

# Radboud Universiteit



## **THE LINK BETWEEN BHUTANESE SENSE OF BELONGING AND THE DESIRE TO GO ABROAD**

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Master Thesis in Conflicts, Territories and Identities

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## **DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE**

I hereby declare that this thesis, “THE LINK BETWEEN BHUTANESE SENSE OF BELONGING AND THE DESIRE TO GO ABROAD”, is my own work and by my own effort and that it has not been accepted anywhere else for the award of any other degree or diploma. Where sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'I' and 'K' followed by 'M' and 'A', with a horizontal line crossing through the middle.

## **Abstract**

The individual's perceived and imagined sense of belongingness is shaped by various factors, and it is increasingly relevant in an era in which people are on the move as a result of, for example, conflict, climate change, water shortage, or economic gains. The academic literature in the Himalayan region analysed the concept of sense of belongingness, but lacks to do this in relation to the outward movement of the most productive segment of society. By answering the question “*What is the relationship between the factors comprising Bhutanese sense of belonging and the desire to work or study abroad?*”, this study seeks to contribute to the academic literature by firstly drawing attention to the salient factors contributing to Bhutanese sense of belonging, secondly the aspects pushing and pulling Bhutanese to work or study abroad, and thirdly analysing whether a more global sense of space exists. Subsequently, this study moves on to link the two sections. The empirical findings show that the presented dominant narrative of what it takes to be Bhutanese is socially constructed, but remains to be a lived reality, and is therefore real in its nature. This shared lived reality resembles a transnational attachment to Bhutan, which moves away from the attachment to the physical space towards an emotional and perceived attachment to the place. Although globalisation links to cultural interconnectedness, Bhutanese present their sense of belonging as a motivating factor and desire to return to Bhutan, which is a perceived transnational attachment to the place. The utopian image of Bhutan is criticised based on the researchers own experience of getting a research cancelled, which reveals the power structures in Bhutan.

**Keywords:** Sense of belongingness, Push and pull factors, Global Sense of Space, Dominant narrative, Social constructivism, Lived reality, Globalisation, Transnational attachment, Bhutan

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## Abbreviations

CID	Citizen Identity Card
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNH	Gross National Happiness
HM	His Majesty the King
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission

# 1. Introduction

Bhutan is a unique, landlocked Himalayan country, known for its Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, being one of the few carbon negative countries and its strict immigration policy (Monaco 2017). Whereas the majority of the countries worldwide measure their gross domestic product (GDP), Bhutan introduced the GNH philosophy, thereby shifting away from merely measuring the material well-being to scaling the happiness level of its inhabitants. Additionally, Bhutan is carbon negative and the progressive environmental policy is ensured by the constitutional legislation of having 60 percent of its land covered by forest (GVI Planet 2022). Furthermore, tourists are obliged to pay a daily fee when visiting Bhutan, which is part of the high volume, low impact policy (Kuensel 2021). The emphasis on conservation instead of mass-tourism is at the base of this policy (Yeginsu 2022).

This country opened its borders in the 1970's, and is therefore a prime spot in analysing the tendencies of the Bhutanese inhabitants in relation to their physical or imagined sense of belongingness to a place (Yeginsu 2022). Academic literature on globalisation pinpoints towards a paradoxical effect (Geschiere 2011). On the one hand, this phenomenon enables the free movement of people, which links to the interconnectedness of the world and thus, a potential widening of individuals' perceived belongingness (Geschiere 2011, Nederveen Pieterse, 1996). On the other hand, a trend towards "*acceleration of preoccupation*" with autochthony and belonging is also visible (Geschiere 2011, p. 322). In relation to Bhutan, a tendency is apparent for Bhutanese inhabitants, as a prevailing will and desire to work and or study internationally is common. In fact, a growing concern is the combination of around 16,000 Bhutanese living abroad and the fertility rate ranking at 1.7, while 2.1 is needed for replacement (Kuensel 2021). Thus, the question arises what the link is between the strong sense of belongingness and the (international) future-oriented behaviour of inhabitants, and students in particular (Seginer et al. 2004).

The above will be analysed by first drawing on the research conducted in Bhutan (Chapter 2), which leads to the research question. Secondly, in the theoretical framework section (Chapter 3), the concepts of sense of belongingness, the will to go abroad, and the global sense of space will be analysed. The theoretical angle applied in this thesis will be presented. Thirdly, the methodology (Chapter 4) will argue the (empirical) research design used for this research. Fourthly, the empirical analysis will dive into the factors important for Bhutanese sense (Chapter 5), which will be followed by the aspects motivating Bhutanese to go abroad (Chapter 6). After that, both concepts will be linked to one another (Chapter 7), which will be followed by the researcher's experience of conducting research in Bhutan (Chapter 8), and a discussion will be presented. Finally, the limitations (Chapter 9) and concluding remarks (Chapter 10) will be presented.



## 2. Bhutan: sense of belongingness and the urge to departure

Within this section, the research question of this thesis will be conferred based on presenting the gap in the literature of the confined Bhutanese research volume on the sense of belonging, in relation to the Bhutanese desire to work or study internationally.

The Bhutanese studies that have been carried out with regard to relevant social science fields can be presented by emphasising culture and GNH (Monaco 2017), documented cultural plurality, sovereignty and security (Schäppi 2005), and how schools enhance the Bhutanese values of “*family*”, “*friends*”, “*school*”, “*hometown*”, and “*country*” (Sakurai 2011, p. 169). The amount of research conducted by Bhutanese scholars is limited. Additionally, foreign researchers are restricted in terms of access to Bhutan. Thus, the volume of Bhutanese research in general is incomplete, and in particular research on Bhutanese sense of belonging is absent.

Additionally, globalisation suggests a reduction of focus on the local and thus a greater pull towards the global (Savage et al. 2004). However, other scholars also pinpoint towards a paradoxical effect on society, as it seems to lead to the intensification of local knowledge on belonging, sovereignty and autonomy (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). The research conducted in the Himalayan region on the belonging to collectivities by focusing on the social, political, and ethnic identities (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011). A country like Bhutan has recently been exposed to globalisation, and it is therefore a prime site to analyse the effects of globalisation. The research conducted in the Himalayas presents an analysis of the important factors in people's sense of belonging, but has not investigated these factors in relation to the desire to move abroad.

Furthermore, a growing concern is the limited Bhutanese population size, as Bhutanese inhabitants leave the country to work and or study abroad. Statistics on the number of Bhutanese living abroad vary. According to a government report 15,904 Bhutanese were residing abroad in 2021 (Bhutanese Business 2022). The age of the Bhutanese settling internationally ranges from 20 to 45 years (Bhutanese Business 2022; Kuensel 2021). At first, the inward flowing remittances were considered to be a positive contributor to the country (Bhutanese Business 2022). However, the development has become worrisome since the fertility rate dropped to 1,7, while 2.1 is essential to ensure a stable population size (Kuensel 2021). Lastly, another reason for apprehension is that Bhutanese are more and more hesitant to return to Bhutan (Bhutanese Business 2022; Kuensel 2021).

The primary and secondary factors pulling Bhutanese inhabitants are based on increasing material wealth and educational purposes. An example of this is the following: ‘99 percent of the Bhutanese are leaving for Australia to look for a better future and to support their families at home with their dollar paying jobs’ (The Bhutanese 2022). The low wages in Bhutan motivate Bhutanese to move abroad. In fact, working a physical labour job in Australia for a year leads to earning an amount that would not be possible during lifelong employment in the civil service or private company (Bhutanese Business 2022). Likewise, low job opportunities also encourage Bhutanese to move

abroad (Bhutanese Business 2022). The combination of higher wages, and job opportunities enable Bhutanese inhabitants to eventually return, purchase land, construct a house, live a rich life, and pass the possessions on to future generations (Bhutanese Business 2022). Apart from the material gain, another factor motivating Bhutanese students to move abroad is to study, develop their skills and contribute to their country upon return (The Bhutanese 2022).

To some extent, the push and pull factors initiating the outward movement of the highly skilled, educated individuals, can be considered as a brain drain (Adeyemi et al. 2018). Whereas the push factors are contributing towards the departure of this salient section of the population, the factors that pull inhabitants are the positive features of the receiving country. However, it must be questioned whether the notion of brain drain is the correct conceptualization for Bhutan. An inherent aspect of the concept focuses on the application of a similar set of skills in international fields, and for Bhutanese inhabitants moving abroad, the majority of the people secure income by working a physical labour job, so highly trained or highly skilled is not applicable for the people leaving Bhutan.

## 2.1 Research question

As presented in the previous section, there is a clear gap in the academic literature with regards to Bhutanese sense of belonging and the motivating factors at the core of the outward movement of Bhutanese individuals. The compelling factor of this research links to the limited accessibility of foreign researchers in Bhutan. Furthermore, as the majority of research focused on sense of belonging is conducted from a western point of view, it is relevant to analyse the sense of belonging in Bhutan. The central question of this research is therefore the following:

*“What is the relationship between the factors comprising Bhutanese sense of belonging and the desire to work or study abroad?”.*

### 3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical analysis will first present the literature on sense of belonging (3.1), which will lead to the conceptual frame for sense of belonging, based on the combination of place-belongingness (3.1.1), politics of belonging (3.1.2) and global sense of a space (3.1.3) (Antonsich 2010; Conradson 2005; Massey, 1991). Moreover, the push and pull factors (3.3) of moving abroad will be analysed.

#### 3.1 Sense of belonging

The concept of sense of belonging has been researched extensively and within this section the knowledge at hand will be presented, as well as the conceptual distinction between sense of belonging and identity.

The desire and need to belong to a group is regarded as a basic human need (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Deci and Ryan 2000). The characteristics commonly used in definitions on concepts of belonging are *“feeling needed, important, integral, valued, respected or feeling in harmony with the group or system”* (Mahar et al. 2013, p. 1030). The sense of belonging refers to the individual attachment and perception of the self in relation to and in interaction with a group (Mahar et al. 2013). In other words, being involved in relationships and the perception of acceptance by others is of importance, and at the base of a positive sense of belonging (Anthias 2011; Banting and Soroka 2012). From a broader social identity lens, the sense of belonging links to the affiliation with groups in the sense of solidarity (Leach et al. 2008), common feeling with in-group members (Cameron 2004) and the interdependence of group members (Phinney and Ong 2007; Fuller-Rowell et al. 2013).

However, the concept of sense of belonging is academically perceived as vague and fuzzy, as perceptions and emotions are experienced and expressed differently by individuals (Knott 2017). In other words, it culturally varies how individuals express and feel a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary 1995). Although extensive research within the field of social science has been conducted, theoretical and analytical consensus has not been reached (Mahar et al. 2013). Within the current literature the concept has occasionally lacked definement, used as a synonym for identity and connected to citizenship.

Firstly, in some research belonging has not been defined, as it was perceived to be self-explanatory. The former can best be seen within the following fields; geography (Malone 2007; Nagel and Staeheli 2005; Schueth and O’Loughlin 2008; Winders 2007), sociology (Marshall and Foster 2002) and also theories on culture (Bromley 2000; Duruz 2002).

Secondly, at times belonging is used as a synonym for identity, be it collective, national or ethnic. To start with the collective identity, belonging is a ‘thicker’ concept compared to (collective) identity (Joanna and Toffin 2011). Belonging ranges from *“formal and informal memberships; material entitlements; and identifications, as well as social ties”* (Joanna and Toffin 2011, p. xxii). In relation, belonging to a nation is also extensively researched and is found to go beyond formal

membership with regard to citizenship. The underlying reason for this is because belonging relates to membership between members, loyalty and commitment (Crowley 1998; Gellner 1983; Guibernau 2004). Examples of this can be found in various fields such as sociology (Bond 2006; Colombo et al. 2009; Fortier 1997; Fox 2006; Gubert 2000; Kiely et al. 2005; Scheibelhofer 2007; Westwood and Phizacklea 2000), theories of anthropology (Dragojlovic 2008; Lovell 1998; Warriner 2007), psychology (Arcidiacono et al. 2007; Hernandez et al. 2007), political science (Croucher 2004; Migdal 2004), as well as geography (Armstrong 1998; Ehrkamp 2005a,b; Mackenzie 2004; Madsen and van Naerssen 2003; Sporton and Valentine 2007; Veronis 2007) and lingual theories (Meinhof and Galsinski 2005; Volcic 2005).

Thirdly, belonging has been used in relation to citizenship, which is perceived to be essential in belonging as it relates to the formal identification with groups (Antonsich 2010). The lack of elaboration on the difference between citizenship and belonging can be found in various fields of research; political science (Clark 2009; Hampshire 2005; Mason 2000; Varsanyi 2005), geography (Ho 2006, 2009; White and Gilmartin 2008; Winders 2007), sociology (Clark 2009; McNevin 2006; Wong 2007), anthropology (Getrich 2008; Rosaldo 1994), as well as history and law (Bhabha 1999; Kaplan 1993; Fahrmeir and Jones 2008).

The above examples display that there is a lack of theoretical and conceptual consensus, but the literature acknowledges that an individual has multiple senses of belonging which can conflict with one another, is influenced by the individual's environment, and links to the question of the power of choice (Marshall and Foster 2002, 186; Croucher 2004, 41; Johnston 2005, 109; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005, 526). In fact, individuals feel a sense of belonging towards different groups and or systems (Mahar et al. 2013). In relation to this, differences in an individual sense of belonging may clash depending on the situation (Mahar et al. 2013). The environment can either have a positive and or negative influence on the individual sense of belongingness, and can be seen as an internal or external influence. The internal factor would be that the individual feels a sense of belongingness, whereas the external influence focuses on social support networks leading to a sense of belonging (Mahar et al. 2013). Accordingly, the role of individual choice can best be presented by the situation in which an individual meets the criteria of belonging to a group and is accepted to belong but lacks the interest to belong (Mahar et al. 2013). In contrast, an individual might feel a sense of belonging, however lacks the authority to choose as a result of discriminatory factors (Mahar et al. 2013). It is argued that the location and the family which an individual is born into is not a choice, and therefore it is argued that the individual is not free to choose (Carrillo Rowe 2005).

Belonging is therefore multidimensional and must be seen as a process (*becoming*), instead of analysing the concept as a static entity (*being*) (Ilcan 2002, 8–9; Kannabiran et al. 2006, 189; Mackenzie 2004, 118; Mee 2009, 843; Scheibelhofer 2007, 321). In line with this reasoning, the primordial argumentation of belonging is criticised and the socially constructedness is argued upon (Kumsa 2005, 181; Savage et al. 2004, 12). As mentioned above, belonging can be enacted or

performed in various ways (Bell 2009; Duruz 2002; Fenster 2005; Fenster and Vizel 2006; Fortier 1997; Instone 2009; Lovell 1998; Mee 2009). In fact, belonging goes beyond identification (Anthias 2006; Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011), and thereby goes against the permanence implied by the term of identity construction (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011). The concept remains pertinent to analyse for both ‘traditional’ societies based on kinship units, and ‘modern’ societies such as nations (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011).

