

Captions :

NUNS AND RESITANT FIGHTERS

Photography report by

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Photo 01 -

Ani Tenzin Choeden arrived in India in 1990. An ex political prisoner, tortured by electric shock during her months spent in the Drapchi prison, she now runs the Shugsep monastery in exile. Today she suffers from memory problems and incontinence caused by the torture.



Photo 02 -

Two monks protesting in Dharamsala in India in November 2010 to defend the use of the Tibetan language in schools in Tibet.

The 3rd of March 2012, Tsering Kyi, a young college student aged 20, from the province of Gansu in Tibet in a protest against the banning of teaching Tibetan in schools, covered himself in petrol, attached himself to iron wires and set himself on fire in the market place.



Photo 03 -

*Gyaltzen Drölkar**, a young nun aged 19 was arrested in 1990 during a peaceful protest in Lhasa for crying **“Long live the Dalai-lama!”** et **“Long live a free Tibet!”**. Tortured then thrown into prison, she stayed there for twelve years. In 1993 with 13 other nuns, she succeeded in recording secret songs that acclaimed the beauty of their country and their desire for liberty. This earned her eight extra years imprisonment in unimaginable conditions. Gyaltzen, freed in 2002, now lives in Brussels and expresses one wish: *“I would like people to support us in an effective way, sympathy for Tibetans is not enough”*.

*Gyaltzen Drölkar, the disobedient of Lhasa - twelve years in chinese prisons in Tibet, François Bourin Éditeur, 2011.



Photo 04 -

Gyaltsen protesting last march in Brussels in commemoration of the 10th of March. The uprising of the 10th of March 1959, suppressed in a blood bath lead to the fleeing of the Dalai-lama and around 80 000 Tibetans to India. This uprising also marks entry of women into the Tibetan resistance. The 12th of March 1959, 15 000 women organised a national protest against the Chinese invasion of Lhasa. These protests lasted several weeks and most of the women involved were imprisoned, tortured and publicly executed.



Photo 05 -

In regards to this period of « reeducation » a nun recounts :

“they hit us in the eyes with their fingers pointing forward, nearly dislodging our eyeballs from their sockets. This abuse was followed by other attacks. If they had beat us in our villages, it would have been known, but they did it in the isolation of the convent, only the nuns were witnesses”.



Photo 06 -

Tsewand Zango comes from a poor family from the area bordering Nepal and Tibet, her parents choose to send her to the Sugsep nunnery in India so she could have a better life. She is playful yet responsible; she studies Tibetan, English, science and philosophy. Later she must choose whether to remain a nun or become non-religious.



Photo 07 -

Dolma was also welcomed into the Shugsep monastery. Today she is no longer a nun, she works in a restaurant in Bodhgaya in India and hopes ardently to one day return to Tibet to be close to her family, as a non religious person this will doubtlessly be much easier....



Photo 08 -

Rigzin Chosans, aged 82, is one of the oldest nuns living in exile. At the age of 62 she fled Tibet in extremely difficult conditions. She arrived in Nepal with her hands torn to shreds. She now lives alone in Dharamsala and devotes her time to meditation.



Photo 09 -

Nyama Dolkar spent five years in the Drapchi prison with two other nuns for protesting on the 20th of March 1995 in Lhasa. Tortured every day and refused the right to return to her monastery, she fled Tibet in 2004. The post traumatic stress from this time in prison forced her to leave her life in the monastery. Today she runs a restaurant in Norbilingka in India with a friend she met in Drapchi. Nyama spent nearly two years in an isolated cell.



Photo 10 -

A young Tibetan in front of the victims of self-immolation in Tibet. Since March 2001, forty Tibetans, monks, nuns and non-religious people have sacrificed themselves through self-immolation. Three nuns, aged 18, 20 and 35 are some of the victims of self-immolation. Tenzin Choedron, aged 18, died on the 12th of February 2012 after an act of self-immolation in Ngaba the night before. She was described as a young, quiet, hard-working and brave nun.



Photo 11 -

Yangzom, a nun and an ex political prisoner, with her son and her interpreter, Lhamo. Yangzom, aged 45, spent 12 years of her youth in the Drapchi prison; beaten and tortured she suffers from severe post traumatic stress from her time in prison and is unable to cope with a new life or to have a family. She now lives in Brussels where she has obtained status as a political refugee.



Photo 12 -

"when I arrived in prison, the guards handcuffed me behind my back and pulled my arms until my shoulders dislocated. Then they burned my hands and face with cigarettes. They hit us in the face every day. But this particular day they attached electric wires to my fingers and electrocuted me whilst beating me with metal bars. They left me in the cell, unconscious, without food or water".

Phuntsok Nyindron, nun and ex political prisoner, Phuntsok lives in exile in Switzerland.



Photo 13 -

Ritual at the monastery of Geden Choeling, situated in Dharamsala in India, residence of the Dalai-lama. It is one of the first monasteries to have welcomed fleeing Tibetans nuns. 160 nuns currently live there.



Photo 14 -

*"I have no regrets of being a prisoner
My country was stolen
That is why we have spilt so many tears
Oh how many tears!"*

Extract from a song from the "singing nuns" of Drapchi.



Photo 15 -

Recently the exiled nuns have been able to gain the same education as the monks, that of Geshe, which has been offering monastic studies for 19 years. Rinchen Khando, leader of the Tibetan Nuns Project* and the first president of the Tibetan Women's Association* is very proud of this step: "these women who when they arrive are often illiterate now have access to a collections of budhist teachings as well as a modern education with English, maths, history, computers, and lessons on health".

* Tibetan Nuns Project : www.tnp.org

* Tibetan Women's Association : <http://tibetanwomen.org>



Photo 16 -

The refectory of the Shugsep convent in exile in India, near Dharamsala. In the monastery, everyone takes turns to do the cooking for the community.

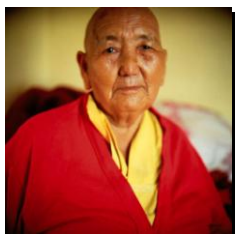


Photo 17 -

Ani Pema Wangmo, aged 76, spent nearly fifty years in exile; she knows that she will probably never be able to return to her home country of Tibet.



Photo 18 -

« They shouted at me that I must get up. So, one of them took of my dress and the other guard inserted an implement into my vagina. The chock and the pain were horrible..... After the other picked me up, they beat me with sticks and kicked me. I fell to the ground many times... »

An account collected in Dharamsala, in India.



Photo 19 -

*“Oh joy of wisdom (the Dalai-lama)
My country has been stolen
Let us, our friends in spirit, prisoners,
No matter how they cruelly beat us
Join our arms together so they cannot be separated”*

Extract from a song from the “singing nun”, recorded in secret in the Drapchi prison



Photo 20 -

*« In the direction of our homeland
We sing a brief song of truth.
Oh wind, if you are conscious,
Carry our song to our birthplace...
Do not be sad.
The time will come for our reunion. »*

Extract from a song from the « singing nuns », recorded in secret from the prison of Drapchi.