Citizen Journalism: An Analysis of News Representation in the Coverage of Bhutannewsservice.com

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This article analyses the discussion of nationality and ethnicity on a Bhutanese citizen journalism site which is particularly used by members of the Lhotshampa ethnic group. Many of the citizen journalists are based outside Bhutan, either in refugee camps in Nepal or as part of a worldwide diaspora. Writers on the site tackle issues relating to a nation, people, culture, and history, particularly that of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people. By criticizing accepted sources and the mainstream media and re-interpreting Bhutanese history, this group of citizen journalists works to assert the Lhotshampa people as rightful citizens of Bhutan and to re-identify other ethnic groups in power in Bhutan as migrants. Bhutan is argued to be a country where all peoples are migrants, and at the same time, diasporic writers remind their readers of why they left Bhutan and look to a better future in their new countries.

Keywords: Citizen journalism, refugees, Bhutan, articles, Lhotshampa, SAARC countries

Since the early 1990s, a growing number of refugees from Bhutan have lived in refugee camps in Nepal. These people are from the Lhotshampa ethnic group and, by 2006, the camps contained more than 107,000 refugees. In October of that year, a group of eight countries, including the US and the UK, announced their intention of offering resettlement places to these refugees. More than 90% of the refugees have opted to accept this offer so far. However, their decision to settle in a third country has led to mixed feelings for the refugees – on the one hand, there is optimism due to the freedom of movement they have been now granted, but on the other hand, uncertainty due to the linguistic and cultural challenges they face in their new homes. In comparison, those who are left behind in the camps are still waiting for a 'safe and dignified' repatriation to their homeland, rejecting the third-country settlement programme.

This article investigates how this division in the political position among the refugees has led to a shift in the discourse on nationalism, patriotism, and national identity within a Bhutanese citizen-journalism site. Analysing news articles published by bhutannewsservice.com which identifies itself as a Bhutanese citizen-journalism site, we argue that different discourses relating to citizenship and national identity have grown up within Bhutanese citizen journalism, depending on the personal circumstances of the writers, but that central to all discourses on this site are the concepts of 'our nation' and 'our culture'.

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Also, while Bhutanese citizen journalists based within the country rarely use this site to express their views or to encourage their fellow citizens to participate in the news process, those that are based outside the country strongly encourage other fellow citizens to do so and to tell their stories.

Bhutan

Sandwiched between China and India, Bhutan is a small country. Almost completely cut off from the rest of the world for centuries, it has started incorporating some aspects of the outside world in recent decades while also protecting its traditional cultures. As well as being a tiny nation, Bhutan is also the most sparsely populated country in South Asia, with a total population of 807,610 (World Bank, 2017).

Bhutan existed as a battlefield of warring chiefs until 1637 when Ngawang Namgyal consolidated rival groups, unifying all provinces into one nation. However, Bhutan plunged into further political crises after his death in 1651. After centuries of civil war, Ugen Wangchuk emerged as the most powerful leader, becoming the first hereditary monarch of the country in 1907 (Rai, 2013). Bhutan made a transition from an absolute to constitutional monarchy through its first general election in 2008, becoming the youngest democratic country in the world. It now has a two-party parliamentary democracy, with the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa party currently in power.

With the new millennium, the Bhutan government has introduced new programmes that it claims will improve the quality of life for its citizens. Plastic bags are banned for pollution control, tobacco is virtually illegal in the country, and the well-being of citizens is measured by Gross National Happiness (GNH) instead of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2006, *Business Week*, published by US-based Bloomberg P.L., rated Bhutan among the 'happiest countries' in the world and the happiest in Asia.

A Complex National Identity

Bhutan does not have its ethnic group that could be classified as the original inhabitants. Some extant sources discuss the civilization and people of Bhutan from as early as the seventeenth century. However, the majority of these sources are religious and therefore only discuss the achievements of religious figures (Pommaret, 2000), and most studies of the history of the country are produced in the second half of the twentieth century (Ueda, 2003).

With the exposure of the country to the outside world, particularly after the forced eviction of thousands of Nepalese-speaking Lhotshampa in the 1990s, scholars began discussing the history and culture of Bhutan from a variety of perspectives. This is a testimony to the nation's preoccupation with what it once was, what it is now, and what it may become in the future. In his book Bhutan and its Agonised People, for example, Rai (2013) provides an insight into the chronological history of Bhutan from 840 A.D. to the present day, discussing Bhutan, the Bhutanese people, and their culture and history. Even social scientists have now become involved in the study of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people, with the description of Bhutan as one of the 'happiest' countries in the world.

