

one) there is no position from which to write that is not itself implicated in the history of colonial inequality.

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The Tibetan-English Novel: A Post-Buddhist Form?

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Although most Tibetans who have chosen English as a language of literary expression are poets (e.g. Chögyam Trungpa, Tenzin Tsundue, Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, Bhuchung Sonam¹), there is also a slowly growing number of Tibetans writing narrative fiction in English. This paper discusses how the four Tibetan-English novels written so far engage the Tibetan Buddhist heritage in a new and hybrid context. The novels in question are Tsewang Pemba's *Idols on the Path* (1966), Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (1999), Thubten Samphel's *Falling Through the Roof* (2008) and Tsering Namgyal Khortsa's *The Tibetan Suitcase* (2013). However, due to the length of this paper, I shall deal with only the first two and older novels in depth, making some marginal references to *Falling Through the Roof* and *The Tibetan Suitcase*, but not fully engaging in their analysis.

To this day, little or no literary criticism has been produced about these four works of fiction. The only exception is perhaps *The Mandala*, which has been read by Venturino (2008: 316-317) as a “postmodern rewriting” of the “[British] archives of imperial governance”. Analogously, one of the very few references to Pemba's work presents him writing back to Western expectations as an author “sensitive to the Western idea of Tibetan primitiveness” (Winks and Rush 1990:97). Not unlike many other post-colonial works, the interpretive (and small) body of work that analyses Tibetan-English fiction focuses more on how Tibetan-English writers interact with the narratives of their colonisers or proxy colonisers, rather than on how they engage and re-interpret their own

¹ See Trungpa (2004), Tsundue (2008), Dhompa (2003) and Sonam (2002)

pre-colonial heritage. To counterbalance this bias, I approach Tibetan-English fiction primarily from the angle of how the Tibetan Buddhist heritage is engaged in a “post-Buddhist” manner.

Post-Buddhism is a term of my invention that covers various re-appropriations of Buddhist narratives in Asian diasporas in general, and in the Tibetan diaspora in particular, applied to literary contexts that are not strictly Buddhist, soteriological or even religious. Thus, post-Buddhism does not imply a rejection or overcoming of Buddhism, but an often contestive appropriation of some of its motifs, much in the vein of the terms post-colonial and post-modern. Such a project is very popular among the new generations of Tibetan-English writers, who tend to take political and cultural stances by dis-embedding and re-embedding Buddhist narrative formulas. This process can be appreciated both thematically and formally, since the four novels are hybrid incarnations of Tibetan / Buddhist narratives and the Western novel. In this way Tibetan-English novels and their authors introduce contestation, reformulation and innovation by reinterpreting their cultural heritage.

The tersest example of how Tibetan and Buddhist narratives are being reincarnated through the bodies of the novel might be found in Jamyang Norbu’s *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, a historiographically metafictional rewriting of the English classic in a Tibetan context. Towards the end of the novel, Holmes is told that he is not just a British detective involved in early 20th century Tibetan politics, but the reincarnation of a Tibetan Lama. Lama Yonten addresses the British character:

Mr. Holmes, Mr. Holmes. Listen to me. You are not Sherlock Holmes! You are the renowned Gangsar Tulku, former abbot of White Garuda Monastery, one of the greatest adepts of the occult sciences. The Dark One slew you eighteen years ago but just before your life-force left your body we were able to transfer it –by the yoga of *Pho-wa*- to another body far away. (242)

Thus Holmes transcends his position as a foreigner helping Tibet to fend off the threat of Chinese imperialism and becomes an insider, a Tibetan lama returned to his fatherland in a strange body.

