

Synopsis:

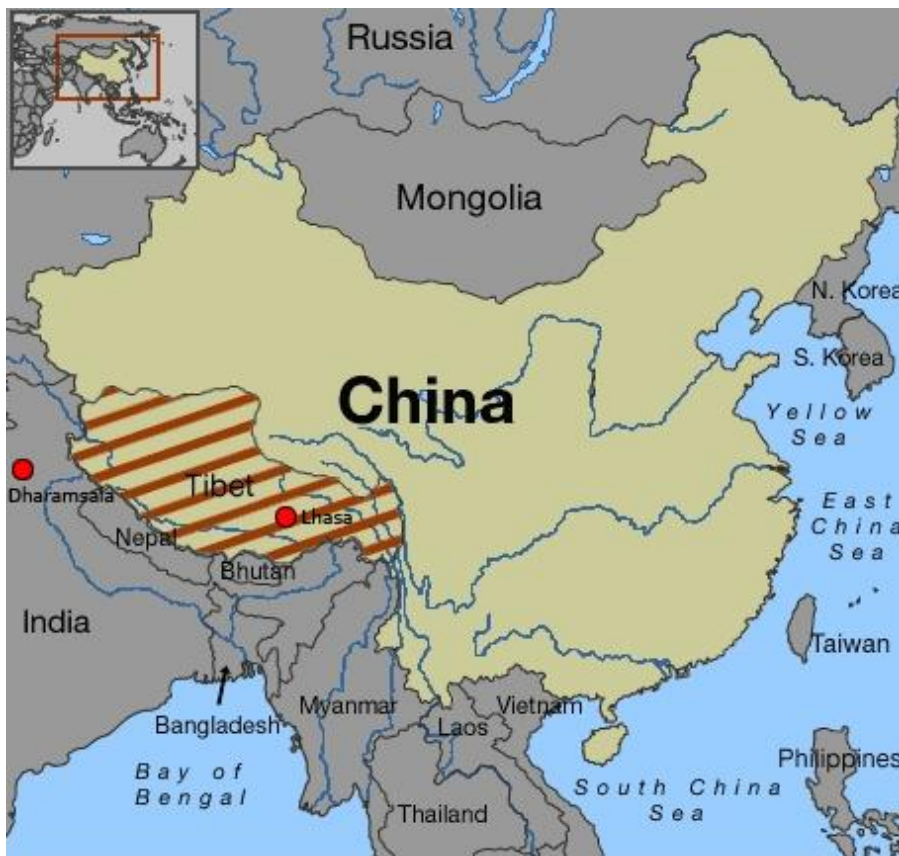
NUNS AND RESISTANT FIGHTERS

Photography report by

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They are named Tenzin, Gyaltzen, Jamyang or Dolma. The youngest were born in exile, in India or Nepal, the others crossed the Himalayas, often risking their lives. Jamyang, aged 48, arrived in Dharamsala in 2004 and remembers “walking in the night to avoid the Chinese patrols, I arrived with frozen feet, I hadn’t drank for four days, I thought I was going to die”. Dharamsala, a town in the north of India, was a holiday resort for British settlers. It became the seat of the Tibetan government in exile since the Dalai-lama settled there in 1959 after fleeing Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. Ever since, the refugees have continued to arrive and there are now 94000 in India.



Tsewang Zangmo arrived in Dharamsala two years ago as a child. She is only nine years old and spends her time running in the passage ways of the monastery, playing badminton, waiting for her suppression of her lessons in a few days time. Born from a poor family from the area bordering Nepal and Tibet, her parents decided to send her here for 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.

Tenzin Choeden, a superior at the monastery marches in the streets of Dharamsala to commemorate the uprising of the women of Tibet on the 12th March 1959. "I was forbidden to return to my monastery after participating in a peaceful protest in Lhasa in 1998, I spent two months in prison". Tenzin confesses that it is still too difficult for her to talk about. Tsomo, her translator, tells us that she suffers from post traumatic stress disorder from the electric torture.

Gyaltsen Drölkar, one of the 'Drapchi 14' lives in Brussels and tells her painful journey in her book, 'The disobedient Lhasa', published in 2011. She was compelled to write "through an obligation to remember, as others are still living today what I lived through myself". Imprisoned in the nineties in Tibet after shouting at a peaceful protest "Long live a free Tibet, long live the Dalai-lama", the "Drapchi14" are shown recording secret tapes of chants that were deemed "revolutionary and separatist" by the Chinese. This earned them an extra five to nine years imprisonment. Phuntsok Nyindron, who shared a cell with Gyaltsen recounts "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".

Since March 2011, in eastern Tibet, more than a third of monks, nuns and non-religious people have set themselves on fire. Tenzin Choedron, a nun aged 18, died on the 12th February this year after an act of self-immolation in Ngaba the night before. She was described as a young, quiet, hard-working and brave nun. She was the third nun to sacrifice themselves in this way.

"There is hope, says Gyaltsen with a smile, things can change because our fight is just, even if it takes time. But we need more than sympathy, we need support", she says with a sudden and grave sigh.

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

* **Tibetan Nuns Project** : www.tnp.org

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