In the Stream of Blessings:
Ordained Buddhist Women in Britain

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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This thesis is dedicated to the participants in this study who kindly gave me so much of their time and attention and who were a constant source of inspiration.

Abstract

Although a number of scholars have investigated the ways in which Buddhism has adapted to the British cultural environment, the experiences of ordained women have been afforded comparatively little academic attention. Although Buddhism in the West is typically perceived as more conducive of lay practice, the numbers of ordained women are growing (particularly within certain Buddhist groups in Britain). However, some Buddhist traditions have been embroiled in heated controversies in relation to female ordination and gender inequality which has had a significant impact on particular communities of ordained women. Research into these experiences uncovers a great deal about the manner in which Buddhism continues to develop in Britain, and a cross-tradition inquiry into the perspectives of ordained women themselves is over-due.

Using ethnographic research methods, this study centres on the narratives of twenty-four ordained (and one formerly ordained) Buddhist women, drawn from seven Buddhist groups in Britain (Forest Sangha/Theravāda; Tibetan Karma Kagyu, Gelug, and Nyingma; Triratna; the Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition/Order of Buddhist Contemplatives; and Amida Trust). The thesis is driven by three over-arching research concerns: women's motivations for ordination, their attitudes to feminism and gender equality, and the role of the British location in shaping their experiences. Whilst there is a marked level of plurality in the attitudes and lifestyles of the participants in this study, challenging any attempt at simplistic representation, overall they demonstrate a strong dedication to putting Buddhist teachings and discipline into practice. Yet, ordination is understood not only as an opportunity to further individual spiritual aspirations but also as chance to belong and contribute to the development of Buddhist communities in Britain. Although cognisant of the impact of their geographic and cultural location, the thesis accentuates the complex combination of influences which contribute to shaping ordained Buddhist women's religious practices in 21st Century Britain.

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Introduction: Research Rationale, Aims, and Thesis Overview

Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline the parameters of this study, beginning with the rationale for the research, its principal aims, and primary research questions. I will then examine two significant terms which I employ regularly throughout this thesis ('ordination' and 'Buddhist practice'), as well as giving an overview of the chapters and the key arguments made within each chapter.

Research Rationale

The research which I present in this thesis began life by chance. As a former social worker, I was planning to submit a proposal for doctoral research within which I would investigate the community development work undertaken by Buddhist nuns (*don chee*) in Cambodia. It was during this time that I met a British Buddhist nun in a University cafeteria. Although I expect I must have been aware of the existence of Buddhist nuns in Britain prior to this, I had not given them much thought, even though I was interested in Buddhism and had attended various Buddhist groups whilst living in England. My chance meeting with this nun, ordained in the Tibetan tradition, provoked a number of questions. Where did she live? What support did she have? How did she feel wearing Buddhist robes in Britain? What was her perspective on women's roles in Buddhism? What issues did she face in living as an ordained nun in the contemporary British context? Were there more nuns in Britain, in other Buddhist traditions? If there were, what were the points of difference and similarity between them? As I pondered these questions, I began to explore whether there was any academic work on Buddhist nuns in Britain. I found that the existing scholarship did not satisfactorily answer all the questions that I had, and, as a result, my research into ordained Buddhist women in Britain was born.

Whilst I will examine the existing scholarship and the questions it inspired in Chapters One, Two and Three, in general terms, women who have taken Buddhist ordination in Britain have not received a great deal of academic attention. When they have been the subject of focused attention, it is often only through the

prism of one or two Buddhist groups. Of note are two connected articles by Angell (2006a, b), which, alongside a book chapter by Shaw (2008), discusses the *sīladharā* (10 precept nuns) in the Forest Sangha in Britain. Indeed, it is the *sīladharā* who have received comparatively more academic interest than any other group of ordained women in Britain, most likely because of the perceived tensions within this Buddhist group in relation to gender equality which I discuss in Chapter One. Goswell (1988) is concerned with both ordained men and women in the Forest Sangha. Her study has particular relevance for my examination of the themes of conversion and motivation which occur in Chapters Five and Six respectively. In her doctoral research, Bell (1991) conducts a comparative study between the Forest Sangha and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (now known as Triratna) in Britain. Whilst she writes more generally about the ways in which these groups have interpreted Buddhist teachings in the British cultural context, she does give attention to the roles offered to women, including ordination. Both Ploos Van Amstel (2005) and Williams (2005) are concerned solely with ordained Buddhist women and mention those in Britain, but take a more global perspective, with Ploos Van Amstel focusing on Western women ordained in the Tibetan tradition, and Williams concentrating on Theravāda Buddhism in various geographic settings. Ordained women are also mentioned in studies which examine Buddhist groups in Britain more generally, but in these they do not receive dedicated, focused attention (for example, Bluck, 2006, Cush, 1990, Henry, 2008, Kay, 2004, Waterhouse, 1997).

Alongside this academic work, there have been a few first-person accounts written by ordained Buddhist women either from, or practicing within, Britain (for example, Candasiri, 2012, Jiyu-Kennett, 2002, Maitreyi, 1997, Palmo, 1999, Sanghadevi, 1999, Sundara, 1999), and indeed, there are some popular biographies of British women who became Buddhist nuns (for example, Mackenzie, 1998 in relation to Tenzin Palmo, a British women ordained in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition). In addition, Buddhist community leaders and members occasionally mention attitudes towards female ordination in published work. However, this is in the context of writing more generally about their Buddhist groups in Britain as a whole and typically their discussion is relatively brief (for example, Khandro, 2007, Morgan, 1994, Vajragupta, 2010, Vishvapani, 2001).

Although this work certainly provides relevant context for this study, it is clear that there remains a significant gap in scholarship. To date, there has not been an inclusive study which seeks to analyse the experiences of ordained women

across different Buddhist traditions and groups in Britain. One of the reasons why
ordained women may perhaps have had less attention in studies of Buddhism in
Britain relates to their comparatively low numbers in relation to the population of
Buddhists. Bluck (2006:194) states that 'only 2 per cent of the convert British
Buddhist community is ordained' and this figure includes those who have taken
monastic ordination and those who have taken other types of ordination, for
example the Triratna *dharmachari/dharmacharini* which I will describe further in
this chapter and Chapter One.[1] In Chapter One, I estimate the number of ordained
women in Britain within each of the seven groups in my study at the time of my
fieldwork and I suggest that there are likely to be fewer than five hundred in total,
with 362 of these being female Triratna Order members or *dharmacharini*.[2]

A further reason why ordained Buddhist women might not have had
adequate academic attention relates to the emphasis typically given by a number of
Buddhist groups in Britain (and the West more generally) to lay practice. This has
been noted by several scholars, including, Barker and Rocha (2011:10), Bluck
(2006:192), Cantwell and Kawanami (2002:65), Coleman (2001:13), Gross
(2009:287), Kay (2004:12), Palmo (1999:185), Ploos van Amstel (2005:157),
Schedneck (2011:342), Wallace (2002:46). Furthermore, Palmo (1999:185) states
that, amongst Buddhist groups in the West,

> *There is very little respect or appreciation for sangha members having
> devoted their entire lives to the Dharma. Centres are mainly geared
> toward lay people and monastics are shunted to one side and considered
> unimportant.*

Whether or not this reflects prevailing attitudes in Britain, I suggest that
ordained Buddhist women warrant greater focused attention in this context, not
least because ordination (particularly monastic ordination) has a highly salient role

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[1] I discuss the overall numbers of Buddhists in Britain in relation to data drawn
from the 2011 census in Chapter One.
[2] This overall figure is based on statistics gathered during my fieldwork period
(2011-2012) and is an estimate. Aside from Triratna, where I was able to obtain
some official statistics in relation to the numbers of female Order members, I was
reliant on the knowledge of my participants to calculate the number of ordained
women within their Buddhist group, which was particularly difficult for those
living alone and who were not strongly connected to a specific community. This
figure does not include those who had taken *jukai* (lay ordination) in the Serene
Reflection Meditation Tradition, but does include the *anagārikā* in the Forest
Sangha, as well as both the *amitarya* and *gankonin* in Amida Trust. What is
available for women in terms of ordination in relation to each of the groups in my
study will be explained in Chapter One.

in Buddhist history as I discuss in Chapter Two, remaining deeply meaningful for those who choose this path. Furthermore, Buddhism is an increasingly popular religious tradition in contemporary Britain (at least according to the 2011 census figures which I discuss in Chapter One). There are proportionally more female than male adherents and, importantly, the number of ordained practitioners has been growing, albeit not to the same extent as lay adherents (Cantwell and Kawanami, 2002:65, Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:20, see also Bluck, 2006:156 in reference to Triratna). Therefore, an investigation of their experiences will contribute to our picture of the adaptation and expansion of Buddhist practice in the British context. In doing so, this study will incorporate an exploration of certain Buddhist groups who have hitherto received comparatively little academic attention, such as the Amida Trust. Moreover, since much of the scholarship about ordained Buddhist women in Britain was published, there has been an international controversy in relation to female ordination within the Theravāda Forest Sangha lineage which has had a significant impact both in terms of Buddhist communities in Britain and beyond.[3] Providing up-to-date scholarly knowledge which reflects upon this situation, as well as exploring the differences and similarities of circumstances facing women who are ordained within other Buddhist groups, is therefore essential and timely.

Analysing the experiences of ordained Buddhist women illuminates issues which are of scholarly interest beyond the study of Buddhism in Britain. These include understanding conversion and religious change, community building and belonging, and the adaptation of different religions to various geographic and cultural contexts as well as the developments which arise in the decades following their initial establishment. In addition, this study contributes to scholarly understanding of the ways in which women engage with religious traditions, practices, and disciplines, and how they navigate issues of gender equality and feminism. There is a potentially wide audience for this research, and I draw on literature from a range of scholarly disciplines including religious studies, anthropology, and sociology in order to situate and provide context for the data that I have gathered.

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[3] I am referring here to the creation of the 'Five Points' and the *bhikkhunī* ordinations in Perth, Australia, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter One.

Research Aims and Research Questions

My aim in this research is to undertake a cross-tradition study of ordained Buddhist women in Britain in order to investigate their lives, experiences, and perspectives in a dedicated and focused way. The research will generate a detailed and current picture of Buddhist ordination for women in contemporary Britain, incorporating multiple Buddhist groups and traditions. In order to achieve this aim (as I describe in more detail in Chapter Four) I will adopt a broadly ethnographic methodology, conducting and analysing a number of in-depth interviews and participant observations with twenty-five currently or formerly ordained Buddhist women living across Britain, including those who have taken ordination within seven different Buddhist traditions or groups (Forest Sangha/Theravāda; Tibetan Karma Kagyu, Gelug, and Nyingma; Triratna; the Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition/Order of Buddhist Contemplatives; and Amida Trust).[4]

This study has three principal research questions which were developed in response to the gaps in scholarly literature which I initially identified and that are designed to support the aims of this study. These are;

1. Why do women in Britain, in different Buddhist groups, choose to take Buddhist ordination, and what does ordination mean in this context?
2. How do ordained Buddhist women in Britain relate to ideas of gender equality and feminism?
3. How does the British location influence women's experience of Buddhist ordination?

The thesis, as I detail further in this chapter, is structured broadly by these principal research questions. In the conclusion, I will reflect on the suitability of these questions, particularly whether they assisted in the achievement of the aims of the research, and how they both enhanced and limited my approach.

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[4] As I discuss in Chapter Four, my participants were either British nationals or those who had a strong connection to Britain, most commonly having lived in England, Scotland, or Wales for an extended period. I focus on those who were not brought up in families where Buddhism was the practiced religion, and the rationale for this sampling will be detailed in Chapter Four. Additionally, one of the participants was formerly ordained, and had returned her vows at the time of interview.

Definitions

Before I provide an outline of the chapters included in the thesis, there are two key terms which I use regularly that require some further definition. The first of which is 'ordination'. When I initially conceived this study, I did not anticipate any particular concerns with using the term 'ordination'. However, when I began my fieldwork, I realised quickly that the word 'ordination' is used to reflect a range of commitments both between and within Buddhist groups in Britain. It is a term that demarcates those who have taken various monastic vows (which encompass novice and 'full' or 'higher' ordination) as well those who have made specific lay commitments (for example, *jukai* or 'lay ordination' in the Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition). In the case of Triratna, 'ordination' refers to a commitment which is 'neither lay nor monastic'(Vishvapani, 2001:29).[5]

Some scholars have questioned the use of the term 'ordination' in relation to Buddhism more generally, arguing that it is loaded with Christian connotations and subsequently does not adequately reflect a Buddhist perspective (Gabaude, 2010, Wijayaratna, 2010:150). In addition, others have indicated that the English terms 'monk', 'priest', 'nun', 'monastic', and 'lay' do not reflect sufficiently the types of commitment made by Buddhists and the subsequent lifestyles that they adopt (for example, Bell, 1991:159, Havnevik, 1989:44, Salgado, 2013:55, Spiro, 1982:279-280). This has led Salgado (2013:55) to state that,

> *formulating a cogent language to talk about who nuns are and what they do is one of the biggest challenges we face in trying to understand female renunciation in Buddhism.*

Whilst I recognise that 'ordination' might cover a range of commitments, activities and lifestyles, and I am cognisant of the difficulties in the translation and interpretation of Buddhist terms from Pāli, Sanskrit, or other languages of Asian origin, I do adopt the terms 'ordination' and 'ordained' within this thesis. This is principally because each of my participants, speaking in English, typically used these words themselves to describe their commitment and status, and this reflects the wider use of the term 'ordination' amongst Buddhist groups in Britain including on their websites. Yet, 'ordination' is still a limited term, particularly in

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[5] I will discuss what is available for women in terms of ordination, as well as the ordination process within each of the Buddhist groups in my study in more detail in Chapter One.

its application across different Buddhist groups. Therefore, in Chapter One, I dedicate time to exploring what it means to each of the Buddhist groups involved in this study. I do not adopt the term uncritically or without awareness of these multiple meanings.

The second term which requires some explanation is 'Buddhist practice'. I use this phrase throughout this thesis to refer to certain activities undertaken by the participants in this study, including meditation, study of texts and philosophy, attending Buddhist teachings, ritual and ceremonial practice, giving offerings, bowing, and chanting. However, amongst my participants, 'Buddhist practice' is also incorporated into activities of daily living, and furthermore includes working in communities, supporting social welfare projects, teaching, and one-to-one spiritual guidance of others. I adopt the term 'Buddhist practice' in this thesis because it is expedient to do so. However, I recognise that the term covers a wide variety of activities and I do not wish to imply that these are understood in the same way by every participant or that 'Buddhist practice' is somehow divorced entirely from activities of daily living.

I will be using other terms which require some definition (including 'the British location' and 'conversion') but I will discuss these in greater length at the appropriate juncture. In addition, there are several Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Japanese terms which appear in the thesis. When I utilise a non-English word, I will define it, typically in a footnote, when it is first used. When using Buddhist terms, I will first write the Pāli spelling, and latterly the Sanskrit, in line with scholarly convention.

Thesis Overview

In **Chapter One**, *Buddhism in Britain*, I will first examine the scholarly literature in relation to the establishment of Buddhist groups in Britain, paying particular attention to their history, growth, and adaptation. I will then look in more detail at the seven groups within which the participants in this study took ordination, focusing on their approach and attitudes towards ordination for women.

In **Chapter Two**, *Women and Buddhist Ordination,* I will examine the issue of Buddhist ordination for women using a historical lens, as well as exploring prominent contemporary issues (most notably in relation to the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī*

debate) in order to provide narrative context for my study. In addition, I will discuss the ways in which the aims and motivations for Buddhist ordination are presented in scholarship, raising a number of key questions which will underpin the analysis of my data in Chapter Six. Finally, I will explore the ethnographic work which considers Western women who take ordination in Buddhist traditions, looking in particular at how their attitudes to gender equality and feminism are presented.

The purpose of **Chapter Three**, *Theories, Concepts, and Context – Conversion, Discipline and Dress,* is to accompany the academic literature presented in Chapters One and Two and involves an assessment of a selection of theories and concepts which provoke key questions for my analysis. I will first explore scholarly perspectives on religious conversion and then I will introduce the concept of Buddhist discipline and precepts. Following this, I will discuss Buddhist perspectives and wider sociological and anthropological accounts of one principal aspect of religious discipline under consideration in this study – dress. The scholarly literature discussed in Chapters One, Two, and Three is purposefully broad, drawing on a range of academic sources in order to firmly situate my study in the wider scholarly context.

In **Chapter Four**, *Methodology – Feminism, Participation, and Ethics,* I present the methods I used to collect and analyse the data within this study, alongside the ethical issues that I faced. I discuss my overarching methodological approach, including some of the challenges I had in working with a feminist analysis. In addition, I will examine my personal position in relation to the research.

Chapter Five – *Ordained Buddhist Women and Narratives of 'Conversion'* is the first of five chapters in which I analyse the data gathered in the course of this research study. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the ways in which the participants involved in this study came into contact with Buddhism, and why they decided to commit to a Buddhist path. I show that by giving some attention to why my participants were initially attracted to Buddhist groups and teachings, it is possible to begin to uncover why they might ordain, and what ordination means in this context. After presenting some basic biographical details of the participants, this chapter is structured using a tripartite typology of *dissatisfaction, answers,* and *connection,* and I will argue that these three themes are of significance in understanding why the participants in this study initially connected with Buddhist

groups. In addition, I will also give attention to the term 'conversion' and its implications, and examine whether it is applicable in this context. I will argue that, ultimately, religious change as narrated by the participants in this study belies simple classification.

In **Chapter Six**, *The Journey to Ordination,* I develop further the tripartite typology presented in Chapter Five, in order to analyse the rationales underpinning women's decisions to both ask for and take ordination within Buddhist groups. In this chapter, I am principally concerned with answering my first research question: Why do women in Britain, in different Buddhist groups, choose to take Buddhist ordination, and what does ordination mean in this context? In order to do this, I will conduct a cross-tradition comparative analysis of the narratives of my participants in relation to their motivation for ordination, and compare them with those presented in a selection of other scholarly studies of Buddhist women based in Britain and beyond. In this chapter, whilst I highlight key areas of commonality and difference within my participant sample, I will argue that the motivation for ordination was typically described as an opportunity to follow the teachings of the Buddha purposefully, and with dedication and focus. However, I also argue that being part of, and contributing to, particular Buddhist communities was an equally significant motivation, highlighting the importance of belonging in the narratives of ordained Buddhist women in Britain.

In **Chapter Seven**, *Buddha Couture – Ordained Buddhist Women and Dress,* I examine the meaning, function, and significance of the dress practices adopted by ordained Buddhist women in Britain. I will show that a detailed examination of dress practices, including robes, tonsure, and name changing, provokes salient questions regarding the points of diversity between my participants in relation to their approach to Buddhist discipline, and provides an original angle through which to assess the ways in which living in Britain might shape Buddhist practice. I will argue that, whilst Buddhist dress (as it is variously conceived in this context) certainly has a symbolic function, it is also understood as a physical practice of dedication to Buddhism; a way through which to put Buddhist teachings into action. Yet, I also explore the tensions inherent in dress practices in this context, both the difficulties expressed by my participants and the diversity between them. Alongside this, I will highlight that dress is equally understood as a form which can be used, but to which a practitioner should not become too attached, suggesting that dress has simultaneous meanings amongst

ordained Buddhist women in Britain. The ways in which these meanings are navigated are a key feature of the analysis in this chapter.

In **Chapter Eight**, *Loaded Words: An Analysis of Ordained Women's Attitudes to Feminism and Gender Equality,* I explore my participant's attitudes to feminism and gender equality, answering my second primary research question. In order to further understand their relationship with feminism, I adopt a series of perceptual maps based on those used by Knott and Khokher (1993). This provides an alternative analytical framework to be applied in conjunction with the more traditional ethnographic presentation and discussion commonly utilised in this thesis. I will argue that both feminism and gender equality remain 'loaded words' for many of the participants in this study and that ordained women in Britain are not all equally concerned with 'women's rights' or 'equality' in the same ways, thereby resisting simple categorisation.

In **Chapter Nine**, *Ordained Buddhist Women: An Analysis of the British Location,* I respond to my final research question: How does the British location influence women's experiences of ordination? This chapter draws on data presented in previous chapters and also introduces new data and analysis. I will argue that 'the British location' is a complex term in relation to ordained Buddhist women and that female ordination in this context is shaped by multiple factors, including the changes made to ordination practices as various Buddhist groups became established in Britain; the physical creation of spaces for Buddhist practice; the living arrangements and personal circumstances of individual ordained women, and the movement (and ongoing connection) of Buddhist ideas, lineages, and practices to Britain from elsewhere. I will stress, however, the importance of immediate Buddhist communities in the lives of ordained women, and that having support, connecting with others (especially those within their immediate community) and belonging to particular groups remain fundamental, albeit subject to change in one's lifetime. In order to best present and analyse this, I adopt a framework offered by Tweed (2006), which I argue allows for a discussion of the global connections of religions and religious people, alongside enabling a focused examination of the influences of particular places on their religious practice.

The thesis ends with a **Conclusion**, in which I summarise and synthesise the key arguments and salient themes that I have discussed throughout, as well as providing a reflection on the limitations of my work and the opportunities for future research.

Conclusion

       I have titled the thesis *In the Stream of Blessings*, reflecting a phrase used by one of my participants to describe how she felt during and after her ordination ceremony. She explained that, when she took *bhikkhunī* ordination, she felt connected through her teachers, through other ordained women and men back to the Buddha, in a 'stream of blessings' which joined her to Buddhist ancestry and supported her current practice. Whilst this participant was referring specifically to her *bhikkhunī* ordination, in considering each of the narratives provided by the twenty-five women who had taken ordination and who participated in this study, this sense of dedication, connection, belonging and respect for tradition, teachings, and practices was equally applicable. Furthermore, the sense that 'a stream of blessings' relates both to being situated in a particular location but equally being shaped by ideas and connections beyond that location illustrates the relationship that the participants in this study had with Britain, a theme which I explore in Chapter Nine.

Chapter One: Buddhism in Britain

Introduction

This aim of this chapter, which is divided into two principal sections, is to contextualise my study in relation to wider scholarly work on Buddhism in contemporary Britain. In the first section, I examine a selection of academic literature which focuses particularly on the history, growth, and adaptation of Buddhism within the British socio-cultural context, as well as key demographic information gleaned from the 2011 census. In the second section I look in more detail at the specific Buddhist groups and traditions within which the participants of this study took ordination, paying most attention to their institutional stance on female ordination. This information is drawn from published academic sources alongside grey literature (including brochures, books, or pamphlets published by the Buddhist groups, as well as their associated websites). In addition, I have supplemented this with information given to me by my participants (regarding the number of ordained women in each group and their dress practices, for example, as this was not always publically available).

History, Growth, and Demographics

A number of scholars have written about the history of Buddhism in Britain, and most posit the initial Victorian interest as primarily intellectual, driven by the translation of Pāli texts, and shaped by the colonial careers of key figures such as T.W. Rhys-Davids who founded the Pāli Text Society in 1881 (Bluck, 2006:5-6, Deegalle and Sumana, 2008:181, Humphreys, 1968:72, Oliver, 1979:21, Waterhouse, 2004:53). Most notably from the 1950s onwards, this middle and upper-class intellectual engagement gave way to a more personal and 'practice'-based involvement in Buddhism (with different traditions gaining popularity at different times) which coincided with the beginnings of a decrease in Christian church affiliation, an increase in availability of international leisure travel, the political situation within Tibet which saw certain exiled monks and Lamas moving to Britain, and was accompanied by a burgeoning popular interest in alternative religious forms (Baumann, 2002a:92, Bell, 1991:3, Bell, 2000b:399, Bluck,

2006:7-11, Cantwell and Kawanami, 2002:64, Kay, 2004:5, Puttick, 1993:6, Waterhouse, 2004). Several scholars detail the initial difficulties and lack of success that was experienced by those who wanted to establish a (Theravāda) monastic *saṅgha* in Britain, particularly highlighting the example of Ananda Metteyya (born Henry Alan Bennett) who ordained in Burma in 1902 and who returned to Britain in 1908 but who eventually disrobed (Batchelor, 1994a:40, 1994b, Bell, 2000b:8, Bluck, 2006:7,10, Waterhouse, 2004:56). Although there are some exceptions, for example the work of Turner, Cox and Bocking (2010) which has uncovered the experiences of working-class Victorian Irish Buddhist monk U Dhammaloka, this pattern of 'elite' engagement gradually giving way to a more broadly accessible practice in the decades following the Second World War is the generally accepted history that is typically repeated in most scholarly work on Buddhism in Britain (Waterhouse, 2004:57).