This appropriation of Holmes as sympathetic to the Tibetan cause and as essentially Tibetan is done in a typically Tibetan Buddhist fashion. The motif of the reincarnating lama who comes back to help his former disciples and relatives, a narrative exclusive to Tibetan Buddhism, is used for claiming a British character for the Tibetan archive, or, in other words, for Tibetanising Holmes. Leaving aside its clear post-Buddhist flavour for the moment, this episode is a useful metaphor for the Tibetan-English novel as a genre. This new genre could be compared to the white English body of Holmes, who in *The Mandala* expresses a Tibetan spirit of cultural and political resistance. However, Holmes’ body is hardly white or British anymore. The novel has undergone many processes of hybridization, by being re-appropriated by colonial subjects all over the English-speaking world, before being used by the Tibetans. Analogously, the literary form Tibetan exiled writers inherit is hardly “western” or “English” in any uncomplicated fashion, since they draw substantial inspiration from colonial British writers like Rudyard Kipling or post-colonial South Asian authors like Salman Rushdie or Pico Iyer². Tibetan-English writers enter the already hybrid space of post-colonial South Asia and further hybridize it by Tibetanising many of its narratives.

Although the narrative of reincarnation often features in these novels as a playful way of reclaiming non-Tibetan characters like Holmes or establishing links with the

² These three authors are mentioned by Tsering Namgyal (Khortsia) in his non-fiction book *Little Lhasa* as examples of non-Tibetan writers who, in writing about Tibet and the Tibetan exile, have provided a reference point for Tibetan-English writers.

Tibetan past, much in the legitimating spirit of the Tibetan lineages of reincarnated lamas, there is another narrative pattern that pervades the Tibetan-English novels in an even more fundamental way: that of the *gter ma* or treasure-texts. By the same time that the idea of personalized and recognizable reincarnation appears in Tibet in order to solve issues of succession and power (12th century), the *gter ma* tradition emerges as another form of retrospectively claiming textual and religious authority. Granting that the boundaries of both traditions are blurred and they often intermingle, they originally represented two different responses to an emerging social order. Whereas reincarnation was the strategy deployed by monastic institutions in the 12th and 13th centuries in order to keep political power in the hands of monk-kings (who were celibate and therefore could not produce descendants)³, the *gter ma* writers (from now on *gter ston*), who are also “male but very few are monks” (Samuel 1993: 296), re-appropriate the authority associated with Buddhist teachers and kings from former times by claiming to have composed or “discovered” texts originally written or inspired by them⁴. The *gter ma* tradition is thus a visionary strategy for presenting new texts and ideas arising from the imagined golden age of Tibetan history.

This golden age comprises the 7th and 8th centuries, when the Tibetan Empire reached its maximum expansion under the rule of Songtsen Gampo (617-649) and Buddhism was firmly established as the official religion under his descendant, Emperor Trisong Detsen (742-800) (Schweiger 2013:73). In fact, not only *gter ston* use this age as their legitimizing figment of the past; the tradition of monk-kings claims it as well in order to substantiate their authority. Therefore, the Dalai Lama is not only considered to be the reincarnation of all the previous Dalai Lamas and an emanation of Chenrezik (Skt. Avalokitesvara), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, but a manifestation of Songtsen Gampo, the greatest of Tibetan Emperors⁵. Thus the past is used in analogous ways by the monastic monarchs and by the *gter ston*, who often lived independent and freer lifestyles outside the great monastic institutions⁶.

The question of agency in the process of *gter ma* writing is a complex one, since, as Gyatso (1998:145-153) has discussed at length, the *gter ston* is neither a mere empty channel possessed by the spirit of a past lama, nor is he said to be contriving the whole process through his own efforts. The *gter ma* tradition was and remains a highly ingenious form of not only introducing novelty within tradition, but also setting up alternative sources of spiritual and scriptural authority. The constant renovation offered by the *gter ma* represented an alternative to the more lineal, conservative and hierarchical authority embodied by monastic institutions. Although *gter ston* were also part of smaller institutions and they claim authority for themselves, they are often unconventional figures who stay away from the centres of power and sometimes challenge their structures, though very rarely in an openly subversive manner⁷.

³ For a more detailed account of how the institution of reincarnation develops as a necessity for the ruling monasteries of 12th century Tibet see Stein (2013: 200-206).

⁴ For a brief introduction to the *gter ma*, both as historical and liturgical genre see Gyatso (1996:147-155).