As mentioned above, the focus on belonging in relation to citizenship or identity has been emphasised tremendously. However, the emotional attachment to a place has not been researched extensively (Antonsich, 2010). In short, sense of belongingness;

*“comprises not only formal membership and labelling, but also imagined and narrated, more or less fluid, we-group constructions related to sameness, unity, and togetherness.”* (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011, p. xi).

### 3.1.1. Place-belonging

The sense of belonging is connected to a territorial place, the individual feeling of safety and feeling at ‘home’ (Antonsich 2010). In detail, it is the real or symbolic space in which the individual has an emotional attachment and feels secure, comfortable and familiar (Hooks 2009). A lack of belonging will link to a sense of desolation, alienation, and displacement (Dorling et al. 2008, 23; Hooks 2009). However, it must be stressed that this attachment to a space differs per individual, as one can feel attached to one’s home (Walsh 2006, 271), village (Back et al. 1999; Fenster 2005, 251; Mee 2009, 849; Savage et al. 2004, 12, 29), community, nation (Ho 2009, 10; Westood and Phizacklea 2000, 11), continent or the world. In short, belonging can be conceptualised as operating on different scales, depending on the individual.

Five dimensions are focused on in analysing the individual, emotional attachment. Firstly, auto-biographical factors such as (childhood)memories connected to a place (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, 459) are of importance. Secondly, individual ties to family and friends and interactions in general are focused on (Ager and Strang 2004, iv; Chow 2007, 514). However, it is stressed that not all relations are equally important in contributing towards the sense of belonging as argued when analysing ‘weak ties’ of interacting with strangers (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Buonfino and Thomson 2007, 16). The relationship with the group must be important to the self, positive and stable (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Thirdly, culture and in particular language is another factor contributing to the individual sense of belonging. Language is stressed upon based on the ability to not only understand what the other is saying, but also to understand the meaning of the language that is being used (Ignatieff 1994). Apart from language, cultural aspects such as traditions, habits and religion are equally contributing to a sense of belonging. Fourthly, economic factors are factors through which individuals have a sense of stability, also in relation to having a future perception (Jayaweera and

Choudhury 2008, 107; Sporton and Valentine 2007, 12–13). Fifthly and lastly, it must not be denied that legal factors such as citizenship contribute towards a sense of safety and therefore belonging (Alexander 2008; Buonfino and Thomson 2007; Ignatieff 1994, Loader 2006; Nelson 2007; Sporton and Valentine 2007; Vieten 2006).

### 3.1.2 Politics of belonging

To have an individual sense of feeling at ‘home’, the social environment is also of importance, and this is addressed within the politics of belonging. As a consequence, being rejected by the environment will have an influence on an individual’s perceived or felt sense of belonging (Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008). Thus, the individual feeling of hominess, the emotional attachment to a place, is related to the discourse of inclusion/exclusion operating at that place. It can be stated that, apart from belonging being different for each individual’s attachment to a place, it is also influenced by the “*sociology of power*” and not isolated to the individual itself (Probyn 1996; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005 p. 528). The politics of belonging is referred to by the analogy of “*dirty work of boundary maintenance*” (Crowley 1999, p. 30). Discourse leading to differentiating between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is at the base of politics of belonging (Bhabra 2006, 39; Lovell 1998c, 53; Yuval-Davis 2006, 204). Negotiation is at play within the politics of belonging between the side that demands belonging, consciously or unconsciously, and the side that has the power to grant belonging (Croucher 2004, 41). These divisions establish societal boundaries, hierarchies and perceptions on who belongs and who does not (Skey 2014).

It could be argued that the notion of citizenship, also known as political belonging, is essential within the politics of belonging. However, even if political belonging is a given, a sense of belonging with regards to a place might lack. In other words, the concept of belonging goes beyond the notion of citizenship, as addressed earlier (Crowley 1999). In fact, the physical home of a person might also feel suffocating as it could be a space in which a strong patriarchal control is experienced (Fenster, 2005).

In short, an analysis will be carried out along the lines of place-belonging and politics of belonging. In light of the place-belonging, the five dimensions will be tested and for the politics of belonging, the notion of citizenship and the allround “*sociology of power*” will be considered (Probyn 1996; Yuval-Davis et al. 2005, p. 528).

### 3.1.3 Global sense of space

Doreen Massey argues on a global sense of space by pointing out that spaces are not merely local, but instead are a combination of relations, who operate together and lead to situations that would have been different otherwise (Massey, 1991) In relation to time being seen in the light of change, space is perceived to be flat, given, and not subject to change (Massey, 1991). She counters this stance, and motivates that space is a cut through of stories, of the people in the space (Massey, 1991), and

therefore is a heterogeneous mix (Massey, 1991). The line of argumentation continues by criticising the unequal power distribution that is connected to social relations, and she specifically argues in favour of accepting the multiplicity of space (Massey, 1991). An example of this is the labels given to developed, developing and underdeveloped countries. It suggests that there is one truth, a linear history, and a clear path which developing and underdeveloped countries should take. However, this notion neglects the multiplicity connected to space. In short, she argues that the space is influenced by the global, and therefore shifts away from the emphasis on the local (Massey, 1991).

### 3.3 Push and Pull factors

The brain drain can be seen in light of the movement of highly skilled, educated individuals to other countries based on push and pull factors (Adeyemi et al. 2018). The academic debate with regard to which factors contribute towards the outward movement of inhabitants is widespread. As there are various aspects motivating people to move, a debroad number of factors is chosen from the literature (Adeyemi et al. 2018). The push factors are those that contribute towards the skilled and educated people to leave and

*‘includes political turmoil, problem of unemployment, economic uncertainty, poverty, underdevelopment, lack of research facilities, job discrimination, absence of conducive working environments, lack of freedom’* (Adeyemi et al. 2018, p. 69).

In relation, the factors that pull inhabitants are the positive features such as;

*‘economic outlook, the prestige of foreign training, a better quality of life, higher paying jobs, modernised educational system that gives room for quality training, conducive political atmosphere, intellectual freedom, and so on.’* (Adeyemi et al. 2018, p. 69).

As previously addressed, it must be questioned whether ‘brain drain’ is the correct conceptualization for the outward movement of Bhutanese inhabitants. The concept argues that the highly skilled part of the population leaves the country of origin and applies its skills in alternative countries. As for Bhutan, the majority of the people working abroad secure income by working a physical labour job, and therefore leave the skilled qualifications obtained in Bhutan behind. Thus, this research will analyse the push and pull factors mentioned in the respondents’ answers by applying the academically accepted factors presented above (Adeyemi et al. 2018).

## 4. Methodology

To answer the central question of this research, a qualitative approach was used. The reason for this method is the subjectivity of the concept of sense of belonging. Within the Research Design (4.1) section, it will become clear why a qualitative approach has been chosen, why semi-structured interviews were opted for, which questions were asked, why particular people were asked to participate and how citing was realised. After that, the Empirical Research Design (4.2) shows how the concepts have been analysed by established criteria based on the literature.

### 4.1 Research Design

In order to obtain in-depth insight on the matter, this research has investigated the central question by means of personal interviews. The underlying reason for this is because a sense of belonging is a personal matter, which makes individual explanations necessary, and essential in grasping the picture. In particular, a semi-structured interview method has been used to have a conversation focused on open-ended questions. By doing this, it was possible to ask follow-up questions related to more specific evidence on the factors of influence on Bhutanese sense of belonging. As such, the use of a protocol to guide the interview is a way to structure interviews, while maintaining the ability to ask for additional clarification.

In this study 50 Royal Thimphu College (RTC) students were interviewed. By collecting in-depth information from 50 people, an insight in the students' sense of belonging was realised. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years. The reason this age range was chosen was because this research aimed to research the sense of belonging in relation to future plans amongst college students. The interviewees were randomly asked to participate. Additionally, this research interviewed 25 female and 25 male students. The reason for this was to get a representation of the genders. Depending on the interviewee the duration of an interview varied from 30 minutes to 1,5 hours. During the interviewing process, all norms, values and needs of interviewee were respected. The interview was conducted on a strictly voluntary basis, and the participant could at all times have the power to end the interview.

The main question the participants were asked focused on which factors are important for the individual in their Bhutanese sense of belonging. As this is a broad question, the follow up question would ask in-depth questions on each of the factors contributing to the sense of belonging. After this, the focus shifted to their short and long term goals. Whenever the student mentioned the intention to work internationally, the motivation was focused on. Finally, the relationship between the students' sense of belongingness and the intention to go abroad (or not) was quierried.



## 4.2 Empirical Research Design

For both the concept of sense of belonging and the push and pull factors of working abroad, criteria were drawn from scientific literature. These criteria were used as a tool to analyse whether the answers given by the participants approved or countered the concepts investigated in this research. In this section, the criteria for both the concepts are presented. After that, a section will show which paper was chosen as a guide to analyse the interviews.

### 4.2.1 Sense of belonging

For the concept of sense of belonging, the answers of participants were analysed in light of the combination of place-belonging and politics of belonging. Within the place-belongingness five factors will be used as a guide to analyse the data. The following criteria will be used:

- Language and culture (traditions, habits and religion) (Ignatieff 1994)
- Auto-biographical factors such as (childhood)memories (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, 459)
- Individual ties to family and friends and interactions in general (Ager and Strang 2004, iv; Chow 2007, 514)
- Economic factors (Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008, 107; Sporton and Valentine 2007, 12–13)
- Legal factors such as citizenship (Alexander 2008; Buonfino and Thomson 2007; Ignatieff 1994, Loader 2006; Nelson 2007; Sporton and Valentine 2007; Vieten 2006).

In relation to the politics of belonging, citizenship will be analysed (Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008). Furthermore, a light will be shed on those people with citizenship who also grew up with a mix of various cultures, leading to a different treatment from the rest.

Lastly, the global sense of space will be analysed by looking whether the perspective of the interviewees is on the global or the local, and how they argue on the chain of happenings that lead to being in the current position (Massey, 1991).

The academic literature sees this approach as a comprehensive way to analyse sense of belonging, which is why these criteria were chosen (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

### 4.2.2 Push and Pull factors

The push factors are those that contribute towards the urge among the skilled and educated people to want to leave and the criteria that will be used are the following: (Adeyemi et al. 2018, p. 69).

- Political turmoil
- Problem of unemployment

- Economic uncertainty
- Poverty
- Underdevelopment
- Lack of research facilities
- Job discrimination
- Absence of conducive working environments
- Lack of freedom

Related factors that pull inhabitants are: (Adeyemi et al. 2018, p. 69).

- Economic outlook
- The prestige of foreign training
- A better quality of life
- Higher paying jobs
- Modernised educational system that gives room for quality training,
- Conducive political atmosphere
- Intellectual freedom

These factors were chosen because the scientific literature on the push and pull factors presents these factors as essential and salient in analysing the concept (Adeyemi et al. 2018).

#### 4.2.3 Interview

To analyse the data gathered by interviews, this paper follows the article of Jašina-Schäfer (2019) in terms of evaluating interviews. The previous article interpreted interviewing people with regard to their sense of belonging. Since this is what the paper at hand does, it is relevant to follow the example of Jašina-Schäfer (2019). The interview data analysis was done based on principles of thematic content analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun, Clarke, 2006). An inductive content analysis was used because this enables a bottom-up approach to analyse the data gathered from the interviews.

All names of interviewees referred to in this thesis are Bhutanese pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Additionally, all interviewees were conducted in 2022. Therefore, no further text referencing based on the year will be done throughout this paper.

## 5. Bhutanese sense of belonging

This section will analyse the factors of importance to Bhutanese sense of belonging and it will thereby distinguish between the place-belonging, the politics of belonging and the global sense of space. However, in order to grasp the complete picture of factors composing Bhutanese sense of belongingness, it is relevant to firstly draw attention towards the emphasis on cultural preservation.

### 5.1 Cultural and identity preservation

The narrative shared by the interviewees in answering questions on their sense of belongingness has its base in the emphasis on cultural and identity preservation. The underlying theme of this voiced priority must be seen in light of Bhutan's geopolitical situation and draws upon both Chinese and Indian expansionism, as well as Tibetan and Sikkim's loss of sovereignty.

Dema Yuden mentioned the Chinese and Indian policy by addressing that *“The geopolitics in South Asia and the expansion of China and India is a threat. If China were to continue the way they expand and if India was also to go along with China in expanding their territories, then what is the strength we have? There is nothing. There was both fear and perceived fear of what might happen to the long term sovereignty of the state”*. The threat of China and India will therefore be an example drawn upon by the students in answering questions on their sense of belonging.

Additionally, the narrative shared by the respondents related to Tibet and Sikkim is that both cultures developed characteristics similar to China and India, which caused the loss of sovereignty. Norbu Wangmo shared that *“what students were made to believe is that Tibet has lost its sovereignty because it lost its culture as it was trying to borrow culture from China. This is not true but that fear was instilled in us that we have to take care of our culture otherwise we might also not just lose our culture but also lose our identity”*. Another clear example of such a statement is made by Kinley Phuentsho in drawing on the following statement: *“The country, Sikkim, which is now part of India, did not protect their culture”*. It is understandable that students repeat this narrative, as Dema Yuden mentioned that *“students are right to say that, as that was being taught by our Dzongkha teacher. Even if you interview Dzongkha teachers now, many do not have that clear an understanding of how Tibet was taken over by China and the claim that China had on Tibet”*.

A sense of security is therefore required to face the expansionist policy of China and India in relation to the narratives of Tibet and Sikkim. Dema Yuden elaborates on this by stating *“in that way it was very important for Bhutan to give some confidence to the people that nothing is going to happen to us. What is important to us is to stick together as one nation, as one state”*. As a result, apart from cultural preservation, developing soft power is also mentioned as an important asset to be drawn on, and this is stated by Dema Yuden saying the following; *“We had no power, both hard and soft power. We are just gradually trying to build soft power on this and using GNH to push towards our national goal”*.

The emphasis on identity preservation is therefore institutionalised within the upbringing of children in families and focused on in the educational system. Yangchen Lhamo elaborated by stating that *“from 2018, the Ministry of Education established that there will be one week, before academics start, about value orientation. They teach all sorts of things starting from our dress code and how we bow”*.

Logically, in answering questions about factors that are important for Bhutanese culture in relation to sense of belonging, statements on cultural preservation are recurring. To ensure the country's sovereignty and independence, the students emphasised cultural preservation and the felt responsibility to pass the culture onto the next generations. Kinley Phuentsho mentioned this by saying that *“we have that feeling about our image to the world in terms of tradition and culture. I want them to recognize me as a Bhutanese, because I have my strong culture, my strong language, my King. We are a very peaceful country and we have our national dress”*. As such, Karma Chime feels *“the responsibility to pass my unique and different culture onto future generations, as it will have a positive effect on our sovereignty”*.