Whilst it is not my intention to present a comprehensive history of Buddhism in Britain as this has been done elsewhere (for example, Almond, 1988, Bell, 1991, Bluck, 2006, Oliver, 1979, Puttick, 1993), a key point to note is that, unlike other Western countries (including Australia and the United States), the earliest history of Buddhism on British shores was not initially shaped by immigration, although this of course would have more influence at a later date (see Barker and Rocha, 2011 in relation to Australia, Bluck, 2006:189, 2012:131, Cush, 1990:12, Parsons, 1993:281, Puttick, 1993:5). However, as Bell (2000b:5-6) argues, it is important not to see the early British engagement with Buddhism as one-sided. Whilst Baumann (2002a:86) argues that 'Buddhism was not exported from abroad by Asian emissaries; it was imported from within by European Orientalists', Bell (2000b:6) is keen to highlight 'a quite sophisticated pattern of interaction' between early Buddhist pioneers in Britain and Asian Theravāda monks. This rather more collaborative approach will certainly become significant when we consider the ways in which Buddhism continues to develop on British shores in relation to female ordination.

Shifting focus to the contemporary era, Bluck (2006:1) states that 'the main Buddhist traditions and sub-traditions are now firmly established in Britain'. He identifies that at the time of his writing, there were approximately '1,000 Buddhist groups and centres' across the UK (Bluck 2006:3) and the biggest groups numerically were Soka Gakkai International, Triratna (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, or FWBO) and the New Kadampa Tradition (Bluck 2006:16, see also Bell, 2000a:398). Writing two years later, Henry (2008:2) indicates that there

were approximately 1100 Buddhist groups listed in updated versions of the same two directories to which Bluck (2006:3) also refers. This shows a progressive increase, and it is not overly surprising given the proliferation of Buddhists in the 2011 census, which I discuss below.

Indeed, the growth in popularity of Buddhism in Britain since the 1960s has frequently been noted within academic literature (for example, Bell, 2000a:397, Cantwell and Kawanami, 2002:64, Henry, 2008:2, Waterhouse, 1997:1). In terms of the number of Buddhists in Britain, 2011 census data shows that, in England and Wales, there were 247,743 people who recorded their religion as Buddhist.[6] In Scotland, there were 12,795 Buddhists recorded, and in Northern Ireland there were 1,046.[7] Taking Bluck's (2006:15) analysis of the 2001 census data as a comparison, we can see that since 2001, 103, 290 more people have self-defined as Buddhist in England and Wales.[8] In addition, in the 2011 census there were also over 14,000 more female than male Buddhists listed in England and Wales.[9] Although Bluck (2006:15) does indicate that census data might not always accurately reflect the number of practicing Buddhists, a comparison between the 2001 and 2011 census data indicates that Buddhism is a religion that is steadily growing in popularity in Britain. Furthermore, Buddhism has attracted a significant number of 'white' adherents (who may have converted to Buddhism, or may be

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[6] Data from the 2011 census cited here was gathered from the Office of National Statistics website which was last accessed on 09.07.2014: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html#tab-Changing-picture-of-religious-affiliation-over-last-decadel.

[7] I have purposefully not added these figures together to give an overall UK figure. This is because, firstly, it is useful to see a difference between the various areas that make up the United Kingdom, and secondly, because, as Bluck (2006:15) indicates, the census questions were asked in different ways in Scotland and Northern Ireland in comparison to England and Wales and therefore might not be automatically comparable.

[8] Bluck (2006:15) does not break down the individual statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland from the 2001 census data, but combines them into a UK-wide figure. Although subtracting his UK figure from the England and Wales statistics gives a figure of 7,547 Buddhists in Scotland and Northern Ireland for 2001. As with the England and Wales statistics, this also shows an increase between 2001 and 2011.

[9] Data on gender and religion was taken from (and last accessed on 09.07.2014): https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/DC2107EW/view/2092957703?rows=c_sex&cols=c_relpuk11.

second or third generation Buddhists), which shows a divergent pattern from other religions of 'Asian' origin in Britain (Tomalin et al., forthcoming, 2015).[10]

Adaptation

In the scholarly literature, it is clear that as Buddhism was transported away from its Indian birth-place, it subsequently adapted and changed in response to new surroundings (Batchelor, 1994a:277, Baumann, 2002b:54, Bluck, 2006:1, Green, 1989:278, McMahan, 2008:254, Mellor, 1991, Peacocke, 2000:115). Indeed, the issue of Buddhism's adaptation throughout history and in various geographic locales has been given significant attention from scholars, not least those concerned with Buddhism in the contemporary British setting (Batchelor, 1994a, Bell, 1991, Bluck, 2006, Green, 1989, Henry, 2008, Kay, 2004:218, McKenzie, 2011, Mellor, 1991, Waterhouse, 1997:20). Typically, scholars agree that the reason why Buddhism has been subject to change was to make it palatable for the indigenous population (Kay, 2004:22, Waterhouse, 1997:239). However, as I will detail in this section, the ways in which Buddhism has been made palatable differ significantly between the different Buddhist traditions and groups, and the issue of Buddhism's perceived adaptation to a contemporary British social and cultural location is highly complex. Given that a key research question for this thesis is the role of the British location in shaping female ordination, the various scholarly perspectives on the issue of Buddhism's adaptation to Britain warrant further investigation. In the discussion that follows, I have selected the work of several key scholars which discusses the issue of Buddhism and adaptation to Britain. Whilst I do not intend this to be exhaustive (particularly as adaptation is a much considered issue) I have chosen these works as they provide the most useful context for my study, and they raise key issues to consider when examining my own data. It is important to note, however, that in the examples considered below, most consciously refer to organisations or groups that are mainly populated by those who have converted to Buddhism, who are, in the main, 'white British'. Whilst this is not necessarily a problem for this study, given my focus on

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[10] Of Buddhists in the 2011 census, 83,635 have given their ethnicity as white, 9,855 as mixed/multiple ethnicity, 147,796 as Asian/Asian British, 2,809 as Black/African Caribbean/Black British, and 3,648 as 'other' (http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/LC2201EW/view/2092957703?rows=c_ethpuk11&cols=c_relpuk11, Last Accessed: 09.07.2014).

participants who themselves are converts and the vast majority of them also 'white British', it does little to challenge the potential bias in existing scholarship which Bluck argues has leant towards 'white Buddhists' in the British context (Bluck, 2006:16).[11]

In an early paper examining the adaptations that various Buddhist groups make to British cultural values, Green (1989:283) questions whether certain Buddhist groups are either 'selling out' or using 'skilful means' to interpret Buddhist teachings for a new audience.[12] She recognises the diversity present between different Buddhist groups in Britain, and argues that, as a result, they might 'usefully be placed along a continuum' ranging from 'wholesale adherence to traditional' to 'cognitive surrender' in terms of the ways in which they have attempted to adapt to their new cultural environment (Green, 1989:283).[13] In relation to the groups involved in this study, she places the English Sangha Association (Forest Sangha) closest to the 'traditional end' as she sees them as having made fewer allowances for British values. She places both the FWBO and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives in the middle as she sees them as taking tradition and contemporary British norms in tandem, and she sees the Tibetan groups as fluctuating between positions (Green, 1989:283-286). Those at the 'pole of cognitive surrender' are those groups which Green (1989:286) argues have concerned themselves too readily with attuning Buddhism to 'science' and 'rationalism', although none of these are groups involved in my study. Batchelor (1994a:337) supports the idea of a 'spectrum of adaptation', although he argues that 'adaptation is not so much an option as a matter of degree' and is clear that in his experience both 'past tradition' and 'present situation' are combined by Buddhist groups. However, he does state that the FWBO should be placed towards the end of the spectrum which indicates a desire to challenge received 'tradition', which he sees as less prevalent in other Buddhist groups (Batchelor, 1994a:337-8). As I will show further in this section, the idea of a 'continuum' or 'spectrum' has been criticised as unable to adequately reflect what is a complex and plural picture.

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[11] This is a point made similarly by Baumann (2002a:101) who argues that, 'scholarly attention has strongly focused on convert Buddhists'. However, in relation to the focus on 'white Buddhists' in Britain, one more recent exception to this would be the PhD study by Sharon Smith (2008), which focused on the experiences of Black and Minority Ethnic converts in two Buddhist movements in East London.

[12] Here, Green (1989:281) draws on Pye's use of the idea of 'skilful means' in relation to the adaptation of Buddhism within various contexts.

[13] Green (1989:283) adapts the idea of 'cognitive surrender' from Peter Berger.

However, what it does show is that there is the potential for diversity in the approach to adaptation taken by different Buddhist groups in Britain, although this needs to be examined more closely in relation to female ordination.

That there are differences between Buddhist groups in how they are influenced by the cultural norms dominant within Britain is also clear within Mellor's examination of 'Protestant Buddhism' in England (Mellor, 1991).[14] In this article, Mellor considers the experiences of two Buddhist groups in England – the FWBO and the Forest Sangha – and highlights the points of similarity and difference between them in relation to the ways in which they interact with certain ideals that he deems are rooted in Protestant thought and practice. Mellor (1991:76-78) presents the FWBO as deeply shaped by Protestant ideals, particularly in relation to what he sees as their unease about ritual, their emphasis on lay involvement, discovering core and fundamental Buddhist beliefs and practices, and their focus on self-development. Although Mellor (1991:77) notes points of difference between the FWBO and the Forest Sangha, he views both groups as influenced by a broadly Protestant trajectory of thought.[15] As a result, Mellor prefers to see the interpretation of Buddhism in England as a result of a process of 'translation' rather than 'transferral' (Mellor, 1991:90).

Whilst Mellor's theory has not been without its critics (indeed, a book was written by Sangharakshita, 1992, and published by the FWBO in response), there are some important points that are highly relevant to my examination of the role of the British location in shaping the Buddhist practice of the ordained women involved in this study. A key facet of Mellor's argument is the declaration that 'religions are always and everywhere embedded in social and cultural realities' and that the social, cultural, geographical and temporal setting within which Buddhist groups operate is deserving of close attention (Mellor, 1991:73, 76). Mellor highlights certain ways in which Buddhist groups in England might differ from each other but states that 'any simple interpretation of the cultural translation of Buddhism to England is problematic' (Mellor, 1991:88). Indeed, the rationale that he provides here is that 'it is difficult to isolate the 'Buddhism' which is being translated' emphasising the complexity involved in assessing how religions interact within different settings and contexts (Mellor, 1991:88). In other words, it is not just the geographic location which provides complexity in an analysis of adaptation, but Buddhism itself.

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[14] In his paper, Mellor refers to Buddhism in England, rather than Britain.
[15] Mellor refers to the Forest Sangha as the English Sangha.

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In her 1991 PhD thesis and subsequent publications, Bell also investigated the process of adaptation, although she is concerned to emphasise the experience of 'mutual modification' and 'intricate patterns of exchange' between Buddhist traditions and the British cultural context (Bell, 1991:42,44). Like Mellor, she identifies differences between the FWBO and the Forest Sangha in terms of the ways in which they have adapted to Britain, and of particular relevance for this study, draws attention to their 'diametrically opposed perspectives…over the relevance of monasticism to the spread of Buddhism to the West' (Bell, 1991:6). Whilst she discusses how the FWBO are a 'totally lay organisation', she highlights the respect and support for Theravāda monastic practice within the Forest Sangha (Bell, 1991:6). However, she shows that there is a complex picture of 'tradition' and 'novelty' within the Forest Sangha (Bell, 2000b:17). Whilst she, like Mellor, emphasises the strong links between the Forest Sangha in Britain and Thailand and the sense of connection that Forest Sangha members feel to the Ajahn Chah lineage, alongside this she also detects some of the 'small readjustments' that have been implemented as this Theravāda tradition has become established in Britain (Bell, 2000b:21).[16] Although she states that these alterations to practice might be 'small', she is clear that their importance should not be overlooked. These changes include a preliminary *anagārika* ordination, and the idea of giving (*dāna*) without wholeheartedly embracing the concept of traditional Buddhist ideas about merit-making (*puñña*) (Bell, 1998, Bell, 2000b:18-19). However, Bell (1991: 289) identifies what she describes as a 'major innovation' with regards to the establishment of the order of *sīladharā*, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section of this chapter. In addition, Bell (2000a:397) emphasises the global connections that are upheld by Buddhists in Britain and, as a result, questions an uncritical application of the category 'British' given that group members may practice in Britain but may not be British, or may have more influential connections to lineages in Asia or in other parts of 'the West'.

Whilst Waterhouse (1997:24, 26), in the main, agrees with Mellor about the influence of prevailing cultural norms on Buddhist practice in Britain, she asserts that placing Buddhist groups within a 'spectrum of adaptation', in the manner of Green or Batchelor for example, is rather unsophisticated and does not

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[16] Ajahn Chah, a Thai monk in the Forest Tradition, founded a number of monasteries both inside and outside Thailand, including in Britain (see: http://forestsangha.org/biography-of-ajahn-chah/, Last Accessed: 09.04.2015).

reflect the diversity that she sees is inherent *within* Buddhist groups in Britain, a point also made by Bluck (2006:189). Waterhouse (1997:26) states:

> *Some elements may be substantially adapted within a group while others remain broadly traditional, in a complex mix.*

She goes on to argue that;

> *This suggests that the variety of British Buddhism is much more than the variety of the organizations and their leaders* (Waterhouse, 1997:239).

In her PhD thesis which takes Buddhism in Bath as a focus, and her later publications, Waterhouse contributes to the analysis of adaptation presented so far by giving attention to British Buddhist adherents' attitudes to 'authority'. She emphasises that, whilst Buddhist groups in Britain 'do not "do their own thing"' (Waterhouse, 1997:213), it is possible to discern an attitude to authority amongst some 'western practitioners' in Britain which revers 'authenticity' (meaning someone who has directly experienced Buddhist truths) over 'legitimacy' (for example, along traditional lineage lines), although they are both respected (Waterhouse, 1999:19, 27). Indeed, she states:

> *western practitioners are not usually interested in custom and tradition per se but in the extent to which traditional structures can enable authentic experience of Buddhist truths* (Waterhouse, 1999:35).

However, notwithstanding this, Waterhouse (1999:21) is quick to point out that there are varied attitudes amongst different Buddhist groups, so much so that she states that 'no one group or person can represent British Buddhism'(Waterhouse, 1997:240) . She particularly cites the Tibetan traditions as having 'more fluid and open lines of authority' in comparison to the Theravāda Forest Sangha (Waterhouse, 1999:24-25).

In addition to her consideration of issues of 'authority' and of specific relevance for this thesis, Waterhouse (1997) also gives attention to gender issues within the five Buddhist groups in Bath which were engaged in her doctoral study. Whilst she does not focus on female ordination (as most of her participants are lay Buddhists) she does identify that there are different approaches to women's roles in Buddhism in Britain amongst the groups of her study. She posits that some women, particularly those ordained in the Forest Sangha, appear more 'obviously disadvantaged' in relation to gender equality than others, such as those ordained within Tibetan groups (Waterhouse, 1997:231). However, she highlights that although women's roles in Buddhism have become the focus of global attention

and activity (an issue which I discuss further in Chapter Two) this was not always of interest to her lay research participants who were, 'largely unaware of the feminist debates about the status of women within Buddhism which are taking place elsewhere' (Waterhouse, 1997:232). Nevertheless, she does indicate that 'the issue of gender is just part of the challenge which Western Buddhists face as they try to understand an eastern religion in a western cultural setting' (Waterhouse, 1997:29).

A further salient argument by Waterhouse is that Buddhism in Britain (and she particularly refers to Tibetan Buddhism in this instance) is shaped by 'political and economic processes' that continue to characterise Buddhist traditions outside Britain, and that in any analysis of adaptation, these cannot be overlooked (Waterhouse, 1997:211). This is a point that is strongly supported by Kay (2004), in his analysis of the adaptation processes in relation to Tibetan and Zen Buddhism in Britain (focusing particularly on the New Kadampa Tradition and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives). In fact, Kay (2004:37) goes as far as to argue that the danger of focusing our attention solely on experiences within Britain is that 'the continuing importance of broader historical and cross-cultural contexts' is overlooked. This is also raised by Baumann (2001:5), who strongly supports fostering a sense of 'global Buddhism'. He highlights what he calls;

> the transnational and transcontinental flow of Buddhist ideas and practices and the global travel of Buddhist teachers and students.

For Kay, the 'transplantation process' is highly complex and variable, with some Buddhist groups deliberately trying to modify certain ideas and practices, but with others less inclined to do so (Kay, 2004:12). Kay (2004:10) directly questions what he sees as the 'axiomatic' approval of Mellor's 'Protestant Buddhism in England' theory. He is supportive of the stance taken by Bell, and argues that amongst Tibetan and Zen groups it is important to acknowledge the complex interaction between British and 'traditional Buddhist precedents and influences' (Kay, 2004:219). Furthermore, he argues, in relation to the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives in particular, that some of the issues that could be seen as 'Protestant' are actually Japanese in origin (Kay, 2004:219). This exposes a rather nuanced picture of the development of Buddhism in Britain.

This variety in relation to adaptation is certainly mirrored in the work of Bluck (2006). In what is the most recent overview of Buddhism in Britain, Bluck uses Ninian Smart's dimensional framework of religion to analyse the patterns of

adaptation of seven different Buddhist groups in Britain.[17] Bluck (2006:3)
describes these 'dimensions' as 'practice', 'doctrinal', 'narrative', 'experiential',
'ethical', 'social' and 'artistic'. As well as providing detailed exploration of the
history and practices of each of the seven groups, Bluck (2006:2, 182) is concerned
to ascertain how far within each of the 'seven interrelated dimensions' adaptations
have occurred, and he suggests that this framework allows for a more nuanced
exploration of differences 'within' and 'between' groups, given that, in his view,
'neither minimal nor complete adaptation is normally found'. Indeed, Bluck
(2006:191) states that, 'there is no simple polarity between traditional
organizations and new Buddhist movements' in the contemporary British context.

Although Bluck (2006:184) highlights that 'the overall pattern here is a
highly complex one', he does draw some conclusions. He suggests that within the
groups he studied, 'practice' and 'doctrine' (including styles of meditation and
'traditional teachings') are the 'least adapted' to the British context with 'narrative'
following, given that 'traditional narratives about the Buddha' are typically
emphasised across the groups (Bluck, 2006:182). At the same time, although the
'experiential dimension' has 'no clear pattern' and the 'artistic' exposes a large
variety in adaptation, both the 'ethical' and 'social' show typically significant
changes in the light of what he deems to be 'Western' cultural norms, including
closer relationships between monastic and lay practitioners, and various new roles
that have been developed both for women (including through ordination) and lay
and monastic community members (Bluck, 2006:183). In relation to roles for
women in Buddhism, although he indicates that there are greater difficulties faced
by women (ordained and lay) in certain Buddhist groups in relation to gender
equality (notably, the Forest Sangha and Triratna), he does suggest that, in general,
'there is relatively little gender bias in much of British Buddhism, with both
women and men becoming respected ordained and lay teachers' (Bluck, 2006:183).
Whilst Bluck (2006:185,192) ultimately asserts that, in relation to the framework
he has adopted, 'the pattern is too complex for the model' and he can find
exceptions to the rule in each theme he considers, he does suggest ten 'family
resemblances' between the groups in his study. These include an emphasis on
'silent meditation', an interest in 'largely traditional devotional activities', a respect
for 'traditional teachings' and the development of 'increased lay participation': all

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[17] At the time of writing this chapter, Phillip Henry had just published his PhD
thesis (2008) as a monograph. However, Henry's interest is with Socially Engaged
Buddhism in Britain, and therefore, arguably, more narrowly focused than Bluck's
text.

factors he sees as typically present within the experience of many Buddhist groups in Britain (Bluck, 2006:192).

To summarise, Buddhism in Britain is presented in the literature as a religion that has significantly grown in popularity since the 1950s and 1960s. We are faced with a complex picture of differing levels of perceived 'adaptation' which highlights the diversity between Buddhist groups. We can assume from the literature that adaptation affects each of the groups which have been written about, albeit variously. Certainly, a key feature within much of the scholarship includes recognition of the complexity amongst Buddhist groups and between Buddhist practitioners in Britain and the term 'diversity' is frequently utilised (Baumann, 2001:2, 2002a:94, Bell, 2000a:398, Bluck, 2006:24, 185, Kay, 2004:3, Waterhouse, 1999:20, Williams, 1989:1). Waterhouse (1997:2) goes as far as to highlight what she refers to as 'sectarian attitudes' between Buddhist organisations in Britain, and this is a point also made by Bell (2000a:398). As a result, no one satisfactory model or framework of adaptation has been proposed to date. Furthermore, as Bluck (2006:189) and Bell (2000a:418) both suggest, many Buddhist groups are no longer recent arrivals on the British religious scene, some having been established for over 40 years (for example, the Forest Sangha or the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives), therefore, it is likely that they will now face different issues in relation to adaptation than they did at their inception, and different issues in comparison to those groups who are relative newcomers (for example, Amida Trust). Yet, whilst not intending to minimise this complex picture, there are some typical features of Buddhism in Britain that can be ascertained from the literature presented. For example, an emphasis on lay involvement, a greater awareness of including and involving women, a focus on meditation and respect for individual realisation and practice of Buddhist philosophical truths.

If one looks to wider scholarship on Buddhism in 'the West', these features also seem to be applicable (Coleman, 2001, Prebish and Baumann, 2002, Wallace, 2002). This is deftly summarised by Barker and Rocha (2011:10) in the introduction to their edited collection on Buddhism in Australia:

> *In the past two decades, scholars have identified a set of characteristics that are present in the development of Buddhism in the West; the plurality of Buddhist traditions in a single country, a diversity of practice for those who converted and those who were born into the religion, blurring of monasticism and lay practice with the consequent diminished role of Buddhist monastics, equality for women, application of democratic principles, emphasis on ethics, secularization (this includes emphasis on*

> *the rational nature of Buddhism and its congruence with Western science),*
> *linkage to psychological concepts and social engagement...Yet the*
> *presence and emphasis on each of these characteristics changes from*
> *country to country.*

Some of these features seem to mirror those identified as 'Buddhist modernism', particularly by McMahan (2008). Whilst it is not the focus of this thesis to delve deeply into an analysis of this multifaceted phenomenon as it relates to female ordination practice in Britain, I will highlight that scholars such as Quli (2009:3,5) challenge the idea that an analysis of Buddhism in the contemporary world might be easily subsumed under any rigid categorisation, including that of 'Asian versus Western', or 'traditional versus modernist' as this overlooks 'the multifaceted nature of their religious traditions, beliefs, and practices'. Recognition of this complex picture provided both by scholars of Buddhism in Britain and 'the West', underpins my approach to analysing the impact of the British location on female ordination practice, which takes place in Chapter Nine. Key questions that I will consider include how ordained women relate to their geographic location and how their connection with Britain shapes their ordination practice and experiences. As I will explore in Chapter Nine, in order to reflect the intricate answers to these questions, I will adapt the broad framework of 'crossing and dwelling' provided by Thomas Tweed (2006).

Female Ordination in Buddhism in Britain: The Groups in this Study

In this section, in order to provide descriptive background information which will help contextualise the data in my study, I will focus my attention on the Buddhist groups or traditions within which my participants took ordination. Given that, in most cases, the general histories of the various groups and traditions in Britain have been previously published, I will not repeat this information but instead will focus on issues relating to female ordination within the groups in question.[18] For brevity, I will refer to the three Tibetan schools involved in this

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[18] My interest is in how these groups have developed in Britain, and, as a result, I will not be giving attention to their long histories within countries such as Japan, Thailand or Tibet. This is not because these histories and connections are unimportant, as I will identify in Chapter Nine, but because presenting information of this historical breadth is beyond the scope of this study. However, in Chapter Two I provide a brief exploration of the origins of ordination for women in early Indian Buddhism.

study in one section, and will also consider those ordained within the Theravāda tradition in another, given the shared histories. However, I will refer to Amida Trust, the Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition/Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, and Triratna in separate sections.