⁵ As Schweiger (2013: 74) points out: “The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngwang Lozang Gyatso (1617-82) was the most successful in claiming the Avalokitesvara concept for himself, by embedding it, in word and deed, in a general concept of Tibetan history”. Moreover, “by establishing the Potala at precisely the spot where the ruined palace of King Songtsen Gampo was said to have stood in the past, he [the 5th Dalai Lama] claimed the position of the ancient Tibetan kings” (Ibid.).

⁶ Samuel (1993: 296) characterizes the *gter ston* as standing at “the ‘wildest’ and most ‘shamanic’ end of Tibetan Buddhist practice” and although “Tertön [*gter ston*] are not necessarily unconventional in their behaviour [...] unusual or bizarre activity is a frequent part of the *tertön* role”.

⁷ Gyatso (1998 227-229) analyzes some of the potentially and implicitly subversive aspects of the *gter ston* Jigme Lingpa’s (1729-1798) work in terms of “personal uniqueness”, “independence” and “autonomy” (1998 227-229).

Parallel dynamics can be appreciated in Tibetan-English fiction, which also aims to present the innovative (e.g. writing in English, Tibetan exiled hybrid identities) aligned and legitimized through the aura of some previous period (e.g. the thirty-seven years of de facto Tibetan independence, The Tibetan Empire)⁸. These modern day *gter ston* are also offering alternative readings of Tibetan history in so far as they retell the story of the Tibetan exodus in ways that differ and dissent from that of the, also monastic and hierarchical, exiled leadership. The four Tibetan-English novels written so far replay in various ways the stories working as a legitimating framework for the *gter ma* tradition. Furthermore, the authors or narrators sometimes deny their authorship and present the text as a treasure discovered accidentally (e.g. *The Mandala*, *The Tibetan*) and some of its characters engage in quests and revelations that owe much to the adventurous tales of *gter ston* (e.g. *Falling Through*, *Idols*). However, these new “treasures” do not aim to refresh the Buddhist message in a dark spiritual age, but aim to spread a new, more political and proactive, consciousness among the new generations of English-speaking Tibetans. In these post-Buddhist tales, the legitimizing golden era is often shifted to the time immediately preceding the Chinese occupation, in which Tibet enjoyed *de facto*, though internationally unrecognized, political independence (1913-1951) (e.g. *Idols* or *The Mandala*), although the more classical period of the Tibetan Empire is also engaged (e.g. *Falling Through*).

Pemba’s *Idols on the Path* might be said to be the novel that engages the *gter ma* model less explicitly, even if the book has a strong revisionist intent aimed at Tibet’s immediate past. Although Pemba (1932-2011) was by no means supportive of the Chinese invasion, describing its cruelty with gruesome detail towards the end of the novel (199-210), he is very critical of the mores and customs of pre-communist Tibet. The first part of the book presents life in a remote valley of early 20th century Tibet as dominated by superstition and the tyrannical rule of local (partly monastic and partly secular) authorities (3-43). Pemba is almost allegorical in his treatment of characters and the narrative progression of *Idols* might be regarded as the personalized history of various Tibetan social classes from the time immediately preceding the Younghusband expedition (1903) up to the escape and settling of the first Tibetan refugees in India (early 1950s).

Idols on the Path resembles more the 19th century European conception of the novel as social critique than any Tibetan literary genre. Not surprisingly, Pemba belongs to a privileged group of Tibetans who received a British education, being the Tibetan doctor in Western medicine and graduating from University College Hospital (1955). He also treated most of the top lamas of the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages along with the Royal Family of Bhutan. He can also be considered to be one of the pioneers of Tibetan modernity; his revision of Tibet, while never falling into a colonial sense of inferiority, is that of a modern and enlightened man. He harshly exposes the brutality of the Tibetan hierarchical system⁹, maintained through uncompromising physical coercion and legitimated through a worldview he regards as incoherent and superstitious¹⁰. However, he celebrates Tibetan spiritual heroes like Milarepa (c. 1052-c.1135) and regards lay and

⁸ For contrasting approaches on the 37 years of Tibetan independence, see McKay (1997) and Goldstein (1991).