The national identity of Bhutan is often pre-determined from a list of several different aspects that are linked to the origin of people, religion, geographic landscape, or even indicators that measure the quality of life or social progress. A few examples include 'Indo-Burmese origin' (Schoubroeck, 1999), 'Buddhist or Buddhism' (Hutt, 1996), and 'Gross National Happiness' (Braun, 2009), or 'happy society' (Hisayoshi, 2013).

Hutt (2005) discusses the complexity of identifying the national identity of the Bhutanese, explaining that the country is one where two different cultural and demographic spheres converge. The more densely populated region to the south of the country is home to the speakers of languages such as Hindi, Bengali, and Urdu, and most of the population is either Hindu or Muslim. In the north, on the Tibetan plateau, Buddhism still survives despite attempts by the Chinese to erase it and Tibeto-Burma languages are spoken (Hutt, 2005, p. 1). Therefore, much of the cultural history of Bhutan may be described as an outcome of the interaction between these two spheres along the line where they overlap.

Also, multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, as noted by Spring (2007) and Hisayoshi (2013), are often discussed as new issues, as they strongly surface as themes in the context of Bhutan and the Bhutanese. Therefore, it might be helpful to understand the social and political contexts of Bhutan about multi-ethnic and multiculturalism by discussing (i) ethnic groups and (ii) population, religion, and culture.

Ethnic Groups

The population of Bhutan is ethnically diverse, comprising a wide range of ethnic groups — from Yak herders in the north to the farmers in the south. Hutt (2005) describes the division of the Bhutanese population into groups being as problematic as its enumeration. However, most accounts identify three broad ethnic groups: the Ngalong in the west and north, the Sharchop in the east, and the Lhotshampa in the south (Schappi, 2005). All these groups have their lingua franca, i.e., Dzongkha for the Ngalong, Tshangla for the Sharchop, and Nepalese for the Lhostsampa.

The Ngalong and the Sharchop are collectively called Drukpa, referencing a branch of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism. The Drukpa is not only predominant in the west but also have 'statutory representation in the state's recommendatory and consultative institution' (Schappi, 2005, p. 3). They are believed to have migrated from Tibet during the eighth and ninth centuries bringing Buddhism with them (Rai, 2013). Despite having a comparatively small population, they predominantly occupy the most senior positions in the government and civil services (Hutt, 2005). In addition, their cultural norms and traditions have been institutionalized as the official norm for all citizens of Bhutan.

The Sharchop are the largest ethnic group in Bhutan, and they are considered to be the descendants of the earliest groups to inhabit Bhutan. They are an Indo-Mongoloid people, believed to have migrated from Assam, or possibly Burma, c. 1200 – c. 800 B.C. Driem (1994) suggests that they are closely related to the Monpa, a major people of Arunachal Pradesh in the north-east of India. They have their own culture and language, are part of an agricultural society and use a slash-and-burn method of farming (i.e., cutting and burning of plants in forests to create farmlands). However, they are the most marginalized ethnic group due to the societal prominence and political power of them along.

The Lhotshampa, on the other hand, are the descendants of peasant farmers, most of whom migrated from Nepal or the Indian state of West Bengal. While they are classified as Hindu, this may be an oversimplification as some groups, such as the Tamang, are largely Buddhist. Besides, there is also a small group of indigenous tribal groups who live in scattered villages throughout the country. They are culturally and linguistically close to the population of western Bengal in India.

Population, Culture, and Religion

Following the introduction of a new form of government in 1974, Bhutan entered a tumultuous new era in its national politics. However, Mathou (2008) comments that the people of Bhutan neither spontaneously welcomed the changes nor did they organize any protests to provoke these changes themselves as the Bhutanese society was essentially conservative at the time. Free education and health services, employment opportunities, highly government-subsidized agriculture inputs, and generous rural credit schemes, however, continued to attract outside people. To control the influx of migrants, the Bhutanese government introduced a law in 1977 whereby laborers were required to possess a valid document allowing them to work in the country. In 1985, the government introduced a new Citizenship Act that provided three avenues for the acquisition of Bhutanese citizenship: birth to a father who was a Bhutanese national at the time of birth; a petition to an official, provided certain conditions of residence were fulfilled; and a petition to an official upon marriage to a Bhutanese national. According to the 1981 census, the Lhotshampa constituted the largest population (53%) in the country, followed by the Sharchop (30%) and the Ngalong (17%). However, a more recent census by the government showed that only 28% of the total citizen population, including those who fled Bhutan in the 1990s, was made up of Lhotshampas (Bisht, 2008).

