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<ct>Sliced Tongues: The Inconvenient Voice of Tibetan English Writers

<ca>Enrique Galván-Álvarez

<fo>The literary production of the Tibetan English-speaking diaspora remains largely ignored in postcolonial studies, although it constitutes a good example of what Bill Ashcroft categorizes as 'transnation' (12), since it is 'not a moment of state administered national identity but a moment of decisive identification' (17) from the margins and from the bottom up. The statelessness that signals the 'modern [Tibetan] condition' (Bhum 114) ought to be regarded as the context in which English is taken up and appropriated, which does not necessarily instantiate a form of 'ideological conformism' (164), as Lazarus argues in relation to analogous dynamics in the West Indies. English-speaking Tibetans inhabit the interstice between two powerful non-European nation-states: India and China. However, they do not simply sit at the physical and imaginary margins of such nation-states: as a globalized and transnational community, they engage, in turn, in a 'marginalization of the nation-state' (Appadurai 33). By looking at Tibetan English writing from this angle, I wish to explore an alternative trajectory of globalization, the one accomplished by Tibetans who contest Chinese power through the language of a proxy colonizer, and in so doing also contest Western expectations and stereotypes in the language in which they were first forged (English). This process of globalization freely appropriates elements from the Chinese and Western milieus, while remaining resistant to the totalizing and essentialist representations of Tibetans crafted in both China and the West. In this sense, Tibetan English literature might be regarded as a singularly Tibetan response to combined and uneven development.

Thus, the aim of this essay is to explore the power dynamics present in Tibetans' use of English and also to compare it with the analogous, if not identical, use of Mandarin by Tibetans in China. As Hartley and Schiffiani-Vedani point out, modern Tibetan literature crosses a number of 'linguistic borders' (xiii), being produced in a number of places and social contexts that range from Beijing to San Francisco. However, some of the studies of Tibetan English writing still regard it as a matter of 'Tibetan Writers, Non-Tibetan Readers' (McMillin 121) or playfully remind us that what the Tibetans use are the lenses of 'the missionary and the spy' (Lopez 180). Even if Tibetans appropriate a field of language power that in the nineteenth century constructed them as pastoral subalterns, at the turn of the twenty-first century they do not learn English from 'the missionary' or 'the spy'. Thus, the role of English in Tibetan processes of self-definition needs to be readdressed as a contested and contended space.

In fact, the use of English is a highly debated topic in the Tibetan exilic community, being at the core of many discussions of what it means to be a displaced and hybrid Tibetan. Although Tibetans have written literary texts in English since the beginning of the twentieth century, it is only in the past 50 years, and in the last decade more intensely, that English has become a language of self-expression for Tibetans. A clear evolution can be appreciated from a more strategic use of the language in the early years of exile (1960s and 1970s) towards a more appropriative use in recent times, which reflects an active wish and claim to Tibetanize the English language. This claim identifies Tibetan English as a Tibetan language, along with Mandarin Chinese and the various dialects of the Tibetan Plateau (for instance, Central Tibetan, Khampa, Amdowa). Consequently, this essay regards Tibetan English as part of a constantly shifting Tibetan exilic identity, rather than as a mere subterfuge to elicit Western support.[1] In order to instantiate this dynamics, I will draw on a number of contemporary authors who challenge the assumption that Tibetan English writers are simply playing to

Western expectations to earn political or economic support. Within this new generation of Tibetan English writers, I will particularly focus on three poets who seem strongly to prove the strategic argument wrong: Chögyam Trungpa (1939–87), Tenzin Tsundue (1970) and Tsering Wangmo Dhompa (1969).