⁹ Chapter 20 (111-117) describes in detail how Tibetan aristocrats abused their serfs, a situation summarised by Pemba as “the age-old beating of the Tibetan social heart, the few aristocrats at the top swollen with wealth and privileges, and the rest of the country poor and oppressed” (111-112)

¹⁰ Pemba opens *Idols* with a macabre episode that combines both superstition and brutality: the killing of a *chilinga* (foreigner, generally European) (10-22). The foreigner is imagined to be a devil because of his unusual physical appearance and is subsequently whipped to death to the sound of prayer-flags flapping in the wind which ironically “carried into the vast beyond the prayers of that valley and the messages of mercy, tolerance and compassion” (20).

monastic Tibetan Buddhist practice as having departed from the original message of the Buddha and the great masters of the past¹¹. In this sense he can be said to be a modern *gter ston* who feels the need to introduce new teachings that will help revitalize the degenerate state of Buddhism. Nonetheless, Pemba's concern is not so much the state of the Dharma (i.e. the Buddha's teaching) but that of the nation: Tibet.

His description of the despotic Tibetan ruling classes (whipping and raping their serves in the name of the Dalai Lama's government, 111-117), the almost humorous and poor condition of the Tibetan army (33-43) and the corruption of monastic institutions like Sera (turned into great centres of power, favour-exchanges and sexual abuse, 83-85) correspond to a description of a socio-political dark age that necessitates a reintroduction to its past splendor. However, the answer to Tibet's problem is not imagined to be a re-connection with its past, but the acknowledgement of its limitations and the moving forward towards a Tibetan modernity. These two movements are embodied in the characters Kunga and Rinzing. Whereas Kunga has embarked, against his young will, on the monastic path and becomes an unconventional Buddhist monk, Rinzing studies medicine in British India and becomes one of the first Tibetan modern doctors, like Pemba himself. Despite following different paths, the two old friends come to an analogous realization about the shortcomings of Tibetan society. While Rinzing reflects about healthcare and social issues, Kunga focuses on Buddhist philosophy and practice. Kunga aims to formulate a Buddhism that goes beyond Buddhism, an endeavour that could be called post-Buddhist.

Kunga's thought begins with the realization that Buddhism might not be a closed definite system; in his own words:

We realized that we had arrived at the end of a blind alley. We both arrived at the conclusion, which was appalling, that even the Buddha had not found the answer. [...] We knew that if we followed the path we were travelling on, it would go on infinitely. We had not yet discovered that one should avoid all paths." (246)

This discovery leads on to another one: a manuscript once hidden in caves and then buried among the many treatises of Sera's library. This *gter ma*-like text, re-discovered by the disappointed monk acquires a new meaning, since its highly relativistic and transition-based philosophy speaks to his predicament and that of Tibet. The ultimacy of change and the injunction to not consider one's current state as definite do not only urge Kunga to reconsider and reformulate his Buddhism (beyond any fixed ideas or rituals) but also anticipate the Tibetan exodus.

Idols on the Path finishes with a conversation between Kunga and Rinzing, in which this philosophy of instability is fully revealed. Rinzing is the embodiment of what Kunga has theorized through years of study and meditation. In fact, Kunga's wish to make Rinzing the heir of his manuscript confirms the latter as somebody open enough to accept Kunga's heretical ideas. Kunga's post-Buddhist ideas, which consist of taking Buddhist principles to their last consequences, thus destroying what most of his fellow monks and countrymen consider to be "Buddhism" – the idols on the path, echo Rinzing's approach to Tibetan modernity. Rinzing does not reject Tibetanness or become westernized (like some other characters who are ridiculed for their mimicry of Anglo-American ways)¹², but takes whatever is useful from modernity (e.g. medical skills) in

¹¹ This view is voiced in the novel by a monk, Geshe Chosdra, who explains how "Nowadays that [the Buddha's] central message is forgotten. We are caught in an intricate system of rites and rituals, idols and gods, traditions and dogmas. Becoming a monk has turned into a profession. The road to salvations has become empty." (75)