Thus, by understanding the background on cultural preservation and the emphasis on Bhutanese sovereignty, it enables the reader to grasp what is meant with the various factors compiling Bhutanese culture, as well as various other factors important in Bhutanese sense of belonging.

## 5.2 Place-belonging

In detail, five dimensions are focused on in analysing the individual, emotional attachment. Although the five dimensions are used to analyse the data, the first dimension focusing on culture and language dimension, will be divided into culture (5.2.1), language (5.2.2) and religion (5.2.3). After that, the other dimensions will be addressed; auto-biographical factors such as (childhood)memories related to a place (5.2.4), individual ties with friends and family (5.2.5), economic factors (5.2.6), legal factors (5.2.7) and lastly, other factors (5.2.8) which could not be fitted in the model are elaborated on. This section will therefore present the main factors contributing to Bhutanese sense of belonging.

### 5.2.1 Culture

Culture is a salient factor contributing to the individual sense of belonging (Ignatieff 1994). As culture is a broad concept, this section will be addressing the various factors associated with Bhutanese culture including the national dress (5.2.1.1), *Driglam Namzha* (5.2.1.2), doing good (5.2.1.3), Bhutanese food (5.2.1.4), and festivals (5.2.1.5).

#### 5.2.1.1 National dress: *Gho* and *Kira*

The national dress, the *Gho* and the *Kira* play a fundamental role in Bhutanese sense of belonging, as it is recurrently emphasised on. An example of this is Tshering Dorji mentioning its importance by

addressing that *“The national dress, the Kira, is very important for me. It is a good way of expressing my sense of belonging”*. Another respondent, Dechen Wangmo, mentioned that *“Without disrespecting other national dresses, our national dress is beautiful. The whole comfort, how we maintain it, the way it protects us. It's so beautiful. So that is why I respect it”*.

The foremost reason why the national attire is seen as important to students' sense of belonging is because it shows the Bhutanese responsibility and uniqueness. Dechen Wangmo is of the opinion that wearing the national attire is essential by addressing: *“If we wear our national attire, it distinguishes ‘us’ from ‘them’. This is part of our identity and this is how our country will be saved and protected by the culture. So, if we forget about wearing the Gho's and we end up wearing the western clothes, it is a risk for the country that the other country might invade. They might claim that they have a similar culture as ours and therefore take over”*. As a result, the emphasis to protect is also mentioned by Ngawang Tobgay: *“an example that we, Bhutanese, have the responsibility to follow our traditions, respect it and pass it onto further generations”*. In relation to the previous statement, showing the Bhutanese identity by wearing the national attire is also mentioned by Karma Chime as she says *“If some foreigners come to visit our country, we might look like some other nationality, but I want to let them see that we are Bhutanese by wearing it”*. In relation, students also mention the perceived pride in wearing the Gho or Kira abroad. Passang Tshering mentioned this by saying *“To recognize yourself, we go in the streets of Los Angeles wearing a Gho. Everyone will know that person is from Bhutan, because of the Gho and Kira”*. The above statements show that the emphasis on showing Bhutanese identity towards the outside world is important and must be seen in light of identity preservation.

It is interesting in relation to this to analyse that some see the national attire as a protection mechanism. This is emphasised by Sonam Choden arguing *“in other dresses, like this type of casual Western dress, it might be tempting for men. Just because it is kind of showy. But then our national dress, it has complete protection. Be it cold, hot, rain and there is no worry”*. Pema Choden addressed the same issue by saying *“I feel safe. I don't get exposed. It doesn't mean that our environment is kind of risky or that I feel insecure. It is just that I feel safe and this shows my sense of belongingness”*. Kinley Phuentsho claims the national dress also has significance, but not because of its protection: *“Our national dress is unique, as it is different from other countries. It is the biggest pocket in the world. The Gho is not only about that it covers our body, it has significance”*.

It must be mentioned that, although the national attire is emphasised extensively in the role of sense of belonging, in practise the Gho and Kira are merely, according to Phuentsho Dorji, worn *“during special occasions and when we go to formal institutions. Other than that it is westernised”*. Another example of the previous is presented by Sonam Pema by focusing on the uncomfortableness by addressing *“The people who you see in town you will mostly see wearing the western style. It's uncomfortable when I walk, the Kira. I don't know if I should say this, but I like the western style because it is comfortable”*. Tshering Dorji further emphasised this by sharing that Bhutanese *“have to*

wear *Gho and Kira* when we visit Dzongs and everything”. However, in remote Bhutanese villages, the majority of people wear the attire on a daily basis. This is shared by Tshering Yangchen: “*Usually in the rural places, the people wear Gho and Kira, back home. They feel more comfortable wearing the Gho and Kira and work in the field, go to the forest and collect firewood*”. Tshering Yangchen further mentioned that “*In every office, no matter private or public, we have to wear our national attire. In a way, we are trying to preserve, but we can't control how it will be done throughout the day. How you will wear it after classes. However, at least during the day, from 9-5, you have to wear the national attire*”. In other words, although the significance of the national attire is perceived as essential in students’ sense of belonging, in reality it is solely worn whenever it is required.

The narrative shared on the origin of the national attire is mixed and focused on the third King and *Zhabdrung ngawang namgyel*. On the one hand, Ugyen Wangdi mentioned that “*the National Gho and Kira only came in the 90’s during our third King's time. We were forced. When our country first joined the United Nations (UN), the UN had some kind of criteria that the country should have a national language, national dress, etc. In the time of the Third King, this culture was established. Before that there used to be Gho and Kira but every district would have different kinds*”. On the other hand, the narrative shared by other students pointed towards Buddhist *Zhabdrung ngawang namgyel*. Jigme Lhaden mentioned that “*Before our Zhabdrung ngawang namgyel introduced this Gho and Kira, we didn't have something like that. Our national dress had an in-depth cultural meaning. We were taught the cultural meaning of it in high school, but I don't remember*”. Thus, the narrative that people present is based on what they remembered.

In short, the national attire plays an important role in Bhutanese sense of belonging as students feel the responsibility to protect their cultural distinctness. The emphasis is apparent, but practice shows that obligation is the factor that leads towards the actual practice of wearing the national attire. In other words, although it is considered as important in their sense of belongingness, it is not worn voluntarily on casual occasions.

### **5.2.1.2 Driglam Namzha**

The concept of *driglam namzha* can be broken down to “*the way (lam) of conscious (namzha) harmony (drig)*” (Hutt 2003, 165). As of 1989 the requirement to wear the national attire and adhere to certain etiquette when in public was established (Hutt 2003).

The way the students’ explained the importance of this concept in relation to their sense of belonging can be shown by Pema Karzi Dema elaborating on her behaviour by addressing “*I behave in public as there are some formalities. It's about the way we show respect, how we behave in front of people, the way of respecting others, how I should behave in front of The King*”. Additionally, Ngawang Tobgay mentioned that discipline starts with body posture by sharing that “*Driglam namzha includes everything, even body posture. If I cross my legs in the class, people will say that ‘this guy has no manners’ and all. It is not not allowed, but it does not look good. Discipline starts from our*

body posture”. Kinley Phuentsho further stated that *“For me, the concept of code of conduct, the etiquette, Driglam namzha that actually shapes us. There is a sense of human being to be very loving and kind. It is always there in a human being. The thing is that we are compared with certain ignorance and certain values that are not acceptable in our own social context. But if you are impeded and guided by the driglam namzha, I think you are becoming Bhutanese in that way”*.

Some students’ connect the concept to Buddhism. Kinley Phuentsho elaborates by stating *“There are also a lot of other things which we see that Buddhism has influenced Bhutanese culture. Especially Vidyana Buddhism. The family rituals and in every day of life, for example, how to respect, how to wear, how to act. Those are all conducts shared by Buddhism”*.

However, one critical interviewee reflected on the respect shown to others by addressing the judgemental character of a collectivistic society. Tandin Phurba shared that *“this discipline of being respectful to others, for most, doesn’t come from a genuine wanting to be good, but how others will view you. Society and judgmentalism plays a great role. How I will stand out in society and how my family will stand out in society had an influence. The judgmentalism is really big here. On the one side you have Buddhist values of caring and giving. Unconditional giving without wanting anything in return. The thing is no one is perfect. For Bhutan, for the majority it will be that it is ingrained in us. Buddhist follow it. You live a good life. The merits you accumulate transpire and again you are reborn. It is ingrained in us. Also, being part of the community, you know the people. Whatever you do, people are watching you. So that is the judgemental part”*.

In relation, Phuentsho Dorji explained the above by the desire to fit in by addressing the following: *“Everyone wants to be socially accepted in some way. They don’t want to be seen as an outcast. There is this theory that we learned; a spiral of science. If a teacher asks a question and you know the answer, but no one answers, you also don’t want to, because you don’t want to stand out. You may be a Buddhist and you are really curious about this culture and want to experience it, but everyone else in your society or community is against it, you don’t want to stand out. You don’t want to be a social outcast”*.

In short, *driglam namzha*, the code of conduct is summarised by Dechen Wangmo as *“an umbrella including all manners”*. It includes etiquette concerning the way Bhutanese eat, dress, speak, show respect and that a person should do good to others.

### **5.2.1.3 Doing good**

Interviewees focused on the heart, mindset and ‘doing good’ in their sense of belonging. In other words, the internal factors are more important. Passang Tshering shared the following: *“Many people will identify Bhutanese as someone that wears a Gho and Kira, speaks Dzongkha and eats Emma Datshi. That’s not a factor for me, as anyone can do that. My value is to do something good. If you can’t do something good, don’t do something bad to others. That’s how I think we Bhutanese should be and I think this is how we should have our values. To be a Bhutanese, the factors that are important*

are your mindset". Phuentsho Dorji also agreed *"I know that wearing Gho and speaking Dzongkha is not the only thing that makes you Bhutanese. Because everyone can wear Gho and anyone can speak Dzongkha if they learn. But the way we think, the compassion. We have to do good deeds and help someone who you don't know"*. In short, there is a difference between students emphasising the external factors in their sense of belonging and others finding the 'within' more important. Jigme Lhaden summarised by saying *"It should be within ourselves. Appearance cannot say who we are"*.

Pessang Tshering mentioned that this attitude is connected to Buddhism. *"For me, I consider myself as a Bhutanese because of factors like being good and following Buddhism"*. The reasoning that followed the previous statement is related to the development of the country. Pessang Tshering further elaborated *"If you want to have a strong country, the upcoming youths and students are the mental backbone. If they have that kind of mindset, then I am sure that the country will be prosperous in the future. If they have a bad mindset in which they kill or murder, then it's not going to support our country. Buddhism grows the mindset of people in the right direction and develops Bhutanese"*. He concludes by saying *"For me, the factor to be Bhutanese, is the mindset and heart combined together"*.

On the other hand, Dema Yuden mentioned the contribution to the country as essential in his sense of belonging and addressed this by saying: *"I don't see treating anyone or looking at how valuable one individual is or how connected one individual is to the state, considering these ideals of wearing the national attire, speaking the national language or the dialect. For me that is important, but I think that's secondary for me. The primary is how you are, how you contribute to the country. I think that matters to me more than just showing how you look, how you appear, how you tell people I have respect regarding this, etc"*. Dema Yuden elaborates by stating: *"The whole debate and idea of contributing to the state is doing what is right. You are involved in things that are legal, you do things that are right and then you also make sure that you are always trying to improve. At the back of your mind the things that you are doing are not only for yourself but also contributing to the nation"*.

Apart from the doing good, helping each other and the hospitality, the constraints that are connected to the described collectivism are also focused on by the students and Kinley Wangchuk mentioned the difficulty to say 'no' and the inability to speak up in class by sharing that *"In Bhutan whenever, and sometimes I feel bad about this also, even if we want to say no, we say yes. Our culture is quite irritating also because in class, even if you want to go against what the professor is saying, we cannot. It is the culture and we are brought up in this culture of not saying anything. We have to be respectful and respect is good"*.

#### **5.2.1.4 Bhutanese food**

Tshering Yangchen focused on Bhutanese food as an important factor in her sense of belonging and shared that *"Emma datshi is important to me. I don't see this in other countries and also our chillies are what makes us Bhutanese"*. She also reflected on the regular use of red chillies, Emma's in



Bhutanese meals by saying that *“The bad thing about Emma’s is that it causes cancer”*. Additionally, apart from the *Emma’s*, other Bhutanese food such as *kewa datshi* and rice is emphasised and this can be seen by Sangay Wangyel stating; *“the most important one is the food. We have emma dasti, kewa datshi, etc. But most importantly we have rice. We eat rice all three meals per day. Even if we only take curry, we won't feel the fullness and satisfaction. So we need the rice”*. Ngawang Pelden further emphasised on the rice *“I have to have the rice, with the proper curry and tea. Even if I eat a lot of the western food, I don't feel mentally full. I have to have the Bhutanese proper dish. So, I think it's the feeling, the familiar feeling. It defines whether you have eaten or not”*.

In short, for some of the students, the Bhutanese food is essential in feeling a sense of belonging, even if it merely is a psychological stance.

#### 5.2.1.5 Bhutanese festival

Interestingly, emphasis is put on Bhutanese culture, but Bhutanese festivals, traditions and rituals are shed less light on compared to the national attire, *Dzongkha*, *driglam namzha* and the collective mentality of helping each other. The interviewees that do mention the Bhutanese festivals focus on the *tshechu* and *losar’s*. Ugyen Wangdi mentioned that Bhutanese festivals are of importance by indicating *“there are a lot of rituals and festivals in Bhutan. Tshechu, for example, is a festival that brings everybody together”*.

#### 5.2.2 Language

The national language, *Dzongkha*, is perceived to have a fundamental role in the students’ sense of belonging. Teeyum Galley mentioned that *“My sense of belonging to Bhutan is because I speak Dzongkha. Every country has its own national language, but our language is very different”*. Karma Chime further elaborates by mentioning that *“our language makes us feel comfortable because it is a common language. It connects my friends and me when we are talking”*.

Identity preservation is also elaborated upon here. Tshering Dorji mentioned that *“Language is important. Because through language, even if our culture dies, we can convince others through our language that ‘once we had Gho’ and you can convince people”*. Additionally, Norbu Wangmo clearly stated that *“the language has a fundamental purpose in preserving the culture”*.