Amida Trust and Amida Order

The Amida Trust was established by Dharmavidya (David Brazier) and his wife, Caroline, in England in 1996 (Henry, 2008:85). Dharmavidya had been involved previously with other Buddhist groups in Britain, including the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives and the Community of Inter-being, and had a strong interest in the relationship between Buddhism, social engagement, and psychotherapy (Henry 2008: 85-86, 96). Two years later, the Amida Order, the associated religious community, was founded after Dharmavidya gave three men and three women the opportunity to take *bodhisattva* vows as a means to 'affirm their commitment to full time Buddhist training in a socially engaged context' (Dharmavidya, 2008).[19] The Amida Order follow the principles of Japanese Amida Pureland Buddhism (including chanting the *nembutsu*[20]*)* and are committed to a socially engaged form of Buddhist practice which includes establishing and supporting social welfare and development projects both in the UK and overseas in locations such as Bosnia, Africa and India (Dharmavidya, 2008, Henry, 2008).[21] According to their website, there are currently four Amida Trust groups or centres in the UK (London, Newcastle, Sheffield, and Malvern), two in Europe (France and Belgium) and six world-wide (Hawai'i, Texas, Ohio, Ontario, Israel, and India) (Amida, n.d.-b). The history and development of the Amida Trust, including key practices, doctrine, and approach (with a particular focus on attitudes towards social engagement), has been documented by Henry (2008), although Amida also receives a brief mention in Kay (2004:32) and Bell (2000a:409). Aside from this,

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[19] See Lopez (2001:148) in relation to a description of *bodhisattva* vows. He states 'The most important vows for the *bodhisattva* is the commitment to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all beings in the universe'.

[20] The *nembutsu* ('namo amida bu') is a ritual and meditative chant giving reverence to Amitābha, used within the Pure Land traditions (Henry, 2008:88-89). It is chanted regularly, and in various ways, by members of the Amida Order and Shu (Henry 2008:88-89). According to one of my participants, chanting the *nembutsu* is the 'blood and bone' of their practice.

[21] Henry (2008) provides a recent and detailed analysis of Socially Engaged Buddhism in the British context, including the work of Amida Trust.

given that it is a relatively new organisation following a Pureland practice which has not historically gathered much support in the UK (Cush, 1990:9, Henry, 2008:90), Amida Trust has received relatively little detailed academic attention to date.

At the time of writing, Amida Trust has developed a multi-layered institutional structure, and consists of the Amida Trust as an overarching charitable body helping to support the Amida Order UK and the Amida India Project, and the Amida Shu as an assembly of individuals who practice Pureland Buddhism particularly following the teachings of Japanese masters Hōnen and Shinran, and Chinese scholar Shan-Tao (Henry, 2008:89-90, 121). The Amida Order is the 'religious fellowship' following the same Pureland practices (Amida, n.d.-a, Henry, 2008:84, 90, 120-1). In addition, the Amida Kai is a support structure or 'spiritual association' for those who, whilst not formally committed to Pureland Buddhism, equally share the motivations of the Amida organisation as a whole (Henry, 2008:84). Within the structure of Amida (which allows for both lay and ordained members), 'ordination' is conceived and practiced in two distinct ways referred to as 'tracks', and these are detailed by Henry (2008:118) as well as on Amida Trust's principal website (Dharmavidya, 2008).[22] In brief, these include a 'ministry track' and an '*amitarya* track' (Dharmavidya, 2008). Those who ordain following the ministry track initially begin as aspirants, later practicing as *gankonin* (chaplains), before taking ordination as ministers (Dharmavidya, 2008, Henry, 2008:117). Both *gankonin* and ministers follow 156 precepts (Henry, 2008:115). The role of a minister in the Amida Order is one which is most typically fixed in one geographic location, providing spiritual support for the surrounding community (Dharmavidya, 2008). Those following the *amitarya* track initially express a wish to be a postulant (often after some time as a trainee, living in one of the communities), and then after a year of training take ordination as a novice, and then, finally, as an *amitarya* (Henry, 2008:115). Within the Amida Order, an *amitarya* follows 238 precepts (the 156 of a minister, and others in addition), lives a communal lifestyle and is committed to a more geographically itinerant practice supporting the various communities and projects around the globe (Dharmavidya, 2008, Henry, 2008:118). Dharmavidya describes the *amitarya* life in the following way:

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[22] One of my participants informed me that, since 2008, those who are part of the *Amida-Shu* and wish to make a deeper commitment (but not as ministers or *amitaryas*) can also become Lay Order members.

> *These brothers and sisters are dedicated to going anywhere and doing whatever is needed for the benefit of sentient beings. They are thus committed to lives of service – lives that are mobile and simple and that are filled with devotion and humanitarian activities* (Brazier, 2001:196).

Ministers do not take a vow of celibacy, and can be married. If an *amitarya* begins training as part of a married couple (and both are committed to the *amitarya* track) they are permitted to remain married and non-celibate (Dharmavidya, 2008, Henry, 2008:118). However those who set out on the *amitarya* path as single people take a vow of celibacy (Dharmavidya, 2008, Henry, 2008:118). After undertaking four years of preparation and following ordination, *amitaryas* can choose whether to retain this vow of celibacy or not. As Henry (2008:115) states, the precepts followed by both the minister and the *amitarya* are not *Vinaya* precepts, but have been developed with regard to *bodhisattva* vows, with awareness of what is needed to support Buddhist practice and community in the contemporary world.[23] A full list of precepts taken by those ordained into the Amida Order is currently available online (Amida, 2008a). Ordinations are most frequently presided over by Dharmavidya as the preceptor, although, at present, ordinations can be conferred by male or female senior ministers and *amitaryas* (Henry, 2008:118). In addition, since 2010, those who have been ordained as ministers or *amitaryas* for over ten years are now given senior teacher, or *acharya* status.[24]

Globally, there are currently four men and women who have taken the *amitarya* path and thirteen who have taken the *gankonin* or ministry track, but only a small percentage of these are permanently based in Britain (Amida, n.d.-a). Both tracks are equally open to men and women, both taking the same precepts, and gender equality is a value that is highly prized within Amida Trust (Dharmavidya, 2008).[25] Indeed, one of the foundational principles of Amida Trust is:

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[23] A brief discussion of the *Vinaya*, or monastic code, can be found in the next chapter.

[24] Those who have taken ordination, both as minister and *amitarya*, also adopt specific dress practices. In relation to any material changes following ordination, both ministers and *amitaryas* wear robes, including a tunic and trousers, an outer shawl or *zen*, and a *wagessa*, a strip of fabric worn around the neck which is white for postulants, red for *amitaryas* or ministers, and purple for senior teachers or *acharya*. Those who are members of the *Amida Shu* wear a yellow *wagessa*. The dominant colour in each of the robes is red, the colour of Amitābha. Ministers wear red and yellow robes, and *amitarya* wear red. Those who follow a celibate path shave their heads. Once ordained as a *gankonin* or novice, individuals are given a new Sanskrit name to signify the changes that they have made and their commitment, as well as providing inspiration.

[25] For a historical discussion of the role of women and nuns in the Pure Land tradition more generally, see Dobbins (2004).

In the Amida School there is to be no discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age, sexual orientation or worldly status (Amida, 2008b).

The participants in this study described the Amida Trust and Order as 'evolving' and the structures that are currently in place as open to modification and change as the organisation develops and becomes increasingly established.

Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition/The Order of Buddhist Contemplatives

In comparison to Amida Trust, the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC) which practices within the Japanese Sōtō Zen Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition (SRM), has certainly received more academic attention (for example, see Batchelor, 1994a, Batchelor, 1994b, Bluck, 2006, Cush, 1990, Kay, 2004, Morgan, 1994, Oliver, 1979, Waterhouse, 2004).[26] The SRM and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (their monastic order) were established in Britain at Throssel Hole Abbey in Northumberland by Reverend Master Jiyu- Kennett (born Peggy Kennett) in 1972 (Oliver, 1979:179). Jiyu-Kennett had taken ordination first in Malaysia and later in Japan in the early 1960s and after a difficult period of time training in Japan which she documents in her autobiography, *The Wild White Goose* (Jiyu-Kennett, 2002), she travelled first to the United States to establish a monastic training centre at Shasta Abbey in California in 1970 (after setting up the San Francisco Zen Mission Society) before supporting the founding of Throssel Hole Abbey two years later (Bluck, 2006:65-6, Kay, 2004:124, Oliver, 1979:181).

A full and detailed history of the SRM tradition in Britain is provided by Bluck (2004), Kay (2004) and Oliver (1979) and they detail the practices, doctrines, and approaches taken, alongside charting the development of the movement. In organisational terms, the OBC is no longer officially connected to Japan (although does maintain friendly ties in Malaysia), and there have been a number of changes to Sōtō Zen practice as the tradition has become established on British (and American) shores (Bluck, 2006:65, OBC, n.d.). Bluck (2006) and Kay (2004) devote attention to examining potential areas of adaptation to British cultural norms, including for example, chanting in a style reminiscent of 'medieval plain-song', however both identify that a combination of 'traditional Sōtō Zen and

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[26] For a discussion of the roles available to women within the Sōtō Zen tradition in Japan, see, Arai (1999), Faure (2003) and Uchino (1983).

adapted elements' are a feature of SRM practice (Bluck, 2006:70, 87). There are different ways in which an individual might get involved in SRM/OBC practice in Britain. For lay followers, they can take 'lay ordination' at a retreat called *jukai*, which formally marks their commitment to the tradition (Bluck, 2006: 70). It is also possible to become a 'lay minister', which is a different level of engagement in meditation and ceremony, which is described in detail by Kay (2004:184) and Bluck (2006:84). The focus of this study, however, has been on those women who have taken monastic vows.

Kay (2004:186) and Bluck (2006:83) describe the process of becoming a monk within the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. Monastic men and women are both referred to as 'monks' (Kay, 2004:135). The first stage of monastic commitment begins with the individual asking to be accepted as a postulant (often after a period of time living as a lay trainee at Throssel Hole). A postulant wears borrowed robes and clips (but does not shave) their hair. According to Kay (2004:186) the postulancy period is between six and twelve months. However, some of my participants indicated that it was not unheard of for this period to be extended, even up to two years, until the postulant is deemed ready for the next stage. At the end of the postulancy period, an individual is told that they are ready to prepare for ordination and they begin sewing their robes. Prior to the ordination ceremony, a candidate's head is shaved, leaving a small tuft to be offered during the ceremony. At the ordination ceremony the Abbot is preceptor, and the candidate begins the ceremony wearing white under-robes. After taking their ordination vows they are given their robes, a bowing mat, their formal bowl set, and a new name (Kay, 2004:186). Names in the OBC are either English or Celtic, although a few have Japanese names. Following the ordination ceremony is a noviciate period, which usually lasts for about twelve months, and thereafter is 'transmission'; a private process between a monk and their Master (Kay 2004:128). This is offered when a monk has progressed further along the path and this is recognised by the Master and they are subsequently able to teach (Bluck, 2006:83, Kay, 2004:186-7). A monk may be considered a 'Master' themselves (and therefore be able to attract disciples) when they have had a *kenshō* (enlightenment) experience (Bluck, 2006:83).

Although sixteen precepts (including ten *bodhisattva* vows) are followed both by those who have made a monastic or a lay commitment, in addition monks vow to maintain celibacy, live communally, not work for money, and not drink alcohol, and they also follow a number of monastic rules which have Zen,

Mahāyāna and Theravāda roots (Bluck, 2006:80-81).[27] There are a number of practical changes to daily living following monastic ordination, including the adoption of robes and tonsure, and vegetarianism.[28] Although Throssel Hole is entirely vegetarian, some of my participants did state that if they were offered meat outside the monastery by a lay supporter who was not aware of the dietary rules, they would accept this out of compassion (see also, Cush 1990:27). Monks do not have to give up handling money and are not required to dispose of their financial resources either (Morgan, 1994:146). There is a precise daily schedule followed at Throssel Hole, and this is described by Cush (1990:24-25), Kay (2004:198), Bluck (2006:71) and MacPhillamy (2000:259).

As Bluck (2006:84) highlights, 'gender issues have always been important in the SRM tradition'. Both men and women take the same precepts and have the same opportunities and roles available to them within the monastic community (Kay, 2004:135). Indeed, Reverend Master Daishin Morgan, the current Abbot, has to date recognised five women as Masters and two men. Men and women live and train together, including having rooms within the same building complex. There are currently twenty-five monks at Throssel Hole, of which approximately half are women. There are also a number of priories and temples across the UK, supported by either male or female monks (Bluck 2006:68). Interestingly, Bluck (2006:88) highlights that the attitude towards equal opportunities for men and women in the OBC is considered to be rooted in the work of Dōgen (the initiator of the Sōtō Zen tradition), but at the same time he argues that it also compatible with prevailing British cultural norms. Of interest to this study, particularly in my consideration of

[27] Bluck (2006:80-81) describes the OBC precepts in more detail.
[28] As Bluck (2006:83) and Kay (2004:187) indicate, the different stages of monastic commitment are reflected in the colour of the robes that are worn, as well as the communal roles that are taken (see also Hollenbeck, 2010). The robes that are worn reflect a traditional Japanese style, and there are both day and ceremonial robes (Hollenbeck, 2010). The day robes consist of a white under-robe and a long tunic which is belted by a 4-inch piece of fabric called a cincture. A *rakkhusu* is worn around the neck, which was described by one of my participants as a 'bib-like' piece of fabric, and a large square *kesa* is worn around the shoulders on ceremonial occasions or for meditation. I was told that all the robes are made in square, rectangular or triangular shapes so that they may be unpicked and reversed to enable them to be used for longer. The ceremonial robe (*koromo*) has wide sleeves, and is also worn over a white robe the same style as the day robe (Hollenbeck, 2010). When a monk dies, they are buried in the ceremonial robe with the *kesa*. A postulant wears black robes; a novice black with white trimming; a transmitted monk wears black with gold *rakkhusu* and *kesa*; and seniors wear brown with a purple *rakkusu* and *kesa* (Bluck, 2006:83, Hollenbeck, 2010). When a monk becomes a master, the robes remain the same although a red brocade piece is worn during ceremonial occasions (Hollenbeck, 2010).

attitudes to feminism and gender equality in Chapter Eight is Jiyu-Kennett's own perspective. When discussing feminism, she stated:

> *I'm not a feminist in the usual sense of the term: the 'struggle for women's equality' doesn't go far enough; it doesn't step outside the brain washing. Behave like an equal, dammit, and then they will stop* (MacPhillamy, 2000:234).

Furthermore, reflecting on the rationale for referring to both men and women as 'monks', Jiyu-Kennett challenged the idea that this was underpinned by 'feminist' values, but instead stated it reflected the appropriate translation of the Japanese terms '*osho*' ('monk and priest') and '*no-osho*' ('female monk and priest') (MacPhillamy, 2000:285).

Theravāda/Thai Forest Sangha

The Forest Sangha in Britain is part of the Theravāda Thai Forest tradition and follows the teachings and practices of Ajahn Chah. As stated on the Forest Sangha website, 'the Forest tradition…most strongly emphasizes meditative practice and the realization of enlightenment as the focus of monastic life' (Forest-Sangha, n.d.-b). The Forest Sangha in Britain is managed by the English Sangha Trust which was founded in 1956 in order to support the development of a Theravāda monastic community in England (Oliver, 1979:102). A history of the Forest Sangha in Britain alongside their key practices has been well-documented by several scholars, including Bell (1991, 1998, 2000b), Bluck (2006, 2008, 2012), Goswell (1988), and Waterhouse (1997, 2004). The Forest Sangha are currently associated with several monastic communities and hermitages across England and Scotland; at Amaravati (near Hemel Hempstead), Cittaviveka/Chithurst (Hampshire), Aruna Ratnagiri (Northumberland), Forest Hermitage (Warwickshire), Hartridge (Devon) and Milntuim (Scotland) (Forest-Sangha, n.d.-a) . These monastic communities are part of a larger international network of Forest Sangha monasteries in Europe, Canada and North America, Australia and New Zealand and, of course, Thailand (Forest-Sangha, n.d.-a). Despite the geographical distance, the Forest Sangha's strong connection to Thailand has been heavily emphasised, and according to Bell (1991:164) *bhikkhu* in the Forest Sangha in Britain value this highly, alongside the sense of connection to a lineage that stretches back to the Buddha (Forest-Sangha, n.d.-b).

In terms of the opportunities available for women within the Forest Sangha in Britain, whilst the male monastic community was established first, shortly afterwards in 1979, four women were enabled to take eight precepts and wear white, following a path akin to that of the *mae chi* in Thailand (Angell, 2006a:97).[29] In 1983, after some discussion with the Thai *saṅgha* authorities, these same women were given permission to take ten precepts, thus joining the monastic renunciant community, and the order of *sīladharā* was born (Angell, 2006a:99). Angell (2006a:99) refers to this as 'an innovative step for Western women' and Bell (1991:97) describes the order of *sīladharā* as a 'radical modification'. Whilst the rules that the *sīladharā* live by took some time to be established, at present the *sīladharā* continue to follow ten precepts alongside 120 training rules (Angell, 2006a:99, 2006b:229).[30] These training rules are based on the *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhunī Vinaya*, although they have been adapted to suit the contemporary situation (Angell, 2006a:103, Bell, 1991:98,276, Bluck, 2008:140). The *sīladharā*, whilst considered monastic renunciants, have not taken *bhikkhunī* or higher ordination given that this is seen by the Thai monastic authorities as no longer being available for women (Bell, 1991:98).[31] As a point of comparison, the male *bhikkhus* (fully ordained monks) within the Theravāda tradition take 227 precepts, leading Angell (2006b:234) to write that, notwithstanding the backing given to the *sīladharā* by the monastic community, 'theirs is not an equal ordination'.

The ordained life for a *sīladharā* begins with a period of up to two years as an *anagārikā* (8 precept novice): *anagārikā* wear white, shave their heads and eyebrows (as is the Thai tradition) and are celibate (Angell, 2006a:97, Bell, 1991:103, Goswell, 1988:2/166). After this period, the novices are able to take *sīladharā* ordination where they adopt brown robes, a Pāli name, and the *sīladharā* precepts which include not cooking, handling money, or driving (Angell,

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[29] A comprehensive history of the *sīladharā* order is provided by several scholars, including Angell (2006a, b) Bell (1991), Bluck (2006), Cush (1990), Goswell (1988), Shaw (2008), Williams (2005). There are also a small number of first-person historical accounts written by some of the *sīladharā* themselves. For example, see Candasiri (2012), Sundara (1999). In addition, the Forest Sangha in Britain produced an anniversary newsletter in celebration of twenty-five years of *sīladharā* ordination, including reproducing interviews with certain *sīladharā*, relating particularly to history and practice (Forest-Sangha, 2007).

[30] A list, and discussion, of *sīladharā* precepts is available from Bell (1991:276-278). Also see Cush (1990:56) and Williams (2005:252). Sundara (1999:61) also provides a précis of the *sīladharā* daily schedule, and Bluck (2006: 28-32) describes daily life at the main Forest Sangha monasteries.

[31] I will discuss the issues surrounding *bhikkhunī* ordination in the next chapter.

2006a:100).[32] During the ordination ceremony itself, *sīladharā* take dependency on the *bhikkhu* saṅgha (Angell 2006a:226, Bell 1991:275). Their preceptor is the (male) Abbot, who is currently Ajahn Amaro who took over from Ajahn Sumedho (who established the Forest Sangha in the UK) in 2010. One becomes a senior *sīladharā* (and can adopt the title Ajahn) after being ordained for ten *vassa* (rains retreats) (Angell, 2006a:110). According to Amaravati's website, there are 10 *sīladharā* and two *anagārikā* currently residing in Britain and living within three of the monastic communities (Amaravati, Chithurst, and Milntuim) (Amaravati, n.d.). Three of the *sīladharā* are British nationals, and others are French, German, or originate from 'South-east Asia'.

A number of scholars have discussed what they perceive as potential areas of tension in the creation, establishment, and development of the order of *sīladharā* within the Forest Sangha (Angell, 2006a, b, Bell, 1991, Bluck, 2006, Goswell, 1988, Williams, 2005). Indeed, the *sīladharā*, more than any other group of ordained women in Britain, have received attention in relation to issues of gender and gender equality (Bluck, 2006:37). One of these areas of tension was a concern that the 'Asian' laity may be less willing to support female renunciants than fully-ordained male *bhikkhu*, although Angell (2006b:223) highlights that as the order of *sīladharā* becomes more established this is altering. As early as 1991, Bell (1991:287) indicated that there were tensions between what she calls 'the need to accommodate Western feminist perspectives by admitting women' and the traditional Thai position on women's roles in the *saṅgha*.[33] Fifteen years later, Bluck (2006:37) continues to highlight this particular issue, drawing attention to the perceived divide between 'traditional practice' and what he calls 'the legitimate expectation of gender equality'. One issue which has increasingly become part of the debate when considering the situation for the *sīladharā* has certainly been that of the *bhikkhunī* ordination, which is currently not open to the *sīladharā* within the

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[32] The *sīladharā* robes are known as the *cattucivara*, and include a lower robe or 'skirt' (*antaravāsaka*), a jacket (*kancukka*), an outer robe (*uttarāsaṅga*) and an additional upper robe (*pavurana*). As I was informed by one of my participants, the jacket and upper robe have been designed specifically for the *sīladharā*, and the lower robe and outer robe are the same as those worn by *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* and are made using the traditional 'rice paddy' pattern as commended by the Buddha (also see Angell, 2006a:100). Within the Forest Sangha, following the Thai tradition, Pāli names are selected to correspond to the letter of the Thai alphabet relating to the day of the week you were born.

[33] Of interest to this study, several of the authors writing about the *sīladharā* mention potential tensions in relation to 'feminism' (for example, see Bell 1991, Goswell 1988:2/221, and Angell 2006b:233) although what this means in practice and to the *sīladharā* is not discussed in any particular detail.

Forest Sangha tradition (Angell 2006b:229, Bluck, 2006:38). A number of scholars (and, indeed, the published first-person accounts of *sīladharā* themselves, such as Candasiri, 2012) highlight that the *sīladharā* hold a variety of views on the subject of gender equality and access to *bhikkhunī* ordination, with several indicating that the *sīladharā,* whilst cognisant of the various issues, have typically been more concerned with implementing Buddhist practice within the parameters set out by the Forest Sangha than challenging their institutional circumstances (Angell, 2006b:233, Bell, 1991:280,286, Bluck, 2006:38, Candasiri, 2012, Cush, 1990:60, Shaw, 2008:159, Williams, 2005:217). Williams (2005:235) goes as far as to state that the *sīladharā* 'seem superficially content with their position' and she argues that they had little incentive to challenge institutional inequality as their requirements for daily living are supported within the monastic communities in Britain. I shall explore the perspectives of my participants on this issue in Chapter Eight.

However, two situations which have arisen since scholars such as Angell, Bell or Williams were writing (namely, in 2009, the implementation of the 'Five Points' and the *bhikkhunī* ordinations in Perth, Australia) have had a substantial impact on the order of *sīladharā* in Britain (Weinberg, 2010) . The 'Five Points', which Tomalin (2013:115) highlights received a great deal of attention on the internet, were presented to the *sīladharā* in Britain by the *bhikkhu saṅgha* in 2009. They consisted of a list of five statements that the *sīladharā* had to agree to in order to remain within the monastic communities, and for *sīladharā* ordinations to continue to take place (Weinberg, 2010:20).[34] The 'Five Points' clearly express the institutional hierarchy within the Forest Sangha and situate the order of *sīladharā* as subordinate to the male *bhikkhu saṅgha* in terms of community living and the ritual practices that are undertaken (Weinberg, 2010:24). In addition, the 'Five Points' clearly state that the *sīladharā* ordination is not intended to be an interim stage before *bhikkhunī* ordination, and that, as such, it is all that will be offered to women within the Forest Sangha lineage (Tomalin, 2013:114, Weinberg, 2010:21).

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[34] A full list of the 'five points' is available online at: http://www.leighb.com/nuns.htm (Last accessed: 21.07.2014) and http://www.bhikkhuni.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/5-Points-for-the-UK-Siladharas.pdf. (Last Accessed 21.07.2014). As Tomalin (2013:119) indicates, there are parallels between the 'Five Points' and the eight *garudhamma* (or Eight Special Rules) that have traditionally been followed by *bhikkhunī*. I discuss the *garudhamma* in the next chapter.