¹² This is instantiated by how Lodrol / George is presented as a negative stereotype of the Tibetan who is ashamed of his culture and mimics American ways. Rinzing, Pemba's avatar in the novel, quietly disapproves

order to improve the living conditions of his people. Pemba exposes the hypocrisies and downfalls of Tibetan society without rejecting Tibetan values altogether. Selecting and reformulating aspects from the Tibetan milieu and wedding them to modern knowledge and science is Pemba's prescription for the Tibetan exiled condition. What need to be left behind are all the "idols" and even the "path" they signal, accepting infinite potentiality and constant change with discriminative openness. In this respect, Pemba is equally opposed to an uncritical rejection as he is to an uncritical acceptance of either Tibetan traditional values or modern Western ones¹³.

A similar re-appropriation of Buddhist ideas and Tibetan values is very much at the core of *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, which explicitly presents itself as a *gter ma*. From its very first page, the author, Jamyang Norbu, (dis)qualifies his authorship by adding after his name that the novel is "Based on the reminiscences of Hurree Chunder Mookerjee", followed by a long list of Hurree's titles, merits and achievements. The character from Kipling's *Kim* thus appears as the narrator of *The Mandala*, which was allegedly committed to a manuscript, in turn discovered by Norbu in 1988 in a strongly *gter ma*-like fashion. Norbu frames his rewriting of Holmes and Hurree through a preface and an epilogue that constitute the legitimating narrative for his peculiar *gter ma* text. Norbu (1949) begins by describing his privileged childhood as the son of a prosperous Lhasa merchant who sent him, in the early 1950's, to receive "a modern education" at "a Jesuit school at hill station of Darjeeling in British India" (x). He then discovered with fascination the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and was to be haunted for the rest of his life by a line in *The Empty House* which briefly stated that Holmes had stayed in Tibet under the pretense of being a Norwegian explorer. After many years of enquiries both in Tibet and in exile, Norbu stumbled upon a descendant of Hurree Babu residing in Darjeeling and eventually found a manuscript containing the account of Holmes' and Hurree's Tibetan adventures.

However, the value of the manuscript goes beyond fulfilling Norbu's childhood dream; it is charged with political meaning. The text contains plenty of historical information that serves to challenge current Chinese propaganda and thus Norbu finishes his preface with a vindication of the text: "Tibet may lie crushed beneath the dead weight of Chinese tyranny, but the truth about Tibet cannot be so easily buried; and even such a strange fragment of history as this, may contribute to nailing at least a few lies of the tyrants" (xv-xvi). The dark ages are identified with the bleak reality of Chinese occupation and the purpose of this treasure text is to spread knowledge about another golden age, that of short-lived Tibetan independence under the rule of the 13th Dalai Lama. Like any other *gter ma*, this revelation aims to challenge and re-order the present. The intent of Norbu's text is similar to that of *gter ma* (i.e. to challenge and re-order the present), and the way in which authorship is deferred, at once negating and vindicating the author, makes Norbu a post-modern and post-Buddhist *gter ston*. For Norbu, the solutions to the Tibetan question is not selecting and combining tradition and modernity, but turning towards a historical period in which tradition and modernity danced with each other in a successfully independent Tibet (1913-1950).

This account of the past reflects back on the present as an injunction for action; it is not a mere act of resistance to "Chinese lies", both past and present, but an invitation to reinstate the golden era. However, Norbu is far more playful and humorous (while also being more politically committed and assertive) in his treatment of the *gter ma* structure

of George's smoking, drinking and self-indulgent lifestyle as a betrayal to his roots, but he tolerates it and remains on amicable terms with him (107-110 and 233-239).

¹³ The issue of combining Tibetan traditions with non-Tibetan modernities to create a genuinely Tibetan modernity is a constant concern for both Rinzing and Pemba. Pemba expresses his view in a more overt and explicit way in a short essay entitled "The Lure of Modernism" (1957: 166-172).

than Pemba. He is contesting “Chinese lies”, but he is doing so through a number of lies (i.e. assuming the existence of Holmes and Hurree as historical characters that interact with actual Tibetan historical figures like the 13th Dalai Lama or the Amban). Norbu does not only undermine Chinese authority, but also his own as a reliable narrator, becoming yet another semi-fictional character in the historiographically metafictional universe that is *The Mandala*. This playful self-irony does not compromise Norbu’s political intent, clearly expressed through the framing narrative and a clear distinction between good and bad characters, depending on whether they are fighting for or against Tibet. Although Pemba’s social critique is far more insightful than Norbu’s nationalistic and militant view, Norbu’s treatment of Tibetan hybridities is far more complex and nuanced.