Moreover, I argue that Tibetan English writers do not necessarily borrow from the colonial narratives in which the first encounter between Tibetans and the English language was framed. It is precisely because Tibetan English writing is not a mere rewriting of the English colonial archive that it is difficult to place it in existing critical categories, as it is so far excluded from both the English and the Tibetan contemporary literary canons.[2] In a sense, Tibetan English literature is not postcolonial, being the product of two atypical colonial histories (for instance, the interaction with the Raj at the turn of the twentieth century and the Chinese takeover of the 1950s) and an exile that represented the fleeing of religious and political elites. Tibet was not only never a British colony, but is also still under Chinese control, which made its fleeing elites reestablish the centre of the nation in an ex-centric and dislocated location (India). Consequently, the complex and unique histories that shape the emergence of Tibetan English writing need to be discussed in their own right, not only as mere echoes in dialogue with powerful voices (those of imperial narratives), but as the hybridly Tibetan voices that raise up against those powers.

The fact that this discussion of Tibetan-ness and its exiles is being conducted in English and through English sources is both significant and relevant. If we take seriously Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani's statement that modern Tibetan literature crosses 'linguistic borders' (xiii), we need to consider Tibetan English as a hybrid linguistic expression of the unique trajectories of Tibetan exilic identity. For a start, let me make clear that 'Tibetan English', a phrase I have borrowed from Tenzin Tsundue (*Semshook* 64), is not a pidgin form of either Tibetan or English, at least not in its literary forms. It is the English written by

people of Tibetan origin, which can be easily understood by any English speaker who has a minimum awareness of Tibetan culture, even though its syntax is sometimes idiosyncratic. However, to ascertain that Tibetan English should be looked at in its own right does not mean overlooking how such a cultural product comes into being; it is not without problems or by accident that Tibetans come to write in English. In the same way that we need to understand the history and power dynamics that led some Tibetans to express themselves in Mandarin, we must do the same with English.

<a>The Missionary and the Spy

<fo>Tibetans who write in Mandarin, such as the poet Woeser, are not only products of the Cultural Revolution, when 'in Tibet almost all publishing in the Tibetan language ceased, except for party propaganda and translations of articles from Chinese newspapers' (Shakya, 'Development' 62–63); they are also products of the already existing discourses about Tibetan-ness conducted in that language. Tibetans who write in Mandarin have to write through the representations of Tibetan-ness forged in the culture and language of another. In such an alienating process, both the representations and the representing/represented subjects become shifted and decentred. The same can be said about English. Although the English language never played the kind of role in a process of cultural and political domination that Chinese has in regard to Tibetan, it is also part of a complicated and ambivalent history. It is not devoid of irony, as Donald Lopez points out, that 'when an American scholar does not know the meaning of the words in the Tibetan definition, he or she can always open the Tibetan-English dictionaries compiled a century ago by the missionary and the spy' (180).

Therefore, when Tibetans choose to write in English, it is rare that if they are forced to do so they also have to deal with the representations of Tibetan culture already present in the English language. They have to see themselves through the eyes of the spy and the

missionary, at least to some extent. These representations are different from those present in the Chinese field of power language, representations that are rooted in a recent history of political, military and cultural domination, as well as in a not so recent history of representational and discursive domination (Heberer 113–137). However, although the British did not colonize Tibet, their representations of Tibet and Tibetans are not altogether unproblematic. To look at the representations of Tibet in English is, by and large, to explore the Western construction of Tibet. While it is true that discourses about Tibet have been produced in European languages other than English, such as Italian, French or German, it is also true that in the last two centuries many, if not most, of these (Euro-American) constructions have taken place in English. After all, the word most commonly used in Tibetan for referring to Westerners is *inji*, a transliteration of 'English'. Such essentialization, which mirrors the construction of the East by Orientalist scholars, also responds to a historical reality: the non-Asian foreigners with which Tibetans dealt most in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the British. When analysing 'The British Construction of an Image of Tibet', Alex McKay divides it into two categories: 'the historical image' and 'the "mystical" or as some prefer, the "mythical" [image], whereby Tibet is perceived as a spiritual realm beyond precise empirical understanding' (67). Although McKay makes this distinction, he also acknowledges that 'despite the existence of a historical image of Tibet, the mystical image retains considerable power' (67). This preference is not surprising given that Tibet 'has been portrayed in the West as an idyllic society devoted to the practice of Buddhism, a nation that required no police force because its people voluntarily observed the laws of karma' (Lopez 9) and also that '[i]t is precisely through Buddhism that Tibet made its entry into the American context at the turn of the twentieth century' (Korom 173).