In addition, just months following the implementation of the Five Points, an Australian branch monastery of the Forest Sangha tradition was involved in a *bhikkhunī* ordination which led to their expulsion from the Forest Sangha lineage (Barker and Rocha, 2011:15, Tomalin, 2013:114). Although the Abbott, Ajahn Brahmavamso, was not acting as the *bhikkhunī* preceptor (and instead this role was taken by an American *bhikkhunī*, Ayya Tathāloka), he refused to repudiate the newly ordained *bhikkhunī* when asked to by the Forest Sangha authorities and was informed subsequently that he was no longer officially part of the Forest Sangha tradition (Tomalin, 2013:114).[35] Weinberg (2010:21) states that as a result of these two events, 'seismic shifts' occurred within the Forest Sangha lineage. This included, in 2009, a temporary moratorium on *sīladharā* ordinations in Britain. Furthermore, in response to the Five Points and the issues in relation to gender inequality within the lineage, a significant proportion of the *sīladharā* living in the British monasteries left the Forest Sangha, either to disrobe, live independently, or to take *bhikkhunī* ordination outside the UK.[36] However, as Tomalin (2013:115) highlights, there has been little attention given to the perspectives of the *sīladharā* themselves, who remain 'barely audible' within the controversy raging on the internet.

In this study, I interviewed both *sīladharā* (either living within the Forest Sangha monasteries or independently) and women who had taken *bhikkhunī* ordination outside of the Forest Sangha tradition.[37] Western women have taken *bhikkhunī* ordination in various locations across the globe, including Australia, North America, India, and Sri Lanka, and they live either in small communities or alone. However, to date, there have been no *bhikkhunī* ordinations on British shores, and there are no *bhikkhunī* living permanently in the UK. *Bhikkhunī* take 311 precepts, shave their heads, adopt Pāli names, and wear saffron coloured

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[35] A detailed exploration of the Perth ordination can be found on Ajahn Sujato's blog: http://sujato.wordpress.com/2009/10/31/how-australia%E2%80%99s-first-theravada-bhikkhuni-ordination-happened/ (Last Accessed 21.07.2014). Also see Barker and Rocha (2011:15).

[36] The West Wight Sangha Blog published a number of letters written by some of the *sīladharā* who decided to leave. In these letters, whilst the *sīladharā* typically offer their gratitude to both the monastic and lay community, they write of their concerns about gender inequality within the tradition and the sadness that this has caused them. One example of these is available from: http://west-wight-sangha.blogspot.co.uk/2010/07/sister-thitamedha-to-disrobe-because-of.html (Last Accessed: 21.07.2014).

[37] In order to protect the anonymity of my participants, I have decided not to state where they received *bhikkhunī* ordination, or where they currently live.

robes.[38] The stages of ordination differ from those followed by the *sīladharā*, although they do begin with a period as an 8-precept *anagārikā*, but this is then followed by a ten-precept noviciate period (*sāmaṇerī*) and two years as a probationary novice (*sikkhamānā*), before full *bhikkhunī upasampadā* (ordination) is undertaken, with candidates taking dependence on the *bhikkhunī saṅgha*.[39]

Tibetan Tradition

In this study, the participants who ordained within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition were drawn from three schools; Gelug, Karma Kagyu, and Nyingma.[40] The participants from within the Gelug school were typically associated with the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) and the various Jamyang centres across the UK.[41] Those involved with the Karma Kagyu school usually had some connection to Samye Ling monastery in Scotland (or its associated centres); Samye Ling being the largest Tibetan Buddhist institution in the UK, established in 1967 (Waterhouse, 2004:61).[42] Those who ordained within the Nyingma school in this study were mostly associated with the Palyul Dzogchen lineage. Each of the schools, unsurprisingly, have had a different historical trajectory in Britain and their growth, development and key practices can be

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[38] According to one of my participants, the *bhikkhunī* robes consist of five pieces, including an outer robe (*saṅghāṭi*) either worn over one shoulder or as a cloak; an upper robe (*uttarāsaṅga*); a lower robe (*antaravāsaka*), and a jacket (*saṅkaccikaṃ*). In addition, they also have a cloth for bathing (*udakasāṭikā*).

[39] For more detail about the stages of Theravada *bhikkhunī* ordination see: http://www.bhikkhuni.net/entering-into-monastic-life-and-ordaining-as-a-bhikkhuni-in-theravada-buddhism/. Last accessed 16.09.2013. Also see Wijayaratna (2010:38).

[40] Throughout this thesis, I shall use the anglicised spellings of the Tibetan schools. Both my participants and the literature in English (including on organisations own websites) commonly use these spellings. Kay (2004) highlights that there are difficulties in rigidly separating the schools, and indeed, some of my participants had affiliations with more than one Tibetan school (see also, Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:38). However, I characterised individuals as being associated with a particular school depending on who they had taken their most recent ordination with. Throughout the thesis, I refer to those in the Karma Kagyu tradition as 'Kagyu' for brevity. In addition, some participants did not want me to identify which Tibetan school they were part of and therefore, when using their data, I simply refer to them as 'Tibetan'. It is important to note that these are not the only organisations representing the Tibetan Buddhist lineages in Britain and in particular, there are other Gelug and Kagyu organisations which also exist.

[41] For a list of FPMT Centres in the UK, see FPMT (2011).

[42] For a list of Samye Ling associated centres, see Henry (2008:307).

charted in works by Batchelor (1994a), Bluck (2006), Henry (2008), Kay (1997), (2004), McKenzie (2011), Oliver (1979), Waterhouse (1997). There are currently a large number of Tibetan Buddhist centres in Britain, from each of the four principal schools (Gelug, Kagyu, Nyingma and Sakya), although as Kay (2004:27) and Bluck (2006:21) indicate, the Gelug have become the most popular of the four.[43]

Within the FPMT, the first ordinations of Westerners (including men and women) occurred at Kopan monastery in Nepal in 1974 (Kay, 2004:54). FPMT ordinations do currently take place on British shores, including at Jamyang London where Geshe Tashi is the principal Tibetan teacher. In terms of the Karma Kagyu school, the first ordinations in Britain (again, for both men and women) took place prior to a four-year retreat at the Purelands Retreat Centre at Samye Ling monastery in 1984 (Khandro, 2007:51).[44] However, for those following the Tibetan *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya,* women are not permitted to take ordination beyond the level of novice (*getsulma/śramaṇerīkā*) which is a 10 precept ordination (divided into 36), as the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination was deemed never to have been transmitted to Tibet (Gutschow, 2004:173).[45] However, as I discuss in the next chapter, some women (including a number of high-profile Western women) have taken *śikṣamāṇā* (two-year probationary novice) and *bhikṣuṇī* (higher) ordination from the Mahayana *Dharmaguptaka* lineage, typically in Taiwan, Vietnam and Korea (Chodron, 2000:85). They continue practicing in the Tibetan tradition, although the issue of *bhikṣuṇī* or *gelongma* ordination remains controversial (for example, see Mohr and Tsedroen, 2010). Of the participants in this study, two had taken *bhikṣuṇī* ordination (248 precepts) and both had travelled outside the UK for this, with support from their teachers. Indeed, this support for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination was given strongly by Lama Yeshe, the Abbott at Samye Ling, who, in 1998, arranged

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[43] As Bluck (2006:21) states, this is likely to be because of the large number of New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) centres in Britain, which have been affiliated with the Gelug school. For a detailed history of the NKT, and the conflict between the NKT and the FPMT, see Kay (1997, 2004). The NKT, according to Bluck (2006:16), are, in Britain, one of the three biggest groups. They were, however, not involved in this study.

[44] I was not able to ascertain when the first Nyingma ordinations took place in Britain, and if indeed any have. My participants travelled outside the UK to take their ordination with teachers from this school. However, more information about the Palyul lineage and their associated centres is available from: http://www.palyul.org/.

[45] For a list of the *getsulma (śramaṇerīkā)* precepts, see Chodron (n.d.-b). This website also provides details of the various ordination ceremonies in the Tibetan traditions for women, and gives advice to potential monastics. The regulations surrounding ordination and the associated stages of ordination for women in the Mahayana traditions are detailed by Wu (2001) and Chodron (2001:33).

for eleven nuns who had previously taken novice ordination to travel to Bodhgaya and receive *bhikṣuṇī* vows at a large international ceremony hosted by a Taiwanese Buddhist organisation (Bluck, 2006:122, Khandro, 2007:81). Lama Yeshe has also named a Danish *bhikṣuṇī* based in Britain as a Lama, the first time that this has happened in the UK (Bluck, 2006:123, Ploos van Amstel, 2005:125, Samye-Ling, n.d.).

In addition to those who had taken *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, the other participants in this study had taken either *rabjungma* vows (5 precepts, plus celibacy and wearing robes, described by one of my participants as 'pre-novice', see also Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:17) or *getsulma* (10 precepts), and all had previously taken refuge and the five lay precepts.[46] My participants described the various ordination ceremonies that they had undertaken. Typically, the *rabjungma* vows were taken with one officiating preceptor, but the *getsulma* and *bhikṣuṇī* ceremonies were often much larger and more intricate affairs, with the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination requiring a female community to officiate.

If a person is interested in taking the first steps towards ordination, the FPMT in particular provides detailed advice on their website, including the need to have some years' experience of various Buddhist practices and the support of a recognised Buddhist teacher (FPMT, n.d.). A number of my participants discussed waiting for requested letters of support from their teachers, many of whom were based outside the UK. Prospective candidates are encouraged to talk through their plans with those who have already taken ordination, and to consider its significance and the changes that it will bring, as within the FPMT ordination is envisaged as 'a life-long commitment' (FPMT, n.d.).[47] A 'pre-ordination course' is also available at Tushita Meditation Centre in Northern India (Ploos van Amstel, 2005:88, Tushita, n.d.). In terms of the changes to appearance following ordination, nuns typically shave their heads, wear robes, and adopt Tibetan names given to them by their preceptor.[48] The ordained women involved in my study from the Tibetan

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[46] Ploos Van Amstel (2005:76) states that there are 8-10 *rabjung* precepts and lists them; however, this was not how my participants described it. Instead, they stated that they had taken 5 precepts, alongside robes and celibacy, and that *getsulma* was 10 precepts, divided into 36 rules.

[47] This is different at Samye Ling, where a temporary ordination can be taken (Bluck, 2006:122, Khandro, 2007:79, Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:77).

[48] The robes, which are predominantly maroon and yellow, include a *shanthap* (skirt), a *tongak* (blouse), a *ngulen* (vest), a *meyok* (petticoat), a *zen* (shawl), a belt and a *dingwa* (sitting cloth). In addition, the *getsulma* have a *chugou*, an additional yellow shawl that is worn with the *zen* for formal events.

schools each referred to themselves as 'nuns', some adding '*gelongma*' or '*bhikṣuṇī*' if they had taken these vows. Some were known as '*ani*', a Tibetan word for 'aunt', and a term that my participants informed me is frequently used for nuns (Havnevik, 1989:44). In terms of practicalities, all of the nuns within the Tibetan lineages in my study handled money (even though some had taken vows not to) and many drove cars and kept possessions, particularly those living outside the monastic environment (see Bluck, 2006:121).

I had some difficulty ascertaining how many nuns there currently were in each of the Tibetan schools in Britain. This was particularly the case for those lineages which do not have a central monastery or nunnery in the UK such as the Gelug or Nyingma, and where nuns will, in the majority of cases, live alone, some with very little connection to each other (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:38).[49] In addition, I noticed a level of geographic mobility amongst my participants, with nuns travelling outside the UK for retreats or teaching, and indeed, some nuns disrobing alongside others taking ordination (see also, Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:37-38). I was informed that, at the time I undertook my fieldwork, there were approximately thirteen nuns at Samye Ling, and several more living outside the principal monastery, either in smaller centres, or alone. Although I did not gather statistics directly from the FPMT and instead was reliant on information from my participants, I estimate that there are less than ten FPMT nuns who permanently reside in Britain, and all of these live outside a monastic environment, although some may have connections to particular FMPT centres where they might work and teach. I was not able to estimate the number of Nyingma nuns, however I would expect this to be also very small number given that there is no Nyingma nunnery or monastic community for women in Britain.

There has been little attention given to Tibetan nuns in Britain, quite possibly due to their low numbers. In addition, Kay (2004:37) has highlighted that in general, Tibetan Buddhism in Britain is under-studied. Whilst scholars such as Bluck (2006:122) and Kay (2004:54) do mention monastic ordination in Tibetan Buddhism in Britain, there has, to date, been only Ploos Van Amstel's (2005) doctoral work which explored contemporary female ordination amongst Westerners in the Tibetan schools in any depth and which includes some

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[49] At the time of writing, the FPMT had purchased Greenhaugh Hall in Northumberland and were working on renovations. This is referred to as the Land of Joy project and it is anticipated to be home to a monastic community, as well as used for retreats (see: http://www.landofjoy.co.uk/ Last Accessed: 16.10.2014).

participants in Britain, particularly focusing on Samye Ling as a fieldwork site. However, the UK was not the only geographic location included in her study and she focused more generally on Western women taking ordination in the Tibetan tradition. Whilst I will discuss the specific findings of Ploos Van Amstel's study in the next chapter, there are a couple of key points that warrant attention here. Alongside a brief history of both the FPMT and the Karma Kagyu tradition at Samye Ling, Ploos Van Amstel (2005:128-131) describes in some detail the development of the nun's community at Samye Ling, the relationships that nuns in Tibetan lineages have with their teachers and male monks, the sometimes tense interactions between nuns and the lay community, and the Buddhist practices ordained women follow, including tantric observances and the long retreats undertaken by those in the Karma Kagyu tradition, which since 2006 have been held at the retreat centre at Holy Island (Khandro, 2007:113). Ploos Van Amstel's study focuses primarily on the interaction between 'Tibetan' and 'Western' culture in the lives of Western nuns, but she emphasises, crucially, the diversity between the nuns themselves (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005: 17, 35, 195-6). She shows how the ordination requirements for Western women in Tibetan traditions have become more stringent since the 1970s, and states that there is now more institutional observation and regulation, a point which was reinforced by one of my participants (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:88, see also, McKenzie, 2011:7). Whilst she cites that there were more monks than nuns at Samye Ling at the time of her fieldwork, this was not the case when I undertook interviews. It appears, therefore, that between 2005 and 2010, the nun's community increased and there are now more nuns than monks (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:130). One of the important points raised by Ploos Van Amstel (2005:89,147,151) is the issues that certain nuns face, particularly those living alone, in balancing the precepts that they have taken with life outside a monastic environment in the contemporary West where they might receive limited financial support. This is an issue that has also been raised within the first-person accounts of Tibetan-tradition nuns in relation to Western locales more generally, and I will return to it in Chapter Nine of the thesis (Chodron, 1996, Palmo, 1999, Tsedroen, 1988).

Triratna

The Triratna Buddhist Order and Community, which, until 2010, were known as the Western Buddhist Order (WBO) and Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) is, according to Vishvapani (2001:5), 'a modern Buddhist movement that applies the universal insights of the Buddha in the new conditions of the modern world'. A history of the movement, which was founded by Sangharakshita in London in 1967, has been provided by a number of academics including Batchelor (1994a, b), Bell (1991), Bluck (2006), Henry (2008), Oliver (1979).[50] Academic sources are complemented by published work from Triratna 'insiders' such as Vishvapani (2001), Vajragupta (2010), and Smith (2008) who was an ordained female member of the WBO and also conducted doctoral research into the movement. In Britain, Triratna is one of the most popular and geographically wide-spread Buddhist organisations, and its practices are seen to have roots in 'a range' of different Buddhist traditions (Bluck, 2006:16,152,158). Triratna has commonly been seen by scholars as an organisation which undertakes some of 'the most conspicuous adaptation' of Buddhist practices to the British cultural context, which I discussed earlier in this chapter (Bluck, 2006: 177).

In 1968, Sangharakshita performed the initial ordinations of followers into his new Western Buddhist Order, which included both men and women (Oliver, 1979:163, Vajragupta, 2010:9, 109, Vishvapani, 2001:19). As Vajragupta (2010:110) highlights, these followers were given '*upāsaka*' and '*upāsikā*' lay ordination and, although Sangharakshita originally planned to have several 'grades of ordination' including monastic, this changed, and in 1982 Sangharakshita suggested one level of ordination, namely *dharmachari*, for men, and *dharmacharini* for women (also see Bell, 1991:111, Bluck, 2006:153). A *dharmachari* or *dharmacharini* ordination is 'neither lay nor monastic', and a commonly used idiom is 'commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary' (Bluck, 2006:167,172, Vajragupta, 2010:108, Vishvapani, 2001:29-30). In practice, this means that Order members can be married or celibate, live in Buddhist communities or live with partners, alone, or with families (Cush, 1990:90, Sanghadevi, 1999:271, Vishvapani, 2001:30). They can work either in the Buddhist centres or associated 'Right Livelihood Businesses', or they can continue working

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[50] Sangharakshita was born Dennis Lingwood, but was given a Buddhist name following his Theravāda monastic ordination in India in 1949 (Bluck, 2006:152, Oliver, 1979:161, Vajragupta, 2010:2-3).

in the job they held prior to ordination, providing that it does not contradict the precepts that have been taken.[51] What is held in common, according to Vishvapani (2001:29), is that 'Order members have made going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha the centre of their lives'. Despite the potential for variation in living circumstances, Vajragupta (2010:69) notes that more recently there have been more Order members living what he calls 'a forest renunciate' lifestyle, and there have also been fewer people living within designated Triratna Buddhist communities (see also Bluck, 2006:171). In addition, according to my participants, most Order members will be vegetarian, unless health problems preclude this (see also Cush, 1990:94).

The ordination process in Triratna is described in detail, particularly by Moksananda (2004). On ordination, individuals take the three refuges (in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha) and subsequently follow ten precepts (also known as 'ethical principles' or 'ethical guidelines') (Bell, 1991:111, Bluck, 2006:167, Moksananda, 2004:22, Nagasuri, 2011:121, Vishvapani, 2001:31).[52] Ordinations commonly occur during several months of retreat, and this is often outside of UK at one of the designated retreat centres (Moksananda, 2004:13, Vishvapani, 2001:31).[53] There are two ordination ceremonies: firstly, a private ceremony involving only the candidate and their preceptor, which for women is a senior female order member (Moksananda, 2004:61, Vajragupta, 2010:107).[54] The second, a public ceremony, which occurs after a further period of silent retreat,

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[51] For a discussion of Triratna 'Right Livelihood Businesses' see Bluck (2006:170), Henry (2008) or Vajragupta (2010: Chapter 5).
[52] Bluck (2006:167) lists the ten precepts taken by ordained Triratna members and notes that they are not the same precepts taken by novice monastics (see also, Moksananda, 2004:116).
[53] My participants mentioned several places that have been used for women's ordinations, including Il Convento (Italy),Tiratanaloka (Wales), Butterstone (Scotland) and, most recently, the purpose-built women's retreat centre Akashavana (Spain) (Vajragupta, 2010:77). Ordination retreats are typically three months long for women, and four months for men. One of my participants informed me that this was because three months is seen as the most appropriate amount of time that women might be able to take away from their jobs and familial responsibilities.
[54] As Bell (1991:296) states, although the earliest ordinations to the WBO were conducted by Sangharakshita, in 1990 the women's wing of the Order began to conduct ordinations themselves and now it is only women who ordain other women. As Bluck (2006:156), Henry (2008: 237), Smith (2008:82) and Vajragupta (2010:126) note, since 2000, the leadership of the Order has been the responsibility of the College of Public Preceptors, rather than Sangharakshita himself. The College also have responsibility for ratifying all ordinations, ensuring uniformity and parity worldwide (Smith, 2008:82).

involves the welcoming of the newly ordained members into the Order community, and friends, family, and the Triratna community are invited (Moksananda, 2010:98, Vajragupta, 2010:107). A Pāli or Sanskrit name is selected for the newly ordained person by their preceptor, and is given during the private ceremony and announced during the public (Vajragupta, 2010:107, Vishvapani, 2001: 31). In addition, a mantra and a visualisation practice (*sādhana*) are also chosen by the ordinand (Bluck, 2006: 157, Cush, 1990:91, Moksananda, 2004:103).[55] Although Order members are not required to shave their heads or wear Buddhist robes, during the ordination retreat candidates are encouraged to wear blue, and I was told that some make their own blue robes from a pattern that is available within the Order to wear on the retreat. For formal and ritual occasions, *dharmacharinis* and *dharmacharis* wear a white *kesa* (which Bell, 1991:111 describes as a 'white silk stole') which has the Triratna emblem of 'the Three Jewels' embroidered on each end to symbolise the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha (Cush, 1990:91, Moksananda, 2004:71).

Initially, both men and women make a commitment to Triratna as a *mitra* (or friend) and then after a period of time, they might ask for ordination (Bell, 1991:112, Bluck, 2006: 157, Henry, 2008:268, Vajragupta, 2010:17, Vishvapani, 2001:33). The ordination process in Triratna is typically lengthier that the other groups considered in this study, and includes attending a series of 'retreats' (Bell, 1991: 113, Bluck 2006:157, Vishvapani, 2001:31). Some of my participants mentioned periods of approximately six years or more, although for some it was less depending on whether they were deemed ready by their *kalyana mitras*; two Order members who have been ordained for at least two years (Sanghadevi, 1999:271, Smith, 2008:82).[56] Some Order members choose subsequently to take *anagārika/ā* precepts, described as a strengthened version of their third precept to avoid sexual misconduct, although this is not a particularly wide-spread practice. Those who choose this path remain celibate, and an *anagārika/ā* in Triratna is described by Nagasuri (2011:121) as 'moving increasingly towards careerlessness, homelessness and possessionlessness' (see also, Vishvapani, 2001:39). There is an additional small ceremony, where the white *kesa* is placed on the shrine, and the

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[55] I was informed by one of my participants that, 'a *sādhana* here is a regular personal meditation practice, traditionally but not always the visualisation of an archetypal Buddha or *bodhisattva'*.
[56] In addition to the *kalyana mitras*, according to my participants, other 'Order friends' are also selected to form a *kula*; a group of people who provide support through the ordination process (see also Henry, 2008:266).

anagārika/ā takes a gold *kesa* in its place. There were 36 female *anagārikā* in Triratna at the time I conducted my fieldwork. In terms of ongoing organisational support following ordination, each *dharmachari* or *dharmacharini* is a member of a local 'chapter' and the importance of community is emphasised in the ordination (Moksananda, 2010:76, 78, Vishvapani, 2001:31). Order members may choose to live in a community of other Order members, typically, but not necessarily, single-sex, and they are encouraged to meet regularly with others, both at the Buddhist Centres where they might practise or teach and at annual national and international gatherings.

A feature of Triratna is that ordination, and any subsequent roles or opportunities, are equally available to both men and women (Maitreyi, 1997:120, Sanghadevi, 1999:271, Vishvapani, 2001:29). Although Vajragupta (2010:73, 109) is clear that both men and women 'have access to the teachings *(and)...*receive exactly the same ordination as men' he also shows that the FWBO initially had more male than female Order members and supporters (also see Bell, 1991:115). However, this has now changed and, according to Vajragupta (2010:76), there are now more women being ordained than men. At the time of my fieldwork, it was predicted that by 2014, there will be equal numbers of men and women in the Order, although I do not know whether this has actually occurred.[57] One of my participants informed me that, in April 2012, there were 362 *dharmacharinis* in the UK (and a further 177 outside of the UK, with many of these in India) which shows a significant increase from the sixty women that Bell (1991:115) identified as being ordained in 1990 (see also Bluck 2006:156, Henry, 2008:282). Although Bell (1991:113) states that in 1991, there were no female Chairs of FWBO Buddhist Centres in the UK, this has also changed, with a number of large Buddhist centres (including two women-only, and women-run, retreat centres, one of which Bell indicates) led by women.

An emphasis on single-sex activities (following Triratna's 'single-sex principle'; now referred to as the 'single-sex idea') is characteristic of Triratna (Bell, 1991:141, Bluck, 2006:170, Smith, 2008:96). Vishvapani (2001:34) describes the process of evolving women- and men-only 'activities' as 'experimental', but it is a feature that continues to be popular within Triratna, principally because working in this way is seen to be 'relatively free of sexual tension and distraction' and thus more beneficial to spiritual development (see also

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[57] This prediction was made following a survey of Triratna Order members in 2007. See Triratna (2009) and Vajragupta (2010:76). Also see Henry (2008:259).

Bell, 1991:139).[58] This is a point that Vajragupta (2010:77,79) makes nearly ten years later, however, he also highlights that the application of 'single-sex activities' has not been without difficulty and that currently 'a more relaxed practice' is operational, which endeavours to balance single-sex events with male and female interaction.