Pemba falls into a simplistic dichotomy when classifying the good Tibetan hybrid subjects as those who retain the essentials of their culture, but try to improve it through selective interaction with modernity, and the bad ones as those who reject things Tibetan altogether and adopt a ‘foreign’ lifestyle. However, Norbu, also writing thirty years later, presents a far more complex picture. A good example is the character of Holmes, who does not only turn out to be the reincarnation of a Tibetan lama, but who is said to have been further reincarnated in a Tibetan exiled lama Norbu meets in Dharamsala in 1988. The ending of *The Mandala*’s epilogue blurs Holmes and this younger Tibetan exiled lama when the latter “commenced to laugh softly in a peculiar noiseless fashion” (265). The lama also shows Norbu the objects he identified as a child before being enthroned as a reincarnation of his predecessor: “a chipped magnifying glass, and a battered old cherry-wood pipe” (264). Through the playful inclusion of Holmes in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, Norbu articulates a Tibetan identity that is hybrid and dialogic and yet resistant to Chinese oppression. This is done in a post-Buddhist and post-modern fashion, by appropriating Buddhist motifs and structures from the Tibetan tradition and re-deploying them in a new context with renewed significance.

To conclude, the birth of the Tibetan-English novel bears witness to the fluid and dialogic nature of Tibetan exilic modernities. Written over a period of almost fifty years, these four novels do not only deal with issues of displacement, change and hybridity, but constitute a hybrid genre in itself. In order to understand the hybrid dynamics of the Tibetan-English novel, it is essential to take into consideration the notion of post-Buddhism as an articulating factor of Tibetan modernities. It is through re-appropriating motifs and narratives from the past that these four contemporary Tibetan novelists negotiate an argumentative, humorous and critical alignment with their Buddhist heritage.

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***Configuring Identity through Memory of Siege:
The Rock and the Barbary Macaque in 21st-Century Gibraltarian Fiction in English***

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Preamble

Like many human communities in the modern world, Gibraltar represents an anomaly - in Gibraltar's case a colonial history that has yet to end and a degree of autonomy that in recent decades has permitted many of its citizens to start to discuss and define an identity of their own, especially in relation to Iberia as a whole, the Mediterranean, the African continent, and Gibraltar's status with regard to both the past and the future. The present article may be read as a very cursory attempt (by an outsider) to participate in that discussion from perspectives afforded by postcolonial and transcultural studies.

Mythologizing Gibraltar

If one were to ask any number of people for their impressions of the most populous of the 14 remaining British colonies – Gibraltar – the response of the vast majority would undoubtedly be “the Rock.” This observation might then be augmented by many individuals referring to the iconic Macaque Apes or monkeys,¹ whilst others might also add some comment concerning the geographical location of Gibraltar at the western end of the Mediterranean. A few might even allude to the largeness of Gibraltar's historical significance set against the diminutive size of the peninsula itself – it extends to only a few square kilometres – 6.8 sq. km., to be precise – with a population of some 30,000² -- whilst others might recall the current spate of stand-offs at the frontier between the Spanish authorities and the British colonial representatives, unpredictably (albeit not

¹ Cf. the replenishment, at Churchill's behest, of the much-depleted monkey population during the Second World War– ironically, at a time when the human civilian population had been evacuated to the “safety” of London and other locations further afield. Popular mythology held (and still holds) that if the monkeys were to disappear entirely, Gibraltar would revert to Spanish control.

² Cf. the British occupation of 1704, controversially ratified by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Colonization has been gradual and sporadic, with the population undergoing four major transformations, its Jewish element the most stable and enduring. See Stephen Constantine (2009: *passim*).