Driem (1994) suggests that at least nineteen different languages are spoken in Bhutan. To a large extent, Nepalese was used as the lingua franca in Bhutan until the late 1980s. However, with the introduction of a 'one nation, one people' policy in 1989, Dzongkha is now the national language. English has been recently adopted as the language of instruction in all academic institutions.

The people of Bhutan are legally free to convert to any religion they like. However, they face social pressure not to do so, as the constitution of the country grants special status to Buddhism. Christianity is seen as a Western faith and converts are often looked upon with suspicion due to the notion that missionaries provide monetary support to converts from other religions. According to the 2014 Religious Freedom in the World report, 75% of the total population is Buddhist, followed by Hindu (23%), Christian (0.55), Muslim (0.2%), and local traditional religion (1.9%).

Bhutanese Refugees

In 1958, the Lhotshampas were granted Bhutanese citizenship and tenure of their lands. The government later pursued a policy of integration that met with a considerable success, and having allowed the south to run its affairs for decades with minimal contact with the north, the government began to train the Lhotshampas for government services and even offered cash incentives for Nepali-Drukpa integrations for some years (Rimal, 2005). This new scheme encouraged the Lhotshampa population to play an important role in the development of national life in the country. In the 1980s, when the total population of Bhutan was stated to be 1,142,200, the six southern districts (each of which had a Lhotshampa majority) were said to have a total population of 552,800 people (Savada, 1993). However, the exact population of Bhutan was unknown as the government census was classified as unscientific because it had been conducted by a group of teachers and students and errors had been subsequently discovered during a 'district-by-district recount' (Rose, 1977, cited in Hutt, 2005, p. 150).

In 1988, citing concerns about an increase in migrants, the government carried out a census in southern Bhutan again, subsequently announcing a series of measures,

including a 'one nation, one people' policy. The Lhotshampas perceived the government's initiative as a plan to attack their language and culture (Evans, 2012), eventually stripping them of their citizenship (Hutt, 2005). Therefore, they sought a system of equality, under which they would be allocated what they needed as an equitable share of the country's polity and economy (Rimal, 2004).

But the government perceived the demands of the Lhotshampas as a threat and reacted to the activism harshly (Rai, 2013). As a result, the action of the government resulted in widespread arbitrary arrests, followed by the eviction of a large number of Lhotshampa, who moved to Nepal and settled in several different refugee camps from 1991 onwards.

In October 2006, a group of eight countries, including the US and the UK, announced their intention to offer resettlement places to these refugees. The US announced that it would take some 60,000 of 107,000 refugees to the US, or even more if required. The other members of the group expressing an intention to take their share were Canada, Denmark, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and Norway. Most refugees expressed their excitement at the possibility of employment, residence, and eventually citizenship rights in the West. However, this settlement programme created political divisions amongst the refugees themselves, with some refusing to settle in the West. Nearly 10% of the total refugees are still waiting for 'safe and dignified' repatriation to their country (Rai, 2013).

These refugees feel that the media, both local and international, pay little attention to their issues. Therefore, in 2004, a group of refugees launched their news site, *bhutannewsservice.com*, to challenge the government-controlled media in the homeland. The original aims of the news site were to promote the voice of the refugees, addressing issues that were largely ignored by the media, and to bring the Bhutanese people living in different parts of the world together to share the knowledge and experience they had gained in their homeland and abroad. Soon, the site grew into not only a platform for advocating the issues of Bhutan and Bhutanese refugees but also an alternative source of news for the people of Bhutan and donor agencies in the global sphere.

Bhutannewsservice.com became a hybrid news organization, exhibiting the common characteristics of both a traditional news organization and alternative media. On the one hand, the site aimed to cover a wide range of news issues, including those relating to society, culture, politics and human rights, and adopted the usual hierarchy of the traditional media, whereby a team of volunteers oversaw editorial affairs. On the other hand, the site relied extensively on its network of volunteer writers, who contributed news articles from different parts of the world.