Despite this, Triratna has not been immune to controversy in relation to gender equality (Bluck, 2006:171, Coleman, 2001:144).[59] Highlighted by Vajragupta (2010:80-81) was an issue surrounding the publication of Subhuti's (1995) book, *Women, Men and Angels,* which was written to describe Sangharakshita's perspectives on gender and Buddhist practice and which 'gained the FWBO a reputation of being anti-women'. This text contended:

> *that women's biological conditioning made it harder for them to tread the earliest stages of the path to enlightenment* (Vajragupta, 2010:80).

Vishvapani (2010:81) highlights that the publication of this text certainly caused significant consternation, particularly amongst female Order members, with some deciding to no longer be involved with the WBO as a result. However, he also suggests that in allowing for discussion about the contents of this text, there was a 'positive side' which included frank dialogue about gender and 'feminism' in the movement, and that only a small percentage of Order members currently agree with the sentiments expressed by Subhuti (Vajragupta 2010: 82). I shall consider the attitudes of Triratna *dharmacharini* to this text, and also wider issues in relation to gender and feminism, in Chapter Eight.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed a selection of academic literature which considers the history, growth, and adaptation of Buddhism in contemporary Britain.

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[58] However, one of my participants highlighted that the idea of single-sex activities as 'free of sexual tension and distraction' would not be the case for lesbian, gay, or bisexual Triratna members. Instead, she stated that, 'the true function of single-sex activities is to afford everyone a break from the tendency to slip into traditional gender roles and see through the fixed-self views associated with them'.

[59] There have been other issues of controversy surrounding Triratna, and these are noted by Bluck (2006:155), Henry (2008:262), Smith (2008:82) and Vajragupta (2010:132-136).

In addition, I have given focused attention to the specific groups and traditions within which the participants in this study took ordination, and have explored key issues regarding ordination for women. This provides important context for the data in my study. I will refer to this literature throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapter Nine where I undertake an analysis of the British location and the ways in which it shapes the experiences and practices of ordained Buddhist women. In the next chapter, as a complement to the data relating to the particular Buddhist groups involved in this study, I examine issues relating to women and ordination in Buddhism more broadly, including an analysis of scholarly perspectives on ordained 'Western' women.

Chapter Two: Women and Buddhist Ordination

Introduction

The 1980s onwards was witness to a groundswell of academic interest in the subject of 'women and Buddhism' (Salgado, 2013:1). This coincided with an invigorated curiosity about the roles that women play (and how they are represented) within various religious traditions, buoyed by the second wave of the feminist movement (Chaves, 1997:46, Wilson, 1996:7). How women have been perceived and characterised throughout Buddhist history, alongside their experiences in contemporary Buddhist settings have been explored using textual, scriptural, historical, and archaeological modes of analysis, as well as through ethnographic work focusing on different Buddhist traditions in a range of geographic locations (Salgado, 2013:1).

Some scholars writing about women and Buddhism state that they are consciously feminist in orientation (for example, Gross, 1993), and indeed much has been written about the intersection between Buddhism and feminism (for example, Cheng, 2007, Kabilsingh, 1991, Klein, 1995, Koppedrayer, 2007, Schneiderman, 1999, Senf, 1996, Watson, 2003).[60] Yet others raise criticisms of what they perceive as a 'Western' feminist ideology underpinning scholarly work on women and Buddhism, arguing that it does not reflect adequately the perspectives of all Buddhist women, particularly those who do not have Western backgrounds (for example, Kawanami, 2013:5, Salgado, 2013:5). For this reason, there has been a more recent move by some to undertake work on gender and Buddhist practice using arguments embedded in post-colonial critiques (notably, Salgado, 2013).[61]

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[60] Much has also been written about the relationship between 'feminism', 'feminists' and various religious traditions other than Buddhism. For example, see Aune (2011), Braidotti (2008), Castelli (2001), Christ (2004), Cooey et al. (1996), Goldenberg (1979), Jasper (2001), King (1993), Plaskow (1977), Schussler Fiorenza (1983), Singh (2000).

[61] For a definition of 'gender' and a discussion of the terms 'sex' and 'gender', see Stanley (2002). For a useful summary of the relationships between post-colonialism, religion and gender, see Joy (2004) and Kwok (2005). Kwok (2005:2) provides a concise definition of 'post-colonial scholarship', stating that 'for many postcolonial critics, 'postcolonial' denotes not merely a temporal period or a political transition of power, but also a reading strategy and discursive practice that

Given, then, that the scope of scholarly work that could be incorporated into any review on 'women and Buddhism' is increasingly wide, my concern here is not to present an exhaustive synopsis of this subject area.[62] Instead, I will focus on appraising the academic scholarship which throws light on the subject of ordination for Buddhist women, with a particular emphasis on 'Western' women as this best relates to the data presented in the thesis.[63] In this chapter, I examine the theme of women and Buddhist ordination in three ways. I will first introduce female ordination (particularly monastic ordination) from a historical perspective particularly in relation to its origin in early Indian Buddhism. I will complement this by a discussion of the contemporary debates surrounding *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination. Next, I will examine the academic literature which considers the aims and motivations for Buddhist ordination, with attention to a selection of studies which focus on women. Finally, I will evaluate the ethnographic work which reflects upon 'Western' women who take ordination in Buddhist traditions, looking in particular at how their attitudes to gender equality and feminism are perceived. These areas of discussion reflect key themes that are considered within the thesis.

Women and Buddhist Ordination: An Historical Introduction and the Contemporary *Bhikkhunī/Bhikṣuṇī* Debate.

Ordination within Buddhism, and particularly monastic ordination, has certainly been given substantial academic attention.[64] Whilst it is not my intention to provide a complete account of the development of monastic and non-monastic ordination across the various Buddhist traditions as this would be beyond the scope

seeks to unmask colonial epistemological frameworks, unravel Eurocentric logics, and interrogate stereotypical cultural representations'.

[62] I have, for example, opted not to include a discussion of the ways in which women are represented in Buddhist texts. Whilst this might provide context, it was not an issue that I discussed in any depth with my participants and therefore its inclusion here would be unlikely to illuminate areas of central concern to the thesis. By way of brief context, the available literature in English attests to a plurality of representations of women in Buddhist texts, including in both Pāli Canon and Mahāyāna scriptural works (Appleton, 2011:51, Cabezon, 1992:viii, Derris, 2008:29, Faure, 2003:58, Gross, 1993:54, Harris, 1999a:49, Havnevik, 1989:27, Paul, 1985:303, Sponberg, 1992:4, Sujato, 2012:160, Tsomo, 1988b:22, 1999b:5, Walters, 1994:363, Williams, 2005:18).

[63] 'Western' and 'West' are terms which, according to some, should not be used uncritically (Barker and Rocha, 2011:10, Hinnells, 2000:8, Ploos van Amstel, 2005:18). However, they are adopted here, and in other sections of this thesis, when they are prevalent in the literature under consideration.

[64] For a summary of scholarly approaches see Tsomo (1996:11).

of this study, I will offer a brief summary of how monastic ordination was initiated by Siddhārtha Gautama (known as the *Buddha*), looking particularly at the origins of the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* order.

As Gethin (1998:87) states, the early ordinations of male followers of the Buddha were modest and occurred 'without much ceremony'. Although the Buddha's first two supporters remained lay-men, when he later met five former acquaintances and delivered to them his early teachings, it was these five who were formally ordained as monks (Prebish, 2007:653). As Prebish (2007:653) further explains,

> *Buddha accomplished this with a simple exhortation of "Come, O Monk"*
> *(ehi bhikṣu). Thus the monastic order, or sangha, was born and within a*
> *short period this monastic community expanded rapidly and enormously.*

Although the first ordinations for men occurred as a result of this 'simple exhortation', as the *saṅgha* (monastic community) grew, the method and process of ordination was made more elaborate (Prebish, 2007:653). Lopez (2001:145) identifies that, following the Buddha's death, ordination (for men) consisted of 'going forth, or becoming a novice' (*pabbajjā*) and then later the 'full ordination' (*upasampadā*). To 'go forth' and become a *bhikkhu* (monk) or a *bhikkhunī* (nun) involved relinquishing marriage and sexual relationships, ceasing working for money and instead being reliant on alms donated by lay supporters; ultimately 'leaving the household life and entering a state of homelessness' (Tsomo, 1999a:5).[65] A detailed history of the development of the Buddhist monastic order (for men and women) is provided by Wijayaratna (1990, 2010).

A large number of discussions about the beginnings of the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* order exist within the scholarly literature (for example, Bancroft, 1987, Harvey, 1990:221-224, 2000:392-400, Murcott, 1991, Schuster Barnes, 1987, Sujato, 2006, Tsomo, 1988a, 2006, Williams, 2005). The origins story which is most commonly cited took place several years after the Buddha's enlightenment and his ordinations of male monks, when his step-mother, Mahāpajāpatī, along with five hundred of her female followers asked to be ordained as *bhikkhunī*. The Buddha is said to have been reluctant and to have

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[65] Although, as Silber (1981:170) highlights, the initial model for ordained Buddhist life was that of the 'wandering mendicant' (only resting in one place during the annual rains retreat, or *vassa*), this shifted as more stable monastic communities developed (see also Conze, 1982:20-21, Lopez, 2001:130-1, Prebish, 2007:654).

initially refused, requiring his assistant and cousin, Ānanda, to convince him to acquiesce to Mahāpajāpatī's request (Harvey, 2000:384, Schuster Barnes, 1987:107, Tsomo, 1996).[66] After his agreement, the *Vinaya*[67] texts show the Buddha stating that, with the addition of a women's order, the length of time in which his *sāsana* (or teachings) would be extant would be shortened (Harvey, 2000:385).[68]

At this point, in order to ameliorate this, the Buddha was argued to have initiated a set of additional rules for the *bhikkhunī* (variously known as the '8 Heavy Rules', the '8 Special Rules' or *garudhamma/gurudharma*) (Harvey, 2000:388).[69] These rules arguably placed the nuns as inferior to the monks and even the most senior nun would have a lower position in the hierarchy than a novice monk (Hüsken, 2010:135). It is said that when Mahāpajāpatī agreed, an order of *bhikkhunī* was thus instigated by the Buddha, later to be transmitted from India to Sri Lanka, to China and beyond (Barnes, 2000, Tsomo, 2006).[70] Yet, although the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination continues to exist in China, Taiwan, Korea and Vietnam, a female order was seemingly never transmitted to Tibet, Thailand or Cambodia, and the *bhikkhunī* lineage died-out in Sri Lanka from the 11th Century, and in Burma/Myanmar from the 13th (Kawanami, 2007:229).[71]

Despite this, there have been high-profile moves to reinstate the Theravāda *bhikkhunī saṅgha,* with Mahāyāna *bhikṣuṇī* assisting in the conferral of ordinations (for example, in the USA in 1988, India and Sri Lanka in 1996, Bodhgaya in 1998,

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[66] That Mahāpajāpatī was the first *bhikkhunī* is disputed by Williams (2005:10). Williams also argues against reading the Buddha's initial refusal to ordain Mahāpajāpatī as evidence that he did not want women to lead renunciant lives. Instead, Williams asserts that a refusal is a means by which to strengthen intention. See Krey (2010) for a detailed analysis of Williams' perspective and a criticism of her key points.

[67] *Vinaya* refers to the monastic code, which I will discuss in Chapter Three.

[68] Anālayo (2013:120) argues that idea of 'decline' being concomitant with the *bhikkhunī* order is likely to be a later addition into the texts rather than the words of the Buddha, reinforcing a position also taken by other scholars which he cites.

[69] Some scholars argue that the *garudhamma* were later additions and are not directly attributable to the Buddha. For example, see Bancroft (1987:83), Tsomo (1999b:27), and discussion in Tomalin (2009:88). For a detailed analysis of the *garudhamma*, and the debates surrounding their origin, see Hüsken (2010).

[70] For women as for men, initially there was no novice ordination, as this developed subsequently (Wijayaratna, 2010:31). Additionally, for women, there is a further stage of 'probationary' nun (*sikkhamānā/śikṣamāṇā)*; a two-year period following the initial noviciate (Wijayaratna, 2010:38, Wu, 2001:100).

[71] See Auer Falk (2001) for an often cited perspective on the causes of the extinction of the *bhikkhunī* order in India.

and in the United States in 1997).[72] However, these ordinations, sometimes referred to as 'full' or 'higher' ordination, have inspired consternation and dispute from within some quarters (see, for example, discussions in Anālayo, 2013, Bodhi, 2010:99, Fenn and Koppedrayer, 2008:58, Kawanami, 2007:228, Sasson, 2010, Tomalin, 2006, 2009:92). Critics argue that the *bhikkhunī* lineage is impossible to (re)establish in accordance with the Theravāda tradition with assistance from Mahāyāna *bhikṣuṇī*. They see these *bhikṣuṇī* as following a different *Vinaya,* and valid ordinations cannot be held unless there are the requisite numbers of both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* presiding over the ceremony, connecting back to the Buddha through a continuous lineage of monastic inheritance (see discussions in Anālayo, 2013, Bartholomeusz, 1994:15, Seeger, 2006 (2008), Sujato, 2006).[73] However, some supporters of the *bhikkhunī* ordination, such as Bodhi (2010) and Sujato (2006:14), argue that, as the ordination of women was initiated by the Buddha and the monks order, it is theoretically possible to authentically revive the lineage including via a single (male) *saṅgha* ordination. Others have highlighted that, as the *bhikṣuṇī* lineage was originally transmitted to China by Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī*, it is possible to collaborate to return it without the lineage inheritance being considered broken (see Kabilsingh, 1991:18, 31, and discussion in Kawanami, 2007:227, Tomalin, 2009: 92, and Anālayo, 2013:123).

Notwithstanding this debate about *bhikkhunī* ordination, what is most commonly available for women within the Theravāda tradition is either to remain a committed lay-woman, or to take between 8-10 precepts and become a *mae chi/chee/ji* (Thailand), a *thiláshin* (Myanmar), a *don chee* (Cambodia), a *dasa sil mātā* (Sri Lanka), or a *maekhao* (Laos). As *bhikkhunī* follow 311 precepts (and lay Buddhists generally follow five), these women have been described as holding a 'marginalised' or 'ambiguous' official position by a number of scholars (Kabilsingh, 1988:228, Lindberg Falk, 2007:8, Salgado, 1996:62, Tomalin, 2006:387, Tsomo, 2010:87). Some have even asserted that women taking 8-10 precepts within countries such as Thailand are akin to 'servants' within monastic

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[72] See Kawanami (2007:227) who cites Li (2000), for a description of the 1990s ordinations in Sri Lanka and Bodhgaya, and Tomalin (2009:90-92) who discusses the revival of the *bhikkhunī* ordination, particularly in relation to Thailand. Importantly, whilst these are the most frequently cited contemporary moves towards the re-establishment of the *bhikkhunī saṅgha*, Kawanami (2007:230) highlights that there had been earlier efforts in Myanmar and Thailand from the 1920s onwards.

[73] Harvey (1990:225) provides a concise description of the different monastic codes of the *Theravāda, Mūlasarvāstivāda,* and *Dharmaguptaka.*

institutions (Williams 2005:199). Others indicate that these institutional circumstances have the potential for a deleterious effect both on the opportunities available for women, in terms of religious education, prospects for practice and study, and in their broader social standing (Kabilsingh, 1991, Khuankaew, 2002, Tomalin, 2006, 2009:84, Tsomo, 2010:103). Although the rationale given by individual women for wanting to re-establish 'full' ordination for women will inevitably be varied, Tsomo (1988a:215-216) has argued that it is 'a tremendous opportunity for advancement on the path' and that without it, 'women are at a distinct disadvantage'. As Tomalin (2009:84, 2013:111) suggests, amongst some women, support might be articulated in terms of a 'feminist' motivation for equality of opportunity, although she indicates this is by no means universal.

However, the arguably negative image of women who have taken 8-10 precepts is increasingly being questioned by some scholars (Cook, 2010, Kawanami, 2013, Lindberg Falk, 2007, Salgado, 2013, Seeger, 2009, 2010, 2013). Whilst cognisant of the differences in the opportunities available for ordination between men and women, these scholars question the idea that women who have not taken full *bhikkhunī* ordination are unilaterally unable to achieve spiritually, or are always perceived by the laity or male monastics in less than positive terms. In addition, it has been suggested that the aspiration to take *bhikkhunī* ordination does not motivate all women who currently hold 8-10 precepts, even where it is currently available (Salgado, 2013, Sasson, 2010:80-83, Fenn and Koppedrayer, 2008:61, Lindberg Falk, 2007, Kawanami, 2013:235). The reasons given for this are varied, although Kawanami (2013:235) indicates that in her study of *thiláshin* in Myanmar, most did not seek *bhikkhunī* ordination because this might 'jeopardize the position they already had in society' including impacting on existing associations with the laity and male monastics. Sasson (2010:80-82) also discusses a number of reasons why Sri Lankan *dasa sil mātā* might not champion *bhikkhunī* ordination, including 'doctrinal arguments' about the legitimacy of re-establishing the *bhikkhunī* order, negative impressions about the existing *bhikkhunī saṅgha*, and worries about 'challenging institutional authority'. However, a concern about ongoing financial resources (that many were wary of rejecting if they sought an ordination which was not fully accepted by the populace) was given some priority (Sasson, 2010:80).

The ordination situation is different for women in Tibetan traditions, for whom the full *bhikṣuṇī* (*gelongma*) ordination is also not currently available in accordance with the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*. There is an on-going debate about

the establishment of a *bhikṣuṇī* lineage within the Tibetan schools, the various ways in which this might be achieved, and the benefits of taking such a step (Chodron, n.d.-a, Gyatso, 2010, Mohr and Tsedroen, 2010). I have discussed what is available for women in the Tibetan tradition in Britain in the previous chapter. Although *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination remains an issue to be cognisant of in relation to women practicing within the Tibetan and Theravāda traditions (and is one that has occupied a great deal of scholarly time) it is not relevant to the situation for women in all Buddhist groups involved in this study, such as the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, Amida Trust, or Triratna who comprise over half of my participants. Therefore, it is important that this issue does not dominate the discussion about female ordination in Buddhism, and it is vital to recognise, as I detailed in the previous chapter, the range of opportunities for ordination available to women across different Buddhist traditions. Therefore, I will not delve into more narrative detail about *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination here, but will discuss how it specifically pertains to the women involved in this study in Chapter Eight.

Ordination: Aims and Motivations

Asking questions about motivation, particularly in relation to celibate, monastic ordination, has occupied a number of scholars and is an enquiry that often features in ethnographic studies of monks and nuns (for example, Chodron and Kacho, 2001, Cook, 2010, Crane, 2004, Goswell, 1988, Gutschow, 2001, 2004, Havnevik, 1989, Kawanami, 2013, Lindberg Falk, 2007, Ploos van Amstel, 2005, Spiro, 1982). When examining the academic literature in relation to the perceived aims of Buddhist (monastic) ordination, several prominent themes arise. Cantwell and Kawanami (2002:45) state:

> *Integral to Buddhism from the start, most Buddhist schools view monasticism as a superior way of life since it enables its members to avoid worldly concerns and concentrate single-mindedly on spiritual practice.*

A person does not, strictly speaking, have to be an ordained monastic in order to make 'spiritual progress' in Buddhism (Bluck, 2006:187, see also, Bodhi, 2010:100,

Numrich, 2009:64, Schober, 2007:360, Sharma, 1977:242).[74] However, according to Conze (1982:20), 'the purpose of the Vinaya rules was to provide the ideal conditions for meditation and renunciation'.

The suggestion that one reason to ordain might be increased 'time', 'freedom' and 'space' to follow 'the *Dhamma/Dharma*' (the teachings of the Buddha) is apparent within the literature, including in the written testimonies of some Western nuns (Chodron, 1999:xxxi, Chodron and Kacho, 2001:41, Ploos van Amstel, 2005:73, Shaw, 2008, Tsomo, 1988c:297, 1988f:56, 2006). Indeed, as Tsedroen (1988:205), a German *bhikṣuṇī* in the Tibetan tradition, asserts, 'being ordained is something which should make life very easy, giving time for the practice and spread of the *Dharma'*. Chodron (1999:xxxi), an American *bhikṣuṇī* also in the Tibetan tradition supports this and states, 'taking ordination is a reflection of our inner decision to make our spiritual practice the centre of our life'.

However, as Lopez (2001:139) argues, 'men and women enter the order with a wide range of motivations'. In the same vein, Tsomo (1988a:58) indicates multiple issues that might motivate someone to ordain, and these include so-called 'mundane' explanations, such as 'poverty' and 'death of a loved one', as well as difficulties at work or in relationships. Although she states that, 'in some countries, frankly speaking, ordination is seen as an above-average job opportunity' she does emphasise that the common justification for ordination includes 'a sincere wish to practice the Buddhist teachings full-time' (Tsomo, 1988f:58). Tsomo (1988c:297) also emphasises this rationale when discussing ordination for those living in the West.

Cook (2010:67) identifies wide-ranging rationales given by her (male and female) participants in a Northern Thai monastery and argues that this is because 'monastics constitute a heterogeneous category and in any given community, motivation for monastic commitment and experience of monastic life will be varied'. These included educational aspirations and promises made to family members during times of ill-health, as well as those with a more spiritual flavour. However, despite this, Cook (2010:6) states that ultimately 'ordination is conceptualized as an opportunity to 'do work' on oneself through meditation.' Similarly, Kawanami (2013:45) in her study of *thiláshin* in Myanmar gives focused attention to the rationales of her participants, including that, for a few of the

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[74] However, Lopez (2004:270) does state 'to attain the final goal of Buddhahood it is absolutely essential to become a monk.'

women who became nuns later in life, taking these vows were 'a convenient way to escape abuse and drudgery'.[75] However, Kawanami (2013:54), drawing on the testimony of one of her participants, clearly acknowledges that there are a range of possible motivations which are cited by women. These are divided into four chief factors: 'fear', 'desire', 'knowledge' and 'faith' (Kawanami, 2013:54). Whilst 'fear' included stark concerns about getting married or giving birth, 'knowledge' or 'education' motivated others, particularly those at a younger age, as some were driven by an ambition to study Buddhist texts in order to eventually be '*dhamma* teachers' (Kawanami, 2013:52, 61, 68). However, for at least one of the participants in Kawanami's study, living as a *thiláshin* is a 'much more meaningful and a worthy way of living' (Kawanami, 2013:74).[76] In addition, Kawanami (2013:52) highlights:

> *women's renunciatory motives tend to be more philosophical compared to those of men. Many of my nun informants alluded retrospectively to the urge to escape 'suffering', an essential Buddhist concept, as a primary motive for their decisions to leave the secular world.[77]*

Whilst I will not be undertaking a comparative analysis of ordained women and men's motivations in Britain, Kawanami's in-depth examination of the variety of forces that might influence an individual decision to commit to renunciant life (and how these might differ between individuals) provokes key questions that I will consider in relation to my participants in Chapter Six.

Like Kawanami, Cheng (2007:101) also challenges the idea that women who choose to become nuns are driven solely by 'social' incentives. Indeed, she warns scholars not to falsely attribute a mundane rationale solely to women, and states 'generalizations about nuns' renunciation should be avoided'. In Cheng's

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[75] The wish to 'avoid the hardships and suffering in lay life' is also recognised as a motivation for some Tibetan women to become nuns, as noted by Havnevik (1989:154, 155, 157), although she too indicates the multiple reasons for ordination that are possible, including for 'a religious career' and to deepen Buddhist practice.

[76] This point is emphasised by Salgado (2013:15) who argues that the Sri Lankan renunciant women she interviewed were not typically motivated to follow a religious path because of a lack of opportunity, and that 'renunciation is not the *only* means of "livelihood" or "vocation" open to them.'

[77] The prominence of 'suffering' in the motivations for ordination for Kawanami's participants is also noted by Havnevik (1989:157) amongst Tibetan nuns. Havnevik (1989:157) argues that, because 'suffering' is central to Buddhist teaching (as I discussed earlier in this chapter), the wish to investigate it, 'is considered the most legitimate motivation' for ordination. Additionally, the investigation of suffering and what it means was also a key feature of the narratives of renunciant women in Sri Lanka, as presented by Salgado (2013:10). This will be further explored in relation to the data in my study in Chapter Six.

