Narrating the Land: Preliminary Thoughts on Polysemic Space in Amdo Oral Tradition

Valentina Punzi

L'Orientale University of Naples / Minzu University of China

Orality and alternative discourses: telling lha sgrung and 'narrated geographies' in contemporary Amdo

Oral narrations lay at the shifting intersection between subjective expression and shared culture. As far as the process of narrating implies a constant negotiation between individual intentions and cultural elaboration, the created narratives express individual creativity, while maintaining those culturally relevant traits that effectively link the narration to its social context. Built upon cultural subjectivity, oral narrations are both forms for producing meaning and cultural tools for processing experience.[1] Thus, they provide valuable resources for gaining insights into the self-perception of a community and into specific representations of collective memory pertaining to beliefs and cultural practices along with neglected pieces of history, ethno taxonomies and folk etymologies of toponyms.

This paper attempts a preliminary exploration of the entangled relationship between oral tradition, especially *lha sgrung* narration,[2] and space in the present socio-political context of Amdo. It further suggests that the adaptability of Tibetan oral genres provides a powerful cultural means to produce a counter-discourse that preserves traditional space arrangement in the face of State-imposed geography.

In the Tibetan context, oral narration (*ngag rgyun, kha gtam, kha rgyun rtsom rig, gtam rgyud*) is a broad domain whose diverse forms and genres have been traditionally reproducing alternative historical, cultural and belief discourses at the fringes of 'orthodoxy'. Since the earliest times, Tibetan Buddhism founded its authority on a large corpus of canonical scriptures and a capillary network of monasteries, nowadays

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[1] See Herman D., Jahn M. and Ryan M., eds. 2005

[2] The word *lha sgrung* seems to be a recent loanword from the Chinese 神话 (shenhua), translated in Tibetan, as suggested by Francois Robin [personal communication, July 2013]. However, since its oral usage has become widespread among Amdo Tibetan speakers, in both common speech and recording settings, I would use it as a possible broad genre label not yet stabilized in its definition. As an example, see: Khyung Thar Rgyal. 2000. *Bod kyi lha sgrung skor gleng ba*. Gansu Publishing House.

standing as the most visible and tangible emblems of the firm and long-term control exerted by the Buddhist clergy on the written word and the natural landscape. The institutionalization of this double code of verbal and spatial orthodoxy is the result of a constant negotiation with the Tibetan indigenous system of beliefs and practices, through a process of mutual interpenetration and assimilation that ultimately confined the heterogeneous body of Tibetan autochthonous knowledge and worldview to the oral transmission of a living stratified and multi-faceted discourse.

The ever-lasting hierarchical dichotomy between the written and the oral channels of transmission in Tibetan culture aroused together with the translation and circulation of the Buddhist scriptures, which marked an irreversible hegemonic shift from the oral *sgrung* (narrations), *lde'u* (symbolic and enigmatic codes, riddles) and *bon* (religion)[3], a source of authority and legitimacy for the pre-historical kings, to the written word of the new introduced religion. From the linguistic point of view, the lexicon and the grammar of Tibetan written genres have remained relatively coherent and stable for centuries; conversely the spoken language has been more open to creativity. Through history, an invisible wall made of genres', contents' and styles' bricks has separated the 'high' written Buddhist texts from the 'low' oral vernacular narrations, thus determining that certain genres have found their expressions into the written word whereas other have been developing in the oral expression.[4]

In the complex and variegated realm of Tibetan oral literature, many elements concerning local knowledge and traditions are to be traced in the profuse narration of *lha sgrung*, 'tales of gods' or 'mythical tales', an eclectic genre of narration characterized by a thematic focus on the origins and the deeds of local protector gods, the inclusion of historical elements, the multiplicity of versions and the strong connection with the local environment and community. Beyond these general features, *lha sgrung* have the inherent quality of openness in articulating the order of existence in the Tibetan changing social context; by incorporating and adapting new contents to the previously existent material, *lha sgrung* convey a renewed space to elaborate the Tibetan individual and collective experience of 'modernity'.