These writers may be described as citizen journalists for the following reasons: first, they come from all walks of life and do not consider themselves to be professional journalists. Second, in contrast to professional journalists in the mainstream Bhutanese media, who promote the political ideology of the Bhutanese government, they offer different political views, criticizing the Bhutanese government and its policies. Third, they provide coverage of news from an alternative perspective, often challenging the mainstream media. In addition, the mode of the delivery of news content is the Internet.

Citizen Journalism: Concepts and Definitions

With the advent of modern technology, we have witnessed a rapid broadening of ways in which ordinary people – often called citizen journalists – engage in the current model of media practice, popularly known as citizen journalism. Using modern technology, such as

the Internet, citizen journalists can do essentially what professional journalists do: they produce and distribute news and information in many forms, from podcast editorials to reports about council meetings on a blog or a website (Cheri, 2014), on a global scale. With citizen journalism embracing all forms of social media platforms, they are performing the roles once exclusively played by the traditional media.

As a result, the notion of citizen journalism has spread rapidly in contemporary media discourses in recent decades. The notion is often seen to challenge the central aspects of traditional journalism, such as professional training and recognition, paid staff, and professional behavior that is politically neutral and unaffiliated (Khiabany & Sreberny, 2009). By contrast, citizen journalism promotes news and information often produced by untrained, voluntary, and highly politicized writers. However, with increasing public participation in the news media, the boundaries of citizen journalism and traditional journalism are blurring, and therefore, fine lines between the mainstream and citizen journalism are becoming harder to draw (Gillmor, 2006).

Bowman and Willis (2003) define citizen journalism as the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news information. The definition further goes on to explain that 'this participation intends to provide independent, reliable, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires' (p. 9). In citizen journalism, citizen journalists are responsible themselves for gathering news content, along with envisioning, creating and publishing such content (Nip, 2010). As citizen journalism exhibits the characteristics of several different media practices, a range of terms have been employed to capture various aspects of the phenomenon, including alternative media (Kim & Hamilton, 2006; Atton, 2008; Kenix, 2009; Berger, 2011), participatory journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2006; Joyce, 2007), underground press (Ke, 2000; Menayang et al., 2002; Lewes, 2009) and user-generated content (Hermida & Thurman, 2008).

In the years since the 2004 Asian tsunami catastrophe, it has also been called 'open-source journalism,' 'hyper-local journalism,' 'distributed journalism,' or networked journalism (Allan 2009). Among other new terms that have entered the lexicon are: user-created content, audience material, 'we media,' community journalism, collaborative journalism, pro-am collaboration, crowd-sourced journalism, interactive journalism, network publishing, bridge media, and random acts of journalism (Kelly, 2009). Despite these diverse terms, they all fall under the broad umbrella concept of Web 2.0 technology, such as blogs and other social media, that allows ordinary people to interact and collaborate to share news and information. The variety of these terms is an indication that there is no common understanding about the concept of citizen journalism 'except that ordinary people actively participate in the process of news and that the range of practice is broad' (Kern & Nam, 2009, p. 641).

The role of citizen journalism is now firmly established, with some citizen journalists, in particular, bloggers, gaining high profiles after September 1, 2001, and during the 2003 Iraq war. The rise of citizen journalism has also led to changes in the mode of journalism practices, and some mainstream media organizations, including The BBC, now provide opportunities for the audience to participate in the process of news. Gillmor (2006) describes this new genre of journalism as a process of media transition, where citizen journalists are able to address democratic deficits inherent in the corporate media system. This means that citizen journalists not only provide news and information on social and political issues but also perform the role of watchdog by monitoring the performance of policymakers and media organizations, raising their voices. In addition,

they may be able to provide alternative views, 'addressing issues that are largely ignored by the corporate media' (Kim & Hamilton, 2006 p. 541).

However, the concept of citizen journalism is practiced variously and thus varies from region to region, or even from country to country. Contrary to the common perception in Western countries that citizen journalism can provide news information without editorial constraints, in non-Western countries, such as South Korea and Malaysia, citizen journalists continue to face challenges. This may be due partly to news practices and media regulations, including editorial censorship (Kim & Hamilton, 2006; Steele, 2009) as the idea of citizen journalism has not yet matured in these countries to the level of what is seen in the West. Thus, the scope of citizen journalism has not yet been fully realized in many countries.