However, there are various perceived difficulties with *Dzongkha*. One factor is that most of the people are unable to express themselves in writing as the grammatical rules are difficult and because Bhutan is a multi-linguistic hotspot. Karma Chime reflects on this by saying that *“There are difficulties with Dzongkha. Grammar is one thing that creates complications. But it remains a way to connect”*. Norbu Wangmo warned that the *“Bhutanese language is not that strong right now. Most of the Bhutanese people might have difficulty writing Dzongkha, while they are able to speak”*. Apart from the grammatical difficulty of *Dzongkha*, another factor influencing it is that Bhutan is a

multi-linguistic hotspot which leads to the majority of the people knowing two or three dialects. Dorji Tashi focused on this by saying *“As a Sharshop, I am not really good at using Dzongkha itself.”* Tshering Dorji also mentioned *“Although if we speak other ethnic dialects, some people won't understand Dzongkha. The majority, maybe 80%, will know the Dzongkha language”*. In other words, the difficulty of the language withholds the majority of the population from mastering the language in an oral and written form. Lastly, this previous statement also relates to another development, the country's strong emphasis on English in education and society. Ngawang Pelden mentioned that *“Language wise, it is deteriorating. It was very strong in the past. But now, even in the offices and during meetings, even in the national assembly, they had so many issues of which language to use. The proficiency of Bhutanese language is going down and English is overtaking it”*. She further elaborated by saying *“if you compare the English marks with those of Dzongkha, Dzongkha will be very low. They just barely pass”*. Following up on the previous statement, even illiterate people use English, and this is also presented by Karma Chime: *“The terms and vocabulary that we have for each object, we don't know. We use English. Television has a word, but we don't use it. Even the people that are illiterate use English words”*. In relation, Sonam Pema elaborated on the use of English by addressing *“We do everything in English, and I think we are slightly neglecting our language. There are a lot of families that teach their kids English most of the time. Most of the kids nowadays can speak good English but neglect Dzongkha”*.

In short, students emphasise the importance of speaking *Dzongkha* as an essential ingredient for their sense of belonging. However, having various dialects, the prominent influence of English and the grammatical difficulty of *Dzongkha* are factors that pose an obstacle to the language.

### 5.2.3 Religion

As Bhutan is regarded as a Buddhist country, respondents also emphasised the rule of Buddhism is their sense of belonging. However, before the factors influencing Bhutanese sense of belonging will be analysed, it must be stressed that religion is a personal matter and that every individual interprets religion in a different manner. This can best be presented by Tshering Dorji saying *“I am not a hard-core Buddhist. I associate being a Bhutanese with living and letting others live. Being tolerant”*. Another example is Sonam Wangmo's disbelief in reincarnation; *“I don't believe in reincarnation, which is there in our belief. Because the whole story is just a little bit crazy. It could be made up. It could be put in a system, we put it into kids, and we can believe that as well. But then, now that I am grown up and I know science and facts, I don't believe unless there is proof and evidence. I can say no because there is no evidence. You need to relate it or else it is just stories that we make up every day. Children will tell their friends and their friends will also believe. My brothers and sisters are like that too. Without evidence they won't believe anything”*. In other words, students refer to Buddhism as

important in their sense of belonging but differ as to which factors are important for them. The next sections should be read in this light.

As Buddhism is also a broad topic, subtopics will be used by focusing on the circle of Karma, reincarnation, the afterlife and the link between Bhutanese culture and Buddhism.

#### **5.2.3.1 Circle of Karma**

The Circle of Karma is referred to extensively when drawing on the influence of Buddhism on Bhutanese sense of belonging. Ugyen Wangdi shared the importance of the Circle of Karma as a factor by saying: *“The majority of the Bhutanese believe in this karmic connection. Like how I am right now is because of the merits that I have gained in my past life. If I need a good life for my next life, I need to do good things right now”*. Sonam Choden further elaborates on the influence of the karmic relation by stating *“My mom is very religious. She will donate everything. I told her once, that if we have enough, then we can give. So, even if we are struggling, why are you giving? Her answer was that it will come back, as she believes in karma. Even if it is a scam, it is okay to give. It doesn't have to go to something that is productive, if people are being helped with this amount, it is okay”*. This statement is a representation of congeneric assertions in relation to the circle of karma.

#### **5.2.3.2 Afterlife**

Ngawang Tobgay described the role of Buddhism in her sense of belonging and focused on the afterlife; *“In case I do something bad in life and my sins are more than my good deeds, it is believed that you will go to hell and suffer a lot. Yedha is the belief that when we go to hell, our throat will be small and our stomach will be big. There will be food in front of us and if you want to eat, you are not able to eat, as your throat can't swallow it. You are craving it, but are suffering because you are in hell. In heaven it is believed that you will get everything that you want to eat. If you imagine you want a thing, because of your good merit, it is believed that it will be in front of us. That's why most of the Bhutanese used to do a lot of praying because they believe in the afterlife. I also believe in the afterlife and I pray sometimes. Sometimes I think if I die tomorrow, 'where will I end up?'”*. Tshering Dorji further elaborates with an anecdote by saying *“when we roll our eyes, from a religious point of view, it is said that our eyes will be taken out of you by the demons. When we eat meat, even though I am a non-veg, if I eat chicken, when I die, a chicken head will come, chop me and eat me in pieces. It is very hard to believe in the afterlife”*.

#### **5.2.3.3 Buddhism and Bhutanese culture**

The link between Buddhism and Bhutanese culture is summarised by Teeyum Galley referring to the link with *“peanut butter and jelly coming together”*. The repeated narrative is presented by Tandin Phurba mentioning that *“Bhutanese culture is built by Zhabdrung ngawang namgyel, who is Buddhist.*

*Zhabdrung ngawang namgyel basically developed everything that is in our culture. He is the one that founded the culture and unified the country”.*

In relation to the national attire, Sangay Wangyel elaborated by saying that *“Everything that we wear has cultural significance. The national dress was implemented by our Zhabdrung ngawang namgyel. The white sleeve of the Gho; it shows that every Bhutanese, despite our complexion, shows that we are pure from the inside”*. Furthermore, Dorji Tashi addressed an obvious link between the national attire and Buddhism by saying that *“This dress (Gho) is only acceptable when we enter the sacred places and monasteries. That’s when you see the Buddhist influence”*.

Furthermore, and more focused on the Bhutanese festivals, Ugyen Wangdi mentioned that *“In our culture we have tsechu, which involves Buddhism. In tsechu it is all about the gods and deities. It is about driving away the bad spirits. That is one of the traditions that we do in each district, once a year”*. Furthermore, Kiba Wangmo mentioned that *“Religion and culture are interlinked. There are lots of religious festivals and they are part of our culture. This is because we show respect to our god, the Zhabdrung ngawang namgyel”*.

Additionally, the relationship between nature and Buddhism can best be presented by the parental educational role in teaching the perceived consequences. Ngawang Tobgay presents this by saying *“From growing up, I was taught that if you pluck a flower, you will go to hell. We believe that plants, animals and everything has a soul”*.

Lastly, the link with *driglam namzha* and Buddhistic values is also apparent and addressed by Sangay Tenzin stating the following: *“in Bhutan we have such a culture that we respect others and make others happy. Buddhism is all about respecting and making others happy”*. In relation, as *driglam namzha* is about discipline, Tshering Dorji is able to connect it with Buddhism by saying *“In Buddhism it is all about discipline. The way that you give offerings. There should be some discipline. The gelongs (munks) talk in a disciplined way to the lhamas. Buddhism is all about respecting and that is discipline”*.

Thus, by the above presented statements, the students perceive the interconnection of Buddhism and various factors of Bhutanese culture.

#### **5.2.3.4 Influence of family and education**

It must be stressed that although Buddhism is emphasised heavily when addressing their sense of belonging, students also share that they lack in-depth knowledge on Buddhism. This underlying reason for this is because of the gap between the traditional and monastic education system. The Buddhist values that are important for Bhutanese students are mostly taught by their family members.

This can be presented by Tshering Dorji mentioning that *“I actually am influenced by religion by my parents, as they are so much into religion. The key factor of why I am influenced by religion is because of them”*. Additionally, Norbu Wangmo said *“the way we do and the things we are taught are shown by our parents and elders. That is how we are following Buddhism”*. Moreover, Sonam Pema

also elaborated by stating that *“Because our parents have been practising this for so long, we are following them. We are following the religion so we can preserve our culture. That is the connection”*.

Thus, the factors that are of importance within Buddhism are mostly based on the students' upbringing and values passed on from generation to generation.

#### **5.2.3.5 Restraining factors of Buddhism**

Some of the students are also critical of the role of religion because of the multiplicity of beliefs that are being taught by different people. Ngawang Tobgay explains this by saying that *“From the early year itself, there is so much belief. I sometimes do feel like that is a burden. Being a Bhutanese there is a lot of belief and I do feel the burden sometimes. Whatever you do, there will always be someone saying ‘don't do it like this, this will be the consequences. With time, I am going with the flow, which also is a Buddhist feeling”*. In other words, although Buddhism plays a role in Bhutanese sense of belonging, it is also seen as a constraint at times.

#### **5.2.3.6 Open to all religions**

While students argued on the importance of Buddhist religion, tolerance towards other religions was a given. In fact, Bhutanese also follow Hinduism and Christianity and constitutional emphasis on the freedom of religion is a fact. Tshering Dorji points this out by saying *“It is your individual choice whether you want to believe or not. I respect every religion”*. Additionally, Yangchen Lhamo mentioned that *“The constitution says that Bhutanese can practise any religion they want and that I can't influence you to follow my religion”*. Pema Choden emphasised on the combination of Buddhism and Hinduism by saying; *“even though I am Hindu and some are Buddhist, we have different religions and cultures, but still we are able to mingle together. That is one thing that makes me Bhutanese”*. Apart from the fact that the religions are perceived to be mixed due to cultural interchange, Pema Choden mentioned that *“Both religions have similar practices and even the gods that we worship are the same but just have different names. Their work or their identity, how we worship, it is similar”*.

In fact, some of the respondents perceived all religions as one. Kinley Wangchuk shared that *“For me, I feel that every religion is the same. Helping others is a good deed and good thinking for others is also a good deed. Doing a good deed for the other is a religion. We don't have to wear the monk dress”*. In relation, Pema Karzi Dema also clearly states that *“If you look into it deeply and if you study all the books on gods, the sancrits and all, it all talks about one thing; being a good person and not harming others. Just the process of approaching the gods is different. Some walk for miles, some pray a lot, some do tshechu. That's the difference I see”*.

In short, Buddhism was extensively referred to in considering students' sense of belonging. However, it must be stressed that different individuals consider different distinct elements as important within

the religion. Additionally, in-depth knowledge on Buddhism seems to be lacking, and the influence that Buddhism has on students' sense of belonging is shaped by their upbringing. Furthermore, students also have different religions, and some also consider all religions as one.

#### 5.2.4 Auto-biographical factors such as (childhood)memories connected to a place

The second aspect is auto-biographical factors, which can be interpreted as a combination of episodic, personal experience and semantic, general knowledge and memory related to the world (Dixon and Durrheim 2004, 459). The interviewees did not mention (childhood)memories as a factor in their sense of belonging. Moreover, whenever the students anecdotally explained, the story was connected to a memory and a place. However, the emphasis on the importance of memories connected to a place or more general semantic knowledge was not pointed to when elaborating on aspects of importance for their sense of belonging. This does not mean that the factor should be removed from the model, but might imply that both the episodic and semantic knowledge are taken for granted when answering questions on sense of belonging.

Interestingly, however, the interviewees who saw wearing the national attire and speaking *Dzongkha* as a secondary factor in their sense of belonging, all emphasised their sense of belonging based on birth in Bhutan as important. This is a direct link to the literature on the place-belonging. For those experiencing an identity crisis, the fact that they were born in Bhutan and see this country as home, leads to their sense of belonging. This can be shown by Dechen Wangmo stating “*The only reason that I can give to you is probably because I was born here. I wouldn't want to live in any other place, this is home basically. That's really just the answer. I don't really think about the clothes or the food, I identify myself as a Bhutanese because my family is here, this is the only life that I know*”. She continued by saying “*this has always been such a confusing topic for me. There is only one thing that I do know for sure of why I identify as a Bhutanese, I generally want the country to do well*”. A different interviewee, Karma Chime, mentioned “*Maybe if I wasn't born in this place, things would be different. Because I was born here, my parents were born here, my grandparents were born here*” and elaborated further by stating “*This is the developing countries syndrome that we are too connected to the land that you are born in and part of. That's the same thing with me as well*”.

#### 5.2.5 Individual ties to family and friends and interactions in general

Different factors affecting the individual sense of belongingness are the individual ties to family, friends and interactions in general (Ager and Strang 2004, iv; Chow 2007, 514). As mentioned before, it is a fact that it depends on the individual which relation contributes (more) significantly. The respondents focused on family and friends, in relation to the educational system, His Majesty the King (HM) and going abroad.

#### 5.2.5.1 Family and friends

The majority of the students focus on ties to family and friends as paramount in their sense of belonging and this may be illustrated by Tshering Yangchen stating *“My family and friends are very important. They are the first priority”*. Additionally, Pema Choden mentioned *“My family brought me up to be a Bhutanese, I am a Bhutanese. If that son does not want to become a Bhutanese and he wants to change his identity, but that’s not allowed because the family is pushing him to be a Bhutanese. Family is therefore the first factor”*. Jigme Lhaden is of the same opinion and said the following *“Family is an important factor. As a Bhutanese, when we are in the countryside, we used to eat and work together. It is always about helping each other. As a Bhutanese, I value that”*. However, not all interviewees linked their family to their sense of belonging and Sangay Tenzin mentioned *“I wouldn’t want to associate my family with my sense of belonging to Bhutan. When I think of my family, I don’t think of Bhutan. They can be anywhere in the world, and I would still have that love for them but they don’t necessarily remind me of Bhutan”*. In short, although family and friends play a fundamental role in students' sense of belonging, it also varies from person to person.

#### 5.2.5.2 Interactions in general

Another important factor contributing to the Bhutanese sense of belonging is the hospitable, friendly and open attitude by Bhutanese. Exemplified by Tandin Dorji, who emphasised the welcoming attitude towards guests as she mentioned *“They don’t treat you as another person. Even if you are a stranger, they will welcome you, feed you and will be the other family that you need”*. Another respondent, Sangay Tenzin, shared that *“if guests are visiting our house, we are very welcoming. They do everything as we never let the guest do the dishes, cook or household chores. In case a guest leaves the house with an empty stomach and with a dry throat, it is believed that we are disrespecting the guest”*.

Not only being hospitable towards guests is included, but also helping each other, regardless whether you know that person or not, is a factor that is repeated continually. Sangay Tenzin elaborates by saying *“If some people are in trouble, we tend to help them. In any kind of situation, we will never leave them. If there is a problem, we will never leave them”*. Tshering Yangchen further mentioned that *“At the base of this mentality is being born as a Bhutanese. We are raised by the philosophy of helping others and not doing harm to animals”*. In fact, linked to the helping attitude and collectivistic thinking, it is a common practice to raise the amount of money to cure a Bhutanese person with chronic sickness outside Bhutan. Tandin Dorji mentioned that *“to stay out there we have to eat and everything. Even with a bank loan and if you don’t have an income source to pay back the loan, it will be impossible for an individual to pay it. In such a situation, one actor will raise the issue in social media and will do everything they can to help”*. Another example given by Kinley Wangchuk compared it with a story told by her teacher: *“I haven’t been outside but then my lecturer said that if we go to Delhi and if we ask for directions, people will point out ‘go from here’ and that would be 10*

*doors. If we go to Paro airport and if we ask, they will literally take us to that room and show. The kindness that Bhutanese show towards us is important*". In short, the collectivistic attitude of helping each other is an important factor in Bhutanese sense of belonging.