Although Tibet makes its entry into the European imagination as early as the seventeenth century, it does so also through Buddhism, as the subject of missionary reports,

whose main concern was to learn about the local religion for evangelizing purposes. The first of these missionaries is most likely the Portuguese Jesuit António De Andrade in 1624, who, in Rudolf Kaschewsky's words, 'might rightly be called the first European who ever entered Tibet' (4). However, 'if we wish to trace the beginnings of the myth of Tibet', we might have to go as far back as 'Herodotus (died 425 B.C.E)', described by many 'as the oldest witness of legendary beliefs about Tibet' (Kaschewsky 3). This legendary image is confirmed in different ways through the centuries, the most widely known example probably being Marco Polo's mention, at the turn of the fourteenth century, of the wonderful 'savi uomini . . . chiamati Tebot' famous for their learning in the 'arti di diavoli' (Polo cxxiv). This representation of Tibet is forged before any actual encounter has taken place, before Andrade and later Desideri (1684–1733) interact with the Tibetans in Tibet. This tendency to focus on the Tibetan religion, over all other aspects of Tibetan identity, history or culture, is a habit interwoven in many ways with the construction of Tibet as a marvellous and magical place. It is remarkable how this habit has survived to this day in much (though by no means all) of the literature produced about Tibetan culture. Even in Ardley's *The Tibetan Independence Movement*, largely concerned with politics and which calls for a divorce of (the traditionally wedded in Tibetan contexts) religion and politics, we read that 'Tibetan culture is totally dominated by Buddhism' or that 'Buddhism permeates every aspect of Tibetan society' (9).

First demonized by missionaries like Desideri, or by Orientalists like Waddell (1854–1938), Tibetan religion begins to acquire a different nuance during the 1920s and 1930s. By the time James Hilton publishes *Lost Horizon* (1933), Tibet is becoming, not unlike Shangri-La, a sanctuary that holds the remedies for an ailing West. As Pedersen points out when he describes 'Romantic Orientalism', this construction is based on a 'sense of loss, the idea that the East is in possession of a truth or a wisdom the West has lost and can regain only by learning from the East' (159). However, to think that such an image is merely a Western

imposition on a mute Tibetan object is to obliterate the fact that '[t]he "Tibetan horizon" . . . is, in a literal sense, the product of a double vision' (Hansen 106). Although Hansen is referring to documentary films made by British officials about Tibet, and his 'double vision' is far more literal than the one of which I am speaking, such a metaphor seems most appropriate for the process of image-making I am discussing.

This double vision is crucial to Donald Lopez's notion of the prison of Shangri-La: 'the mirror-lined cultural labyrinths that have been created by Tibetans, Tibetophiles and Tibetologists, labyrinths that the scholar may map but in which the scholar must also wander' (13). The shape of such a prison can be appreciated, for example, by the fact 'that the most familiar tropes in recent biographies of Tibetan lamas also occur in accounts of Tibet by British colonial officials composed some two centuries ago' (Lopez qtd. in McMillin back cover). In this way, Lopez implies that Tibetans who write in English somehow inherit the clichés and motifs of the British officials who were involved in various colonial adventures within Tibet. If we assume this perspective, the Tibetan who chooses English is somehow doomed to walk 'The Way to Epiphany' (McMillin 3), to write him- or herself up in a self-exoticizing fashion. McMillin sees this as a new manifestation of the old 'patron/client relationship [that] shaped exchanges between Godan Khan and the Sakya lamas in the thirteenth century, and defined the proper spheres of influence for the Dalai Lamas and their Mongolian and Manchu protectors' (132).

