

# GROWING OLD

Aging in five different places in the world



VELUX FONDEN



VIvE

DET NATIONALE FØRSPØRSELSES  
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Klitgaarden seminar 2018.  
Photo: Harmandeep Kaur Gill.

## INTRODUCTION

This booklet provides insights into the many processes behind the exhibition "Growing Old". Here you can join the ethnographers' fieldwork sites, gain insights into the philosophical reflections behind "the philosophers' square" and the overall project, and get behind the imagistic and scenographic expressions in the exhibition. Working with this exhibition has forced us to be in collaborations between our respective disciplines to a degree that is rather unique – as you will see in the mail correspondence between exhibition designer Tove Nyholm and Maria Louw, anthropologist at fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan or in the shared fieldwork between the philosopher and anthropologist with Else at a dementia ward.

We hope that the exhibition and this booklet will inspire reflections on aging as an existential human condition for the individual, for the family and for society at large.

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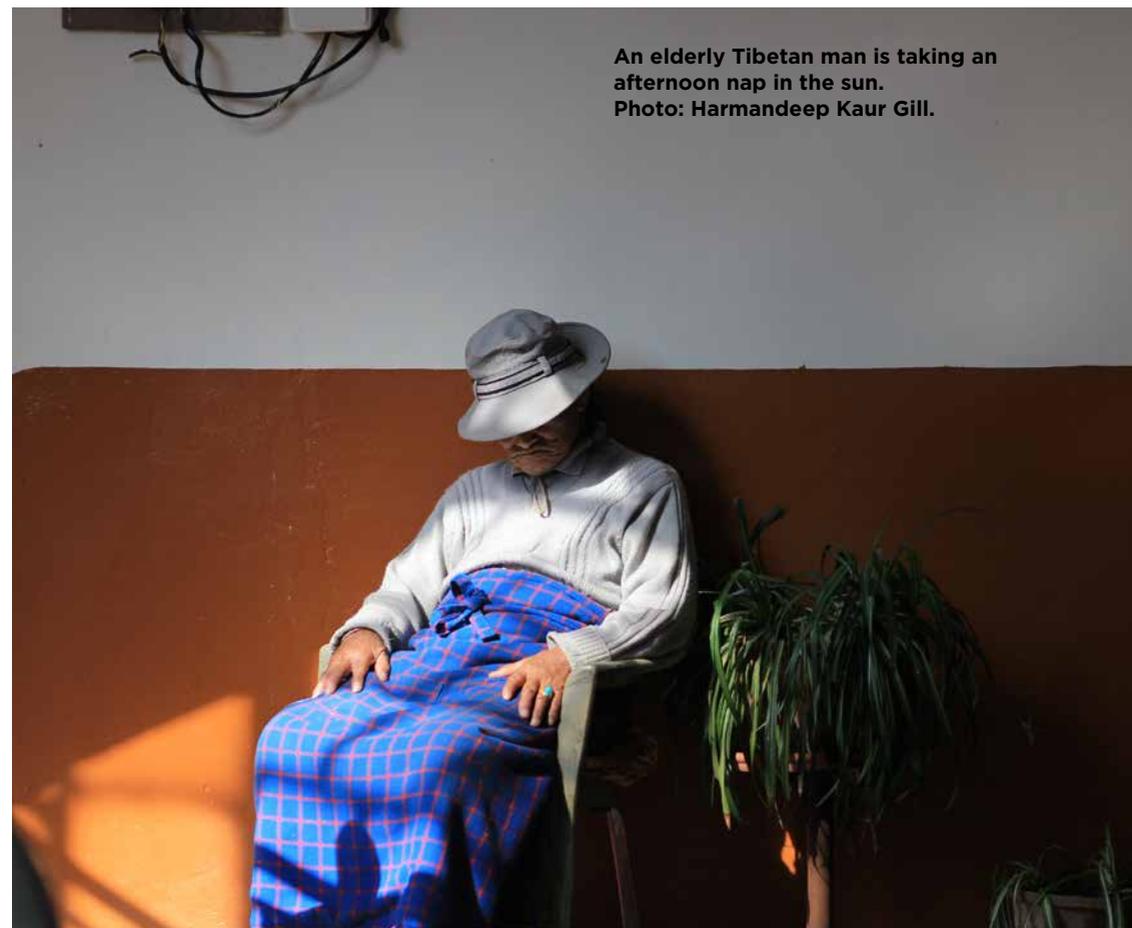
How do people who are aging under challenging and uncertain life conditions strive to achieve good lives?