In the aftermath of the dramatic political changes that occurred in Amdo from the 1950s onwards, new forms of political orthodoxy and social standardization, promoted by the Chinese nation-state, have selected and promulgated official memories of the past and "disciplined" Tibetan religious and cultural practices. In the tense

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[3] See Namkhai Norbu 2006: 31-79 and Stein 1986: 31.
[4] See Soerensen 2010: 145-168.

circumstances of the contemporary times, the Chinese urgency for the spatial and social inclusiveness of the untamed western frontier, and its 'minority' citizens, is indirectly triggering new forms of Tibetan oral narrations. By using traditional narrative devices pertaining to the genre of *lha sgrung* and new encoded political contents, the reiterated act of storytelling generates a counter-narrative to that imposed by the State.

With the distress of the contemporary political situation, the marginalization of traditional institutions of local powers, the challenge of adaption to changing social and economic circumstances, Tibetan orality is located in the interstices of the Chinese dominant written tradition. It speaks for taboo topics like the repression under the rule of the Hui warlord Ma Bufang at the beginning of last century, the great famine and the struggle with the Chinese army in the fifties, the calamity of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the effects of the dismantling of the *gongshe* system[5] in the eighties and the most recent policies for nomads' settlement. Orality draws on the surviving memories of the past to canalize political resistance into local forms of narration of the pre-Maoist past and the following advent and establishment of the Communist rule. In the act of narrating individual and family experiences, History looses its distant and generic character and becomes a piece of shared knowledge transposed on a legendary level by means of cultural elaboration.

Lha sgrung reconnect the past with the present and from isolated events build up a shareable social drama sculpted in the collective memory. Bandits hiding in mountain caves fight against the invading Chinese army with the help of the local protector gods, shepherds encounter mountain gods foretelling a Chinese defeat, local cadres' meetings are interrupted by the curses of a *lha-ba*: *lha sgrung* conventional forms adapt to the changed political and social circumstances and reconstruct the role of local protectors as actively performing on the side of the community against the foreign threat. Besides political content, contemporary narrations also deal with Tibetan kinship, decaying social customs and tribes' customary laws. For example, many *lha sgrung* ascribe the origins of tribes to the offspring of the local gods, like in the following passage:

> At the beginning, the people of Klu tshang stayed by Mtsho dmar.
> Because they were killing animals for the meat, an old man (someone
> says he was from A rig) said: "If we kill for the meat, with the skin we
> can make a tent". This is said to be the usage of the skin. This is what

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[5] From 1958 until 1985, *gongshe* were the highest collective units of production in the rural areas of People's Republic of China.

the place-name "Ko ru" means. Then, he never had any child. One day, someone came riding a horse with big hoofs and stopped there. We said: "It must be the horse of a Chinese." He was wondering why a horse with so big hoofs came to him. He was thinking where the horse might be heading to, but he didn't know. Then, he saw the horse going into a cave and coming out. After that, his wife was pregnant. It is said that the child's father is A myes Brag dkar. So, we people of Klu tshang have great devotion for A myes Brag dkar and we are his offspring.

('U tsho klu tshang gi brag dkar 'di shin tu mchod pa dang 'di skyes lha byed go no de 'di ltar bshad go gi de nas lha sgrung de mo zig yod gi Deng ma klu tshang 'di ko ru mtsho dmar gan nas bsdad nas de nas sha ri dags bsad nas de nas rgad po zhig gis de a rig gi yin zhes kyang bshad go gi sha sogs bsad nas ko yis sbra zhig bzos ni red bzos de 'dra 'ang bshad srol yod gi ko ra thog don de red ces bshad ko ru sa ming thogs don de yin de nas kho la nam yang byis pa med pas de'i rjes nyin zhig bltas tshe khang zhig bab yod pa rta rmig rjes po can zhig 'then yod ni red zer 'u tsho yin na skya mi zhig gi rta rjes yod ni red zer de ya mtshar de kho tshang la 'di mo rta rjes chen po can zhig yong ni med bsam nas bsdad dus de nas 'di gang la song bzig bsam nas bltas tshe song yul ma shes ni red zer de nas bltas na phug gtod nas yar la bud song bzig zer de'i rjes kho yi bud med de la byis pa zhig yod btang zer ni red de a myes brag dkar gyi sras yin zhes bshad srol de 'dra zhig yod ni red de yin na da 'u tsho klu tshang 'dis a myes brag dkar 'di shin tu mchod no gcig nas a myes brag dkar gyi rgyud pa yin zer go ni red)[6]