Thus, McMillin, borrowing and reshaping the notion from Klieger, says that '[i]n a reinterpretation of patronage in [the Tibetan] diaspora, to be worthy of support is another way of being authentic; to receive support is to have one's Tibetanness affirmed' (132–133). From this standpoint, the idea of Tibetan authenticity is shaped, if not dictated, by Western expectations that are validated by the economically powerful position of the patrons. This explains 'the lack of . . . representations in English language autobiographies' of those

Tibetans who 'lack one of these identities – exile, Buddhist, nationalist'; a lack that McMillin judges to be 'considered something less than fully Tibetan' (122) by the alleged readers of such biographies. However, we need to keep in mind that, for McMillin, Tibetan autobiographical writing is a matter of 'Tibetan Writers, Non-Tibetan Readers' (121) and also that her work precedes the full blooming (though not the existence) of Tibetan English literature.

This neat division collapses in the face of recollections like Tsering Namgyal's: 'the first book I read about Tibet when I was growing up was the comic book, *Tintin in Tibet!*' (15). These memories go hand in hand with the confession that 'I had read very little in the original Tibetan; I lacked both the necessary linguistic skill and the time to invest in improving it' (15). Are we to suppose that Namgyal is not (also) writing in English for those Tibetans who, like him, use that language to (re)present themselves to themselves? To look at Tibetan English writing as exclusively accommodating a Western gaze is to obliterate the fact that, as Tsundue argues in Namgyal's *Little Lhasa*, 'there is not just one English-English. Just as there are many different forms of English: Malaysian-English, Indian-English, Jamaican-English and American-English, there is now scope for Tibetan-English too' (Namgyal 7). In the same way that Malaysians or Indians are writing about and for themselves in English (though not exclusively), Tibetans are also using English as a way of reaching both young (and not so young) Tibetans who may feel more comfortable with the English language, along with non-Tibetan English readers worldwide.

As Shashi Tharoor argues in response to Harish Trivedi's criticism (made in English, as Tharoor ironically points out) of Indian writers who write in English as being 'cut off from the experiential mainstream and from that common cultural matrix . . .' (Trivedi qtd. in Tharoor 273), '[w]hy should the rural peasant or the small-town schoolteacher with his sandalwood-smeared forehead be considered more quintessentially Indian than the punning

collegian or the Bombay socialite, who are as much a part of the Indian reality?' (274). In the same way that in the Indian context certain images have been privileged as 'authentic' or 'quintessentially Indian', in the case of the Tibetan exile similar stereotypes, too, have become solidified.

Some of these stereotypes are the ones discussed by McMillin – that is, 'exile, Buddhist, nationalist' (122) – to which we might add monastic or Tibetan speaking. McMillin acknowledges how this construction of Tibetan authenticity occurs in English and presumably for a Western audience, but it obliterates the fact that analogous discussions of Tibetan authenticity and identity are conducted both in Tibetan and in English in the Tibetan exilic community. Consequently, Tsundue's, and his generation's, reclaiming of English of and for themselves can be seen as a way of counteracting particular definitions of Tibetan-ness fostered by certain Tibetans and Westerners. As I will discuss in more detail later in this essay, if the Tibetan horizon is a double vision, we can speak of a representational pact between Tibetan elites and a certain Western public.[3] If a certain image of Tibetan authenticity is marketed for the West in English to appropriate English in order to destabilize, those 'authentic' images seems more an act of resistance than a nod to Western expectations.