At the base of the helping attitude and hospitality is the belief that a human should do good, and this factor is focused on especially by those who considered wearing *Gho* and *Kira* and speaking the national language *Dzongkha* of secondary importance to them.

## 5.2.6 Economic factors

According to the academic literature, economic factors also play a part in contributing to the sense of belongingness, and lead to perceived stability and safety for the current state and in the future (Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008, 107; Sporton and Valentine 2007, 12–13). A possible explanation of why economic factors were not mentioned by students regarding their sense of belonging may be because of students' financial dependency on their parents. Although the underlying mechanism to the Bhutanese collectivistic society in relation to work efforts will be addressed later on, it will shortly be mentioned here. The perceived lack of job opportunities and low wages lead to an all-round shared drive to work and earn a living internationally. In short, the dependency on family as a result of a collectivistic society, in relation to the drive to work abroad, might account for the fact that students do not mention or are not aware of economic factors having an influence on Bhutanese sense of belonging. However, the next empirical chapter will address this matter in detail.

## 5.2.7 Legal factors

Having citizenship grants inhabitants the feeling of belonging (Alexander 2008; Buonfino and Thomson 2007; Ignatieff 1994, Loader 2006; Nelson 2007; Sporton and Valentine 2007; Vieten 2006). Amongst the interviewees two did not have Bhutanese citizenship. Although the issue is historically sensitive and draws back to an uprising in the 1990's and 2003, the interviewees without a Citizen Identity Card (CID) were willing to elaborate on the lack of citizenship but still feel a sense of belonging (Schäppi 2005). For example, Tandin Dorji has not yet been granted citizenship and mentioned that "*as I don't have citizenship, you feel underprivileged. I am proud of being Bhutanese. I am proud of the country and grateful for the opportunities such as free health care and education. But at the same time, as I am a native and have been living here for all my life, I am not given the same rights*". For Tandin Dorji this led to internal activism being followed by intervention from parents, and eventual acceptance, which can be illustrated by "*Because of my mom I feel Bhutanese. In my teenage years, due to not having citizenship and all, I started hating the country and also did some kind of protest. Not in the community, but inside the family. At that time my mom showed me the path and made me realise that even though people don't think that I belong here, somehow my roots are connected to the country. She also helped me understand and be more mature, talk about the situation*".



*and take in the things that I felt due to the situation*". Another respondent, Karma Chime justified her lack of citizenship by stating *"I accept it because I am paying for what my ancestors did. It is okay. But I do not want my offspring to pay for it as well"*. To summarise, although these two interviewees are influenced by the political system, they still have a sense of belonging.

Additionally, the people that do have citizenship but are raised with both the Hindi and Bhutanese cultures also share their perspective. Passang Tshering pointed out that *"when I am staying in Bhutan and having Bhutanese citizenship, I can't deny the fact and I have to follow it. So I follow it. Since by birth I am born into a Hindu family, I also have to follow that"*. The obligation ensuing from citizenship also contributes to the sense of belonging.

## 5.2.8 Other factors

The five factors do not cover all the aspects comprising the Bhutanese sense of belongingness. Other contributing factors are Wangchuck dynasty, nature, diversity, environment and architecture.

### 5.2.8.1 Wangchuck dynasty

Bhutan is a democratic, constitutional monarchy with Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, His Majesty (HM) The King, at the head. The absolute monarchy has its origin in 1907, and it is perceived to be a *"Buddhist monarchy"* (Mathou 1999: 618). In other words, the monarchy has its foundation on a contract with the people and *"has never held absolute power"* (Bray 1993: 213). The fundamental role of the Wangchuk dynasty for the country's development and the role that His Majesty (HM) plays in the lives of Bhutanese can best be captured by what Sangay Tenzin said: *"The current and previous Kings are in front of us. I would say that my belonging to my country is vested in HM"*. Additionally, Sonam Pema mentioned that *"Many people outside Bhutan get surprised because if you go to a Bhutanese house, everyone has a portrait of the King. It is everywhere, in every shop and in every office. People from outside get surprised and ask me 'why do you keep the portrait of the King? Why do you not keep a portrait of your family?'"*.

The interviewees draw on the tremendous efforts made by HM, who is considered to be compassionate and sacrificing himself for the people. For example, Tshering Yangchen mentioned that *"The most interesting thing about our King is that he doesn't put 'I' in any statement. He is called The People's King. He never thinks about himself"*. Furthermore, Soname Pema said *"The King deserves the title as 'The People's King' because instead of looking after the total economy of the country, he is looking after the wellbeing of the people and balancing the economy with the people's needs"*. In fact, Karma Chime mentioned that *"It is a really strong bond. I am not saying this out of fear for him, but out of genuine respect for the love that he has for his country and the work he does"*. In the next section the way the Wangchuk dynasty affects the Bhutanese sense of belonging will be discussed in more detail, and will thereby show how factors such as giving democracy to the people, the skilling

programs, Kidu, identity preservation, othering, being a role model and the influence of speeches have on the sense of belonging for Bhutanese students.

#### 5.2.8.1.1 Democratic power, given or forced upon the people

In relation to the above, the transition from an absolute monarchy to the current democratic constitutional monarchy is also a contributing factor to students' sense of belonging. Dechen Wangmo mentioned *"I have heard and seen that in other countries, The King doesn't give the power to the people. But in our case, our fourth King has given the right to vote and established a democracy in our country, although people didn't want it. They trusted our King so much that they didn't want democracy"*. Karma Chime also added that *"during that time, some of the people were crying to not implement the democratic system, but to be under The King only"*. Jigme Lhaden narrated a story from his grandparents by saying *"Our grandparents rejected; 'we don't want democracy in our country. We want you as our King'"*.

The role of the relatively new democracy is legally implemented, but Jigme Lhaden mentioned that *"even though the King has given democracy to the people and we therefore have a democratic government, people think that he remains the head"*. Kinley Phuentsho also emphasised this by saying that *"During that time, we revolted against them stating that we don't want the government. We want the power to be fully in control of HM. HM didn't listen to us. Now look at us. We didn't foresee how HM foresaw it. We are getting used to the government and all. But still there is an attachment to HM"*. Tshering Dorji further mentioned *"He is not running the government, but for every small thing starting from education to anti-corruption, he's involved in everything"*.

#### 5.2.8.1.2 Skilling programs and Kidu

In particular during the covid pandemic, the effort made by HM was highly appreciated. Kinley Phuentsho mentioned that *"in this covid crisis, The King is giving tools and risking his life by going out and taking care, instead of staying in his palace"*. During the pandemic but also before, HM gave 'Kidu' to the citizens. Ugyen Wangdi confirmed this by saying *"right now he is giving kidu to those that are unemployed, and he is also introducing skilling programs"*. Norbu Wangmo further elaborates by stating that *"our King is doing so much during the lockdown and for the industry that has been affected by the covid. In particular the entertainment and tourism sector. He is giving 12000-18000 Bhutanese ngultrum to every individual every month"*. Bhutanese inhabitants were used to getting kidu before Covid, illustrated by Teeyum Galley saying *"Kidu was already there for people that didn't have land and those who face poverty. Also, in case of their house getting burned, due to some natural calamities or whenever something happened to them or their family. They will be given land, money, food and shelter"*. Also, the Desuup skilling program is referred to when elaborating with regard to the contribution of HM. Yangchen Lhamo held forth on the origin of this skilling

program by pointing out; *“when HM went on the tours visiting colleges, college students used to say ‘give us an opportunity to work, to learn how to use weapons and all. But HM questioned himself by asking ‘why are they saying it like that?’. The thing is that during the first, second and third proposal and all, they weren’t able to convey the message properly. During one of the visits, one of the students clearly clarified by saying ‘we want a group where we can voluntarily work under HM’s name and not just learn how to use weapons, but learn how to do basic works, learn how to do search and rescue. All the things, but under the name of HM. That’s when HM created Desuup. When we clarify to him, he will listen to us.”* Thirdly, the Gyalsung project is also mentioned.

On the financial picture of Kidu and quarantine, the interviewees mentioned that HM pays all funds from his own pocket. Yangchen Lhamo reflected on this by saying *“like my own pocket, not knowing the person, how can I give anything for them to make a stable life? He is giving money to us in order to help us”*. Adding to the previous comment, Ngawang Pelden mentioned *“HM uses his own funds in this crisis”*. Ngawang Tobgay also included the payment for quarantine by stating *“we also have free quarantine, right? The King has been spending up to two million plus from his pocket to accommodate the people in quarantine and their food, for two years”*. In short, Tandin Phurba summarises it by saying *“our King’s giving 100% to us and additionally he sold all of his assets and stocks in some of the companies to give Kidu to us. I feel like, even if I was not in this country, I would have respected him”*.

The reasoning why these projects are necessary is shed light on by Ngawang Pelden; *“The King is very concerned about our developmental process. In Bhutan development is quite slow, so he wanted to be able to compete with other countries. So he wants our country to be independent”*. This concern can be linked to the ‘cautious modernisation’ approach taken by Bhutan (Bray 1993: 213). Additionally, Pema Dema elaborated that *“there are so many provisions that The King has given us to sustain and not lose our identity”*.

#### 5.2.8.1.3 Identity preservation and unifier

The above statement and the reference towards the potential loss of identity, is also elaborated on by other students. Sangay Wangyel mentioned that *“I think that 90% of the people in Bhutan believe that the sovereignty and independence of the country itself is protected by our monarch”*. Adding on the previous statement, Kiba Wangmo said that *“every act that the Kings have done was indirectly the rule that they took in order to save our identity. So that we don’t lose our identity to other people”*. Regarding this, Tandin Dorji pointed out *“he is the most complete person to preserve our cultural identity. We don’t see him wearing other western clothes. In Bhutan we will see him wearing Gho”*. Moreover, the repetition on what it means to be Bhutanese is also mentioned by Tshering Dorji when considering the following, *“wherever he goes, he emphasises on being Bhutanese, what it is to be Bhutanese, what skills we need to be Bhutanese. He always focuses on youth, as they are the future”*.

Ngawang Tobgay summarised by saying *“I think people have a high regard towards the monastic establishment and how the monastic establishment is able to convey this message to everyone about the question of identity”*.

In other words, HM is seen as a unifier who does not differentiate between people. Passang Tshering emphasised that *“people don't necessarily oppose The King. He has been able to and built that personality for himself and the way in which the monarchic system functions in itself. He has a big influence in ensuring that he is able to create an environment in Bhutan where people feel that they are part of the same system and not seen as different. He has been doing that and is very smart in doing that”*. Dorji Tashi elaborated further by saying *“I think the King unifies the country as one. He is trying his best to make Bhutanese think as one, which is quite difficult and challenging”*. A similar statement was made by Karma Chime when she said *“Bhutan without him is not Bhutan actually. I think our Majesty is the glue that bonds the country and the force that actually strengthens the country”*. Similarly, Ngawang Tobgay said *“He only thinks about people, people, people. That's why people are accepting whatever he wants to do and thinking. People will listen to that. He is parenting us to the right way. For our country and for our future he was telling us again and again he's the one that we have to follow, and we have to listen to HM”*. Sonam Pelden annotated by saying *“I think our Majesty is the glue that bonds the country and the force that actually strengthens the country”*. Ngawang Tobga summarised by saying that *“HM stated in one of his speeches that nobody will be called as a southern Bhutanese. Everybody is a Bhutanese”*.

Tandin Phurba for example mentioned that *“in case there would be no monarch, there are chances that we would fall under China or India, because they are so big”*. Additionally, Sangay Wangyel said *“if we don't have this kind of King, we won't be able to face the other countries. There might be a war against a country. Like our country, it is small. They want to connect with our King only”*. Likewise, Tandin Phurba is of the same opinion and criticised the government by saying *“if we don't have any King, our country will totally collapse. Somehow I feel like our government is not stable. Whenever I listen to our prime minister talk, and I am not humiliating him, he used to say ‘the King has done like this, this, etc’. But he is not doing anything on behalf of the government. All the pressure is given to the King. The prime minister is scared that the current King will be angry at him”*.

#### 5.2.8.1.4 Othering

The link to other countries can also be seen by the process of ‘othering’ when comparing what they have seen from abroad with their relationship with HM. Tshering Yangchen mentioned that *“we appreciate the generosity of our King. In other countries people are literally dying of starvation, because of no money and food. Whereas in our country there is not even a single case where people died out of starvation. So, our King just doesn't want that to happen”*. In relation to this, Yangchen Lhamo pointed out that *“like other countries I have seen the Kings and the people are not really close.*

*They don't really communicate. But out here in Bhutan, our King normally visits each household face to face and they share regarding their problems".* Additionally, Phuentsho Dorji mentioned that *"for others, they would have ignored people's wellbeing and they would have gone for the increasing of their wealth, wellbeing and interest. For us, the Kings did not overlook their people. Rather, they have worked to improve our living standards and life overall"*. Additionally, Kinley Phuentsho shared that *"In some other countries, there is a kind of dictator. But our leader is totally different. It is very rare to see if the leader goes to war. In 2003, our present King's father went to war"*. Kinley Wangchuk summarised *"He plays a great role in defining the Bhutanese population. The King of Bhutan is, I think, well recognized by the world"*.

#### 5.2.8.1.5 Role model and speeches

HM is also considered as the role model for Bhutanese. Tshering Yangchen elaborates on this by saying *"he speaks the national language itself fluently, he was trained and disciplined. A King should know to be the perfect individual to portray as being a King of this nation"*. Karma Chime added to this by saying *"I look up to him very much. I feel that every time I see his figure, it gives me strong vibes. A strong energy of positivity and compassion"*. Dorji Tashi also mentioned that *"he is a role model to every Bhutanese. He is our symbol of hope, aspiration and motivation. A reason for most of the Bhutanese to live a purposeful life. The four previous kings have worked tirelessly to build and protect our sovereignty and to improve our life"*. Lastly, Tshering Dorji shared that *"Even for our grandparents he is the role model, because he helps the people. He helps humanity. He helps poor people"*.

The above also links to the influence of HM's speeches. Dorji Tashi shared that HM is very special. *"It melts your heart. He speaks pure Dzongkha and even his voice is so good. I feel like listening to him all day"*. In fact, Ugyen Wangdi emphasised that *"I never miss his speeches, as I feel so encouraged and motivated to listen to his speech. Even I download his speech and whenever I feel down, I listen to him talk"*. Similarly, Dechen Wangmo agreed by saying *"By hearing their speech, we get motivated. We get energetic to do what HM says"*. Additionally, Pelden Pema mentioned *"Whenever he addresses the youth, I feel personally pointed at. He would say that the youths are the future of Bhutan and integral for nation building. I feel that he is personally talking to me as I belong in that category"*. In short, the underlying reason for this motivation is explained by Pema Karzi Dema *"He keeps on reminding Bhutanese people that there is someone that is ready to help in any kind of situation. That is the reason why Bhutanese people are not giving up. He is the main source of motivation and encouragement that Bhutanese are living happily. It doesn't mean that Bhutanese people do not have any suffering or problems. That is the way of life. Obviously, we have sufferings and all. But then HM motivates every person"*.