Soon after the affirmation of the Chinese communist rule, the apparently indistinct space of today's Qinghai province's grassland was sliced into prefectures (*zhou*), counties (*xian*), townships (*zhen*) and villages (*cun*) to conform to the system enforced in the rest of the People's Republic of China. However, previous to the introduction of these administrative divisions, the grassland was neither a boundless nor an indistinct space. Tangible fences and borders were mostly ignored by nomads but the landscape was marked according to a shared emic[7] taxonomy of geography that efficiently

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[6] Recorded on 20 June 2012 in rTse khog county, Rma lho prefecture (Qinghai province).
[7] The theoretical distinction between emic and etic was proposed in the field of linguistics by Kenneth Pike

regulated assertions of control onto the physical space. Within Amdo, agricultural places were, and still are, categorized as *gong ma* and *zhol ma* (upper and lower) according to their relative altitude and types of farming. Among nomads, *sa khul* traditionally indicated a wide pasture area, divided into *ru*, a term that defines a smaller space unit. *Ru* were further articulated into *sbra rgan* and *rus rtse* (big and small tents), indicating the older and younger generations of a family. The borders of *sa khul* were porous, but their centres approximately coincided with mountains where the dwelling mountain gods were worshipped or with the local monasteries. Regardless of the physical distance from these centres, the grouping of the members of a *ru* within a *sa khul* was determined by the performance of rituals to one or the other mountain god and the affiliation to one or the other monastery.

The spatial network of Amdo was also perceptible through landmarks' evocative place-names, which stressed a strong connection with the landscape features and the legends associated with a place. To name but a few examples from eastern Amdo: Dmar mtsho, a lake whose waters turned bloody red after the murder of a Mongol soldier; Nyima lung, a wide valley facing south and illuminated by the sun; 'ba' thang, a pasture whose name was given by King Gesar because of the number of sheep bleating and making the sound "'ba'"; Khyung sman, a place where medical herbs grow.[8] Tibetan toponyms maintain a contiguous relationship between the landscape, its inhabitants and memories, which clashes with the State's attempts to assert its control over the space of the grassland.

The politically tense context of Amdo, naming a place is an act of appropriation, carried out by the State through a place-renaming policy that denies the original Tibetan toponym-place connection in two main ways: by using Chinese phonetic calques derived from Tibetan, i.e. 尼玛隆 (Nima long) for Nyima lung, 王加 (Wangjia) for Bon rgya; by creating new Chinese place-names completely unrelated to the original Tibetan ones, i.e. 贵德 (Guide) for Khrika, 同仁 (Tongren) for Rebgong. In both cases, the original meaning of the Tibetan toponym is lost, altogether with the stories connected to it. At the same time, new townships and villages are coming into existence and gaining importance in the administrative network, with their Chinese names rapidly

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in 1954. It originally referred to the suffixed terms phon-emic (the unit of sound in a particular language) and phon-etic (the transcription and comparison of sounds according to a standard system). Making a more general statement about the difference between emic and etic, Pike argued: "The etic viewpoint studies behaviour as from outside of a particular system, the emic viewpoint results from studying behaviour as from inside the system." See Pike 1971: 37.

[8] Recorded on 13 August 2012 in Khrika county, Mtsho lho prefecture (Qinghai province).

spreading and becoming integrated into the physical and mental map of the region. At the same time, many pre-Communist Tibetan places increasingly loose their centrality in the official geography and are not reported on official maps; their survival depends on people's memory, verbal recalling in informal daily communication and performance of religious rituals in specific sacralised sites of the natural landscape.

Many vernacular oral narrations are global texts that encompass a comprehensive knowledge of a place, thus they can be appropriately labelled 'narrated geographies'. The strong link to the local context is reflected in the highlighting of the spatial dimension, compared to the temporal coordinates. Space is usually more accurately outlined by spatial referents, landmarks and place-names, whereas the timeframe remains vague.[9] In this type of narrations, history and legends, memories and traumas, vernacular descriptions of the landscape and local customs and taboos, toponyms' etymology and religious beliefs merge and share the common trait of being embedded in loco as individual and collective experiences of the land. 'Narrated geographies' have developed in Tibetan culture as substitutes of cartographic representations of the land to provide spatial orientation and transmission of knowledge about both the surrounding environment and distant places.