This question has been central in the research project: "Aging as a Human Condition: Radical Uncertainty and the Search for a Good (Old) Life", on which the exhibition is based. The project is funded by VELUX FONDEN with contributions from Aarhus University and VIVE – The Danish Center for Social Science Research. It is organized as a collaboration between eight

researchers from Aarhus University, Copenhagen University, VIVE and University of Southern California – and two artists from Australia and Denmark.

There is already burgeoning research on the good life in old age framed as successful, active and healthy aging and critical research on inequality and stigmatization in old age. This project takes a different approach: a comparative project that speaks to broad humanistic concerns and puts philosophy, anthropology and art in dialogue.

The project has explored the experience of old age in local settings in Denmark, Kyrgyzstan, Uganda, USA, and among exile Tibetans in India - by comparing four themes central to the experience of aging: the body, intimate others, lived time and home space. The project has sought to provide experience near portraits and theoretical reflections through engaging conversations between ethnographic fieldworks, artistic expressions and philosophical reflections.



An elderly Tibetan man is taking an afternoon nap in the sun.  
Photo: Harmandeep Kaur Gill.

# AN EXHIBITION TAKES SHAPE

The homes in the exhibition are created in a close dialogue between Tove Nyholm and the ethnographers at fieldwork. Here's an excerpt from a mail-correspondence with Maria Louw.

Dear Tove

I am away on fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan btw September 10th-20th and again during the autumn holiday. Looking forward to have something more concrete to discuss. ...

Dear Maria

Here's an outline - for inspiration, in the first place - but what we might end up including in the exhibit.

Photos:

- Tajinisa's face
- Her room, preferably with details. her view, windows, doors. Inflow of light.
- Flooring/carpets.
- Her seat. with measurements (just roughly) - for making a reconstruction if necessary.
- photos of her ancestors, her saints, childhood village, personal relations, things she worries about.

Items:

Selected items that matter to her and which reflect her life: crafts, worn kitchenware that she used every day, photos, books etc. One of her smocks/dresses/shawls. Headscarf.

Text/speech:

about growing old, about her life. Relations.

PS: Really exciting to be able to join you on your fieldwork ...

Dear Tove,

I visited Tajinisa today together with Aizat, my local assistant, and it went well. She doesn't mind that we portray her in the exhibit - in fact she was really glad when I asked. I took a good deal of pictures, and did a long interview today, both to catch up and to initiate a conversation again. Tomorrow morning, we plan to visit her again and focus on things for the exhibit: at least photos and audio.

Afterwards, Aizat and I can go to the bazaar and buy some things that reflect her life and matter to her. Offhand, I think:

- A white tablecloth with flowers. A tea pot, some porcelain cups, glass bowls for the things she always serves for her guests.
- Some white clothes. Maybe a scarf from here - she loves white, and has a lot of white clothes hanging on the outside of her closet.
- Maybe some notebooks. She's got small scraps of paper with notes on (about everything, from poems she writes, phone numbers, about her medicine her doctor says she should take) lying everywhere.
- Some pillows, maybe a quilt.

It won't be Tajinisa's stuff I bring, but I can ask her to talk about what the needlework, the poems and the hospitality mean to her. OK?

I think that was it. And yes: it is exciting to work this way. I can feel that it is truly fruitful for me to work with your "obstructions" and be forced to focus more on the visual and material aspects.

All best, Maria

Dear Maria!

Do send my regards, and tell her that it is an important and a great joy that she would like to participate - in relation to the overall values and aim of the project.

Furthermore, it would be of great value if we could hear her talk about her dreams and memories. To me that is one of the most personal things from another person - its language.

Kindly, Tove

- Tove Nyholm, exhibition designer



Tajinisa in her home.  
Photo: Maria Louw.

## TAJINISA

“Don’t worry, everything is clean,” Tajinisa says as she places teacups and small bowls with jam, honey and sweets in front of my field assistant Aizat and I. Aizat sneezes. And sneezes again. Her eyes turn red. Thick layers of dust cover most of the surfaces in Tajinisa’s apartment.