Thus, Tsundue's reclaiming of Tibetan English offers a counterbalance to Lopez's origin myth (largely espoused by McMillin) of the 'Prison of Shangri-La':

> <q>It was as if a double of Tibet had long haunted the West, and the Tibetans, coming out of Tibet, were now confronted with this double. In this sense the Tibetans stepped into a world in which they were already present, and since their belated arrival . . . they have merged seamfully into a double that had long been standing. (200)

<fo>It could be argued that in 1998, when *Prisoners of Shangri-La* was first published, much of the Tibetan English literature that challenges this particular understanding of Tibetan exilic identity (like that of Tsundue or Dhompa) had not yet been published. However, even Trungpa's life and writings constitute a systematic disruption of 'the double of Tibet' already present in 'Western fantasies' (200). Trungpa died in 1987, but there is little scholarly literature that goes beyond considering him 'controversial' (Lopez 266) or 'notorious' (McMillin 184). Even though he can be seen as controversial and notorious, a conscientious and scholarly exploration of his peculiar interaction with the 'Prison of Shangri-La' is still missing.

Ironically, whereas Tsundue reclaims the space of Tibetan English, the space of hybrid in-betweenness, the *bar* do[4] of exile, Lopez sees that process as falling into an already set pattern. Lopez's 'Prison' is a claustrophobic space that is described through yet another cinematographic metaphor: 'The Tibetan's self-presentation, as in science fiction, sometimes merges with its evil twin [the Western fantasies] and sometimes stands alone, while the observer is rarely able to tell the difference' (200–201). Nevertheless, the fact that 'we are captive of confines of our own making' and that I, like Lopez, write within 'the walls of the prison' (201) should not make us forget that 'Lopez's latent conservative interpretation of Tibetan culture and history' has been refuted by Tsering Shakya and Germano (Dodin and Räther 410). Such a refutation has, in turn, helped to highlight 'the dialectic of autochthonous creativity and inculturation of exogenous ideas so typical of Tibet's cultural history' (Dodin and Räther 410). Such dialectic creativity, not exclusively 'typical of Tibet's cultural history', is precisely what the new generations of Tibetan writers celebrate in their own different ways.

<a>Complex Negotiations

<fo>Although Lopez's discussion and, consequently, Shakya's and Germano's refutation are largely concerned with how Western representations of Tibetans imprison the latter, it is also true (as Lopez rightly acknowledges) that those representations imprison us all, both representers and represented alike. Nonetheless, by considering 'the very active participation of the Tibetans in the emergence and continuing reiteration of the current image of their country and culture' (Dodin and Räther 410), their agency is restored. It is what Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther phrase as '[t]he dialectic of autochthonous creativity and inculturation of exogenous ideas so typical of Tibet's cultural history' that Tenzin Tsundue reclaims in many of his writings. An example of such a dialectic of inculturation is put forward when Tsundue celebrates the poetry written by Tibetans in Mandarin:

> <q>[O]ur counterparts in Tibet have been taking Chinese language to greater heights. Tibetans are recording history and writing poetry in Chinese. They are singing in Mandarin. The Chinese cannot but regret they gave the Tibetans their tongue, now the Tibetans' Chinese tongues are setting the red flag on fire. (*Semshook* 61)

<fo>Significantly, Tsundue mentions this discussion in order to justify his use of English for writing poetry. Far from considering the language in which most of the Shangrilaist projections were crafted imprisoning, Tsundue watches himself in the mirror situation of Tibetans writing in Mandarin and celebrates, through them, his appropriation of a non-Tibetan language as a tool for Tibetan resistance.

Whereas it is true that using the English language does not necessarily entail falling into the pattern of British imperial narratives or entering a field of inescapable Western discursive scrutiny, it is also true that, as Dhompa acknowledges, 'these are complex negotiations' ('Nostalgia' n.p.). Thus,

> <q>as the first generation born in exile we are just beginning to articulate our experience of being Tibetan outside Tibet. For this, we've chosen to write in English. We are entrusting a language other than our mother tongue to speak of the loss or the absence of a country. ('Nostalgia' n.p.)

<fo>For Dhompa, English is not only a choice, but also a metaphor of her displacement. Her use of what she labels 'American-Indian-English' (Namgyal 9) is not only a medium for speaking about her complex sense of identity and belonging, but also something that speaks for itself, a self-standing statement. Far from espousing one of the (indistinguishable) sides of the dichotomized mirror reflection of Lopez's Shangri-La, Dhompa, like Tsundue, seems to reclaim a third way of presenting herself as Tibetan.