Therefore, there has been a limited amount of research into how citizen journalism has been practiced in its history and how it is being practiced in now, in particular outside the West. This article is part of a wider study of citizen journalism, focusing on the South Asia region. It offers a snapshot of citizen journalism in the context of Bhutan, hoping to stimulate debate on different citizen-journalism models and also to encourage further studies of the phenomenon in different areas of the world.

Methodology

This paper analyses the coverage of citizen journalism news published on *bhutannewsservice.com* in the year 2012. The year 2012 was chosen for this study as this period saw several important news events in Bhutan, thereby stimulating debate amongst citizen journalists: Bhutan was preparing for its second general election since its first transition from an absolute monarchy to multi-party democracy in 2008. The Bhutanese refugees who had resettled in the third countries were experiencing new challenges, with a few committing suicides in their host nations during this year. On the other hand, back in the homeland, the Bhutanese media was covering land-corruption scandals involving some influential politicians.

In 2012, *bhutannewsservice.com* published a total of 493 news articles all in all. Of the total, 140 articles were selected for further analysis based on their subject matter. Only news articles that provided critical views were selected for this analysis. Therefore, news articles that were selected for analysis included opinions, news analysis, and essays and reviews. To ensure that data was as correct and complete as possible, several procedures were instituted to maintain the integrity of this study. To achieve this objective, news articles were first thoroughly read before deciding whether they should be incorporated into the dataset for analysis.

Other news articles, including ones that were coded as 'general news' (i.e., news articles offering readers general information on public affairs), were excluded from the study, as they offered little analysis of the issues being discussed. Articles in languages other than English were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the study was focused on English-language citizen journalism that aimed at achieving an international readership both inside and outside its country of origin. Therefore, the materials for the analysis are in English, which aim at a multinational audience of first- and second-generation diasporic refugees.

It should be noted that the site also often re-published news articles from the mainstream media when it considered they were of relevance for its readers. While these news articles appeared on the sampled site, they were treated as news articles produced by professional journalists and therefore excluded from this analysis. The analysis was

undertaken by reading and re-reading the selected texts and coding them using a mutually agreed coding system based on the themes in the articles. For example, articles that drew the attention of readers to parliamentary debates were coded as political news while those that discussed farming profits were coded as financial news.

Findings and Analysis

When analyzing the coverage of bhutannewsservice.com, we find two particular themes relating to the nation and national identity repeated throughout the site: first, an insistence that the Lhotshampa people are Bhutanese; second, the argument that Bhutan is a country made up entirely of migrants from neighboring countries. There are seven discursive techniques by which the articles construct these discourses.

Constructions of the Lhotshampa and their History

A central concern for citizen journalists writing on bhutannewsservice.com was the fear of becoming un-Bhutanese citizens (i.e., losing both their homeland and their Bhutanese national identity) due to political conflicts in the country. While the mainstream media provided regular updates on the high-level talks between officials, reviving hopes for safe repatriation of the refugees to their homeland, bhutannewsservice.com articles played down any such hopes. Instead, they drew the attention of readers to the history of the Lhotshampas to demonstrate that they were the victims of racial prejudice in their own country. This process is accomplished through four main discursive techniques:

Representing the Common Personality Traits of the Lhutshampa: One of the most regularly discussed issues in the coverage of bhutannewsservice.com was the common characteristics of Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of the world. The articles promoted the instinctive qualities of what was described to be the common traits of the Lhotshampa in Bhutan. An article published on October 21, 2012, for example, described the Lhotshampas as 'brave', 'hardworking,' 'loyal and obedient to masters' and law-abiding by nature. The use of such terms suggests that the Lhotshampas are loyal and law-abiding by nature and therefore make them desirable citizens. The articles argued that the Lhotshampas were good citizens who had played an important role in the development of the country, even though they were now treated as outsiders by the government.

