REHEARSING THE STATE

THE POLITICAL PRACTICES OF THE TIBETAN GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE

Fiona McConnell
Rehearsing the State
Rehearsing the State

The Political Practices of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile

Fiona McConnell
For Dhasa friends
# Contents

*List of Figures* viii  
*Series Editors’ Preface* ix  
*Acknowledgements* x  
*Note on Transliteration* xiii  

1 Introduction 1  
2 Rethinking the (Non)state: Time/ Space/ Performance 17  
3 Setting the Scene: Contested Narratives of Tibetan Statehood 40  
4 Rehearsal Spaces: Material and Symbolic Roles of Exile Tibetan Settlements 61  
5 Playwright and Cast: Crafting Legitimacy in Exile 92  
6 Scripting the State: Constructing a Population, Welfare State and Citizenship in Exile 116  
7 Audiences of Statecraft: Negotiating Hospitality and Performing Diplomacy 145  
8 Conclusion: Rehearsing Stateness 171  

*References* 190  
*Index* 216
List of Figures

1  Map of exile Tibetan settlements where research was undertaken 66
2  Chortens, Lugsum-Samdupling 81
3  Large prayer-wheel, Dharamsala 82
4  Cartoon from the Tibetan Review, January 1992, p. 11. 98
5  CTA: The Problem Tree 2004–2007 121
The RGS-IBG Book Series only publishes work of the highest international standing. Its emphasis is on distinctive new developments in human and physical geography, although it is also open to contributions from cognate disciplines whose interests overlap with those of geographers. The Series places strong emphasis on theoretically-informed and empirically-strong texts. Reflecting the vibrant and diverse theoretical and empirical agendas that characterize the contemporary discipline, contributions are expected to inform, challenge and stimulate the reader. Overall, the RGS-IBG Book Series seeks to promote scholarly publications that leave an intellectual mark and change the way readers think about particular issues, methods or theories.

For details on how to submit a proposal please visit:
www.rgsbookseries.com

David Featherstone
University of Glasgow, UK

Tim Allott
University of Manchester, UK

RGS-IBG Book Series Editors
Acknowledgements

Research is never a solo activity and the completion of this book would have been simply impossible without the support, assistance, expertise and friendship of numerous people. First and foremost my thanks go to the staff of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in Dharamsala and across the exile Tibetan community. Needless to say the willingness of exile government officials to spend time discussing their working lives and future aspirations with me was indispensable to the research that underpins this book. My sincere gratitude also goes to all those from the exile community in Dharamsala, Delhi, Dehra Dun, Bangalore, Bylakuppe, Ladakh and London who generously shared their time, opinions and expertise with me. For reasons of anonymity and space it is impossible to thank each by name, but a number of individuals require special mention. Thupten Samphel, Penpa Tsering, Karma Yeshi and Tenzin Lekshay were invaluable to my early discussions at Gangchen Kyishong, while friends in Dharamsala variously associated with Students for a Free Tibet-India, Friends of Tibet-India, GuChuSum and a number of other NGOs helped to make that hill-station in the Himalayas a home away from home. Particular thanks in that regard to Tenzin Tsundue, Bhuchung D Sonam, Tenchoe, Tenzin Choeying, Karma Sichoe, Damchoe, Tenzin Jigdal, TseNgodup, TseDorj, Tenzin Jamyang, Gelek Namgyal and Lobsang. Tsering Yangkey in particular provided not only generous friendship but also fantastic food, and her early death in 2010 left a hole in many hearts. With this research having begun in 2005, and friendships forged since 2002, I’ve had the privilege of following the migrations, marriages, children and careers of this amazing group of people, and of gaining insights into the painful personal and community struggles of exile life far from parents, siblings and places that feel like home.

Thanks to Migmar Yangchen’s family in Bylakuppe who made me feel so welcome, as did Tenzin A and family in Dharamsala and beyond, and Dala Tsering’s family in Choglamsar. In Delhi I spent considerable time with the fantastic team at Empowering the Vision, of which particular thanks to Youdon Aukatsang, Lhakpa Tsering and Tenzin Ngawang. Philippa Carrick, Ricki Hyde-Chambers and Paul
Golding at Tibet Society have been great supporters of my efforts to understand the wider implications of exile Tibetan politics, and my thanks to them for including me in the delegation of British MPs to Delhi and Dharamsala in September 2011. In 2012 I had the pleasure of working with the Foundation for Non-Violent Action in Delhi, where I had fascinating discussions with Rebon Bannerji, Mr Tandon and Chok Tsering. I have also spent many an enjoyable afternoon in lively discussion with students and staff at Jawarhalal Nehru University, where it’s been fantastic to see the cohort of Tibetan masters and PhD students grow and graduate. Special thanks to Jigme Yeshi, Lobsang Yangtso and Srikanth Kondapalli. In the wider exile Tibetan community I have learnt a lot from conversations with Ngawang, Dechen Pemba and Tendor, and support received from Tsering Tashi, Thupten Samdup and Chonpel Tsering at the Office of Tibet in London has been particularly important.