Furthermore, Dhompa's self-confessed 'tendency to read where nostalgia and reality converge' and her disclaimer 'I'm only speaking my own ambivalence' ('Nostalgia' n.p.) confirm her as a dweller in the in-between. Similar thoughts are relevant to Tenzin Tsundue, already read by Oha as a dweller of the Third Space, 'the zone where discourse can afford to be pragmatically interrogative' (98). In such a context, choosing 'a language other than our mother tongue' (Dhompa, 'Nostalgia' n.p.) is not a mere 'casualty of political displacement' (Oha 98); it is, rather, 'a useful weapon for subverting cultural imperialism and [a] tool for creating a new, dynamic, Tibetan identity' (Oha 98).

Nonetheless, Trungpa negotiates his choice somewhat differently. He was a prolific writer in both Tibetan and English and, despite receiving formal training in Tibetan poetics, he regards 'the poems that I write in English as finger painting . . . Just straightforward' (*Collected Works* 636). His emphasis on the English language is partly due to his love for this language and the culture associated with it (*First Thought* xx). However straightforward his

poems seem to him, Trungpa regards them also as 'evidence of how the Tibetan mind can tune into the Western mind' (*First Thought* xix). Such a statement, although coined in language that is no longer in usage, is somehow radical for the time and context in which it was uttered.

The fact that a 'Tibetan mind can tune into the Western mind' implies that there are no such things as solid or fixed cultural boundaries, that identity is fluid and flexible. Trungpa assumes a divide between Tibetans and *injis*, thus conceptualizing Westerners in a generalizing fashion, but he later deconstructs this Tibetan–*inji* divide. Again, he uses the now outdated rhetoric of 'minds', but only to show that whatever these minds might be, they are not deterministically confined to an essentialist sense of identity. Yet Trungpa considers that 'there is nothing extraordinary about this; the important fact is that East and West can meet together' (*First Thought* xix),[5] a meeting that again shows how the divide might not have been too solid in the first place. Trungpa's use of dichotomies constitutes an early attempt in the Tibetan exile to think of oneself in English as a mobile or tuning subject. This fluid (de)construction of self-presentation, and identity at large, can be said to be the core of Buddhist practice as a whole, although such Buddhist principles are not always explicitly applied to Buddhist-based political or cultural practice.

Whereas it is true that Trungpa, like the Dalai Lama or Gendun Chopel, was part of Buddhist Modernism, it is also true that his particularly fluid appraisal of the notion of modernity enables us to see him as a pioneer of Buddhist postmodernity. His deep grounding in *rnying ma*/*rdzogs chen* (Great Perfection) teachings enables him to engage with modernity and its motifs in a way that is very postmodern. It is interesting that even Fabrice Midal, a philosopher and Trungpa expert, sees him exclusively through modern lenses ('A Spiritual Master' 85–93), even portraying his 'critique of democracy' ('A Spiritual Master' 91) as a very modern revision by linking it to Rousseau's thought (92). The modernity that Trungpa

encounters is on its way towards postmodernity; the Britain he so admires is starting to cope with its post-imperial condition; the English he learns is already affected by the colonial encounter. Even though Trungpa studied at Oxford, we cannot forget that he first learned English and attempted to read English literature in Delhi and that for challenging the East–West divide he quotes the equally complicated hybrid Kipling (*First Thought* xix).