Piles of stuffed plastic bags fill up the living rooms, the kitchen and the hallway, and on the tables there are piles of notebooks and scraps of paper with notes. The wallpaper hangs in

tatters, and carpets and mattresses are invaded by moths. In a passable corner of the living room lies a carpet and a string of beads. Tajinisa tries to pray five times a day, she says. A cupboard is decorated with childhood pictures of Tajinisa’s children. She rarely talks with the children, she says. Her two daughters migrated to Europe.

It is January, and the living room is cold. Tajinisa went out to buy slippers when she heard that we were to come, but now she is unable to find them. I

Aizat and I ask if we can help her instead. We also ask if we can take some of the many plastic bags with us when we leave. Tajinisa declines: the plastic bags are filled with things she needs. She grabs a couple of the bags and out of them she pulls embroidered pillowcases, felt works, knitted sweaters, a woven silk blanket – and a huge carpet with motives of deer and eagles. The best men are like eagles, she says, and the best women are like deer that live in the fresh air in the high mountains. She has made everything herself. She also finds a faded newspaper clipping: a tribute she wrote to Chinggis Aitmatov, Kyrgyzstan’s famous national writer. After he died in 2018, he came to her in her dreams several times, kissed her on her cheeks and gave her his hand – a kind of blessing and sign that they were connected.

She disappears into the kitchen and brings back a large platter with *plov* (pilaf). Aizat climbs over the plastic bags and helps her making more tea. On the door to the kitchen hangs a poster with verses from the Quran, a lottery ticket and a small handwritten note: “If God wills, I will become a BILLIONAIRE!” I take a picture, but Tajinisa does not want to talk about the lottery ticket and the note. Now we should eat, not talk. We are the first guests to visit this year, and that has to be celebrated.

– Maria Louw, anthropologist

tell her not to worry, but she finds a pair of her own shoes for me to wear. She puts on a white shirt, a white scarf and a pink knitted waistcoat. Her favorite color is white, she says. She likes the cleanness of the white color.

As we talk, the room gets darker. It is lit only by the daylight that enters through her balcony’s broken windows. From the ceiling hangs a couple of loose cords. Tajinisa had called a man who might help her putting up a lamp, but he never came.

## KUWAM

Kuwam, the elder and clan leader from Tultul village, has been sick for some time. My co-researcher Jacob from the Ik community tells me worriedly: “Kuwam looks weak, there is no one around his place and... the place is just scattered.” The next morning Jacob and I go to visit Kuwam.

We approach the place where the village used to be firmly demarcated with an outer stockade – *nyeriwi* – of poles and sticks, intended to keep wild animals and enemies out. Part of the stockade has been removed when many families recently moved and took most of the poles with them. Tultul village *does* look scattered.

At Kuwam’s place there are almost no internal fences left, and only pieces of the outer stockade. Kuwam is lying outside the house on an old mosquito net, with his head resting on a pair of black gum boots. The transformation since I saw him about six months ago is immense. His body has shrunk to about half his earlier size, from the days when he was an active clan leader. He is too weak to sit up and his metal lip plug (the proud body decoration from his youth) is threatening to fall out when he tries to speak. It is hard work to preserve dignity when the body, the face, the house and fences are physically disintegrating.

The next day Kuwam is lying inside his house, but he is able to sit on his sleeping skin and talk quietly, even though his lip plug still dangles when he speaks. We converse inside his house even though this is his most private space, but he cannot walk yet, so he invites us in. The house is falling apart. The grass thatch on the roof is

thin and the walls are decomposing. There used to be mud between the poles of the walls. Now it is mainly the poles left. Like bones in a body with little flesh left. The smell is sharp of urine and reminds me of what Kuwam said last year about growing old. He said “one of the worst things about getting old is when the body gets so weak that you cannot get away from your own faeces... you are stuck with your shit – and you may not even be able to see it”. He was laughing about



Lotte Meinert at fieldwork in conversation with Kuwam. January 2018. Photo: Karl Baaré.

the comical situation, but added with a more serious mine: “You lose some of your dignity and become very dependent on others.”

Outside Kuwam’s house, curious neighbors and grandchildren are looking in through what used to be the wall, and one of the neighbors asks: “What have you brought today? What is for sharing?.” It is hard to get privacy to talk, but Kuwam seems happy to have people nearby and engaged. The neighbor’s arm sticks through the

penetrable wall and asks for tobacco with a characteristic hand move. Kuwam shares a pinch of tobacco and some of his old dignity seems to re-inhabit his body.