Motivated by the speech and because of the amount of work HM does, respondents feel the responsibility to repay him. Tshering Yangchen mentioned that *“his generosity is something that we will never be able to repay. We can only give him our prayers, wishes and our services in the future”*. Jigme Lhaden mentioned that *“He shows his love like a flowing river, and I can proudly say that. The King really contributes to us being Bhutanese. He shows that he is looking after his people and that is how Bhutanese pay. It is a give and take. King showers his love to people and we give what he is giving us”*.

However, other respondents, such as Kinley Phuentsho, answered *“I know many Bhutanese view HM as the model Bhutanese. I personally don't see it like that. What I see is that HM as a Bhutanese has the capacity to make others into the model Bhutanese. Not himself. He has the ability to do it and that's why he is making all these laws, changes, and implementing GNH. He gives the window for the Bhutanese to not be a model, but to be a better Bhutanese. It is up to the people to go through the window or not. He is one who is just giving them the opportunity”*. In relation to this, people also appreciate HM as a ‘normal citizen’. Sonam Choden mentioned that *“after a trip to a dzongkhag, he does not go to his palace immediately but stays at homestays, like a normal citizen”*. Moreover, HM is considered and perceived as a parent by the students. An example of this is Ugyen Wangdi saying *“In simple terms, I consider him as a parent, as every Bhutanese does. For example, last month, HM rolled out face masks for everyone. That was given by him.”*

#### 5.2.8.1.6 Interviews

Lastly, the role of HM on their sense of belonging was apparent for most people. However, for some, HM was mentioned relatively late in the interview. When asked for the underlying reason for this, Norbu Wangmo mentioned *“What I had in mind are the everyday occurrences in my sense of belonging. So, the dress we wear, the language we speak and the landscape. It is with us. Because of that order of frequency of occurrences, to think about The King, to meet him, to see him address the public, it is rare. However, now that I remember The King, he plays an important role. As soon as I hear The King's name, I immediately connect it to Bhutan. He is the King of Bhutan, and he has done several great things for Bhutan”*.

Accordingly, Ugyen Wangdi mentioned *“I think every Bhutanese should be grateful to our King. Because they have done so many things to us. Bhutan right now is all because of the monarchic Kings”*.

### 5.2.8.2 Nature, diversity and environment

Other topics mentioned having an influence on students' sense of belonging were nature, diversity and environment. Teeyum Galley focuses on these aspects and shared that *"The constitution of Bhutan has a section that 60% of Bhutanese land should be covered with forest. What we do is that if we cut trees, we have to ask for permission to cut down the tree and we have to plant back double"*. She continues by sharing her felt responsibility by saying *"As a Bhutanese citizen, I feel that I am responsible for taking care of the environment. On Social Forest Day we planted trees together and it made me feel so great"*.

Another respondent, Ngawang Pelden shared that *"In Bhutan there are hilly and mountainous regions. How Bhutan is so green and even in autumn most of the time it is green. There are no great plains, and it is covered with forests. Bhutan has some winding roads and that might have crept into my sense of belongings. If I travel on a straight road, I would feel out of place"*.

Another factor of importance in the sense of belonging is the security of resources Bhutan has. Phuentsho Dorji mentioned that *"If you go into the depths of these mountains, there are thousands of medicinal herbs which can cure any disease. There is a traditional hospital and they are working. I feel that there are some more herbal medicines that are way more powerful than foreign medicine"*.

In short, the responsibility to protect the environment and nature and the resources connected to nature also are contributing factors for some of the students regarding their sense of belonging.

### 5.2.8.3 Architecture

Dechen Wangmo mentioned the importance of Bhutanese architecture in being important to his sense of belonging by addressing: *"If I went to some foreign country and saw the European style of a cathedral, I wouldn't feel connected. If I went to a Bhutanese embassy and the architecture is in the traditional way, there will be a feeling that I am home, even if I am not"*. Likewise, Sonam Pema agreed with the previous statement by saying *"Bhutan has different architects. More than paintings, I like crafts. The typical Bhutanese house is of value to me"*. Thus, apart from the actual building itself, individuals are able to feel a sense of belonging when it comes to the appearance of a building.

## 5.3 Politics of Belonging

In order to have an individual sense of feeling at 'home', the social environment is also of importance, and this is addressed within the politics of belonging. In other words, being rejected by the environment will have an influence on the sense of belonging (Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008). The boundary construction between who belongs and who does not, or to what extent someone belongs, is therefore also important to analyse in the context of Bhutan. It could be argued that the notion of citizenship, also known as political belonging, is essential within the politics of belonging.

As mentioned before, having citizenship grants inhabitants the feeling of belonging. It is therefore relevant to analyse the sense of belonging amongst the interviewees who do not have citizenship. A clear example of this is Tandin Dorji, who has not yet been granted citizenship and mentioned that *"I am not sure about it, but my belonging to the country is more about how I am seen by others. Especially by Bhutanese. I don't have a CID, so I am not fully Bhutanese. I am kind of a refugee right now. Because of that, most of the time I get looked down on"*. The interviewees did experience the negative effects of not having citizenship but also mentioned that they do connect to Bhutan and having a sense of belonging.

However, even if political belonging is a given, a sense of belonging with regards to a place might lack. In other words, the concept of belonging goes beyond the notion of citizenship, as addressed earlier (Crowley 1999). The factor that was seen as important in their sense of belonging was the perspective of the 'full Bhutanese', the ones with citizenship. Tandin Dorji mentioned this by saying *"my belonging to the country is more about how I am seen by others"*. Apart from Tandin Dorji, Kinley Wangchuk does have citizenship and shared that *"I was really poor at speaking and reading Dzongkha. They would usually look down on me and make fun of me for being so poor. I used to be bullied and put in a locker room. That is when I felt like I didn't belong. I felt the huge difference"*. She continued by saying *"even though I belong here, it drives me out also. The people drive me out. There are really good people here but there are also corrupted minds and toxic people. I know that that is life and that there are many people out there that are similar"*. These two interviewees show that the relationship with, and recognition of people in society is detrimental for their sense of belonging.

## 5.4 Global sense of space

As presented above, the Bhutanese students embrace the traditions and culture connected to being Bhutanese. It is well known that culture is changing, and for that reason, the students experience culture in a different manner compared to the times of their (grand)parents. An example of this is Pema Choden addressing *"Sometimes I question my grandpa saying 'this is not even necessary', he then replies that this is our culture and this is what makes us Bhutanese. So if you don't pass those cultural traditions to our future generation, then the Bhutanese culture might slightly go away. That is his only fear. The younger generation is into western culture and he has a fear in his heart that the culture will go away"*. The Bhutanese youths are exposed to social media, and therefore have easy access to the world outside of Bhutan.

However, the question remains to what extent Bhutanese students are aware of the influence of the global on the local. In other words, are they aware that they are choosing their clothes/food and culture? The respondents of an interviewee is Kinley Wangchuk saying *"I sometimes feel that some of the culture and traditions that we practise here don't have meaning. It is just a belief. Sometimes,*



*those beliefs are good in a way, but sometimes I feel that those beliefs restrict us to become somebody*". In Chapter 6 the motivating factors to go abroad will be addressed, and it will become clear that students wish to go abroad for education, and economical welfare. Although the quote, in relation to the will to departure of Bhutanese are signs that the global influences the local, and that is therefore a mix. Nevertheless, the inhabitants have a strong sense of the local, and argued that the isolative policy of the government should be upheld.

Furthermore, Massey also focused on power relations, and for Bhutan specifically, there is a clear national form of control on government, organisations and the media. It is an effort to close down the global, in order to protect the local culture. The state is not able to channel the information influx coming from the free accessible internet. This could be seen as a loop in the system, and to some extent it is, but the isolative policy and educational storytelling, has a fundamental influence on Bhutanese. Whenever Bhutanese talk about Bhutan, the proudness can be felt, which is an example of the dominant narrative present in society. With that, during an interview the question was asked if a student could imagine Bhutan with open borders, tourism and the western organisation, to which Sangay Tenzin answered: *"No, I cannot imagine this. This has been my life, and I am used to this. Of course I see how developed it is in different countries. But for me, Bhutan has its beauty as it is. A peaceful country. If we open the borders, and let everybody in, we might be the next Nepal. Bhutan is great"*.

In short, although the influence of the global is felt by Bhutanese, the country remains to have a powerful influence on the narrative and emphasis on the local.

## 5.5 Shaping the individual's sense of belonging

The respondents focused on family and friends (5.4.1), in relation to the educational system (5.3.2), His Majesty the King (HM) (5.4.3) and going abroad (5.4.4) as having an influential factor in their sense of belonging.

### 5.5.1 Family and friends

As indicated in the section on Buddhism and the influence of family, this section will draw on the effect of the household on the individual sense of belonging. Within the family, it depends on the individual who had the largest influence. Dechen Wangmo mentioned the role of her grandmother by stating *"My grandmother shaped me. What I am now, is all because of her. I call her every day. She always says that 'before I die, I want you to be successful'. She always gives me encouragement whenever I am down. She is my role model"*. Additionally, Tshering Choden focused on extended family by sharing: *"My father's older sister. They are like a mother figure for me. They prayed and in the altar they made offerings. After seeing that, that made an influence on me"*.

In comparison, the father was mentioned the most in relation to other family members. An example of this is Tandin Phurba's answer *"My father, obviously. Everything related to Bhutanese culture. If it is language, dress, anything. My father was very well versed in it and every time I asked, he used to impart his knowledge to me. I think he was my backbone when it comes to Bhutanese culture"*. Another relevant statement is the following: *"My mother is really religious. Plus my father really appreciates HM and is a government servant, so he follows every rule and regulation. He is the kind of person who follows everything. Because of that, that influences me"*. A clarification of the dominant father role could be linked to the dominant masculine family hierarchy. However, this statement must also be presented with caution, as this question was not asked why the father had a more significant role in comparison to other family members. Regardless of the emphasised father role, others also mentioned the influence of mothers and grandparents.

Additionally, when asked why family members were influential, the majority of students referred to the amount of time spent with the family. An example to clarify the former is Tshering Yangchen stating *"The most influential is the family as we spend a lot of time with them"*.

The way the family contributes to the students' sense of belonging is established through narrating stories on 'the right thing to do'. Phuentsho Dorji further elaborates by saying *"Everytime we make a mistake, a story will come full of value. Even if we don't want to listen, they force us to listen. I think that is the right thing to do"*. He gave an example of a story that had an influence on him by sharing; *"There is a movie in which the son doesn't do good deeds to his father. He kicks him out of the house. Later my son will kick me out of the house. My father used to say that 'if you do to me like this, your son will also do this to you'. I have seen these types of scenarios and I therefore believe that it is true. If you do things with good intention, good deeds will come. If we don't, like harming others, we get harmed"*. It is interesting to see that the narrated stories entail a hypothetical threatening situation in the future, a 'what if', which has an effect on the young individual.

Some of the students also compared their family influence with the other mentioned factors of education and HM, and focused on the significance of family. Phuentsho Dorji argued that *"I think that the knowledge that they have given me is much bigger than the knowledge I obtained in education. They give outside the book knowledge"*. In comparison to HM, Passang Tshering mentioned that *"There are a lot of examples that we can take from our own spiritual leaders and the historical leaders, The Kings himself. But more than anything, our everyday life comes from family"*.

In short, for the majority of the students the role of family is apparent in their sense of belonging. Within the family members, the father is mentioned frequently. However, this should not be seen as a hard fact. The influential family members educate their child by narrating stories, which are based on 'what ifs' in the future.

### 5.5.2 Educational System

Apart from the role of the family, the educational system is deemed to have an influence on students' sense of belonging because, according to Tshering Dorji, *"the teachers are told by the ministries that there are certain things that you have the children learn"*. Related to this, Dorji Tashi added that these 'certain things' are based on identity preservation and are illustrated by the following statement: *"Teachers are always saying that 'if you guys don't preserve, then our culture identity and all will go extinct. You should practise it. They normally give us examples of Tibet and China"*. Additionally, Sangay Tenzin elaborated by saying *"Although my grandpa taught me, education made us feel fulfilled. Those things were taught from very young. The ministry of education came to school and gave this speech saying that it would be so good if people complete the high school and I am proud that I did! He really inspired me"*. In other words, the message presented in education is focused on identity preservation and therefore was influential in the students' sense of belonging.

### 5.5.3 His Majesty The King

As mentioned in the section on HM's role on the students' sense of belonging, it is clear that HM influences the individual sense of belonging. This can be presented by various statements such as Yangchen Lhamo stating *"I think I am inspired by my Kings"*. Alternatively, Tandin Dorji mentioned *"HM had an influence. He says how well we are and how independent we are is all because of our culture. As a Bhutanese, you have to preserve our culture and wear our national dress and everything"*.

### 5.5.4 'Outside'

The influence of going abroad and the resulting ability to see the differences in cultures, influenced those that had the privilege. Dorji Tashi shared that *"My sense of belonging only started when I went outside Bhutan. That's when I realised how tough the world was and how lucky I am to be born here. I am so happy and proud to be a Bhutanese. So I think the outside made me realise and made me value what I had"*. Merely few had this privilege, and therefore it cannot be seen as representative for the majority of the students.

## 6. Desire to go abroad

In this chapter, attention will be drawn towards the future perspective of Bhutanese students in relation to their sense of belonging. The motive of why this is relevant to analyse is because, although Bhutanese students' have a robust sense of belongingness to Bhutan, the desire to go abroad is substantial. This section will therefore first address the people wanting to stay in Bhutan, and will examine the factors pushing and pulling students to work or study abroad.

### 6.1 Staying in Bhutan

Although the majority of the students express a strong desire to go abroad, there are two who want to stay in Bhutan and their motivation to stay varies per individual. An example of this is Ugyen Wangdi sharing *"As of now, I don't have any goals. Short term goals, I don't have any. Long term goals, I would establish myself in a proper job, fixed job, stable. That's it"*. Tandin Phurba asserted *"I am very accustomed to the culture in Bhutan, as I have lived here my entire life. I am very comfortable out here. I don't want to change the living habits and culture. I want to live here only. I am very attached to Bhutan"*. Subsequently, Ugyen Wangdi stated *"I don't have many desires and I don't have a goal to become rich. My main aim is to do prayers and meditation. If possible I want to join the teachings of a monk in a monastery and if that does not work, I will do it myself under the guidance of my master"*. Dorji Tashi also focuses on the non-materialistic way of life, and has enlightenment as an end goal; *"My goal is to get enlightened. It might sound absurd to you from a foreign perspective. You don't have to be a llama to be enlightened. I think it is different to how the world is defined. How it is seen in Buddhism is different to the meaning of the word. So I can't actually say it because the analogy that they give is, if you want to know what enlightenment feels like, you have to experience it yourself. Rimboche's give this example all the time, eating a sweat, a candy. I have eaten a candy, I know what it tastes like. However, when I explain it to you, regardless of what words or vocabulary I use, you will never know what sweetness is about. You would hear it, but you never know what sweetness is about. To know about enlightenment, you have to feel and experience it yourself. In the scriptures it is even written that when Buddha wanted to explain about enlightenment, his tongue got twisted. Even the Buddha can't do it, we can't do it. It is to follow an experienced teacher who is enlightenment, who has tasted enlightenment. He can guide you to go to that shop, buy the candy, unwrap it, put it in your mouth, suck on it. Step by step. The teacher is seen as a guide towards enlightenment, but he can't give you enlightenment"*.