Charting the space through oral narration is a common cultural practice implemented by many so called traditional societies, which displays a coherent conceptual organization of the land no less accurate than the representational model embodied by maps. As formulated by Alfred Korzybski, "the map is not the territory", maps are a representation of territories based on the usage of conventional symbols, thus a map stands for a territory but is neither the territory itself nor the real experience of it.[10] Beyond the field of semantics, not only the ontological coincidence between map and territory is generally taken for granted, but maps are also usually regarded as the only valid cross-cultural model of representation. Nevertheless, ethnographic documentation of space taxonomies in different cultural contexts shows that the usage of maps has been a relatively recent acquisition for many communities and only in recent times has it partially substituted the traditional storytelling of the land.[11] Local 'narrated geographies' are not so relevant if judged according to criteria of historical reliability; they display their full potential contribution in their social function of enacting social dynamics and moulding reality into historical memories that shape

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[9] See Casey 1996: 13-52.
[10] See Korzybski 1994: 61.
[11] See Gow 1995: 53-90.

contemporary political narratives and geographies.

Lha sgrung and 'narrated geographies' tellers are not professional storytellers but subjective minority citizens struggling to keep alive their linguistic and cultural identity, values and sense of place in the context of a national tendency to demand minorities accept linguistic homologation and cultural exoticization. The narration follows a land-centred approach, derived from a range of different sources and genres and depending on a selective appropriation of events. In this way, local knowledge at once retains the power of places overlooked by the State, i.e. *la rtse*, sacred mountains, paths of circumambulation and water springs, and disempowers the State's new landmarks, borders, administrative divisions and spatial arrangement of the pasture. Many narrations acknowledge the previous invaders of the landscape and express ambivalent feelings toward them: this is the case, for example, of the Mongols living in Kokonor area, who since the thirteenth century have alternately dominated Amdo and intermingled with native Tibetans.

In the Tibetan written tradition, the Buddhist clergy also made a consistent interpretative effort to produce cultural and religious interpretations of the Tibetan landscape through codified geography texts, i.e. *gnas bshad*, *gnas yig*, *dkar chag* and *lam yig*.[12] These types of descriptive texts put emphasis on the location of monasteries, sacred mountains and other pilgrimage destinations in the Buddhist envisioned landscape and make large use of metaphors to describe landforms and special features of the environment. The texts under these genre categories bring together distant mountains, lakes, paths and rocks disseminated onto the Tibetan landscape to produce a coherent description resembling the perfection of a mandala.

Compared to the written geography texts, oral descriptions of the landscape do not present the same conventional structure and contents. While the religious dimension remains a central focus, they tend to include some aspects of the laic history of the area, the changes of the natural environment and the local legends. It is noteworthy that in oral geography a total experience of the lived landscape is reproduced: the presence of monasteries, *la rtse* and *mchod rten* is harmonized with the surrounding natural features and practical information are given about the quality of the grass, the average winter precipitation and the folk etymology of place names. Imagination, religious visualization and empirical knowledge are intertwined levels of the narration that constantly shift through the text. The act of narration not only describes but also creates

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[12] See Martin 1996: 500-514.

the landscape and permeates it with a network of relevant religious and cultural connections. Like in a mandala, in the written canonical texts of geography genres and in the oral descriptions of the landscape, geographic landmarks are not freestanding elements but acquire significance when they are interconnected.

Both written *gnas bshad* and oral 'narrated geographies' embody a conceptual understanding of the landscape perceived and organized through the lens of Tibetan own cultural resources. In the struggle to maintain a Tibetan cultural identity under the Chinese rule, narrations of the landscape cluster around places whose memories convey value to the present space experience of Amdo Tibetans. 'Narrated geographies' support the effort to confront official narrations and the imposed spatial reconfigurations enforced by the State, which has intruded in local lives with a new arrangement of the land.

Beijing's government pursues a policy of expansion of the internal frontiers and control of border areas for both economic and ideological reasons but ambiguity and tensions arouse when issues of regional development plans like the China's Western Development (西部大开发) irreducibly clash with the already existing spatial order. The State takes possession of the land by fencing the pastures, building roads and forcing nomads to move to the new-built settlements: these visible marks remain on the landscape as a constant reminder of the State's violence.

In the complex polysemic geography of Amdo, Tibetan movement becomes a way to express indirect appropriation of the land and contrast the emergence of the nation-state. The landscape is a lived experience generated by people's mobility, carrying the marks of past and present events, clothed with narratives and beliefs, spatial and cultural referents. The movement between places is a meaning-creating experience of networking places and people, based on the dialectic of memory and place in everyday life: from the tent to the pasture, from the grassland to the county township, from one county to another, from the grassland to Xining city.