My research on exile Tibetan politics has its early roots in my undergraduate dissertation undertaken in the early 2000s at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, while the arguments developed in this book have their origins in my doctoral research at the Department of Geography, Queen Mary University of London. That research was funded by an ESRC studentship, with additional support from the University of London’s Central Research Fund. I am hugely grateful to Miles Ogborn for his detailed critical feedback and supportive supervision during my PhD. I developed my ideas further during an ESRC postdoctoral fellowship at the School of Geography, Sociology and Politics, Newcastle University in 2010–2011, where the encouragement and friendship of Nina Laurie, Nick Megoran, Alex Jeffrey, Raksha Pande and Alison Williams was invaluable. Many productive conversations were had in the wonderful setting of Tynemouth. Additional research was undertaken during my time as a junior research fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, where the College’s research fund enabled fieldwork in India in 2011 and 2012 and an RGS-IBG Small Research Grant funded research on the diplomatic practices of unrecognised states. Cross-disciplinary conversations with Joya Chatterji, David Washbrook, Bhaskar Vira and Philippa Williams at the Centre for South Asian Studies helped hone many of my arguments, while working with Alice Wilson on questions of legitimacy and exile has been a fantastic experience: she is a scholar of incredible knowledge, diligence and generosity. The writing of this book was completed during my current role at the University of Oxford. Whilst my teaching commitments at Oxford have in many ways delayed the completing of this book, my students at St Catherine’s College and those who have taken my course on ‘Geopolitics in the margins’ have been a wonderful source of feedback and inspiration: thank you.

Some of the arguments made in this book have appeared in articles published in Political Geography (2009), Geoforum (2012, 2015), Area (2013), Annals of the AAG (2013), Contemporary South Asia (2011) and Environment and Planning D: Society and Space (2012). I am grateful to the editors and anonymous reviewers for their detailed reading and constructive criticism of my work. Parts of this book have
been presented at seminars, workshops and conferences in Cambridge, London, Sheffield, Nottingham, Edinburgh, Singapore, Washington DC, University of Virginia and University of Washington. I am grateful to Phil Howell, Deepta Chopra, Sharath Srinivasan, Nayanika Mathur, David Beckingham, Andrew Barry, Sonali Joshi, Dan Hammett, Alex Vasudevan, Dan Swanton, Rebon Bannerjee, Tashi Rabgey and Craig Jeffrey for their hospitality and critical engagement on these occasions. Valuable feedback has also been received from presentations made at conferences of the Association of American Geographers, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), International Association for Tibetan Studies, European Association for South Asian Studies, Asian Borderlands Research Network and International Studies Association. With regards the latter, discussions with Nisha Shah have been especially useful in fine-tuning my arguments around territory. Friends and colleagues in Tibet studies in particular have provided invaluable advice, support and encouragement. Special thanks go to Tina Harris, Sara Shneiderman, Mark Turin, Dibyesh Anand, Carole McGranahan, Emily Yeh, Tsering Topgyal, Hildegard Diemberger, Tsering Shakya, Robbie Barnett, Tashi Tsering and Emma Martin. My academic ‘home’, however, remains in political geography, and support and advice from many colleagues, but especially Jason Dittmer, James Sidaway, Phil Steinberg and Klaus Dodds, has been invaluable.

The current and previous human geography editors of the RGS-IBG Book Series who have overseen the various stages of this publication – Dave Featherstone and Neil Coe – have been fantastic both in terms of offering supportive critique and being reassuringly prompt and encouraging. The same goes for the staff at John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, in particular Jacqueline Scott, whose patience and diligence in keeping things on track have been much appreciated. Anonymous reviewers of the proposal and the manuscript provided much appreciated feedback, critique and suggestions on refining the arguments made. Many thanks also to Ailsa Allen and Edward Oliver for creating the maps that appear as Figures 3.1 and 4.1 respectively, and to Tibetan Review for permission to reproduce Losang Gyatso’s cartoon (Figure 5.1) and to the Planning Commission for permission to reproduce Figure 6.1. Finally, thanks to Heather and Gordon McConnell for their unquestioning support for a daughter with itchy feet and a wandering mind, Abi Brunswick for her listening ear and humour and, most of all, to Conall Watson for his wisdom, encouragement and love.
Note on Transliteration

The Wylie system of transliteration is popular within Tibetan studies as it remains faithful to original Tibetan spellings. However, as it offers little guide as to the actual pronunciation of Tibetan it can be unwieldy for those unfamiliar with the spoken language. The closest to a standardised phonetic rendering of Tibetan is the Tibetan and Himalayan Library’s Simplified Phonetic Transcription system developed by David Germano and Nicolas Tournadre. In order to make Tibetan terms readable in this book I have largely drawn on this system, which is based on the Central Tibetan dialect. Exceptions include terms and titles that have easily recognisable spellings, for example Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama.