– Lotte Meinert, anthropologist

## THE FIVE FIGURESCAPES

The five tall charcoal drawings in the exhibition explore five situations of aging. They all focus on the figure, but the figure here is not depicted as the physical body, and old age is not represented as the body in decline. Rather, the drawings are figurescapes, in which I imagine aging as the lived experience of situations where the fragility of existence makes the connection to others essential for a sense of self.

Each drawing is addressed to a particular person or situation from the fieldwork of the anthropologists. Some address a person from one of the five homes in the exhibition and some do not. Specifically, the figurescapes respond to a set of conference papers, which overflow with a poetic tenderness that speaks poignantly about struggles for recognition and about an insistence on being more than a burden, a past or a frail body.

I have distilled the papers into a kind of imagistic poetry, which accompany the drawings in the exhibition. From the poems, I imagine the five situations as interpersonal and spatial tensions (e.g. as *heaviness*, or *attachment*, as *a reaching for* or *a holding on*), and through these tensions I explore each situation as a demand for response and recognition.

### About the drawings: Another Human Being

Sonam Dolma, a Tibetan in Dharamshala, is confined to her chair and depends on visiting carers. These relationships are often uneasy, because Sonam Dolma's sense of self relies on being equally able to give care. In my

drawing, I have made Sonam Dolma an assertive figure, who at the same time reaches for something fragile.

### The Presence of Unlived Lives

Like many others in Kyrgyzstan, Tajinisa's family rarely visits. Her personhood has come to depend instead on imagined presences, spirits and an idea of a life she could have lived. In this drawing two worlds coexist: one marked by absence and one crowded with imagined presences, through which Tajinisa maintains her sense of self.

### You Need Her and She Needs You

In Southern California, three African American women live a life entwined through nurturing a severely disabled boy. Through their care for the boy, aging and fragility have become something shared. I have tried to draw this entwining of personhood as a great movement towards a cradle-like centre.

### They Too Are Vulnerable

In Uganda Kuwam's sense of self is bound to others with intricate fence work, which connects as well as separates. I have drawn the fence work as part of a complex entanglement of figures, where Kuwam's struggle for recognition is evident in the disintegration of the fences.

### Within the Realm of Humans

In a dementia ward in Denmark, we meet people who interact in a heightened presence, because their personhood no longer rests securely on an idea of a past and a future. Although on the surface their interactions



lack content, it is through presence and connection that personhoods are revealed. In my drawing I want to make visible these delicate but profound affirmations of personhood.

– Maria Speyer, artist

From the studio.  
Photo: Jesse McNicoll.

## ELSE

Else gets up from morning coffee and says that she really must get going. I remind her that she said I could visit her and listen to her Hansi Hinterseer CDs. She says that's fine. I ask if Rasmus can join us. And he can.

We walk down the hallway to her apartment, and she shows us around: Living room with dining table and chairs, television, bookshelves with many family photos. Bedroom with an institutional bed. Bathroom. Plenty of flowers in pots and vases. She shows us an image from her childhood farm, which hangs over the bed, and explains about all the beets she hoed, about the garden and the animals she looked after. She was allowed to go to agricultural school and decided that she would never marry a farmer. But – she forgot, she adds with a crooked smile. She has told the same story about her daughter – maybe it happened to both of them?

A small stuffed plus animal lies under the covers in her bed. A small cat. She calls it the 'Little One' and it is hard to determine whether she thinks, it is a cat or a child. She repeats sentences almost verbatim repeatedly: She just cannot understand that anybody left it there. "You cannot do that! Who would do such a thing! Imagine that somebody just left it there, it cannot survive without somebody caring for it!" She smiles when she talks about how sweet it is, it sleeps in her bed. Both Rasmus and I get to hold it. I wonder how this is for him, after all, he is a philosopher and this is his very first day of fieldwork. He strokes the head of the Little One.

Else then shows us photos on the bookshelves of her (deceased) husband, her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, cats and dogs. She is pretty clear about her husband and her children, but when she wants to introduce us to her grand- and great-grandchildren she turns the photos and reads the names written there. There is also an image of her daughter with a bundle of Sct Bernhard dogs – another image at her door portrays Hansi Hinterseer and a Sct Bernhard dog. She tells that he often visits – after all, they have the same kind of dog!