Creating space through the entextualization of oral tradition

In *La Production de l'espace*, Lefebvre argued: "No space ever vanishes utterly, leaving no trace."[13] In the Amdo context, oral transmission and daily practice are revitalizing the traditional organization of the space. If the State planning is subverting the present and future physicality of Amdo, the imposition of a new spatial arrangement constantly

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[13] See Lefebvre, 1991: 164.

evokes memories of vanished landscapes, causing nostalgia and activating local memories. In order to continue to reproduce traditional space models, Tibetans are renovating a range of traditional literary forms, notably *lha sgrung*, wherein the emic conceptions of the landscape have been traditionally codified. The on-going production of written narratives by the different agencies of the Chinese state and the local Tibetan authors, involves underpinning dynamics of power, hegemony and resistance in the context of Amdo.[14]

The exclusive control over the written word traditionally held by Buddhist clergy has played a strong influence in shaping laic Tibetans' underestimating attitude towards vernacular narrations as well as discouraging any effort of collecting and writing down oral tradition. However, due to the contemporary subordinate status of Tibetan culture in a Chinese dominant environment, Tibetans are increasingly aware of the urgency to write about their culture not within the narrow frame equalling Tibetan culture with Tibetan Buddhism but in a broader view that considers vernacular culture as an integral part of Tibetan past and present cultural identity. Giving expression to this trend, officially and privately published works in Tibetan language, authored by locals, are an emerging phenomenon in Amdo. The private publication outside of the authorized publishing houses precludes the wide circulation and distribution in the official book market, but it also provides the authors with a wider space to contest official configurations of history and to promote sense of locality and community belonging. A quite explicit autobiographic imprint pervades these works: from Nagtsang Nulo's "The Joys and Sorrows of the Nagtsang Boy" and Tserang Dondrup's "Rlung dmar 'ur 'ur" to the historical chronicles of clans based on oral interviews, to the history of local monasteries and pilgrimage destinations, to folklore collections encompassing *lha sgrung*, *bsang yig* and folk etymology of toponyms and landmarks.[15]

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[14] See Bauman and Briggs 1992: 131-172.

[15] Numerous examples can be cited: A bar lo rgyus rtsom sgrig khang. 2009. 'khar rtse kha gsum dang rong 'brog tsho lnga'i byung ba rjod pa chos srid nyi zla'i 'od rlabs. [*Light irradiating from the sun and the moon of the mundane and religious history of the three valleys of Kartse and the five rural and nomadic tribes*] Gansu Nationalities Publishing House; Anonymous. 2005. Bya khog gi deb ther nor bu'i mgul rgyun. [The *precious stream of the Bya khog chronicles*] privately published; Ku ru tshe ring dang skal bzang tshe brten. 2010. Reb kong dme shul tsho ba'i lo rgyus. [History *of the Meshul tribes of Rebgong*] Gansu Nationalities Publishing House; Srid gros rtse khog rdzong u yon lhan khang. 2011. Rtse khog rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig. [*Research on the history and culture of Rtse khog*] privately published; 'brug thar dang sangs rgyas tshe ring. 2005. Mdo smad rma khul tsha 'gram yul gru'i lo rgyus deb ther chen mo. [Historical *chronicles of Tshadra area of Ma area of Amdo*] Nationalities Publishing House; Rgyas bza'i bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho. 2005. Ban shul rgyas bza'i lo rgyus dri bral shel gyi 'bab stegs. [*The surface of clear crystal of the history of Banshul area*] privately published; Lha 'brug rgyal. 2008. Bdud shul pha rting gsum gyi byung ba brjod pa bden gtam drang pa'i tshangs thig. [*The chain of straightforward account of the historical events in the area of Bdud shul*] privately published.