The articles also emphasized in the legality of the presence of the Lhotshampa in Bhutan. For example, an article entitled 'Bhutanese without Bhutan' described how the Lama Ngawang Namgyal visited Gorkha, currently in Nepal, in 1616 and invited the craftsmen to Bhutan with a promise of equal rights and privileges (1 April 2012). Another similar article discussed the fourteenth Daga Penlop, 'Penlop Tsithub,' who officially initiated the settlement of the Lhotshampa in Bhutan in the 1880s (9 October 2012). Some articles even asserted that the history of the Lhotshampa was as old as that of modern Bhutan itself (3 April 2012), as the Lhotshampas have contributed to the development of modern Bhutan, although the Bhutanese government reclassifies them as 'illegal migrants.'

New Life in a New Country: Over 100,000 refugees are now hoping for new lives in the West (UNHCR, 2015). For these refugees, a third-country settlement came with a mixture of despair and hope — on the one hand, there was optimism due to the freedom of movement now available, but on the other hand, there was uncertainty because of linguistic and cultural differences experienced in their host countries. Bhutannewsservice.com articles discussed the challenges and opportunities for the refugees who had left their home country and

described how they were learning new skills and languages in their new countries to improve the quality of their lives. The articles expressed hope for a better future in their new homes, as authors raised their new country as powerful and prosperous, and compared the culture and security system of that country with those of Nepal and Bhutan. For example, an article headlined 'Immigration, expats and the Netherlands' (24 August 2012), described the Netherlands' history of colonization despite its size, and explained how its political power, business shrewdness, and the income of expatriates had led to its rapid [economic] prosperity. In comparison, other articles looked back at how the refugees used to live in Bhutan and Nepal, describing their lives as fearful and anxious: 'it used to be a matter of fear and panic when some family members [did] not return home in late evening, which is not a worry [here] in Holland' (23 October 2012).

The majority of these articles assured readers that the refugees would soon be part of their new local community, finding and even creating jobs in their newly adopted countries (5 November 2012). Overall, bhutannewsservice.com articles expressed optimism, encouraging refugees to look forward to the day when they considered themselves integrated members of their host nations.

Remembering Bhutan as a Home Country: Bhutannewsservice.com articles constantly reminded readers of the political treatment they had received in their native country. The main aim of these articles was to remind readers of how Bhutanese government officials abused their power, killing or raping victims, and shutting down public facilities, including schools. One of the articles, for example, offered the personal account of a refugee currently living in the US:

... Late on the third day, again I heard heavy boots running up the stairs. With a bang, the door opened, and again the guards ran out. A police officer entered a revolver in his hand; I trembled with fear. He pointed the gun at my head for a while and said, 'you wretch fellow,' and stormed out muttering profanities. ...I lost my self-respect and dignity. I lost all of my belongings. I lost the country of my birth. I lost my enjoyment and happiness (26 August 2012).

The articles accused the ruling elites of using excessive power to suppress the voices of those who had been part of Bhutanese society. While the majority of the articles on this site were published from within Western countries, their focus was on their homeland and continued criticizing the political system of their homeland.

However, the picture painted of the refugees' lives in their new countries was not completely positive. Although bhutannewsservice.com articles were optimistic about a better future for the refugees, they also acknowledged the fact that cultural differences could make refugees' lives difficult in their host nations:

It is hard to understand how anyone could see our new Bhutanese neighbor as a threat [in the US]. Go into just about any Bhutanese home in town [in Bhutan], and you will be welcomed, served chia (tea), and probably [even] offered a meal. You will be treated graciously, and with the kind of hospitality, many of us have forgotten in the rush of our busy lives [in the US] (5 November 2012).

These descriptions suggest that the refugees often find themselves in odd situations in their new countries, despite being assured of a friendly welcome. Problems are ascribed to be due to cultural differences and a lack of understanding of each others. However, the articles continued to encourage the refugees to hold on to their Bhutanese culture, although in their day-to-day existence they must focus on their host country.

Negotiating the Political Agenda in a Hope for Repatriation: In the context of a 'safe and dignified' repatriation of the refugees living in different parts of the world, the articles raised concerns about the integrity of the Bhutanese government, as well as the

ability of the Nepal government. They urged that the governments should deal with refugee issues seriously. The articles frequently used terms such as a 'foul game' to refer to repatriation-related activities such as the bilateral talks between the two nations, implying there was little positive news for the refugees even though talks had been taking place. Some articles viewed the chance of a 'safe and dignified' repatriation to be slim and therefore urged that refugees' demands should be realistic, negotiable and flexible line with new political developments (28 August 2012).