But she mostly talks about the Little One, whom she has taken in her care. At one point she exclaims with indignation that there are those who puts small children in the newspaper and write: "For sale!" She is so happy that the Little One is with her now and that its parents has not requested it. It is always happy, she says. It smiles both at her and at others who come to visit. Like Rasmus and me.

We thank her for inviting us in. She seems happy for our visit, but then says that now she really must get going.

– Lone Grøn, anthropologist

**Else with her great granddaughter, Saga.  
Photo: Anette Grabow.**



## AGING AND PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy has always been preoccupied with death and time, but paradoxically it has neglected aging as a philosophical theme. The few thinkers who have pondered aging have done so from a notoriously negative perspective. “The older we grow, the more heavily the burden of the [inert past] weights upon us,” Simone de Beauvoir wrote. René Descartes wrote that the fact that “the grey hairs are rushing in” warns him that he should use his time “studying how to postpone the process.” In short, aging means that the past becomes frozen, while the future is closing. Aging is to run out of possibility.

Many voices in this exhibit relate similar experiences of loss. But there are also aspects of a less negative understanding of aging and possibility. Several voices point to an interweaving of life-trajectories that makes the future a shared horizon that remains open beyond the individual life-trajectory. This shared, open future is at stake, when the question of what one passes on to the coming generations becomes pressing. Perhaps, it is an essential part of aging that one experiences this interweaving of life-trajectories and vital possibilities that surpasses one’s own life; i.e. one experiences that new life interrupts the present state of affairs and that these interruptions introduce the possibility that everything might change.

As Hannah Arendt writes: “The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a

faculty which is inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin.” Aging is not simply to have witnessed the times changing. Throughout life, also in old age, the ability to partake in the birth of the new is present.

Also in life with a dreaded disease like dementia, this ability to partake in the co-creation of meaningful possibilities is present. On the one hand, Else’s relationship with the Little One can be viewed in biomedical terms. In that case, the Little One is simply a therapeutic remedy and the existential dimensions of the relationship are easily overlooked. If we, on the other hand, take seriously Else’s experience of their relationship, it is clearly a profoundly ethical project that gives orientation to Else’s life. Hence, on the strength of Else’s relationship with the Little One a new dimension of meaningfulness is created at the dementia ward. The caregivers and Else’s daughter initially support this relationship and thus they become co-creators of this meaningfulness. However, without Else’s original ethical commitment this would not have been possible.

This insistence on possibility is not meant to disregard the despair caused by the disease. In Arendt’s words, it is a “reminder” of a thoroughly human capacity for creating possibilities and meaning. Rather than studying the loss of possibility, a philosophy of aging must study how life possibilities are transfigured when old and new life-trajectories cross and interweave.

– Rasmus Dyring, philosopher

## ASSEMBLING SAYINGS FOR THE STEPPING STONES

*On the stepping stones in the exhibition you find sayings about aging and death from Bunyole in Uganda. They have been collected by Susan Whyte, who has conducted fieldwork in the area for many years. Here is an excerpt from Susan’s fieldnotes:*

Lusi looks around at her daughters-in-law and grandchildren and remarks with a twinkle in her eye: ‘They’re getting tired of me. I better go stay with my brother.’ She is joking, as she often does. We all know how much they love and care for her. At 80 years, Lusi hobbles painfully with a stick, visits the health centre often, but remains sharp and confident.

When we arrived, I had put the question often included in greetings to older people in eastern Uganda: ‘How are the bones?’ ‘They are bad’, she replies and goes on to complain about her health. ‘The good long stick has become short, only good for digging potatoes’, as the proverb says. She brings out the worn exercise book in which health workers have recorded her high blood pressure and crippling arthritis. ‘Old age doesn’t kill you’ she reminds us. ‘Sickness does.’

A few days before, I had met Lusi at a funeral. She was wailing plaintively and dragging herself across the other graves near where the new one had been dug. Watching her, I thought about the last lines of a drinking song I had heard: ‘the grave will eat the bones.’ But today she is lively and full of talk, as we sit under the magnificent old cashew tree in her compound. It

is a large home, prosperous by local standards, with three brick houses, several kitchen huts and two granaries. Two of the houses belong to her sons. She sleeps in the middle one with five of her grandchildren.