### 6.2 Push and pull factors

Karma Chime elaborated on the aspiration to go abroad by indicating: *"I would like to go to Australia, and I am representing thousands of youth"*. Tandin Phurba specified by saying *"they want to go*

*overseas and work there, earn money, come back, buy land, build a house and their life will be set here. You don't have to work anymore, for the rest of your life". To the question whether money buys happiness Sangay Tenzin replied "Money can buy happiness. I think that when you are poor, to be happy, you need money. But when you are rich, have money and you have everything, you don't have friends or family. That's sad". In relation to the previous statement, Passang Tshering shared "I don't know why Bhutanese say that we are happy. We are just forced to think that we are happy. No, the main reason is that we don't have a crisis out here. Like we don't have a shortage of anything. It is just that people want more money. Shortcut to earning money".*

### 6.2.1 Push factors

The factors perceived to push people out range from political turmoil, poverty, underdevelopment, to lack of research facilities (Adeyemi et al. 2018, p. 69). However, within this subsection it will become clear that not all elements are relevant for Bhutanese. In fact, this section will present the contributing causes that seem to focus mainly on wages, the absences of capital and the lack of job opportunity.

As the wages are low in Bhutan, going abroad to work is seen as 'a shortcut to life'. An example focusing on the wages is presented by Tshering Yangchen stating the following: *"My brother used to manage Bank of Bhutan funds, but he used to call my mom because he needed a taxi fee. Managing huge funds and at the end calling mom for a taxi fee. That is how we are financially weak here".* Another example of this is shared by Dechen Wangmo *"Mom inspires me a lot. She tells me 'please don't work here, as the wages are very low. You won't be able to sustain yourself. If you want to go out, go".* In relation to the wages, Bhutanese find it worrisome that their income is not based on hourly payment and this is presented by Dorji Tashi saying *"We are not paid on an hourly basis but on monthly. I feel that we are underpaid for most of our jobs. That is a disadvantage here in Bhutan".*

Furthermore, the lack of job opportunities should also be considered as a factor motivating the students to go abroad. Phuentsho Dorji argued this by stating that *"Employment opportunities are making students really dull in Bhutan".*

Apart from the capital and wages, the lack of capital undermines young (ambitious) people to start a business. Karma Chime declares this by saying *"You know, we are in need of capital for business. In order to start a business, we need capital and that is something that we don't have".*

### 6.2.2 Pull factors

In pulling inhabitants abroad various factors play a part such as economic outlook, quality of life, higher pay, modern educational system to intellectual freedom (Adeyemi et al. 2018, p. 69). As the push factors mentioned in 6.2.1. have shown, the higher pay and economic outlook are indeed factors pulling Bhutanese students abroad.

Another component pulling Bhutanese abroad is the modern education system. Ugyen Wangdi argued in favour of this by addressing *“I want to go, but not to earn. Bhutanese are all into earning. But I want to do a masters because my mom has lots of dreams for me. I am an only child, so I need to fulfil it. Also, I need academic validations and all. So I think I want to do a masters. If I can, I would want to stay and do my PhD there”*. Likewise, Dechen Wangmo shared *“I have a plan to do my masters abroad. The education system in Bhutan compared to outside countries is totally different”*.

Moreover, the educational system was also mentioned in relation to exposure. Karma Chime addressed this by saying *“I have been studying here for 16 years and I haven't been exposed to different cultures. I want to experience different cultures and educational system”*. Furthermore, Norbu Wangmo also emphasised this by stating *“Going abroad is to experience international standard education, to expose myself to different cultures and to improve my learning skill. My written English is good, but the speaking part is not. To get a good job in Bhutan itself”*. In fact, Ngawang Tobgay shared that the mechanism is to also take your (recently signed) spouse; *“You take your partner, and one works, the other learns”*.

Furthermore Ngawang Pelden shared *“I want to explore, I want to get all the opportunities and open as many doors as possible. Be it in Australia or America, I will take the opportunity. As long as the experience gained from it is worth it”*. The reasoning for this desire is shared by Kinley Phuentsho saying *“There are so many people out there and I just want to experience. Here we are all in our own little bubble. If we remain here, it is okay. But I guess if you want something big or ambitious, you go abroad. For me personally it feels that I am being stuck in a bubble”*.

## 6.3 Beyond the push and pull factors

Underlying societal mechanisms play a predominant role in shaping the motivations of students and this subsection will focus on the preference to work for the Bhutanese government, the role of the family and the choice for physical labour jobs.

### 6.3.1 Preference: Bhutanese government

The students mentioned that, although the desire to go abroad is apparent, some voice their preference to work for the Bhutanese government, and see going abroad as a second option. In other words, some of the students argue that they want to sit the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) exams first, and if they do not get a government job, they will try to go abroad. Ngawang Tobgay illustrates this argument by saying *“First I want to do RCSC and if I don't get through, I want to do the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to go outside. Maybe for further studies or to work”*. Kiba Wangmo also agrees with this by sharing *“To be honest, if I pass RCSC I will stay here. But if I don't, I am planning to go abroad”*.

A government job is considered to be a stable job, and better compared to a job in the private sector, according to the students. In fact, the government grants scholarships to the top performing highschool students, and awards them a six-year contract after graduation. Tshering Yangchen is an example of this and shared *“I am a scholarship student, so if I pass, I am obliged to stay here for the coming 6 years. If I pass, I have to stay here for 6 years minimum”*.

### 6.3.2 Role of the family

The justification for this preference to work in Bhutan is related to the desire and felt responsibility to stay with and take care of their family. Pema Karzi Dema shared *“As I am an only child, I have to look after my mom. That's why I want to be in Bhutan only”*. Sangay Tenzin also mentioned this by saying *“I actually thought I was going since my elder sister is in Australia. I did think of joining her for a double degree. But here there is no one with my parents to help them out. Then my sister is also planning to go there, so I actually thought of staying with them to help them out”*. Additionally, Tandin Dorji shared *“Going abroad could be one of the last options. My grandmother would never allow me. I am not in a situation where I need so much money, so she repeatedly reminds me not to have a dream to go outside. My father says that if you really want to go, and even if grandmother insists on not going, he could convince her. But then, she is really old, which I shouldn't hurt her”*. Although the students feel the responsibility, some remain motivated to go and this is made clear by Sonam Pema stating *“I really want to be independent. I am not saying that I want to leave my mother. But there were lots of instances where my sisters made me feel that I needed to stay with my mother all the time, take care of her, and not travel abroad. It is not the ego, but it is the belief that I can do it. It is my goal to give my mother a better home and I really want to prove to her that one of her children has competed with thousands of students and is going to earn”*.

### 6.3.3 Physical labour jobs

If students do prefer to go abroad to work, physical labour jobs are opted for. Karma Chime mentioned this by stating that *“They go there to earn money by cleaning”*. As this is a common phenomenon, The King addressed it in one of his speeches. Kinley Wangchuk stated this by saying; *“He says that it is okay if we want to work overseas and earn money. But if you want to work overseas and if you majored in a degree, you should do that same work in other countries. If I go there as a cleaner, he says that our degree is of no use. Even if we want to work, we should work on our professional level”*. Among students The King's opinion is also voiced, and this is illustrated by Dorji Tashi *“When my friends talk about a job outside and I am not judging them, but they have so much potential in them, but they do not make use of it”*.

Ironically, the students are not likely to do the same blue colored job in Bhutan itself because of the previously addressed collectivistic society, linked judgmentalism, and low wages. As Bhutan is

a tight knit community, seeing that a daughter or son is cleaning elsewhere, leads to negative judgement from society. An example of this could be Tshering Dorji stating that *“In Bhutan, if we see our relatives or siblings cleaning the toilet, there is a culture that people talk behind their back. This is the negative side that Bhutanese have”*. Tshering Dorji elaborates by addressing the Bhutanese sense of comfort *“all the Bhutanese are ambitious to comfortably sit on the office chair. But they only prefer white colour jobs, offices, and banking”*.



## 7. Sense of belonging, the desire to work or study abroad and a global sense of space

The relationship between the sense of belonging to Bhutan, and the desire to go abroad should be analysed. When it comes to the sense of belonging it is clear that the factors within Bhutanese culture, Buddhism, HM, birthplace, but also citizenship and the judgement of ‘others’, are important for Bhutanese sense of belonging. Related to this, the main motivating factors presented by the students to move abroad are focused on the short term desire to get (educational)experience and material wealth. Within this section the link between the sense of belonging and the desire to go will be made. The desire to return and contribute to the country (7.1) will be laid-out first, which will be followed by the perception of home and the internal feeling of belonging (7.2).

### 7.1 Desire to return and contribute

Although the development of Bhutanese going abroad has been occurring throughout the years, a relatively recent trend is that Bhutanese stay abroad permanently, and acquire permanent residence status (Kuensel, 2021). Tandin Dorji, for example, shared her doubt by addressing *“The person that I marry, a Bhutanese or a chilip (foreigner), would play a major role in me returning or not. I would for sure visit, but I don't know”*. A different interviewee, Pema Choden, is convinced and stated *“Even though I am going out, I must come back. I have to die where I was born. That's our feeling”*.

The general order of argumentation is that Bhutan is lacking in a particular field and by going abroad the students are able to learn from the system in place. Consequently, the students desire to take the experience and knowledge to Bhutan and implement it for the better. Kinley Phuentsho mentioned this; *“We don't have an expert in childcare here, and I could learn from them, while earning from them and do the same thing here to contribute to Bhutan”*. Another example is shared by Pema Dema; *“In Bhutan we don't have many specialists and all. So, especially in terms of business, I want to do some courses and apply here. Our country's companies are mostly dependent on specialists from outside, so our incomes are mostly flowing out. So I want to sustain it within the country”*. Additionally, *“For me, which attracts me to go abroad, I can go abroad and study how the services are done for 10-20 years. Then come back to Bhutan and implement it over here”*. In the same vein Kinley Wangchuk shared that *“Bhutan has a very good lineup of video editing and film makers, but I think I can learn more from professionals in foreign countries”*.

The main motive mentioned by the students, whether in favour of staying in Bhutan or going abroad, is to serve the country. Passang Tshering referred to this by stating; *“My belonging to Bhutan is not that I go abroad and forget about Bhutan. I am going abroad for Bhutan only. I want to go there and learn how to do stuff, learn about what is missing, what can be implemented in Bhutan and*

*implement it over here. That is how abroad and Bhutan are connected. I want to bring those facilities from those countries abroad and then reshape it to the Buddhist context and then implement it". Dema Yuden further mentions "My goal would be serving the nation properly. I have taken multiple things from this country. I took everything from this country. I studied for free education. They helped me to get to this point right here. I don't know how I should express it". Phuentsho Dorji shared "I am provided with a scholarship by this country. Why should I betray them after getting so many things in my head?". Lastly, Phuentsho Dorji emphasised: "I only have one goal; to get a degree and to serve your country. Our King is very humble and hardworking. I kinda want to repay him for everything he does for us. He protects us. I want to pay him back by doing something for the country. I want to join the army, I want to try".*

## 7.2 Home and internal longing

Linked to the above, the argumentation that students feel an urge to come back is based on a perceived feeling of home. Dorji Tashi shared the following *"If I happen to go abroad, I will come back because nothing feels like home. Maybe we don't have the best technology and best facilities, but the happiness and sense of belonging is here". Ngawang Tobgay shared "After 10 years of staying in the outside country, I will come back. I feel like I belong here. Working and earning is good in other countries. But spiritually I feel that I belong here. How much I earn, even if I earn a lot of outside money, my feelings and spiritual attachment will be here. That's why I would return. This feels like home. Bhutan is my home, and I can't leave it behind. If I am born here, I want to die here".*

Linked to this, the students discussed the internal feeling of belongingness, also when being abroad. Druk Tshering mentioned *"When it comes to relationships with my sense of belonging, going outside doesn't mean that I will forget my tradition and culture. Even going outside, I can wear Gho or Kira. My cousin sister and brothers wear Gho and Kira during occasions, and they also do gatherings and play archery. I think it doesn't make any difference whether we are in Australia or Europe. The way we think is the important one which shapes the way we behave". Pema Karzi Dema shared "Even if we go out, we can make money and send money back. We can serve our country in that way also. Not only by sending money, but it is the true heart that we are having. Even if we stay outside of Bhutan, we feel a longing, feeling for our government or our country. This should be fine without money also. If a person has a true heart for your partner or homeland, this should be the core thing that holds our culture, values, ethics in one person. If we have genuine love for our country, I wear my kira, I hold my values, traditions, even if I am in Australia. Money doesn't matter, what matters is the true heart. In short, Teeyum Galley concludes by saying "I should definitely come back. I have to because this is my country. This is home. This is where I belong".*

## 8. Discussion

In this chapter it will be clear that the factors contributing to people's sense of belongingness should be seen as a lived reality, although socially constructed, and as a transnational attachment to an imagined and or emotional space (8.1). After that, a suggestion to the five factor model of sense of belonging is argued upon (8.2), since the model lacks space for culturally specific factors being part of an individual's sense of belonging. In short, this section will present what aspects of the data collected will add to the academic literature at hand. Consequently, the lack of the global sense of space will be drawn on (8.3).

### 8.1 Dominant narrative and transnational attachment

The academic literature on sense of belonging argues on the move beyond formal membership and towards “*imagined and narrated, more or less fluid, we-group constructions related to sameness, unity, and togetherness*” (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011, p. xi). The data collected for this research also shows this trend, but will introduce the concept of transnational attachment, in relation to globalisation, to the debate.

The similar perspectives presented by the interviewees represents a clear cultivated opinion and stance on what it means to be Bhutanese, and thus what a so-called correct Bhutanese sense of belonging is. As Bhutan is a hierarchical society, knowledge is passed onto and accepted by young people. As discussed in chapter five, and in particular the section on who or what influenced the students, the dominant narrative is presented by His Majesty the King, preached by the educational system and repeated by family. Thus, the environment in which the students grew up in and resided has a fundamental influence on what is perceived to be important in their sense of belonging, in relation to their desire to go abroad.