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

Crossing the square in front of the parliament building, I enter the Department of Home, where the mildewed walls and peeling layers of paint are evidence of decades of monsoon rains and attempted repairs. The office of the Additional Secretary is typical of Tibetan Government offices throughout India. There’s a photograph of the Dalai Lama, a map of Tibet and one of India, a panorama photograph of the Tibetan capital Lhasa and a promotional calendar from a local Indian printer hopeful for a renewed contract. The Additional Secretary explains to me over Tibetan tea and Indian biscuits that he is currently evaluating agricultural yields from settlements in Orissa, liaising with the Department of Health over a TB awareness programme, and heading a committee to oversee locally elected assemblies. Next door, the Department of Security is screening applications for ‘Indian Registration Certificates for Tibetans’, with batches of forms ready to be dispatched to the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi. At the Department of Information and International Relations the Minister is preparing for a press conference on recent events inside Tibet, and over at the Department of Finance applications are being filed for the ‘Green
There is both a familiar mundanity to this scene of bureaucratic busyness, and a sense of ‘out of place-ness’ (Cresswell 1996). Tibetans in the monsoon rains of India, Members of Parliament in monastic robes and individuals ‘playing’ at being state bureaucrats and foreign ministers. This might catch our attention as a somewhat intriguing set-up, but it is also one that is easy to dismiss. No government or state legally recognises the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGiE). This institution has no legal jurisdiction over territory in Tibet or in exile, it operates within the sovereign state of India, and it is vilified as a ‘separatist political group campaigning against the motherland’ by the Chinese Government (Zhu Weiqun cited in Aiming 2011: 8). At first glance, therefore, this government-in-exile appears to be both a powerless pawn in Asian geopolitics and simply another political ‘oddity’ on the margins of the inter-state system.

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

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

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

**The Case of Exile Tibet**

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

In 1950, China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) entered Chamdo in eastern Tibet, and by 1951 had declared Tibet’s ‘peaceful liberation’. Eight years later, the PLA crushed the Tibetan national uprising in the capital Lhasa, and the Dalai Lama and around 80,000 Tibetans crossed the Himalayas to seek refuge in India, Nepal and Bhutan. Today, the Tibetan diaspora numbers over 128,000, with 74% residing in self-contained settlements and scattered communities in India (Planning Commission 2010). On 29 April 1960 the Dalai Lama re-established the
Tibetan government in the north Indian town of Dharamsala, with the twin task of restoring freedom in Tibet and rehabilitating the Tibetan refugees. Over the following decades the exiled Tibetan community, under the leadership of the Dalai Lama and more recently the democratically elected Tibetan ‘Prime Minister’, has developed, expanded and institutionalised the TGiE, an exilic political structure that is widely regarded as one of the best organised in the world.

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

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

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

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

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

The first of these sets of debates concerns understandings of the state. The state is certainly not the most intuitive conceptual lens through which to view the case of exile Tibet. For a start, this is a situation where the existence of a legally recognised state in the past is disputed and where a state in the future is not only inconceivable under existing political conditions, but is not currently
being demanded by the exiled elite. Indeed, if we are to follow legal definitions of the state as a juridical entity of the international system and a government as the exclusive coercive organisation that represents a state (Robinson 2013), then what Tibetans in exile have brought with them and have (re)constructed within India simply counts as neither. However, as the following chapters demonstrate, when viewed through the lens of everyday state practices, the seeming disjuncture of the conventional institution of the state and the case of exile Tibet shed valuable light on the contemporary nature of the state. Such a dialogue needs to be facilitated carefully, and a particular route through state theory has been chosen for this task.

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, the idea of rehearsal developed in this book is a framework that encourages a convergence of thinking on the state and performance with questions of temporality. With the split mandate of dealing with immediate needs in exile and continuing the struggle for a future back in the homeland defining exile communities, cases such as the TGiE have a very particular and acute sense of political temporality. A key feature of exile is being stuck in limbo, of waiting. Rehearsing the State engages with a growing body of scholarship examining people’s experiences of chronic waiting (e.g. Mains 2007) and, in doing so, it charts the Janus-faced nature of prolonged ‘timepass’ (Jeffrey 2010). On the one hand the debilitating disillusionment of being ‘stuck’ in exile, and on the other hand the productive aspects of waiting: of experimentation, preparation and reflection. Central to these more positive attributes is how the temporality of the future shapes the exile present. The exiled Tibetan leadership has, in
the past, explicitly stated that the purpose of the time in exile is to experiment with state practices in anticipation of implementing these within a future Tibet (Planning Council 1994). A very particular relationship between the state and temporality is thus being articulated here, and it is one that speaks to a growing body of literature on anticipatory action (Anderson 2010; Collier 2008). In the discussion that follows I set this focus on the forms of imagination, performance and calculation through which futures are made present alongside issues of prolonged waiting and the situation of exile. I thus ask what happens to these anticipatory logics when the time frame is extended indefinitely, and how futures are anticipated and acted upon at the scale of the nation.

**Researching a State-That-is-Not-a-State**

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

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