**“How are the bones?”  
“They are bad.”**

As people often do when receiving visitors, she shows us the graves, which are as much a part of the home as the houses. In the dense shade of a huge mango tree is the grave of her husband’s mother and next to it the bigger well-tended grave of her husband. She stops and sits upon a new grave, that of her sister, buried there only a year ago. Bitterly, she relates how her sister’s three daughters brought the very ill old woman from the neighboring district. They just left her and went away. All the effort and expense of providing care and then arranging the funeral fell to Lusi and her children. Leaning on her stick, Lusi heaves herself up and shuffles slowly back to the shade of the cashew tree. ‘She left me with a very big *ebbanja*’. I am puzzled at first. *Ebbanja* is a debt. My companions explain that Lusi means she has a debt to die. She owes it. Then I begin to see. *Ebbanja* could also be translated as obligation. Following that visit to Lusi, I notice that others also remark, when looking at a new grave, that the dead person has left them with an obligation... a recognition of mortality, our human condition.

– Susan Reynolds Whyte,  
anthropologist



Self-portrait of young Mama Summer, c. 1975.



Street in neighborhood near Mama Summer's home, Los Angeles 2019.  
Photo: Nicola Chavez Courtright.

## MAMA SUMMER

I first met Summer at her home in the spring of 1998. Instead of the usual gray high-rises, the poorer sections of Los Angeles had small single houses along tree-lined streets, jacarandas heavy with purple flowers in the spring, the smell of jasmine in summer months. Front yards might be packed with dirt but still, bursts of pink and red bougainvillea climbed along metal fences. Summer and her four grandchildren mostly stayed inside. The curtains were closed, metal bars covering the windows. Street violence was not uncommon and one had to take care, Summer said. When I first met her, she was only 44, but she suffered a variety of illnesses. Her face was unlined but her body seemed to sag under the weight of her life.

During my visits, Summer often sat in her favorite armchair in the living room, where she could keep an eye on the children as they ran in and out of bedrooms or the kitchen.

On one visit, Summer is in the dining room looking for some of the paintings she made when she was young. Summer is in her usual long, flowery dress and slippers. She picks up a baby as she goes to a picture hanging on the wall. "When did I do that one?" she asks. "It's an eagle." She looks more closely. "No wait, it's a dove". After a while, she puts the baby down on the arm chair, so that she can reach the top of a tall wooden armoire where some paintings are stacked. Summer brings down a more abstract painting. She explains that there are

several pictures in this painting: a woman in a flowery dress and in the dress folds there is a small scene of men rowing a boat rocked by furious waves.

A child of about two walks over, naked. Mama Summer looks down. "Where your diaper at Taylor?" Taylor stands impassively, thumb in mouth. Summer repeats more loudly. "Taylor, I said Where Is Your Diaper?" She sighs and pulls down another painting, a self-portrait she dusts off with the hem of her dress. "I did this back in the 70s. I wonder whatever happened to that blouse in the picture?" Her adult son wanders into the room. "You don't see none of the kids in the backyard?" He shrugs. Summer looks back at her painting. "So, I used pastels here but

I like acrylic better. But it has been so long." Her voice trails off. "I stopped painting because, well, too many problems. My pictures was coming out too dark. People asked: "Why are your pictures like that?" Well, I have darkness all in my life."

Taylor has returned wearing one sock. She asks: "Where is your other sock?" Taylor stands silent. "Taylor, I said Where Is Your Sock?" Taylor suddenly calls out "Mama Summer!" Summer laughs delightedly. "What? Taylor, did you just say Mama Summer for the first time?" The baby on the armchair is now biting his feet. Summer bursts into more laughter. "All babies do that," she remarks.

— Cheryl Mattingly, anthropologist



Tenzin Dolma and I are sitting outside on the rooftop and enjoying the sunny afternoon on a winter day in late November, 2018. She moves the wooden beads of the *mala* in her hands, one by one, while reciting a Tibetan-Buddhist *mantra*. Photo: Harmandeep K. Gill.

## TENZIN DOLMA

Tenzin Dolma leans onto the shelf behind her. Her eyes are fixated at something outside the kitchen window. As usual, she seems miles away. I wonder what she is thinking about. She returns to the room with her complains over the monkeys. “They can suddenly attack you”, she says. Tenzin Dolma usually refers to the monkeys as “thieves”, since they are always on the outlook for food. The second she spots one of them outside the window, she threatens it in an angry voice or curses it. The most hilarious curse word she

throws their way is “monkeys”. It is common in India, even among the exile Tibetans to liken unmannered people to animals, such as monkeys. Tenzin Dolma cursing monkeys for “monkeys” always brought me to laughter.