From the researcher's etic perspective, it is attractive to attempt a clear classification of oral and written narration of *lha sgrung* and 'narrated geographies' according to criteria of historical reliability. However, due to the complex coexistence and interaction of historical and legendary elements in these types of narration such a classification would not be pertinent in the local view and could only be enforced at the expenses of ignoring the Tibetan traditional emic understanding of history and historicity. It has been accurately pointed out that the term *lo rgyus* itself is a comprehensive "genre label for any narrative referring to the past of something or someone" or, we may add, somewhere.[16] In principle, Tibetans do not consider *lo rgyus* in the restricted sense of a historical account, but rather as a narration, which tends to include many not historically documented elements that intertwine with local beliefs and legends, individual perspectives and community bias. In terms of divergences in scope, contents and reception, the gap between fiction and non-fiction is not emically relevant and the restrictive genre classification of either "history" or "folklore" is often eluded. Nevertheless, Tibetan histories, particularly those orally transmitted, are a valuable key to gain insights into the cultural elaboration enacted by the community in processing specific historical events.

Parallel to the Tibetan spontaneous writing ferment, the last two decades have also witnessed an intensification of the State's engagement in publishing both historical recordings and folklore collections in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures of Qinghai Province.[17] In order to ensure their diffusion, these publications, mostly based on an originally oral material, are often in both Tibetan and Chinese languages. The editors involved in this State-sponsored initiative have drawn an arbitrary demarcation line between the reliability of 'pure' historical works and the timeless charm embodied by folklore collections (i.e., folktales, folk songs, proverbs, myths and legends). In order to enhance one allegedly incontestable version of Amdo Tibetan history and disregard alternative oral narrative discourses circulating in the local context, data have been categorized, according to Chinese etic criteria and regardless of the Tibetan emic perspective on the matter, into fictional and non-fictional, relevant and irrelevant, politically harmless and sensitive, to be silenced and to be overemphasized.

'Entextualizing', i.e. making an oral text into a written form, is in fact not a

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[16] See Gentry 2010: 131-164.

[17] To my knowledge, the most recent and comprehensive publications of this type are the two volumes edited by the Hainan and Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures: Mtsho lho khul sa ming rig gnas brda 'grel. 2010. Gansu Nationalities Publishing House and Rma lho khul sa rig gnas brda 'grel. 2012. Gansu Nationalities Publishing House.

simple operation of writing down an oral narration. Due to the detachment from the performance that makes audience, context, choices of the storyteller and reception of the message an irreproducible event, the intentions of the writing agency determine the selection of the oral material to be included or excluded in the written text, depending on the purpose of the writing project. By fixing and entextualizing orality, written texts make a representation of the oral tradition, which inevitably does not coincide with the original message. The power imbalance between the State agency and the Tibetan subjectivities poses many questions about issues of authenticity and representation of oral tradition, since "texts can be defined as true or untrue only in accordance to their specific context of social enactment and interpretation".[18] Despite their different agendas, the single written narrations are elaborated from a range of oral versions and the multivocality of oral tradition is reorganized into the monovocality of individual written texts, which become a distinct creation-reinvention of a piece of tradition. Following the perceived hierarchical gap between low oral expression and high written texts, Tibetan authors tend to beautify and adjust the register, both lexically and grammatically, in producing the written version of an oral tradition, an effort which is usually lacking in the State-supported publications.

Finally, it should be remembered that the foreign researcher also plays a critical role in collecting and entextualizing Tibetan oral tradition. The choices made with regard to transcription, translation and degree of adherence to the original message are unavoidable challenges that reflect the researcher's perspective and affect the representation of the tradition.

Attempting some conclusive remarks

The richness of Amdo Tibetan oral tradition can give access to many unexplored paths of research. Tibetan oral narrations tell us less about history and more about how people construct their sense of place and cultural identity. This does not diminish their significance because they provide insights in what is valuable and thus selected by the local social actors. Shared stories are the sources of shared notions of truth and appropriateness, which join people together: by showing events and places to have structure and meanings, stories shape worldviews and replace the objective reality of political subjugation with the narrative frame of traditional knowledge of the space. In this article, I attempted to show that oral narrations are an important source of

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[18] See Mills 2007: 68-73.

information for the understanding of Tibetan emic space categories, geography and orientation. Thus, their entextualization arouses complex questions about emic and etic representations that should be seriously considered by the researcher.

Tibetan alternative voices, pushed to the margins by the dominant discourse of the Chinese nation-state function as a hidden transcript[19] that builds resistance within traditional narrative frames to assert Tibetans' control on the landscape and its memories. Living the space and narrating the land are ways to express a counter-discourse and, in times of profound changes, spatial marks and stories are left for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

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[19] See Scott 1990.

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