<a>Passages through India

<fo>Tibetans' encounter with the English language is largely mediated through the colonial encounter between India and the British Empire. The early commercial and diplomatic journeys, such as those of Bogle in 1774 and Turner in 1783, and the military expedition of Younghusband in 1904 all take place in the context of the Raj. Even those Tibetans who could afford a British education in the missions of Darjeeling or Kalimpong before 1959 accessed the English language in a colonial context. Thus, Jamyang Norbu, 'educated in Darjeeling at St. Joseph's College' who 'first read English at a Jesuit school', defines himself as a 'Hindustani of *Tibti jati*' (Namgyal 12); that is, an Indian of Tibetan origin. The tendency to emphasize the Indian legacy is increasingly stronger in the younger generations, particularly those born in exile (unlike Norbu). A good example is Tsundue's opening of his award-winning essay 'My Kind of Exile': 'I am more of an Indian. / Except for my chinky Tibetan face' (*Kora* 26, ll. 17–18). Tsundue's stand is very similar to Norbu's when he defines himself as 'Indian-Tibetan' (*Kora* 13), a definition that happens in English, a language 'learned from Indian teachers' (*Semshook* 63).

Thus, if we understand that English is not only the language of the two arguably most important (Western) imperial(ist) projects of the last 200 years (the British Empire and postwar America), but also the language in which much resistance to colonialism has been articulated, we do not need to see the use of English as an automatic nod to Anglophone

imperialism. However, the issue of language is not an easy and unproblematic one. Whereas critics like Trivedi or Thiong'o, to mention but two, consider writing in English a hindrance to 'decolonizing the mind', others, for example Tharoor or Chaudhuri (Galván 225), see and celebrate English as part of their postcolonial hybrid condition. Nevertheless, this debate is not fully applicable to the Tibetan case, given that Tibet was never a British colony, unlike India or Kenya. It is true that British officials successfully entered Tibet in 1904 and that commercial ties were forged during the nineteenth century, but Tibet was never colonized per se. Rather, the Tibetan administration often saw in the British a useful ally against another imperial power: (Late Imperial and Republican) China. The same can be said about postwar America, especially 1945–59. The Tibetans tried to appeal to anti-communist feelings in order to gather some support from the United States, in much the same way as they had used British colonial interests in order to consolidate their complex sense of independence from China.

Hence, English is not Tibet's (post)colonial language; it is the language of its historical allies, the language used when in need of foreign support. Before 1959, Tibetans who knew English belonged mostly to wealthy families who could afford to have a British education at the border settlements of Darjeeling or Kalimpong. However, a newly opened English-language school in Lhasa was quickly closed in 1945, due to pressure from the more conservative monastic elites. Those elites, under the leadership of the three main *dGe lugs* monasteries of Deprung, Sera and Ganden, saw the English language as a foreign and dangerous influence. This conservative sector even regarded with suspicion the thirteenth Dalai Lama's modernization of Tibet and his fashioning of the new Tibet as a modern nation-state. Many similar reforms were inspired by the British living in Tibet at the time (though not always with London's or New Delhi/Simla's blessing) and led to a declaration of independence issued by the Tibetan government in 1913.[6]

In this way, we can see how the English language was involved even in pre-exilic attempts to define the Tibetan polity. Moreover, learning English can be viewed in this context as an act of resistance against the more conservative religious elites, who opposed the idea of Tibet fostered by the thirteenth Dalai Lama, in turn inspired by British residents in Lhasa. Learning English seems to provide an alternative and heterodox way of understanding Tibetan-ness, an alternative that the monastic elites perceived and still perceive as a threat to their carefully guarded 'authentic' image of Tibet. Although it is too early to talk about hybridity and linguistic displacement, it is true that English offered, in the first decades of the twentieth century, an alternative 'imagiNation' of Tibet. This image-making took place then almost exclusively in Tibetan, but it was ignited through infectious contact with the English-speaking world. Gendun Chopel is the best early example of a Tibetan who reimagines Tibet through interaction with late colonial and Anglophone India.[7] Analogously, Trungpa, Tsundue and Dhompa can also be regarded as more contemporary instances of Tibetans who use English for reflecting and reformulating their Tibetan identity and not merely as a strategy for deriving Western support. This does not mean, of course, that the authors discussed in this essay are not interested in support or popularity.