Tenzin Dolma is silent before she suddenly asks: “Are there many Tibetans in Norway?” “No, maybe only about forty or fifty,” I reply. “But there are many in France, Switzerland and USA”, I add. “Yes,” Tenzin Dolma replies and adds Australia to the list.

a series of eruptions, reflecting the chaotic pattern of thoughts; the way one thought thrusts forward another. “Yes, many times,” I respond to her question. “It’s a good country, but the people are so bad. Sucking up to China. It’s very difficult to be a Tibetan in Nepal these days. The country is good, but the people are bad,” Tenzin Dolma says, making a face. At this point, she leans forward from the shelf. Once more, there is silence, before Tenzin Dolma moves onto another related thought; her birth place in Kyirong, in Tibet, which is not far from the Nepalese border. Like numerous other times, she reminisces of the beautiful landscape in Kyirong, the Chinese occupation and their escape into exile, India. She shares about the hardships of the initial years in India, in the early 1960s, as she has done many times before. Tenzin Dolma repeats many of the same, old stories. It strikes me how often my elderly companions repeat the same stories with the same words and remarks, again and again.

I ask Tenzin Dolma whether she misses Kyirong, in spite of knowing the answer. Her answer is crystal clear; yes, she does. There is a pause. “But what to do. The bad Chinese have taken over. People can’t go to the monastery, they can’t practice religion,” Tenzin Dolma yawns.

– Harmandeep Kaur Gill, anthropologist

“These days, all the youngsters are going to the west”, she says, something I know Tenzin Dolma is not too fond of. There is a pause, before she carries on: “We have seven relatives in the west, two in Canada and the rest in USA.” There is silence. The clock ticks, adding a weight to the silence. “Have you been to Nepal?”, she asks. Such were many of my conversations with Tenzin Dolma. They did not always have a natural flow, followed by an elaboration of the topics she spoke about, instead, the conversations would have

# PHILOSOPHERS' SQUARE

The town square as the center of philosophical dialogues on important life questions goes back to ancient times, where both Socrates and Aristotle asked the question: What is the good life? This is still pertinent and the concern has inspired the research project behind the exhibition, which examines the good life in old age under challenging life circumstances. Aging is a shared human condition, so can we learn something from people who are experiencing old age?

In the exhibition's five houses, you experience the worlds of different elderly people, and it becomes clear, that none of them are alike. It is also evident that there is not one right answer or recipe for the good old age. The Philosophers' Square raises questions across the different parts of the exhibition – and invites the visitors to make their own reflections and conversations.

HOW DO I CHANGE?  
WHO TAKES CARE OF ME?  
WHAT DO I PASS ON?  
WHAT BECOMES THE GOOD?

The four questions invite reflections on the shared human condition of aging. Experiences of how the body and mind change; changes that can create new kinds of dependencies and maybe facilitate an awareness of what to preserve and pass on – and which might also sharpen the sense of what is good in life. They are philosophical, wondering questions because they reflect something universal, and at the same time something particular, as is it not given what the answers might be.

The philosophical questions come out of dialogues between the projects' anthro-

pologists, artists and philosophers. For three years, the members of the research group have met, mainly at the refugium of Klitgården in Denmark. Surrounded by dunes and the seas of Skagen, the members have exchanged experiences and insights from their individual subprojects together with invited national and international researchers. The theme of aging is complex in nature because it is both intimate and abstract. Intimate when the researchers' own elderly family members pass away during the project. Abstract when researchers talk about societies where aging becomes invisible, and about the need to be seen and acknowledged when old.

The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer underlines that you have understood something only when you are able to pose the question that the dialogue, the art work or the text is an answer to – and that while reposing this initiating question, it opens for self-reflection and new conversations. The quotes at the Philosophers' square do not only say something about how people in the research projects experience old age, but open up for the audience to reflect on their own experiences and expectations. Maybe you are an elderly person, or consider how to grow old? Perhaps you have grandparents or aging parents? Or reflections about who will take care of you in old age, and how you will respond to the needs of others? What is the good life in old age? The purpose of the Philosophers' Square is therefore with reference to the exhibition to pose these questions to every visitor: *what does it mean to get old, and what is the good life in old age?*

– Helle Sofie Wentzer, philosopher