(2007:107) study of nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka, she argues that, in many cases, women turned to monasticism because they 'wanted to live a spiritual life' and were 'convinced by the *Dharma*'. This is also recognised by Gutschow (2001:207) who states, 'the religious life remains a vocational opportunity which offers women relative freedom to pursue study and contemplation'. Further problematizing the idea that women choose to become nuns because they 'have failed in the world', Crane (2004:266-267) in her study of women who take monastic ordination in Taiwan, argues strongly that those she interviewed had 'bright futures' and had not necessarily experienced extreme poverty or hardship and indeed, had achieved career, and corresponding social, accomplishments. She asserts that the prime motivation for this section of Taiwanese women was spiritual; expressly removing oneself from being 'stuck in the wheel of reincarnation' (Crane, 2004:273). However, she highlights that this was experienced in conjunction with a strong feeling of not wanting to get married, as she presents marriage as being the sole socially acceptable option for women in this context. This leads Crane (2004:273-277) to argue that 'this desire to resist marriage is a major motivation for many of the young women in Taiwan today who become nuns.'[78]

In addition to these predominantly ethnographic studies, a discussion of motivations for ordination also features in textual studies, such as those undertaken by Wijayaratna (1990) and Sharma (1977). Wijayaratna (1990:12) identifies the potential for both 'negative' and 'positive' stimuli for men and women taking monastic vows, and Sharma (1977:141), in an analysis of the narratives within the *Therigatha* poems within the Pāli Canon, discusses various push-and-pull factors which influenced women either being 'drawn towards' or 'moved towards' Buddhism, both in their reasons for conversion and ordination.[79] However, Sharma (1977:249) does emphasise that, ultimately, more women were attracted to the Buddha's teachings rather than seeking to escape 'domestic drudgery and domestic

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[78] The concern about marriage and child-bearing is also highlighted by Gutschow (2004:136) in her study of nuns in Zangskar.

[79] The Pāli Canon refers to the body of texts written down in the centuries following the death of the Buddha which are traditionally revered by those who practice within the Theravāda tradition (see Harvey, 1990:3, 322-324 for more detail about the Buddhist Canons). The *Therigatha* is a series of poems within the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka* of the Pāli Canon (see Norman, 1997). The verses are said to have female authorship and they depict the spiritual achievements of early female followers of the Buddha, including his step-mother, Mahāpajāpatī. Much scholarly attention has been given to the *Therigatha*. For a useful analysis of this see Collett (2006).

tragedy'. She writes that, 'they were looking perhaps more often for a handshake, and less often for a helping hand' (Sharma, 1977:250).

In terms of ordained Buddhists in the British context, Goswell (1988) devotes a chapter of her PhD thesis to detailing the reasons why men and women might take ordination in the Forest Sangha, which, as I will explore in Chapter Six, are similar to the narratives provided by the participants in my study. Following on from her analysis of the reasons for initial attraction to Buddhism, Goswell (1988:2/19, 3/8-9) describes the reasons for seeking ordination, in particular the concern that 'worldly goals' are not ultimately rewarding, leading to a feeling of being 'dissatisfied with what lay life offered', and a sense that monasticism offered a practical alternative. Whilst she doesn't actively analyse her data in this area through a gender lens (although she does identify specific comments made by individual *sīladharā*), she states that men and women cited both 'rational' and 'intuitive, emotional, almost unconscious impulses' as explanations for their wish to take ordination within the Forest Sangha tradition (Goswell, 1988:2/122). Of those that she considers 'rational', Goswell (1988:2/123-125) includes unhappiness with 'worldly life', a desire to concentrate on Buddhist practice, particularly meditation and a 'need for discipline'. Of the 'intuitive and emotional' she lists the lure of community members (which she calls 'a tremendous emotional attraction'), a 'sense of vocation' and, for some a feeling that the path of the monastic was an inexorable and 'inevitable' part of their spiritual journey (Goswell, 1988:2/130-136). Ultimately though, the participants in Goswell's study emphasise that a monastic lifestyle and community was the most effective context for Buddhist practice, providing the necessary structure particularly for meditation and to gain some 'relief from suffering' (Goswell, 1988:2/19, 3/8).[80] She also identifies that the reactions of some families to ordination was not always wholly positive, and indeed the feelings that arose for certain individuals during, and following, ordination were complex, and included happiness, but also anxiety at the change of lifestyle, which she states some novices describe as 'a sense of impending death, dying to the world' (Goswell, 1988:2/134). Although she is cognisant of the differences between individuals within her sample, she summarises their motivation in general terms as follows:

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[80] In a chapter on the *sīladharā* order in Britain, Shaw (2008:160) also makes a similar point about the strong desire to focus on Buddhist practice as a motivating factor for ordination.

The simplicity of life, its wholesomeness, discipline and form seemed incredibly beautiful, sane and practical to many, and it was seen by the heart as an opportunity to go deeper into oneself (Goswell, 1988:3/10).

In her study of Western nuns in the Tibetan schools, Ploos Van Amstel (2005:83-85) also considers the rationales that women gave for ordination. Her study does not devote as detailed attention to the issue as Goswell and it is not always easy to distinguish the precise geographical location of her participants for specific analysis. However, she does make certain points that are relevant for this study. Although Ploos Van Amstel (2005:83) notes that there is a variety in her participants' pathways to ordination, she argues that 'on a spiritual level', there are profound similarities within the narratives she collected. This includes the desire to give greater focused attention to Buddhist practice, a recurring theme in the literature, and it was seen as a means by which to best 'help all sentient beings' (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:83). In addition, she notes that, in describing their decision to ask for ordination, several of her participants used what she calls 'dharma jargon', highlighting that some felt that they had either been nuns or had a link with their teacher in a past life (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:83).

A discussion of the literature in relation to motivation for ordination raises important issues for this study, not least because my second research question is 'why ordain and what does it mean in this context?' In order to answer this question, in Chapter Six I will focus on the decision to ordain and the journey that my participants take to reach this decision and I will conduct a comparative analysis between the data I collected and evidence from other studies, which include those in Britain and beyond. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the literature on ordained Western women in Buddhism, focusing particularly on their representation in ethnographic studies.

Ordained Western Women and Buddhism

There are a number of detailed scholarly studies of ordained Buddhist women, rooted in various geographic contexts and which utilise ethnographic methods of data collection and analysis. For example, in relation to Myanmar/Burma (Kawanami, 2007, 2010, 2013), Japan (Arai, 1999), Laos (Tsomo, 2010), Sri Lanka (Bartholomeusz, 1994, Cheng, 2007, Salgado, 1996, 2004, 2013, Sasson, 2010), Taiwan (Cheng, 2003, Crane, 2004), Thailand (Cook, 2010,

Kabilsingh, 1991, Lindberg Falk, 2007), Tibet (Havnevik, 1989, Mackley, 2005, Tsomo, 1987, Willis, 1995),Vietnam (Freeman, 1987), Zangskar (Gutschow, 2001, 2004).

Yet, despite this interest in female ordination, in 1999, Chodron (1999:xxvi) identified a paucity of research into Buddhist ordination in a Western context and, six years later, Ploos Van Amstel (2005:27) noted that there was still little academic attention to Western women who had ordained in Tibetan traditions. Even though Chodron made this initial statement some fifteen years ago, it continues to be applicable especially to Britain. Whilst there have been a limited number of qualitative studies which mention ordained women in Britain (particularly in the Theravāda/Forest Sangha) which I discussed in Chapter One, more generally Western women who take a Buddhist ordination remain under-researched subjects. However, ordained Western women are mentioned in some of the studies which I cited at the start of this section, including Bartholomeusz (1994), Havnevik (1989), Kawanami (2007) and Salgado (2013). In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore this literature alongside studies undertaken by Ploos Van Amstel (2005) and Williams (2005) which look at female ordination within a single Buddhist tradition over a wider geographical area, and I will consider the ways in which Western women who take Buddhist ordinations are represented. Together with the literature on ordained Buddhist women in Britain which I discussed in Chapter One, this will identify a series of important questions for my thesis, particularly in relation to my participant's attitudes towards gender equality and feminism which are under consideration in Chapter Eight.[81]

In her much-cited work which focuses on Sri Lankan Buddhist *dasa sil mātā* ('lay nuns' who have taken 8-10 precepts), Bartholomeusz (1994) gives some

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[81] While there is a blurring between 'academic' and 'practitioner' in some writing about Western Buddhist women (which is no doubt paralleled in scholarship about other religious traditions) my interest here will primarily be on texts written for an academic audience. This includes those studies which are rooted in an ethnographic methodology as this will best contextualise my own research. As Ploos Van Amstel (2005:27) notes, there are other texts written by, and about, Western women who have taken Buddhist ordination, such as meditation guides and Buddhist teachings (for example, Chodron 2004, Khema 1998), as well as biographies and autobiographies of high-profile Western Buddhist women, some of whom are ordained (for example, Haas, 2013, Jiyu-Kennett, 2002, Mackenzie, 1998). Whilst these can be fruitful sources of information, it is beyond the scope of this research to analyse them in sufficient detail. I will, however, reflect on evidence drawn from first-person writing about the experience of Buddhist monastic life for women in the West both in this section and throughout the thesis (for example, Chodron, 1996, 2000, Palmo, 1999, Tsedroen, 1988, Tsomo, 1988c).

attention to Western women who have taken ordination and who live in Sri Lanka. Although she is concerned not to polarise 'western' and 'Sinhala' *dasa sil mātā* too strictly, she does draw a noticeable division between these two groups (Bartholomeusz, 1994:156, 174). Bartholomeusz (1994:156) states that this distinction is made because 'their background and outlook are radically different'.[82] Here, a Western nun is depicted as someone who is concerned more typically with furthering her individual meditative practice as opposed to the approach of 'service and devotion' of the Sinhala nuns (Bartholomeusz 1994:170). This is a point also made by Schneiderman (1999:234) in relation to Western Buddhist nuns in Nepal, and, to a certain extent, Chodron (2000:82) who, as a Western Buddhist nun herself, asserts that a Western cultural heritage is likely to foster a more 'individualistic' attitude (see also Klein, 1995:xvii, Wetzel, 1988:311). As a consequence, Bartholomeusz (1994:171) identifies that this translates into a distinct antipathy between these two social groups, arguing that;

> *most of the Western lay nuns I interviewed implied that the practice of their Sinhala counterparts is too lax, and thus inappropriate for the life of the world-renouncer.*

Bartholomeusz (1994:180) attributes this perspective to the influence of 'Protestant Buddhism', as highlighted by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988), and asserts that 'western lay nuns approach the religion as a rational philosophy'.

In some ways, a similar picture of Western nuns can be drawn from Havnevik's (1989) study, which focuses on nuns in Tibet and Tibetan exiled communities in India. Like Bartholomeusz, Havnevik also draws boundaries between groupings of Western and Tibetan women and nuns. She presents 'western Buddhist women' interacting with Tibetan communities in India as frequently influenced by 'feminist ideas', and as attempting to translate these ideas to Tibetan cultural settings to try to ameliorate their concerns about the status of Tibetan women in society (Havnevik 1989:190-191). As a result, she highlights that Western women (both ordained, and lay) are often at the forefront of transforming 'Tibetan culture' to allow for increased space for ordained women's practice, improved educational opportunities, and have championed *bhikṣuṇī* ordination (Havnevik, 1989:192, 195, 199). Whilst she does identify Tibetan

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[82] This is a point also made in more general terms by Bancroft (1987:95), who attributes the difference between 'Western' and 'Asiatic' nuns primarily to differing educational levels and styles. Although, problematically over-generalising, she identifies that 'Westerners', as a result of this education, have 'enquiring minds'.

women working to this end she highlights 'the western nuns have made some of the problems visible' (Havnevik, 1989:194).

However, she indicates that some Western nuns have struggled to create satisfactory lives for themselves in Tibetan nunneries in India, and she identifies that 'the drop-out rate for western nuns seems to be somewhat higher than that of western monks', attributing this in part to a desire for independence (Havnevik, 1989:191). Reversing the impression given in Bartholmeusz's study, Havnevik highlights that, it is the Western nuns that are sometimes perceived by the Tibetan laity as lax (particularly in relation to monastic dress), and they are portrayed as at times bringing an attitude of 'aggressiveness and… open criticism of the Tibetan tradition' because of their concerns about a lack of gender equality (Havnevik, 1989:193 and 204, see also Wetzel, 1988:310) .

Ploos Van Amstel (2005:17), in her study investigating Western nuns in Tibetan traditions across various geographic settings, also considers this potential culture clash and the issues that provoke 'tensions and problems' between Western practitioners and their adopted Tibetan religious tradition.[83] Like Havnevik, Ploos Van Amstel (2005:179) points out that there is an influence of 'feminist ideas' on 'Western nuns' in Tibetan traditions, and whilst she does not analyse this in any depth, she does state that none of the nuns in her sample labelled themselves 'feminist'. However, at the same time, she assumes that there is a palpable influence from feminism on Western women, including those who become nuns in Tibetan traditions:

> *Western women experience the growing freedom for women in Western countries, or at least they live in countries whose society and culture are affected by feminist thought* (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:189).

Most likely as a result of this influence, she states that the Western nuns she interviewed stated that they wanted to avoid having to 'submit to a male hierarchy – and authority again' and they remained concerned about gender 'inequality' (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:21, 179). She agrees with Havnevik on a number of points, including that Western nuns (and, indeed, Western women in general) have had a noticeable effect on the promotion of gender equality within Tibetan

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[83] I have introduced Ploos Van Amstel (2005)'s work in Chapter One and mentioned her earlier in this chapter in relation to motivation for ordination. In this section I will refer principally to her more general points on Western nuns and their relationship to Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Buddhism, and that they are not always described by members of the Tibetan laity in positive terms (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:23,153). However, she also identifies that a desire for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination was not as much a universal preoccupation as she might have expected, and she consciously draws attention to diversity between Western nuns in Tibetan traditions, both in attitudes, experiences, motivations and living situations (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:23, 28, 139, 196). In addition, in a quotation from one of her participants, she alludes to a perceived tension between Buddhist practice and 'feministic things' and 'politics' for at least for one of the nuns she interviewed, particularly in relation to getting involved with international networks for women in Buddhism (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:146). However, whilst she does not explore this tension in detail, she does state;

> *Several of the nuns reported coming to the conclusion that one can have feminist values without necessarily having to be dogmatic about these values* (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:192).

Ploos Van Amstel (2005:149,153) maintains that there are valid distinctions to be made between Western and ethnically Tibetan nuns, particularly in relation to their 'values', and she consistently uses and reinforces the 'Western' label, despite also recognising its limitations as a category and the lack of coherent 'group' identity between the nuns that she studied. For example, she states,

> *Western women have their Western upbringing, Western education, and Western surroundings. Values such as democracy, gender equality, and responsibility for environmental and social problems turn out to be deeply rooted when the individual is subsequently confronted with another culture's values or manners of expressing these values* (Ploos Van Amstel 2005:21).

In addition, she argues that Western nuns in Tibetan traditions are 'on the margins' and are self-determining individuals with 'strong personalities' (Ploos van Amstel, 2005:128).[84] The impact of this is, she suggests, is that to a certain extent they are 'in-between Western and Tibetan culture' (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:195), something that is also identified by Chodron (1996:230).

The idea that some Western women (either ordained or lay) might find it difficult to accept what they perceive as unequal gender roles within certain Buddhist communities is a point also made strongly by Williams (2005) in her PhD

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[84] This point is also strongly made by Chodron (2000:82) who asserts that 'a Western woman who cares about what others think about her is not going to become a Buddhist nun. A woman who becomes a Buddhist nun is more likely to be self-sufficient and self-motivated.'

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study which considers the opportunities for women within Theravāda Buddhist communities including Thailand, Sri Lanka, Britain, the United States and Australia. Although her PhD study uses textual analysis, she does draw on interview data with contemporary Buddhists, including ordained women, and she alludes to 'the tensions between Buddhism and Western cultural assumptions', particularly in relation to feminism (Williams, 2005:198). She argues that that Western women's ideas about the validity of feminism and the promotion of gender equality can be a point of contention when they become involved in Buddhist groups (Williams 2005: 198-9). Williams (2005:19) states;

> *Western women often find the cultural aspects of traditional Buddhism in conflict with their ideas of freedom of expression, human rights and gender equality.*

Williams (2005:234) argues that, particularly in a Western cultural setting, some women have attempted to challenge 'the inferior role assigned to renunciate women by Eastern tradition'. This idea of Western women raising concerns about elements of Buddhist structural hierarchy and concomitant gender roles as they are transmitted to the West is also mentioned within several first-person accounts written by Western Buddhist nuns, such as Tsedroen (1988:203) and Chodron (2001:37), both of whom have ordained within the Tibetan tradition (and who have taken *bhikṣuṇī* ordination).

However, both Chodron and Tsedroen are quick to point out that there should be limits to this 'questioning' of tradition, and Chodron (2000:93) states that 'Western nuns do not seek to change Buddhism, however, but to be changed by Buddhism'. Furthermore, Tsedroen (1988:208) asserts:

> *the question of becoming ordained is totally unrelated to and should not be confused with that of striving for equal rights in a worldly sense. The decision should be motivated solely by an aspiration to be freed from cyclic existence.*

Williams (2005:217) highlights that that lay and ordained Western women in the Theravāda tradition may have varying perspectives on gender equality and she argues that, 'many of the Western nuns express no wish for higher ordination and stress that the practice of the *Dhamma* is what is important' (Williams 2005:217), mirroring the point made by Ploos Van Amstel which I discussed earlier.[85]

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[85] I discussed this issue in relation to the *sīladharā* in the Forest Sangha in Britain in Chapter One.

In some contrast to this, Kawanami (2013:7) argues that, 'many Western Buddhist nuns and feminist scholars' are in fact, 'preoccupied with secular power and formal status within the institutional structure'. The focus of Kawanami's research is on the *thiláshin* in Myanmar/Burma (women who have taken 8-10 precepts), and she draws a distinction between 'Western Buddhist nuns', and 'Asian nuns' who she states are more concerned with 'fulfilling their religious duties and serving the community' (Kawanami, 2007:242, 2013:8). Kawanami (2013:8) directly supports the argument made earlier by Bartholomeusz that 'Western Buddhist nuns…are primarily interested in their personal spiritual development' as opposed to practicing within, and supporting, the existing structures within established Buddhist communities.

That there may be variation between the attitudes of Buddhist women influenced by different cultural locations is a point that can be discerned in the work of Salgado (2013). Although Salgado's (2013:1) recent book, as she herself indicates, is not principally a work of ethnography, it is worth some attention here because she seeks to raise questions about different trajectories of thought amongst Buddhist renunciant women and the scholars who write about them. Through this, I argue, a particular impression of 'Western' nuns can be ascertained. By way of context, Salgado (2013:23) states that there has been a 'narrative disjunction' between a number of scholars who have studied nuns or 'renunciant' women in Buddhism and the perspectives of some of these nuns themselves, particularly in relation to those who are situated outside of a Western cultural context.[86] She asserts that the scholars who are shaped, even perhaps unconsciously, by 'liberal notions of feminism and equality' do not adequately reflect the perspectives of the renunciant women that she has interacted with (mainly in Sri Lanka, but also elsewhere), who commonly appreciate the world, and their place in it, with reference to Buddhist philosophical ideas such as *dukkha* ('questions of suffering or dis-ease') and *sīla* ('moral or disciplinary practices') (Salgado, 2013:5, 10).[87] In

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[86] For example, Salgado (2013:22) singles out the work of Rita Gross, Tessa Bartholomeusz, and Wei-Yi Cheng for particular analysis and criticism.

[87] This is an argument made clearly by Cook (2010:170) when she states that 'the rationale of monastic practice is never understood in terms of resistance to male authority or to the equality of women vis-à-vis men.' In addition, she adds that scholarly understandings of 'freedom' need to be adjusted to reflect this, for 'freedom is not the unfettered exercise of the will' (Cook, 2010:166). However, whilst recognising this, Salgado (2013:243-244) takes issue with Cook's approach to the perceived social and religious status of Thai *mae chi*.

response, Salgado (2013:48) calls for a 'ground up approach' to prioritise the narratives of nuns themselves.

Of particular relevance to understanding Western ordained Buddhist women, Salgado (2013:3) highlights a division between those Buddhist renunciant women, who she argues are influenced by liberal political values (whom she often refers to as 'globalatinized'), and those who she states are not. She uses this term 'globalatinized', following Derrida, as she does not want to prescribe an immutable division between 'Asian' and 'Western' nuns, but instead wants to draw attention to those nuns who do not communicate in English and who do not understand the world using 'the conceptual vocabulary of Christianity, modernity, secularism' (Salgado, 2013:1,3). Although she states that the terms 'non-Asian origin or Western origin' and 'Eastern or Asian' should be seen as 'far from adequate', she does utilise them at various points in her work (Salgado, 2013:213, 237). As a result, it can be quite challenging to always separate the terms 'globalatinized' and 'Western' in Salgado's text, and arguably, although one assumes there may be Western Buddhist nuns who are not 'globalatinized', she does not draw attention to these. She does, however, indicate quite strongly the potential for diversity present between renunciant women of 'Asian origin' (Salgado, 2013:269). As a result, whether it is intended or not, one leaves her work with some assumptions about Western Buddhist nuns, albeit couched in the 'globalatinized' rubric.

Salgado (2013:213) suggests that those nuns and scholars who are influenced by a 'globalatinized' perspective are more likely to understand women's roles in Buddhism in relation to a discourse of 'rights' and 'equality'. In addition, 'globalatinized' nuns and scholars may typically be more likely to seek out, and highlight, 'transnational' connections between Buddhist women and emphasise the need for equal access to *bhikkhunī* or *bhikṣuṇī* ordination as part of a 'social movement' (Salgado, 2013:123, 211). Indeed, she argues that a global campaign for full ordination is itself an idea rooted in liberal goals and as a result, is one which overlooks the 'everyday concerns' of some nuns who might not share this inspiration (Salgado, 2013:2). She states that,

> *most nuns living throughout Asia understand the higher ordination quite*
> *differently from the way English-educated practitioners (mostly of non-*
> *Asian origin) do* (Salgado, 2013:15).

The implication of this is that a Western Buddhist nun is perhaps more likely to be influenced by a liberal feminist perspective which sees it as important to strive for

institutional equality between men and women, including within their religious traditions.

The work of Salgado, alongside the other studies presented in this section, highlights a number of key questions for this study. In what ways do these various representations of ordained Western women reflect the experiences of the participants within this study? How do ordained women in Britain engage with ideas of gender, gender equality and feminism? Are ordained women across the different Buddhist traditions of this study all influenced by an aspiration for social equality with men, and if so, in the same way? How do ordained women in Britain position themselves in relation to *bhikkhunī* or *bhikṣuṇī* ordination and to global networks for Buddhist women? These questions will be considered in Chapter Eight.

Conclusion

In this chapter, in order to best explore the issue of Buddhist ordination for women, I have incorporated both a discussion of historical and contemporary issues. I have charted the origins and trajectory of female ordination particularly in relation to early Indian Buddhism and have introduced the controversies surrounding the contemporary *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* debate which are of relevance for some of the participants in this study. In addition, I have discussed both the scholarly and practitioner perspectives regarding the aims and motivations for Buddhist ordination including for women, which will be analysed against the data from my study in Chapter Six. Finally, I have focused attention on scholarly work in relation to Western women who take Buddhist ordination and have considered the ways in which they are represented. The literature discussed in this chapter, alongside that presented in Chapters One and Three, functions not only to provide background which is relevant for an analysis of the experiences of the participants in this study, but also illuminates a series of questions that will be considered further within the thesis as a whole.

Chapter Three: Theories, Concepts, and Context – Conversion, Discipline, and Dress

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the remaining theories and concepts which underpin and inform my data analysis and discussion in Chapters Five to Nine.[88] I begin with an examination of theories of religious conversion and change. This will be followed by a discussion of Buddhist precepts and discipline, focusing on 'dress' as one aspect of discipline which has major significance within this study. The rationale for the inclusion of these theories and concepts will be discussed as the chapter progresses.

Conversion

Religious conversion has received a great deal of scholarly attention from various disciplinary perspectives, most noticeably from the 1960s onwards, and frequently in connection to studies of so-called 'New Religious Movements' (Exon, 1999:34, Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels, 2008:101). Scholars have disagreed about what conversion means, how it happens, who it happens to, when and why it happens, and what the consequences are (Wilson, 1984:301). The most notable issues of scholarly debate centre around whether the convert is actively engaged with, or passive in the face of their conversion experience (see, for example, Gooren, 2010:34, Kahn and Greene, 2004:235, Lofland, 1978:22, Rambo, 1993:167); whether conversion is a moment of intense clarity, experienced like 'a bolt from the blue', or a more gradual 'process' (Austin-Broos, 2003, Brasher, 1998:37, Rambo, 1993:1, Rambo and Farhadian, 1999); whether conversion entails an absolute change and 'radical re-organization of identity, meaning, and life' (Travisano, 1970:600) or allows for a continuation and development of previously held world-views (Anderson, 2003, Exon, 1999, Sachs Norris, 2003, Straus, 1979) and the difference between the terms 'conversion', 'membership', 'commitment',

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[88] The conceptual issues in relation to Buddhism in 'the British location' which underpin the analysis of my data in Chapter Nine were discussed in Chapter One, and the issues in relation to women and Buddhist ordination were discussed in Chapter Two.

