of my child's voice"
NAME OF THE CHILD:
NAME OF THE PARENT:
DATE: **SIGNATURE:**

3.

☐ "I allow my child to participate in research but I do NOT want any private photos taken of my child"
NAME OF THE CHILD:
NAME OF THE PARENT:
DATE: **SIGNATURE:**

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