Although it could be argued that a dominant narrative is socially constructed, it would be a mistake to disregard its value. In other words, and despite the fact that the dominant narrative is socially constructed, that does not mean that it is not real or lacks in existence. The factors mentioned as important in Bhutanese sense of belonging are a lived reality and the truth for Bhutanese inhabitants. The construction of the narrative is a fact, but it should not be taken to the extreme that nothing therefore exists. It is a lived reality and hence perceived as a truth for the interviewees.

The above mentioned lived reality should not merely be seen with regard to Bhutan, but should be interpreted in a broader context, as it is a common human practice. The individual ideas and truths are legitimate based on factors such as dominant narratives, actions and cultural markers. The influenceability of the individual based on its surroundings is what creates a lived reality and this process is carried out throughout the world.

As the relationship between the Bhutanese sense of belonging and the desire to depart was analysed in this research, it found that the perceived desire to return ‘home’ serves as a transnational

attachment to Bhutan, and the felt cultural responsibility could be an explanation for this trend. Although moving abroad would possibly result in shifting or altering the students' type of attachment, the students share their perspective and wish to return to their 'home' eventually. At the base of the desire to work or study internationally is the obtainment of material wealth, education, and or ideas on how to contribute to Bhutanese society. However, the students recognize the will and pull towards 'home', based on their strong sense of belonging, in which the emphasis on cultural preservation is a fact. In other words, the strong sense of belonging and desire to move abroad, links to a transnational attachment to a physical place, their 'home', Bhutan.

Despite the fact that the desire to return to the physical place is apparent, the sense of belonging, and thus the desire to return is firmly based on the emotional and perceived attachment to a place. It is the image created in the mind of what is seen as 'home'. In other words, the concept of territory and 'home' moves beyond the physical space and more towards a mental construct of felt attachment.

The transnational emotional and perceived attachment to a place, must also be analysed in relation to globalisation, and it could be argued that the concept of 'transnationalism' is linked to globalisation and to some extent it does. Globalisation enables and eases the international work motivated departure of multiple Bhutanese. Due to this, belonging could shift away from a state orientated identity. However, and as already mentioned, the paradox regarding globalisation can be presented by the trend which focuses on the local and puts emphasis on autochthony (Geschiere 2011). For Bhutanese inhabitants the desire to return is strong, as is their sense of belonging. The cultural responsibility, the preservation of the culture and thus the sovereignty of the country, is a motivating factor to return. Another example of this is the exceptional occurrence of intercultural marriages when Bhutanese are abroad. Even though globalisation tends to lead to a mingling of cultures, Bhutanese mostly refrain from this. This could be explained by how extremely difficult it is to obtain Bhutanese citizenship, as it requires having lived in Bhutan for 15 years, and being able to read and write *Dzongkha* (Dual Citizenshipreport 2019). More importantly, perhaps, would be the strong responsibility to preserve one's culture, which ensures the sovereignty of the country. Although globalisation enables the departure, the transnational attachment, which is driven by the emotional and perceived image of 'home', draws Bhutanese students to Bhutan.

Thus, and although the dominant narrative of what it takes to be Bhutanese is socially constructed, it remains to be a lived reality and is therefore real in its nature. This shared lived reality resembles a transnational attachment to Bhutan, which moves away from the attachment to the physical space towards a move emotional and perceived attachment to the place. Although globalisation links to cultural interconnectedness, Bhutanese present their sense of belonging as a motivating factor and desire to return to Bhutan, which is a perceived attachment to the place.

As such, the data gathered in this research adds to the academic debate by presenting a different angle on globalisation, as it did not analyse the effect of inward coming global forces, but

instead the outward movement of the most productive segment of society in relation to their sense of belonging. It could serve as a chapter in 'The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamics' by Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Gérard Toffin, which focuses on how global forces are altering social, political, and ethnic identity in the Himalaya (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011).

## 8.2 Adding cultural dimension as a contributing element in place-belonging

According to the academic literature, a sense of belonging could best be analysed based on the combination of place-belonging and politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The five factors composing the place-belonging managed to capture the importance of culture, language, religion, legal factors, and ties to family, friends, and interactions in general in Bhutanese sense of belonging. However, the model did not cover the entirety of factors contributing to the Bhutanese sense of belonging. As such, the students did not mention auto-biographical memories as being salient in their sense of belonging. There might be a possibility that these were taken for granted and therefore not focused on in the interviews. However, this cannot be taken as a hard-core conclusion. Additionally, economic factors also were not mentioned in the students' sense of belonging. The underlying reason for this could be the lack of necessity to think about the financial picture, as the students are dependent on their parents. However, the lack of job opportunity, low wages and the collectivistic, judgmental society, motivates the students to work or study abroad. This could imply their search for stability, but does not relate to their Bhutanese sense of belonging. Lastly, the role of His Majesty the King, nature, the environment and diversity, as well as the architecture did not fit within the five dimensions of place belongingness, nor did the politics of belonging. In short, although the five dimensions were able to cover a wide variety of factors, it did not manage to cover the entirety of the picture.

This paper therefore suggests adding a dimension which is sensitive for culturally bounded aspects. In Bhutan the role of HM is fundamentally important in people's sense of belongingness. Also, and despite the fact that the environment and architecture was not mentioned as frequently as HM, for some interviewees it was relevant in their sense of belonging. A possible critique on this suggestion would be that this cultural dimension is theoretically perceived as fairly vague, as there is no concrete definition of the elements comprising the dimension. However, in practice, the Bhutanese government has established a distinct Bhutanese culture, in order to preserve its sovereignty. By adding the cultural dimension, and thereby accepting this weakness, the model of sense of belonging is able to include the various factors contributing to the sense of belonging.

### 8.3 The lack of the global sense of space

The empirical section revealed that the global indeed influences the local in Bhutan. However, a critique to Massey would be that, although the idea is solid, the ordinary individual does not see the aspects pointed out by her. In Bhutan, and elsewhere in the world, there is a structure of narratives, which are clearly focused on the local. Because individuals are influenced by their environment, space is connected to the repeated narratives. People are therefore not necessarily aware of the effect of the global, as the truth that is shared mentions otherwise. Regardless of this, there should be an attempt to spread this global sense of space, as it has potential in broadening the perspectives of the people that do merely focus on the local.

## 9. Conducting research in Bhutan: power structures

The analysis presented above is based on the arguments shared by the students, and it is clearly in line with the interest of the Bhutanese political system in ensuring the sovereignty of the country, and the lineage of the King. However, in this section my experience as a researcher in Bhutan will be shown. This is not intended to disregard the answers given, but instead to show the university's decision to cancel my research on national identity links to the far reaching power structures in Bhutan.

To begin, accepting a foreign researcher is a risk for potential negative publicity of the country, and the process to actually get a visa was therefore lengthy. RTC is an established institution that has an interest in moving forward. As the college merely provides bachelor courses, I was the first master student to ever try and conduct research at the institute. Because this was fairly new, my research proposal had to be accepted by the Immigration Office of Bhutan and based on this, I was granted a research visa. RTC reassured Immigration that the institute would guide me closely, and that the research would be in line with the draft proposal. The communication and cooperation between RTC and Immigration has to be seen in light of an isolated country, which specifically opens its borders to rich tourists, and foreigners who are invited by the King to help the country develop. The step to accept a foreign student, who does not have an in-depth emotional connection with the country is therefore seen as a risk, as I could spread negativity about Bhutan in the world.

The process of getting to Bhutan took six months. It was, what at a time seemed, a never ending game of waiting and doubts, to not even mention the uncertainty related to Bhutan's strict covid policy. Looking back at it, the amount of preparatory meetings, documents and time put into realising this, is insane. Luckily I could build on an inexhaustible source of intrinsic motivation. The constant source of uncertainty merely left the moment that I set foot on Bhutanese soil for the first time, while I knew that I would directly be brought to a hotel for 14 days of total isolation.

Apart from the classes that I took at the university, I worked hard to be transparent with regards to my research. The research committee of the university was responsible for supervising the

research conducted at the institute. The members of this committee are internationally well recognized scholars, who had been working at the university for eight to ten years. My periodic efforts to update the committee on my progress were answered with green lights, which motivated me to keep going.

However, at one point in time, I got a big red light and was asked to come to the Dean's office. My (initial) research was on Bhutanese national identity, and in particular what factors individuals considered important in feeling Bhutanese. The methodology of this research would be built on 50 in-depth interviews, as well as a survey that would be filled out by 1000+ Bhutanese citizens. I already formulated the interviewee's questions, conducted 25 interviewees, made the survey, and sent it out to RTC students, as well as non-university students throughout the country.

The foremost reason why this research got cancelled by the university, is because it is too sensitive of a topic, which reveals the operating power structures in Bhutan. The internal uprising during 1998 and 2003 of the population, who are Nepali from origin and currently living in the south, led to an emphasis on state building. A research on national identity could potentially reveal the absence or lack of collectivism, which would be alarming. In fact, it is a small country and internal instability is a major threat to the sovereignty of the country and the lineage of the King.

During the meeting's that followed with all the members of the research committee, the picture of the 'happy country' shifted. Due to this, I got to look behind the curtain of what really was going on in this country, and I found out that anything that the King has addressed in public speeches is safe to conduct research on. This should also be seen in light of the power structures operating within the country, leading to the university not wanting to burn its fingers, and obtain a bad reputation. In other words, apart from the students presenting dominant narratives, the institutions in the country also are influenced by the political pressure from above.

Additionally, as the repetition of worse case scenarios is an effective way to keep the status quo intact, I was told about a foreign researcher who published negatively about Bhutan, and was told that the people participating in the research were affected by this. The argumentation that followed was that it is a small country and people keep each other in check. I was therefore strongly advised to change my research, if I wished to return, and have a long term connection with Bhutan.

Further restrictions to this new angle of research were given, and I only was allowed to interview students of RTC, whereas the plan at first was to also talk to people in different districts, professions and age groups. Additionally, I was not allowed to ask which districts the students were from, as this would potentially reveal differences in sense of belonging amongst the various regions.

On a more personal level, and at the time this was going on, I was overwhelmed by the fact that an institution would be able to limit my fundamental right of conducting research. Apart from this, I also saw all the work put into digging through the extensive literature on national identity and the hours spent interviewing and transcribing the interviews go up in smoke.

Looking back at it, the emotional burden of having to grash the underlying reason for the university's decision to cancel my research, in relation to the work that had to be done all over again,

was high. However, within a week I managed to shift the conceptual aim of this research from the collective national identity to the more individual sense of belonging. Adjusting rapidly enabled me to get back on track with my research.

Apart from the fact that the shift in research was an emotional, stressful and time consuming process, it adds to the academic literature by countering the narrative presented in the media on the country of happiness, and the view of this utopian place on earth. A direct example is also given by Passang Tshering *“I actually never felt that I belonged here. A small part does feel that I belong here. Maybe because of the King, and the free education. But then, at certain times when the people from different districts speak, we have different cultures and sometimes I can't relate to them. Sometimes I do, because we have similar things, but there are also different things”*. Furthermore, Phuentsho Dorji mentioned *“The people drive me out. There are really good people here but there are also corrupted minds and toxic people. I know that that is life and that there are many people out there that are similar. I think when I go abroad I will miss my family and friends more than the country. The friends and the family that I have make me feel at home”*.

Thus, the desire for throne succession, and therefore ensuring the lineage of the royal family, in relation to the country's drive to stay independent, leads to pressure from above. The influence of this is felt in all corners of society, which my research is an example of



## 10. Limitations

There are various limitations to this research. First of all, the interviewees are all RTC students, and this implies that the sample population is not representative for the general Bhutan public. Secondly, the number of people interviewed is 50. If the research had been conducted on a larger scale and with different research methods, the outcome might be different. Additionally, it is questionable to what extent the Bhutanese students shared their entire story. The influence of the educational system and upbringing, which is focused on repeating the arguments presented, instead of critical individual thinking, could also be a factor influencing the answers presented. Furthermore, this thesis is an interpretation of the interviewees' answers. Spending six months in Bhutan helped to understand its culture to some extent, also in relation to the narratives told by the interviewees. However, the possibility remains that some cultural misconceptions may have arisen. It must be stressed that the culture and the stories shared have been treated with great respect. Lastly, the questions on the motivation of the students to go abroad are focused on the future. Students therefore are able to share what their plans are, yet these plans are hypothetical. Further research is needed in which Bhutanese living abroad are the focus of attention. A possible angle of view might be an analysis of composing factors of Bhutanese diaspora and its possible influence on nationalism.

## 11. Conclusion

The link between Bhutanese sense of belonging and the desire to work or study abroad was analysed, and it can be argued that although Bhutanese are going abroad to study, work or to get exposure, the emotional and perceived attachment to a space is pulling them back to their homeland. Bhutanese sense of belonging can best be summarised by focusing on the Bhutanese culture, religion, language, citizenship, the Wangchuck dynasty, nature, environment, diversity and its architecture. Although the sense of belonging model did capture the salient elements in Bhutanese sense of belonging, it lacked culturally specific factors. Furthermore, the desire of Bhutanese youngsters to go abroad was focused on, and it may be concluded that the material gain of working internationally, as well as education and getting exposure pulls and pushes them. Additionally, and because the analysis found similar narratives shared by the students, it can be concluded that the dominant narratives are based on social constructivism, while at the same time validating its truth, as it is a lived reality. Moreover, the notion of sense of belonging moves away from the physical space, and shifts towards a more emotional and perceived attachment to a space. This line of argumentation could be linked to the notion of globalisation, and although globalisation draws on cultural interconnectedness, Bhutanese present their sense of belonging as a motivating factor and desire to return to Bhutan, which pin points towards a transnational attachment of Bhutanese. As such, this research analysed the link between the salient factors contributing to people's sense of belongingness, in relation to the outward movement of the most productive, and promising segment of society. Although the prospect of returning to Bhutan, and contributing to the society is futuristic, the strong sense of belonging is a motivating factor to return, which is reassuring for Bhutan's development. Additionally, the global sense of space is limited and visible in Bhutan, but it must be questioned to what extent the individual is aware of this, as it is influenced by the dominant narrative in society. The concluding remarks presented above are in line with the utopian view of Bhutan. However, the experience as a researcher, and in particular experiencing that the initial research was cancelled, shifted the 'happiness' perspective of the country. It revealed the power structures that are operating in society. The dominant narrative presented by the students therefore is understable, as the interviewees are influenced by the system. The King has an interest in passing the throne to his family, and support from its inhabitants is therefore essential.

The complexity of the topic must motivate other scholars to investigate a sense of belongingness in relation to the desire to leave. Thus, further research is needed which focuses on a sense of belongingness in different countries. Additionally, researching various cases and different cultures would make it possible to generalise and investigate connections. In short, there is a considerable amount of potential for follow up research. Researching this topic will grant in-depth insights in the motivation for people to move, and how their sense of belonging changes along the way, which is increasingly relevant in an era in which people move as a result of economic gains, conflict, climate change, hunger and water shortage.

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