'alternation' and 'affiliation' (Eddy, 2012, Gooren, 2007, Snow and Machalek, 1984:171, Travisano, 1970). Scholars have considered the role that personal crisis plays in propelling people to convert (Finney, 1991, Heirich, 1977, Snow and Phillips, 1980, Ullman, 1982), and the significance of relationships, particularly between those of the potential convert and other people involved in the religious group in question (Lofland and Stark, 1965, Rambo, 1993:1, Richardson and Stewart, 1978:37, Snow and Machalek, 1984:182). A number of models and frameworks have been developed to analyse the conversion experience; the most widely cited include Lofland and Stark's (1965) seven-step model, Lofland and Skonovd's (1981) 'conversion motifs', and Rambo's (1993) 'systemic stage model'.

In this section, I will focus primarily on the studies which consider 'conversion' within Buddhism in Britain, and situate these within the wider literature on conversion, looking particularly at three key themes: diversity and discontent, the role of relationships, and the issue of terminology. One notable exception to my interest in British-based studies will be a discussion of Eddy's (2012) research into conversion experiences within two Buddhist groups in Australia, as this raises some key questions which warrant further exploration. To give attention to conversion is important, not least because each of my participants would commonly be considered 'converts' as none of them were born in to families where Buddhism was the practiced religion, and all chose to be involved with Buddhist organisations in adulthood. Yet, as I will show in the following sections, certain scholars have argued that the term 'conversion' should not be applied uncritically without sufficient analysis of the meaning that different religious groups attribute to the experience. However, as Bluck (2006:191) argues, there has only been a rather limited academic engagement with 'the social and religious backgrounds' of those who have converted to Buddhism in Britain and thus there is a need to explore 'conversion' in more detail.

Buddhism and Conversion

Before discussing how conversion to Buddhism might be understood in the British context, it is necessary to explore what 'conversion' might mean for Buddhism in more general terms. There is no one overarching 'conversion ceremony' or process that all Buddhists in all traditions participate in, and Lamb (1994:10) goes as far as to argue that Buddhism is 'remarkably deficient in rites of

passage'. Indeed, as I shall explore in Chapter Five, the participants in this study marked their adherence to Buddhism in a number of different ways – some in a public ceremony (such as the *jukai* ceremony in the Sōtō Zen tradition or the *mitra* ceremony in Triratna), some individually, and some by taking refuges and precepts from a monk, nun or teacher and being given a 'refuge name' (specifically in the Tibetan schools). The importance of 'taking refuge' in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the *dharma*, and the *saṅgha*) is repeatedly mentioned by scholars as the marker of adherence to Buddhism, even though it may be perceived differently within the various Buddhist traditions (Bodhi, 1994, Gombrich, 1988:1, Lamb, 1994:12, 1999:79, Lopez, 2001:167).[89] Yet, as Coleman (2001:186) argues, not everyone attending Buddhist groups (even those who may have been involved for many years) will have had formal refuge ceremonies. Furthermore, 'going for refuge' does not automatically indicate a complete comprehension of Buddhist philosophy, or an absolute rejection of all other perspectives (Robinson et al., 2005:132). As I will discuss below, whilst the act of taking refuge certainly seems significant, 'conversion' has been represented in some Western contexts as more akin to a 'gradual and cumulative' progression (Eddy, 2012:205); an experience Lamb (1999:85) describes as 'an interior and gradual change of mind-set'.

Diversity and Discontent

Although Bluck (2006:191) indicates that there has been a lack of focus on the individual background narratives of those engaged with Buddhism in Britain, what has received more attention is the reason why Buddhism has begun to attract an increasing number of Western followers, both in Britain and beyond. Some key reasons given by scholars include, a general feeling of dissatisfaction with British (or Western) society and established religion and the sense of 'exoticism' surrounding Buddhism; the feeling that Buddhism is in-tune with rational, scientific values and that it is subsequently less 'dogmatic' than other religious traditions; and that Buddhism is a peaceful faith that provides practical guidance for living a good life (Bell, 1998:155, Bluck, 2006:136-7, 2012:136, Cantwell and

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[89]Amongst the participants in this study, in addition to taking refuge in the Three Jewels, those in the Tibetan schools also take an additional refuge in the Guru or spiritual teacher (see Harvey, 1990:179, Lamb, 1994:15). Members of Amida Trust are also able to take additional refuges in Amida and the Pure Land. Different 'stages' of 'Going for Refuge' are given particular emphasis in Triratna (Bluck, 2006:160-1, Smith, 2008:88-9).

Kawanami, 2002:41, Clarke, 1997:98, Green, 1989:277-8, Kay, 2004:5-7, Mellor, 1991:89, Phillips and Aarons, 2007:328, Puttick, 1993:6, Snodgrass, 2003:211, Waterhouse, 1997:21). Bell (1998:155) states that, 'British converts appear to be directed to Buddhism by a strong desire for self-help and self-cultivation which leads them to begin to learn meditation'. In addition, Bluck (2012:136) indicates that, 'a new sense of community and mutual support' might also motivate some to engage with Buddhist groups, a point also made by Bell (2000a:398); a rationale I will argue is highly significant for the participants in this study. Keeping this in mind, I will now examine a selection of relevant studies which have looked in detail at the 'conversion experience' amongst particular groups of Buddhists in Britain.

In her PhD study of monks and *sīladharā* in the Forest Sangha in Britain, Goswell (1988) provides a detailed exploration of the factors that pre-empted their initial engagement with Buddhism. Although she does not analyse her participants' accounts in the light of wider sociological theories of religious conversion, she makes several points which are relevant for this study. The first is that there is a notable diversity in the family, educational and social situations of her participants, and the second is the significance of feelings of discontent or 'unsatisfactoriness' (including with previous religious orientations) that they described prior to their association with the Forest Sangha (Goswell 1988:2/76). Goswell (1988:2/72-4) identifies 'a great richness and variety of circumstances' between her participants, a position that is also supported by Bell (1991), and she features monks and nuns with graduate educations, in artistic professions, and in blue-collar jobs, such as bar-tending. She shows that their initial contact with Buddhism happened in different ways, through exposure to Buddhism at university, through reading, or travelling (Goswell, 1988: 2/83-87). She divides the experiences that drew the monks and nuns in her study to Buddhism into personal issues and 'influences from outside' (specifically, the role of education, drug-taking, and relationships with others, both within and without the organisation) (Goswell, 1988:2/83).[90] For Goswell (1988:2/76), the most significant motivation amongst monks and *sīladharā* in relation to their engagement with Buddhism was 'a sense of unsatisfactoriness with their present lives' and for some this was extreme, including significant depression and anxiety.

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[90] The role of experimentation with illegal drugs also features in the life-histories presented by Bell in her PhD study of members of the FWBO (Triratna) and the Forest Sangha (Bell 1991:109) and also by Coleman in his study of seven Buddhist groups in America (Coleman 2001:201).

The recognition that there are likely to be multiple factors in an individual's decision to commit to a Buddhist group and a diversity in the backgrounds of 'converts' is also a feature of Ploos Van Amstel's (2005) study of Western nuns in the Tibetan tradition. Although she does not analyse their conversion narratives in particular detail or indicate any specific points of difference between women in the various countries included in her study in relation to these, she does indicate that whilst there was a range of different life-trajectories that led individual women to Buddhism, many 'did not feel at home with their religion of upbringing' (which was, in the majority of cases, Christianity) (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:42). Furthermore, they were frequently looking for 'relaxation, quietness, or concentration' (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:42). Importantly, she argues that 'there is always more than one reason (to go for refuge), and there are always openly mentioned motives as well as implicit ones' (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005: 42). The reasons include searching for 'the deeper meaning of life' (Ploos van Amstel, 2005:42). However, foregrounding a point I shall return to later in this section, they also include a strong relationship between individual women and their Buddhist teachers, which led them to engage with particular Tibetan lineages (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:45). However, significant for Ploos Van Amstel's participants, like Goswell's, is a sense of wanting to understand the 'suffering' present in their lives (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:51).

The foregrounding of life 'crisis' as a precursor to religious change is a feature of the wider literature on conversion, represented specifically in Ullman's work which highlights the significance of 'stress and anxiety' and childhood 'emotional turmoil' amongst converts in four religious groups in the United States (Ullman, 1982:191-192).[91] Rambo's stage model also features 'crisis' as an important element in the process of conversion, although he does emphasise that it is not the only significant component (Kahn and Greene, 2004:235). However, this attention to crisis as the most likely precursor of religious conversion has been challenged. Finney (1991:381-2), in his study of Zen Buddhism in America, is keen to point out that conversion should not be positioned solely in terms of 'personal pathology and stress' as this has the tendency to over-shadow all other potential causes of religious change. This line of argument is supported by Snow and Phillips (1980:443), Gooren (2010:34), Heirich (1977:673), and Smith (2008:28).

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[91] The four religious traditions that Ullman included in her study are: the Hare Krishna movement, Baha'i, Catholicism, and Judaism.

Yet, a recognition of, and the desire to pursue a resolution, to personal 'suffering' is a feature of Kennedy's (2004) and Gordon-Finlayson and Daniel's (2008) studies of Buddhism in Britain, complementing Ploos Van Amstel's and Goswell's. However, what is most useful about Kennedy's analysis in this regard is the recognition that 'suffering' or 'crisis' occurs for Buddhist adherents in a multitude of forms – including both major life events (for example, death, divorce, alcoholism) and significant mental health issues (including depression and anxiety), as well as a more generalised and persistent feeling of uncertainty (Kennedy, 2004:145). Furthermore, Goswell (1988:2/76) highlights that not all her participants were aware of their 'discontent' prior to coming into contact with Buddhism and were subsequently actively seeking a resolution to clearly defined problems. 'Only in the finding of the answer', she argues, 'did they become aware they were asking the question' (Goswell, 1988:2/74).

Goswell (1988:2/82) highlights that this acknowledgement of 'suffering' reflects, in fact, an acceptance of a central tenet of Buddhist philosophy, namely the First Noble Truth - that suffering or dissatisfaction is pervasive in *samsara* (see also Lopez, 2012:58, Spiro, 1982:36-9)*.* Indeed, 'this sense of dissatisfaction is regarded as an essential prerequisite for progress on the Buddhist path' (Lopez, 2012:108). 'Suffering' or 'dissatisfaction' is, therefore, likely to be prioritised in Buddhist adherent's narratives as this reflects their understanding of a key facet of the Buddha's teaching. In their study of Nichiren Buddhism in America, Snow and Phillips (1980:435) call this 'the internalization of a new interpretative schema and its attendant vocabulary of motive'. Although Yamane (2000:185) suggests that 'conversion experiences…are simply experiences made meaningful after the fact', Beckford (1978:250) argues that whilst converts' narratives might not reflect an entirely 'objective' depiction of their personal spiritual journey, they can be used to identify what is deemed important by the religious group in question. An awareness of 'suffering' or 'dissatisfaction' is conspicuous in the narratives of my participants and will form an essential component of the typology I present in Chapter Five.

The Role of Relationships

In addition to the role of dissatisfaction and the recognition of 'suffering', Goswell's (1988:2/89) study also highlights the significance of personal

relationships in drawing individuals to, and connecting them with, Buddhism.[92] For Goswell's (1988:2/89-93) participants, these relationships incorporated those with family and friends who may have also been interested in Buddhism, their Buddhist teachers, and other monks and nuns that they met in their early engagement with the traditions.

In general terms, relationships (both within and without religious groups) are frequently foregrounded in scholarly analyses of conversion (Coleman, 2001:197, Snow and Machalek, 1984:182). For example, Richardson (1978:5) argues that, typically, 'commitment grows within a group context' and Rambo (1993:1) states that 'all conversions...are mediated through people, institutions, communities, and groups'. However, Heirich (1977:673) suggests that the group context and connections between individuals are only noteworthy when people are already in the process of searching for an alternative spiritual tradition.

In relation to Buddhism, Coleman (2001:197-9) argues for a reduced emphasis on the role of social connections in facilitating religious change, asserting that 'the primary focus has always been on spiritual practice, not social relationships' which usually begins with reading books about Buddhism and then moving to practicing meditation. This early 'intellectual' exploration also features in research on Buddhism in Britain, including by Bluck (2012:136) and Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels (2008), and is also mentioned by Ploos Van Amstel (2005:42-3). However, Davidman and Greil (1993:96), in their study of Orthodox Judaism, highlight that there are 'gender differences' in the experience of conversion, arguing that 'women's contact was more likely to be mediated by significant others' whilst men were more typically 'committed searchers'. Indeed, as I will explore in Chapter Five, the role of other people in encouraging my participants to get involved with Buddhism initially, and the on-going importance of connections they make in, and to, Buddhist groups, remains highly significant and provides some support to Davidman and Greil's hypothesis.

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[92] Kennedy (2004:147) also notes the role of 'relationships' (alongside social context and crisis) in propelling identification with Buddhism, preferring to foreground these as opposed to 'autonomous acts of free-will' or 'choice'.

Conversion, Continuation, or Commitment: An Issue with Terminology?

In many definitions of the term, 'religious conversion' necessitates an absolute change in 'world-view' (Numrich, 2000:195); an intense, pivotal time that concludes with 'a change of mind, and a change of heart' (Buckser and Glazier, 2003:xvi, Gooren, 2010:10). In his often-quoted study, Travisano (1970:600) states unequivocally that 'conversions are drastic changes in life' and this is supported by Hine's (1970:63) assertion that 'commitment…is generated by an identity-altering experience and a bridge- burning act'. For Travisano (1970:601), an experience which does not include these 'drastic changes' might be referred to as 'alternation' rather than 'conversion'. However, although the idea of 'overnight, all-in-an-instant, whole-sale transformation' might still be compelling for some, the inexorable link between conversion and total world-view and identity change has been challenged (Rambo, 1993:1). Anderson (2003:124) argues that the assumption of absolute change is rooted in Christian understandings of conversion (most notably, according to Buckser and Glazier, in Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus) that may not be applicable in other religious contexts (Buckser and Glazier, 2003:xvi).

Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels (2008:112-114) indicate that rather than breaking with the past in a dramatic 'conversion' moment, potential converts to Buddhism in Britain are involved in a process of 'test-for-fit'; relating and integrating the values that they currently hold to the doctrines and practices of the new group. Although not discounting the importance of the new religious doctrines or practices, this indicates that 'conversion', in this context, could be seen as a maintenance and development of previously held perspectives, rather than an effort to entirely distance oneself from them; a model that is also supported by Sachs Norris (2003:171). Henry (2008:109), in his study of Socially Engaged Buddhist groups in Britain discusses the different ways in which members of Amida Trust came into contact with the organisation (including reading books by group members, finding out about their social projects, and also through seeing their information on the internet). He highlights that the reason why individuals are initially attracted to this particular group, with its emphasis on social engagement, is often as a direct result of their earlier interest in promoting social change, creating a strong trajectory between current and previously held views (Henry, 2008:111).

Kennedy's study of converts to Buddhism in Britain further supports this theme of continuity as opposed to radical change. Kennedy (2004:143,144) prefers to use the term 'discover' in this context, reflecting his emphasis on the 'on-going process' which individuals are engaged in. He argues (in support of the findings in Exon's (1999) study of Western Hindu converts) that models of conversion presented to date do not adequately reflect the experiences of people involved in non-Christian religious movements, where complete personal 'transformation' is not generally reported to occur (Kennedy, 2004:144). He notes that in Buddhist philosophy 'radical transformation' typically occurs when one reaches enlightenment, rather than on initial contact with the *Buddha-dharma* (Kennedy, 2004:144). He identifies that an individual's initial contact with Buddhism is often mitigated by things that have happened to them in the past, particularly foregrounding 'unfulfilled childhood religiosity' as significant (Kennedy, 2004:144). Indeed, a number of his participants were unable to identify the exact basis, or motivation, for their interest in Buddhism (Kennedy 2004: 144). Kennedy (2004:144) therefore challenges the idea that religious identity change in the Buddhist context in Britain is always a wholly clear, well thought out, or 'rational' decision.

In her study of two Buddhist groups in Australia which focuses on the individual experiences of group members, Eddy (2012:205) also emphasises a 'gradual and cumulative' progression rather than overnight religious transformation. Whilst scholarship has increasingly begun to recognise the significance of the 'process' in an analysis of religious change (Austin-Broos, 2003, Brasher, 1998, Rambo, 1993), Eddy argues that the term 'commitment' instead of 'conversion' should be used in relation to Buddhism in this context, as this better elucidates an interaction between the individual and the group which is engaged and dynamic, and one that does not entail complete 'radical personal change' (Eddy, 2012:7). She suggests a model which begins with initial 'apprehension and engagement', moving through to 'comprehension' and which finally culminates in 'commitment' (Eddy, 2012:18-19). Whilst some of her participants mention a concern to deal with 'suffering' as a feature of initial interest in Buddhist groups and practices, she typically de-prioritises the one-off dramatic religious experience and instead highlights that her participants described 'two or three points of change' (Eddy, 2012:167, 174, 205).[93] Whilst Eddy (2012:205-6) does indicate that these 'points of

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[93] A similar point is made by Exon (1999:206) in his study of Western Hindu converts.

change' might certainly be experienced as powerful for some, she argues that characteristically they act as the catalyst for further investigation of Buddhist thought as opposed to heralding a 'dramatic change in self-concept or identity'. Drawing on Lofland and Skonovd's model of conversion (particularly their 'experimental motif') she highlights that, for the participants in her study, there was most commonly a 'quality of quiet illumination as opposed to the intense emotion that is traditionally held to accompany conversions', most often occurring over a longer time period (Eddy, 2012:167, 205). However, although 'radical personal change' might not typically occur in a singular instance, this does not mean that Buddhist principles are not of ultimate significance for Eddy's participants (Eddy, 2012:206).

Importantly for this study, Eddy (2012:16) also notes that there are likely to be different paths to commitment between the two groups of her study – one of which focused on silent *vipassanā* meditation practice and did not offer a formal 'refuge' ceremony and had, as she states, 'the least amount of social influence and pressure'. That there may be different experiences of early religious commitment within different Buddhist traditions is a point also made by Smith (2008:28) and Bell (1991:150) in relation to Britain. Although there are two ordained members within Eddy's sample (from the Tibetan tradition), she does not specifically discuss whether their narratives were in any way different from non-ordained members, which, as I will explore further in Chapter Five, might be relevant. A key question, therefore, is how far this image of gradual, increasing commitment fits the experiences of ordained women in this study. In Chapter Five, I will argue that, although the evidence from ordained women in the British context does provide some support to this (challenging particularly the idea of conversion as a complete 'break with the past'), only acknowledging the gradual model which de-emphasises the 'dramatic moments' of initial connection with Buddhism does not reflect the experiences of all of the participants in my study.

In the following section, I will first examine the role and function of Buddhist precepts and discipline, particularly in relation to ordination. I will then explore the literature on dress, as one aspect of discipline which is significant in this study.

Precepts, Discipline, and Dress

Following ordination, a person takes on 'vows', 'precepts' or 'training rules' which aim to shape personal conduct and how an individual might relate to people within and without the monastic community (Tsomo, 1988f:54, 59).[94] Initially, the Buddha did not construct all the rules for his new followers in one sitting, but instead the regulations and practices that were adopted by the *saṅgha* developed as things happened or indeed, went wrong (Lopez, 2001:140).[95] This process has been well documented by scholars, for example see Chodron (1999:xxxiii), Lopez (2004:223), Tsomo (1996:9), Wijayaratna (2010:12) and Wu (2001:55). Monastic regulations regarding conduct were initially given orally by the Buddha, and then later compiled into written form within the *Vinaya Piṭaka* scriptures, which include a list of rules (*pāṭimokkha/prātimokṣa*) for monks and nuns to follow (Harvey, 1990:224).[96] These were eventually constructed in various ways by Buddhist schools, although they 'agreed in substance and most of the details' (Harvey 1990:225, see also Tsomo 1996:4). *Vinaya* means 'discipline' (Holt, 1995:2) and as Harvey (1990:224) states, it translates to 'that by which one is led out (from suffering)'.[97]

As I discussed in Chapter One, not all the women in this study follow the same precepts after ordination, and there are differences in practices between women who are part of those groups which follow the *Vinaya* (the Tibetan and Theravāda traditions), and those which do not (such as Triratna, Amida Trust or the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives) but whose disciplinary practices are variously shaped and influenced by it.[98] As Buddhism came into contact with different cultures in

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[94] It is not only ordained people who follow precepts in Buddhism. Lay Buddhists most generally take five precepts (Pāli: *pañca sīlanī)* which include vows not to kill, steal, lie, take intoxicants, or commit sexual misconduct (see Harvey, 1990:199, Lamb, 1994:11).

[95] *Saṃgha* is the Sanskrit spelling, but in this this thesis I will utilise the Pāli spelling, *saṅgha*, as this appears more commonly in scholarship.

[96] Schopen (2004:329) states that the *Vinaya* texts were written down in the first four to five hundred years of the Common Era.

[97] A further discussion of the *Vinaya* is provided by Holt (1995), Gethin (1998:86) and Gombrich (1988). Tsomo (1996) also provides a useful and accessible history of the development of Buddhist schools, the *Vinaya* and precepts, particularly in relation to nuns.

[98] As detailed in Chapter One, the *sīladharā* of the Forest Sangha tradition, although a Theravāda group, do not follow the *Bhikkhunī Vinaya* and take ten precepts on ordination and over a hundred training rules. However, the *sīladharā* training rules were developed with a consideration of the *Bhikkhunī Vinaya*, and

various geographic settings, so the rules and practices for ordained *saṅgha* were consequently affected (Chodron, 2001:29, Lopez, 2001, Tsomo, 1988e:103, Wu, 2001:49).[99] As Prebish (2007:660) notes:

> *as Buddhism moved through South, Southeast, Central and East Asia, an enormous variety of quite distinct Buddhist sectarian sanghas developed, radically altering the Buddhist landscape, and turning the study of the overall Buddhist sangha into a profoundly multifaceted, highly variegated pursuit.*

Although Conze (1982:14) highlights that 'at any given time the newer developments did not entirely supersede the older ones', the category of 'ordination' does include a diverse group of people and practices. This is the case even *within* a tradition, and as Lopez (2001:132) notes, 'the *saṅgha* was by no means a homogenous community' (see also Cook, 2010:6, Spiro, 1982:315).

A number of scholars have written about the *Vinaya* monastic precepts and vows, not only in terms of their historical development, but also in relation to their purpose, function and meaning. Monastic precepts have been described as 'aids to spiritual training' (Harvey, 1990:224), 'a means to salvation and the nucleus of communal identity' (Holt 1995:1) and 'very useful guidelines for daily behaviour' (Tsomo, 1988f:59). Of course, the same could be said for lay precepts, although arguably to a lesser extent given that the number of precepts taken by ordained monastics is often far greater than those taken by lay Buddhists, and *Vinaya* precepts are rigorous in specifying appropriate behaviour in a vast array of different circumstances.[100] Tsomo (1996:9) is clear that the vows taken on ordination also 'intentionally…set (monastics) apart from laypeople who enjoy a different way of life'.

However, instead of perceiving *Vinaya* monastic precepts as a rigid 'code of conduct', Lopez (2001:144) argues that they should be seen as 'an ideal to aspire to'. This does not mean that there are not strict consequences for behaviour and certain activities would automatically entail dismissal from the monastic community, for example, murder (Wu, 2001:132). As Wu (2001:48) highlights, 'the precepts are not an external ideal being forced upon us, but points for training

share points of similarity (see Angell, 2006a for further discussion of the *sīladharā* training rules).

[99] An example which is often cited is of the rejection of the alms round in Tibetan context due to the extensive mountainous terrain (Lopez, 2001:133).