Constructions of Bhutan As a Home to All Migrants and the Political System of Bhutan Under the Wangchuck Dynasty

In response to the reclassification of Lhotshampas as 'illegal immigrants,' bhutannewsservice.com articles attempted to legitimize their Bhutanese identity by describing the history of Lhotshampas in Bhutan. The articles explained that Bhutan itself had a short history as a country and that the people of Bhutan were all immigrants. The articles described the Wangchuck regime, which classified the Lotshampa as illegal immigrants, as undemocratic.' Three main techniques were used to construct discourses on Bhutan as a 'country of all migrants' and its political system as 'undemocratic.'

Representing the Lhotshampas Early Migrants: The majority of articles on *bhutannewsservice.com* suggested that the Lhotshampa had over four hundred years of history in Bhutan (17 July 2012), which is older than that of the current monarchy itself. The articles focusing on the history of Bhutan suggested that modern Bhutan now occupies land that had been under Karmarupa until 650 A.D. and that the northern Bhutanese, including the current dynasty, are all Tibetan migrants. A few articles even went on to claim that Tibetan monks had encroached on Indian territories, ousting the Indians who ruled what is known as Bhutan today (3 April 2012). As Bhutan is the land of all migrants, the people are living in the south should have the equal rights to those of the north. Thus, articles on *bhutanewsservice.com* perceived Bhutan to be a home to diverse migrants and focused on the history of these migrant people as they constructed the national identity of the Bhutanese people. Overall, the articles are critical of official sources and reconstruct the historical hierarchy of expertise and authority, re-classifying most of the official sources as 'untrue' or 'fabricated' stories.

To contextualize these findings, bhutanewsservice.com can be contrasted to discussions about national identity on two other Bhutanese citizen-journalism sites, this time operated by writers based within Bhutan: *tsheringtobgay.com* and *sangaykhandu.com*. In contrast to the idea that Bhutan is a land of diverse peoples promoted on *bhutanewsservice.com*, the writer of *tsheringtobgay.com* promoted their royal government's 'one nation, one people' policy, which reinforces the idea that Bhutan is made of a single ethnic group. Articles by this writer also attempted to persuade readers to bear their share of social responsibility in the development of the nation. For example, an article published on *tsheringtobgay.com* read:

> … Most of us, who live in urban areas, take public property for granted. We want the best. But unlike our farmers, we do not contribute to building them. We do not even contribute to their maintenance. This is not sustainable. If we want to enjoy good roads, good schools, and good parks, we better learn, like Aum Thinley Lham, to contribute. Or we better be willing to pay our city corporation higher taxes (15 March 2012).

While the terms 'we' and 'us' refer to the people of Bhutan, they exclude the Bhutanese refugees partly because the government of Bhutan – which also controls the mainstream media – has reclassified them as outsiders or foreigners, and thus, they are not Bhutanese.

On 23 May 2012, a similar news article appeared on *sangaykhandu.com*, which discussed the Bhutanese people and their qualities. The article described the Bhutanese people as law-abiding, hardworking, and some of the happiest citizens in the world. However, it excluded the Bhutanese refugees and their issues in its discussions, suggesting that they are outsiders. These descriptions are an indication that differences occur in citizen journalism news articles while constructing the national identity of the Bhutanese people. In other words, in articles on *bhutanewsservice.com*, the national identity of the Bhutanese people represents a diversity of people who are all ethnic migrants and speak different languages. In contrast, in articles by citizen journalists from within Bhutan, the basic requirement for the construction of the national identity is the 'one nation, one people' policy,' which refers to the same language, religion, and culture.

Representing the Bhutanese government as 'Undemocratic and 'Ruthless': The first duty of a government is to afford protection to its citizens (Heyman, 1991), and the function of the citizen is to keep the government from falling into error (Grosch, 2005). However, when officials and their actions were discussed in the coverage of *bhutannewsservice.com* news, readers were assured that the government was 'corrupt,' 'ruthless' and 'biased against' the Lhotshampa group. The articles also tried to persuade readers that all political decisions that the government makes in the capital Thimphu are in favor of the people in the north. For example, an article on Bhutan's Citizenship Act published on 3 September 2012 explained that no Bhutanese could be registered for citizenship without the evidence of land tax receipts. The provision in the law is that, without the approval of the King, any person occupying a vacant land shall be seen as illegal and punished by the confiscation of the land and imprisonment. These descriptions imply that the King has the power to use his discretion on issues of land ownership. Even if some people owned lands, that alone would not qualify them to obtain citizenship: The King has the final say, and his government sees the Lhotshampas as outsiders. The article described this legal provision as a way of discriminating against Lhotshampas in the south.