In terms of support-seeking, Trungpa and Tsundue are the ones who are more oriented towards gaining others' sympathy. It must be noted that they are or were both public men: Trungpa a guru, in the traditional sense of the word, and Tsundue a political activist. Dhompa does not have an equivalent extra-literary role in the public sphere, but her choice of English has enabled her to be acclaimed as one of the voices who is 'out to reweave the whole . . . American literary tapestry' (Silliman qtd. in Dhompa, *In the Absent* back cover). The use of English is, thus, strategic in a number of ways. However, to include English readers worldwide does not mean to exclude Tibetan (English) readers within the community. This is true even of Trungpa, who seems, among the three writers, the one most detached from the

exilic community. Although Trungpa's teaching was mostly aimed at his British and American students, Jigme points out that 'based on firsthand observation in my Dharamsala bookstore, I have noticed that Tibetans who are in their twenties and fluent in English are frequent purchasers of his religious essays and literary works' (283).

<a>Conclusion

<fo>English can be seen as (yet) another Tibetan language, one of the languages used by Tibetans to express themselves. Whereas the encounter between Tibetans and the English language takes place in a semi-colonial context, it is also true that Tibetans have appropriated the language and use it for the purposes of self-definition and self-expression. Leaving behind notions that imagine Tibetan writing in English as nothing more than a means to obtain political and/or economic support and so falling into the pattern of the first encounter, I argue that Tibetans who write in English, like Trungpa, Dhompa or Tsundue, do so for the benefit of other Tibetans (as well as for Anglophone non-Tibetans). Tibetans encounter English mostly through colonial and postcolonial India, and thus reclaim instances of resistance already present in India's contestive use of English. This contestive use of English mimics the defiant use of Mandarin by Tibetan writers living in the People's Republic of China, like Woeser (1966) or Yidam Tsering (1933–2004),[8] who, far from bowing to Chinese expectations, engage in a reflection on Tibetan identity that is aimed at disrupting them.

Perhaps the best way to understand Tibetan English writing might be through a metaphor borrowed from Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*. In this original rewriting of an English classic in a Tibetan context, Sherlock Holmes is told towards the end of the novel that he is the reincarnation of a Tibetan lama: Gangsar Tulku (Norbu 242). Thus, his (beneficial) activities in Tibet are appropriated into the Tibetan context through a typically Tibetan narrative process. Funnily enough, Norbu describes in the Epilogue (261–265) his

encounter with the alleged rebirth of Holmes's *sprul ku* (tulku, reincarnated lama): a Tibetan abbot now living in Dharamsala. In the same way that Holmes lives on through a new Tibetan body, we can think of English verse (re-)manifesting through Tibetan (sliced) tongues,[9] so forging a singularly Tibetan alternative trajectory of globalization in a world of culturally and literarily uneven and combined developments.

<a>Notes

1 For a similar argument in relation to Fanon and the use of colonial language, see Parry 15.

2 Analogous dynamics, albeit in non-Tibetan contexts, are succinctly discussed in Chatterjee 17.

3 This aspect of anti-colonial discourses has been analysed in depth by Chatterjee, who argues that elite nationalism first emerges in and eventually returns to the Western ethos of modernity (41).

4 A Tibetan term mostly used for the transitional period between death and rebirth, but more generally any interstitial or in-between space.

5 This comment by Trungpa echoes Said's notion of contrapuntality, which has been discussed at length by Etherington (221–228).

6 For contrasting accounts of these early twentieth-century Tibetan histories, see Shakya, *The Dragon* 1–26 or Goldstein 621.

7 These dynamics are instantiated in Chopel's poetry, both in Tibetan and in English. A few of his more significant poems have been recently published under the title *In the Forest of Faded Wisdom.*

8 For a thorough discussion of the emergence of Tibetan Sinophone literature and the work of Woeser and Tsering, see Shakya 'The Development' and Maconi's 'Lion of the Snowy Mountains'.

9 The phrase sliced tongue, which is used for the title of this paper, is in turn the title of one of Dhompa's poems (*Rules* 33).

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