Delegitimizing the Bhutanese Media: During 2012, the Bhutanese mainstream media published several articles boasting Bhutan to be fortunate to have been little known and isolated for most of its history and thus had the opportunity to reveal itself to the outside world through the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH).

However, *bhutannewsservice.com* articles countered in such claims, insisting that the Bhutanese media spread 'lies' and fabricate stories. For example, an article entitled Forgotten in the land of GNH' (17 August 2012) described the Bhutanese media 'as the mouthpiece of the government, promoting government voices and slogans, such as 'happiness.' For *bhutannewsservice.com* writers, the Bhutanese media is a source of 'unreliable' information, if not downright falsehoods.

Discussion

Our analysis of articles relating to the national identity of Bhutanese people reveals that the articles employ seven different approaches to construct discourses on the people of Bhutan, their national identity and history and culture. In particular, the articles make two main claims in their discourses — that the Lhotshampas are brave, hardworking, adaptive, and have centuries of history in the country, and that Bhutan is a country of all migrants, describing the ruling elites as Tibetan immigrants.

Particularly important in these articles is the representation of the national identity of refugees living in different parts of the world. A central concern is that the

government has reclassified some of the Lhotshampas as 'illegal immigrants,' thereby ceasing their citizenship. As the government reclassifies the Lhotshampas as outsiders, the articles re-articulate a contrast between 'us' and 'them,' thereby positioning those living in northern Bhutan as Tibetan immigrants.

The alternative argument is put forward that Bhutan is a country of all immigrants, mainly the Lhotshampas, the Ngalong, and the Sharchop, who arrived in Bhutan during different periods. In particular, the articles try to legitimize the presence of the Lhotshampas in Bhutan by referring to the 1616 diplomatic relationship between Bhutan and Gorkha and thereby the regular movements of the Nepalese craftsmen to Bhutan.

Whilst reconstructing the ideology of national identity, the articles play down the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which the Bhutanese government promotes as its legitimate voice. Moreover, in contrast to the Bhutanese government and mainstream media, which promotes the notion of social responsibility in the development of the country, the majority of articles published on bhutannewsservice.com promote the concept of nationalism describing Bhutanese cultures and traditions, languages, and religions as distinctive.

Conclusion

Central to discourses in the coverage of *bhutannewsservice.com* news are the concepts of nation and national identity, perhaps not surprising for a citizen journalism site that aims to serve both a diaspora living throughout the Western world and those left behind in the refugee camps. The articles give the highest priority to the voices and concerns of Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of the world. While the articles are concerned about the issues of refugees, discourses keep shifting from one perspective to another as political changes take place in Bhutan and refugee camps. For example, some articles in 2012 urged a review of the refugees' original demands, as some of the demands, such as the transformation of national politics in Bhutan, had become 'unreasonable' in the changing context. This call for a review of refugee demands may be understood as a result of political changes in Bhutan and in the refugee camps in Nepal as Bhutan adopted a constitutional monarchy in 2008, and more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees opted to move to the West after the announcement of the third-country settlement programme.

Two categories of citizen journalists emerge in this study. The first category – which is critical of the Bhutanese government and its policies – represents Bhutanese refugees living in different parts of the world. The other category – which promotes the national programmes of the government– represents writers from within Bhutan. This division of representation creates differences in news discourses, particularly when discussing the national identity. Unlike citizen journalists based within Bhutan, who focus on the concept of 'one nation, one people' policy, citizen journalists from the refugee community frequently discuss the history and culture of the Bhutanese to construct their national identity. To assure readers the legitimacy of their arguments, they regularly refer to various sources, quoting and paraphrasing them, and aim to promote their critical views, challenging official sources. While these writers are critical of the establishment, they share the same voices and concerns as those of the establishment when it comes to the ideology of nation and national identity — the fact that their country is Bhutan and therefore they are Bhutanese.

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