[100] There are exceptions to this. For example, in terms of this study, both lay and ordained members of the SRM/OBC take 16 precepts. Ordained monastics adopt particular lifestyles (including celibacy) but the actual precepts taken are the same.

that we voluntarily undertake'. Whilst Wu (2001:55) lists the Buddha's 'ten advantages of precepts' which include a support for spiritual attainment and to encourage concord within the *saṅgha,* she argues that the 'ultimate purpose' of putting monastic vows into practice is the achievement of enlightenment, and as such they are an important 'ethical discipline' (Wu, 2001:76). This is also emphasised by Tsomo (1988d:196) who argues that,

> *Regulating outward behaviour in accordance with Vinaya discipline is considered essential for fostering inner development…Thus inner discipline and outer discipline go hand in hand.*

Understanding this 'inner' and 'outer discipline', therefore, is an essential area of consideration in any analysis of the lives and experiences of ordained people. The participants involved in this study described a variety of approaches to daily discipline, governed, at least in part, by the regulations adopted by the Buddhist tradition with which they were involved. As a result, a consideration of 'discipline' as a whole across each of the seven Buddhist groups of this study would have been a vast undertaking, and therefore it has been necessary to focus on one element of daily life in order to gain the appropriate depth of understanding. In deciding on which element of discipline to focus, I could have chosen diet, meditation and ritual, attitudes to daily schedules, patterns of sleep and work, or celibacy and relationships, amongst a range of other practices and activities of daily living (Covell, 2005:20-21). Indeed, each of these topics was mentioned, to a greater or lesser extent, within many of the interviews I conducted. However, the changes made to clothing, hair and name following ordination was an area which was discussed in depth in each interview, even amongst those in the Triratna Order who do not, as a matter of course, follow the practice of head shaving or wearing robes.

Most of my interview subjects appeared to enjoy telling me about their attitudes to appearance following ordination; particularly explaining the meaning of the names they were given. In addition, none of the studies which include ordained women in the British context, such as Goswell (1988), Angell (2006a) and Ploos van Amstel (2005), mention dress other than descriptively or in passing, and there has not been any in-depth analysis of Buddhist dress in the British context amongst either men or women. Furthermore, the taking of a Buddhist name following ordination has received comparatively less attention than robes or tonsure both in the British context and beyond, and therefore warrants further investigation.

The following section will look specifically at the scholarly literature on 'dress' to underpin my analysis of ordained Buddhist women and dress practices in the British context in Chapter Seven. Firstly, I will explore why dress has been given academic attention, and the perceived benefits of using dress as a mode of analysis. Secondly, I will give specific consideration specifically to Buddhist dress, and the meaning that both scholars and practitioners have attributed to robes and tonsure. In the final part of this chapter, I will discuss a selection of the sociological and anthropological theories relating to dress, particularly religious dress; focusing on the perceived links with 'social control' and the function of dress as communicative of individual and group principles and identities. The literature I discuss here, whilst not exhaustive of this large and varied subject area, has been selected as the most relevant, both to situate the data from my study and to provoke significant lines of inquiry that I will take up in Chapter Seven.[101]

Why dress?

Clothing, appearance, and fashion have provoked interest from within a wide range of scholarly disciplines, including anthropology, history and sociology. Tranberg-Hansen (2004) provides a useful summary of anthropological work by geographical area, and Miller and Hunt (1997) offer a brief analysis of the relationship between sociology and dress. Entwistle (2000:9), however, provides a critical perspective arguing that, in general terms, 'sociology has failed to acknowledge the significance of dress'. With this in mind, I will draw from both sociological and anthropological approaches and also from within studies of Buddhism (particularly of nuns in various contexts) in order to provide a robust underpinning for the data I have gathered.

In this study, I employ the term 'dress' as a result of the work of Roach Higgins and Eicher (1992:1). They argue that 'dress' should be adopted over 'clothing, adornment and costume' as it is more comprehensive and can

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[101] In presenting this literature, I will not look specifically at 'dress and gender'. Whilst this has been a topic of sociological and anthropological consideration (for example, the collection edited by Barnes and Eicher, 1992b), I decided instead to focus on an analysis structured by the themes of 'communication, control, and change' which will identify key questions for this thesis. Throughout this literature review, however, I will be drawing on studies that consider dress, particularly religious dress, in relation to women.

subsequently incorporate 'an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body', comprising of hair-styles and other changes or additions to the fabric of the body (see also Tranberg Hansen, 2004:371). This is useful in the context of this study as it allows me to consider head-shaving and the burning of cones of incense into the shaven head which leaves three permanent round marks, alongside robes and some of the other items given at ordination in particular traditions (such as an alms bowl and a mat) under the basic rubric of 'dress'.[102] Thus, when I refer to dress in this chapter, and also throughout the thesis, I am including clothing and hair-style. In Chapter Seven, I have also included name-changing within the same category. Whilst Roach-Higgins and Eicher do not mention name changes, and whilst I recognise that changing one's name on ordination is not exactly the same as adopting a robe or shaving one's head, they were considered together by my participants when we discussed some of the changes that took place following ordination. Furthermore, as I will show in Chapter Seven, there are some similarities in their meaning and aims in this context. However, I remain mindful of the differences between 'robes', 'hair' and 'names', both in this literature review section and in Chapter Seven, not least because 'hair' as a category of analysis, has received specific and detailed attention (for example, Hiltebeitel, 1998, Miller, 1998, Obeyesekere, 1981, Olivelle, 1998, Singh, 2010, Synnott, 1987).

The need to engage with different dress practices as a valuable means through which to analyse communities has been emphasised by Arthur (1999:1, 2000:4), Entwistle (2000:6), Roach-Higgins et al.(1995:1), Miller and Hunt (1997:320), Michelman (1997:352), Tarlo (1996:1), Tranberg Hansen (2004:372), amongst others. As Arthur (1999:1) argues,

> *Dress provides a window through which we might look into a culture, because it visually attests to the salient ideas, concepts and categories fundamental to that culture.*

Entwistle (2000:6) supports this, and emphasises the universality of 'dress', asserting that 'the social world is a world of dressed bodies...dress is a basic fact of social life'. Indeed, I found that asking questions about dress not only focused my attention within the larger subject area of 'Buddhist discipline' and was a topic that sparked lively and enjoyable discussion but, more importantly, it became a prism to

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[102] The burning of three cones of incense into the front/top of the shaved head on ordination is sometimes undertaken during ordinations in Mahāyāna schools, in countries such as China, Taiwan and Vietnam. See Lopez (2001:148), Harvey (1990:220) and Freeman (1987:277).

analyse broader issues such as the relationships that ordained women in Britain have with their religious practices, their communities, and with wider British society, emphasising key themes of consideration in this thesis and contributing directly to my primary research questions.

Prior to returning to broader sociological and anthropological theories about dress, I will first discuss the relationship between dress and Buddhism, focusing on monastic robes and tonsure. Whilst not all of my participants are monastic, this literature does provide a basic historical background to the ways in which Buddhism and dress practices interact.

Buddhist Monasticism and Dress

Writing about the Theravāda monastic tradition, Wijayaratna (1990:32) argues that 'the clothes worn by monks and nuns are one of the most important symbols of the religious life'.[103] Even though, as Tsedroen (1988:210) highlights, 'to wear robes is not a major rule' within the *Vinaya,* she argues that robes remain significant and, indeed, they are one of the 'four requisites'.[104] Wijayaratna (1990:33, 2010) provides a detailed exploration of Theravāda monastic dress (both for *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī*) and he describes the origin of the robes and their fabric as first consisting of rags, including from charnel grounds, but subsequently comprising of new cloth provided by lay supporters (see also Rahula, 1974:8, Wu, 2001:254-255). In addition, as Wijayaratna (1990:40) shows, the *Vinaya* regulations are concerned not only about robes - what they should look like, how they should be worn, and how many each monk or nun should own - but also about hair (which, after shaving, should not have longer than 'two inches' of re-growth before being shaved again) and also regulations about perfume and jewellery and the use and ownership of other items, such as umbrellas and footwear. For Wijayaratna (1990:40), the restrictions governing monastic appearance, 'embodied the rejection of all worldly frivolities' and represent 'the spirit of religious detachment.' According to Harvey (1990:220), tonsure symbolises 'renunciation of vanity'. However, Wijayaratna (1990:41,53) is keen to emphasise that Buddhist

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[103] In this vein, Spiro (1982:300) refers to the robes as 'the badge of monastic office', and Lopez (2001:132) calls monastic clothes 'the defining sign of a monk or nun'.

[104] The 'four requisites' (or 'resources' as Wu, 2001:246 refers to them) are 'clothing, food, lodging and medicine' (Ariyesako, 1998:65).

monastic robes and regulations around appearance were not introduced in order to enforce rigid austerity or 'penance', and that the Buddha had allowed for changes to the dress code, particularly when monks and nuns travelled to other places and in response to the weather.

Wu (2001), in her study of *Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya* from the perspective of the *Dharmaguptaka* monastic tradition, gives some attention to dress, including providing a full list of the various constituent parts of the *bhikṣuṇī* robe. She argues that monastics adopt robes in order to shield themselves against inclement climates and as a 'cover' that renders each of the individual monastics as equals (Wu, 2001:253). However, perhaps more significantly, dress acts as 'a symbol representing our ordination' which 'distinguishes us as monastics' and ensures that all those who recognise the robe understand what a monk or nun has taken on in terms of their ordination vows and lifestyle (Wu, 2001:253), a point reinforced by Tsomo (1988f:62) and Ploos Van Amstel (2005:75), particularly in relation to celibacy. Havnevik (1989:35), in her study of Tibetan nuns, furthers this and states;

> *The vows taken by the novice involve a passage from the worldly to the spiritual realm. The cutting of the hair, the monastic robe, and a new name indicate that the neophyte has entered a new stage.*

The effect of this is, according to Gutschow (2001:192), 'deeply transformative'. Furthermore, Tsomo (1988f:57) highlights that Buddhist monastic dress (alongside precepts) function as a 'reminder of one's decision', which is an often repeated theme in the literature on Buddhist dress. Freeman (1987:277) argues that the scars left by burning incense cones into the head on ordination are 'symbolic reminders' of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Lopez (2001:132) indicates that the 'vest' worn by monastics within the Tibetan traditions represents 'the gaping mouth of the Lord of Death, thereby serving as a constant reminder of impermanence'. Moksananda (2004:98) writes that the Buddhist name given to ordained members in Triratna, because it is imbued with 'meaning', functions to 'constantly remind the ordinand, and others, of the aspiration which it embodies'. Cush (1990:26), writing about the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives in Britain states that dress and tonsure 'tell other people what you are, and remind yourself what you have to live up to'. Finally, Hollenbeck (2010), also in relation to the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, echoes this idea of Buddhist dress as a 'reminder', and states:

> *Religious training is not easy, and we use whatever we can that will assist us in remembering our purpose.*

However, perceiving religious dress as a 'reminder' also resonates more widely, for example amongst the Catholic nuns in Poland that were the focus of Trzebiatowska's (2010:61) study, which will be discussed later in this section.

Particularly within some first-person accounts from Western Buddhist nuns, one can identify a further draw of monastic dress and a shaved head – practicality and ease. This is exemplified by Chodron (1999:xxxi), an American *bhikṣuṇī*, who states;

> *because we shave our hair, wear monastic robes, and do not use jewelry or cosmetics, we do not need to spend time buying a variety of clothes, deciding what to wear, or worrying about how we look.*

This mirrors a point made briefly by Shaw (2008:162), writing about the *sīladharā* in the Forest Sangha in Britain, who argues that 'the nuns seem to like the freedom and simplicity (the robes) confer'. A feeling of freedom experienced through tonsure, in particular, is also evident within Kawanami's (2013:86) study of nuns in Myanmar and therefore has relevance for women beyond a Western geographical setting. However, this appreciation of the daily 'ease' inherent in wearing monastic robes is also accompanied by a recognition that because Buddhist dress is not by any means a mainstream choice in 'the West', wearing robes is sometimes fraught with misunderstanding, particularly from non-Buddhists (Chodron, 1996:223, Tsomo, 1999a:8), and this is different from a context where Buddhist robes were more frequently seen. For example, Chodron (1996:228) states that her shaved head has occasionally been attributed to chemotherapy treatment, and Tenzin Palmo (1999:186), a *bhikṣuṇī* in the Tibetan tradition, highlights;

> *Some feel that wearing robes alienates them from other people, that people act artificially towards them, cast them in a role, and do not see them as human beings who have problems and need moral support and friendship. Some feel conspicuous wearing robes in the street in the West because people stare and some even say "Hare Krishna!"*

Yet, despite these difficulties, both robes and tonsure are understood as having an important role in relation to Buddhist practice, and can also function, notably, to 'lessen our attachment to appearance' (Chodron, 2001:29) and 'as a powerful incentive for mindful awareness' (Tsomo, 1999a:8); important outcomes for a Buddhist practitioner. How dress interacts with Buddhist practice amongst ordained women in Britain will form a fundamental part of the discussion in Chapter Seven.

Wu is clear that those who have taken monastic ordination, according to the *Vinaya*, must not be out of robes 'overnight' (Wu, 2001:259). Ultimately, she argues, the function of robes is 'to protect our body, not to look attractive' (Wu, 2001:263). Furthermore, for Wu (2001:254), the design of the monastic robes themselves (the 'rice paddy' pattern, with several squares of fabric sewn together to represent how rice fields are laid out on the landscape) is also significant. One reason for this is because the 'rag' robes would have been made from scraps of different materials, in order to prompt feelings of humility amongst the wearers (Wu, 2001:254). However, the colour of monastic robes became important, and Wu (2001:254) states that white is not permitted to be worn, as it was once associated with the laity.[105] The appearance of monastic dress, and particularly the colours and styles, were altered as Buddhism was transmitted between countries (see Riggs, 2004:312 in relation to Japan, and Wu, 2001:264 in relation to China). As I will detail further in Chapter Seven, there are a variety of approaches to dress amongst the women in this study, and differing practices in relation to robes, hair, and name.

The next section of this literature review will examine the wider scholarship on dress, particularly religious dress, drawing especially on sociological and anthropological works.

Theories of Dress: Communication, Control, and Change

Within the sociological and anthropological literature on 'dress', three broad themes in relation to its function and meaning emerge which are relevant to this study. First, that dress is a means of communicating personal or group values and identities. Secondly, that dress (particularly religious dress) is a means of 'social control' and restriction, and finally that dress is a means of exacting and facilitating personal change. An exploration of these three tropes will structure the following section.

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[105] Tsomo (1996:144) identifies that *bhikṣuṇī* in the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmaguptaka schools are also not permitted to wear black for similar reasons. Wijayaratna (2010:96) highlights that, in addition, blue is also an inappropriate colour for a monastic to wear.

Communication

One of the more frequently utilised theories of dress is that it operates as a way of advertising and displaying something that is important to an individual (Entwistle, 2000:66, O'Neal, 1999:127). As Arthur (1999:3) highlights, dress acts as a 'visible manifestation' of individual and communal moral codes, principals and identities (see also Cooper, 1971:7, Entwistle, 2000:35, 66, Olivelle, 1998:12, Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992:1, Roach-Higgins et al., 1995:5, Synnott, 1987:394) . Furthermore, as Entwistle (2000:35) states,

> *Not only is our dress the visible form of our intentions, but in everyday life dress is the insignia by which we are read and come to read others.*

This is particularly the case in relation to religious dress, and according to Keenan (1999:391), 'to be dressed religiously is to wear one's faith on one's sleeves'. By adopting dress which is ostensibly associated with a particular religious tradition, this both highlights that your particular lifestyle choices might be different from others and, simultaneously, draws you together with like-minded individuals (Arthur, 1999:3-4, Keenan, 1999:391, Lang, 1995:34, Michelman, 1999:135, Olivelle, 1998:40, Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992:6, Trzebiatowska, 2010:56). As Craik (2005:22) asserts, religious dress acts as 'a mark of distinctiveness'. This idea is deepened by Campbell-Jones (1979:175), who, in her study of Catholic nuns, draws on the work of Victor Turner (1969) and argues that changes in hair-style following ordination are indicative of a 'transition from one social status to another' (see also Hallpike, 1987:155). This is similar to the perspectives of Havnevik (1989:35) and Gutschow (2001:192) in relation to Buddhist nuns. Indeed, as Van Gennep (1960 [1909]:167) states (and Gutschow, 2001:194 also cites), 'to cut the hair is to separate oneself from the previous world; to dedicate the hair is to bind oneself to the sacred world'.

To understand the consequences of this separation, it is useful to turn to the distinction that Emma Tarlo (1996:318) identifies between 'differentiation' and 'identification' in dress practices. Although Tarlo refers to 'clothes' rather than hair when she makes this distinction (and is also not specifically referring to religious dress), her analysis remains poignant. In a study focused on the Indian context, Tarlo (1996: 318) highlights that dress defines who is *in* a particular social group ('identification'), and who is *out* ('differentiation'), even if the intention might not be one of deliberate rejection (see also Barnes and Eicher, 1992a:1) . Therefore,

she argues that 'clothes are literally a means of classification' (Tarlo, 1996:318). Tarlo (1996: 8) shows that this 'classification' is not necessarily permanently fixed for all time, but, notwithstanding this, the style of dress that a person adopts does point out their likely social affiliations.

In the same way, hair-style (and expressly, a shaved head) can be significant in terms of identifying someone who has taken monastic vows and in symbolising their celibate status (Gutschow, 2004:177, Leach, 1958:156-159, Olivelle, 1998:20, Synnott, 1987:402). The work of Lang (1995) in relation to Buddhist nuns is particularly salient here. Lang (1995:32) refers to earlier work by Leach (1958) and Obeyesekere (1981) in relation to the psychological meaning of hair practices, and she challenges the idea that shaving one's head equates to a 'symbolic castration'.[106] Although she accepts that tonsure within Buddhism 'signifies a rite of separation, a turning away from the heat of sensual desire toward the coolness of nirvana', she argues that this is less to do with 'castration' but instead, is firmly about Buddhist practitioners 'control over the mind' (Lang, 1995:33, 36, 38). As she explains,

> *The physical act of shaving the head places novice monks and nuns in the right direction and on the Buddha's path, but progress on this path depends on the control they have over the mind's tendency to seek out and pursue sensual desire* (Lang, 1995:38).

In other words, in Buddhism, shaving the head is not about completely removing 'sensual desire' but instead, is a means of communicating that a person is learning to manage it in a particular way. So whilst a monastic might look 'somewhat asexual' (see also Gutschow, 2001:194, Havnevik, 1989:35) this may not, in reality, be the case. Emphasising a further degree of complexity, although Faure (2003:43) highlights that shaving one's head in an ordained context 'symbolically removed sex and gender', he states that in Japan, nuns were still affected by behavioural norms guided by existing standards of 'femininity'. Therefore he argues that the meaning of tonsure in relation to Buddhism can vary in different geographic and temporal settings (Faure, 2003:43, see also Gutschow, 2001:196).

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[106] A useful summary of the debates in relation to head-shaving, celibacy and 'castration', and particularly the work of Leach and Hallpike is provided by Olivelle (1998) and Banks (2000).

Control

Uniform dress, including religious dress, has certainly been equated with regulation and 'social control', especially in relation to women, and this has particularly been the case (in both academic publications and in the popular media) in relation to the *hijab*. 'Veiling' in Islam has been highly politicised in the contemporary public sphere, and it would be impossible to discuss religion and dress without referring to the rather polarised debates on this issue. On one side, the *hijab* is presented as synonymous with female 'oppression' (see, for example, Lazreg, 2009), and on the other, it is portrayed as a symbol of individual and communal 'agency'. A useful overview of these positions in relation to the veil is provided both by Bracke and Fadil (2012) and Hirschmann (1998), who both underpin the complexity of an overly simplistic appropriation of 'agency' verses 'oppression' in this context.

At this juncture, I wish to turn to theories of dress and 'social control' more generally, beyond the specific example of Islamic veiling. As Gökariksel (2009:660) highlights, the work of Linda Arthur (1999) is particularly relevant here. Although a year later Arthur (2000) returns to examining dress beyond the prism of 'social control', her 1999 edited collection engages directly with this issue. Here, Arthur (1999:1) argues that,

> *Strict dress codes are enforced because dress is considered symbolic of religiosity. Hence, dress becomes a symbol of social control as it controls the external body.*

Similarly, Hallpike (1987, 1979:103) theorises that 'cutting the hair equals social control'. Whilst he recognises that hair-styles should be acknowledged as having multiple connotations, he asserts strongly that 'social discipline or restraint' is the primary symbolic effect of shaving the head (Hallpike, 1987:155). This line of argument is also furthered by Craik (2005:207), who states that religious uniform dress is concerned principally with,

> *restraint, ritual, authority and the regulation of action, emotion and attitude.*

There are echoes of this within Gutschow's (2001:194-5) study of nuns in Zangskar, for she states that head-shaving 'is a form of disciplinary control by which the apprentice is brought under the monastic gaze'. Craik (2005:4) identifies

that that not only does a uniform 'control…the social self' but, at the same time, it also helps to regulate 'the inner self and its formation', exposing parallels with Lang's (1995) position on head-shaving amongst Buddhist nuns. As a result she argues that 'uniforms shape who we are'; a trajectory of thought that I will return to in the next section (Craik 2005:4).

In a study of Catholic nuns (or 'women religious') in the USA who dispensed with wearing the habit following the changes in relation to nuns' dress regulations in the wake of the Vatican II Council, Michelman (1997, 1999) very much takes up the position of dress equalling 'social control'. She argues that the nuns she interviewed felt 'stereotyped' by assumptions made about the habit and that this 'affected their ability to interact and communicate freely as individuals' (Michelman, 1999:135-137).[107] She even states that 'the habit made them feel less than fully human' (Michelman, 1999:136), a parallel to the concerns that Palmo (1999) identified in relation to Buddhist robes which I detailed earlier. Yet, despite this, both Michelman and Craik recognise the complexities inherent within an analysis of dress. Michelman (1999:139) highlights that, alongside this perception of control, nuns did find their habits gave them a sense of 'freedom', particularly from what she calls 'the tyranny of appearance…in North American culture'. Furthermore, Craik (2005:4) asserts that a uniform (like other forms of dress) has the potential to resist social control and attempts at individual regulation. This parallel function is recognised by Olivelle (1998:41) in relation to head-shaving. Tarlo (1996:318) states that, 'however great the constraints, some element of choice is always possible'. In terms of the Catholic nuns studied by Trzebiatowska (2010), this dichotomy of 'oppression' and 'freedom' is also present. Whilst she argues that many of the Polish nuns in her study felt 'empowered' through their religious dress, others did not wholly agree (Trzebiatowska, 2008:92). This leads Trzebiatowska (2010:62) to later assert that dress in this context 'liberates and… restricts'. This mirrors Chodron's (1996:225) perspective on the function of the Buddhist monastic code, which she explains 'is liberating, not restricting'.

This perceived interaction between 'freedom' and 'social control' in relation to dress identifies important questions for this study. Namely, what does an analysis of dress tell us about the relationships that ordained Buddhist women in Britain have with Buddhist disciplinary practices and traditions? Do ordained

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[107] This point is also reinforced by Tarlo (1996:18) who argues that this is a wider issue in relation to dress, as when one chooses to wear a particular item, it is impossible to predict the reaction in response. She refers to this as an issue of 'intention and interpretation' (see also Entwistle 2000:112).

women in the British context experience a sense of being 'controlled' in wearing robes, changing their names and shaving their heads? What different perspectives on this issue can be drawn from a group of women from various Buddhist traditions and stages of ordination, not all of whom opt for robes or shaven heads?

Change

As Leach (1957:147) attests, 'symbolic behaviour not only "says" something, it also arouses emotion and consequently "does" something'. Synnott (1987:402) recognises this when he states that;

> *Shaven heads effect what they symbolize. They symbolize rejection of the world and its values, but also perhaps inspire a reciprocal rejection*.

Dress, therefore, might itself enact change and function as a means though which individual beliefs are not only revealed and displayed but also created and maintained. As Entwistle (2000:10) explains;

> *dress in everyday life is always more than a shell, it is an intimate aspect of the experience and presentation of the self.*

This position is also taken by Tarlo (1996:1, 8), who is cognisant of the 'active' and 'dynamic' functions of dress.

A specific dress code may also have multiple implications, dependent on who is wearing it and why, and indeed where it is being worn. This is well represented in the literature. Subsequently, the importance of seeing dress 'in context' is highlighted by many contemporary scholars (Banks, 2000:6, Bracke and Fadil, 2012:50, Hallpike, 1987, Lang, 1995:47, Olivelle, 1998:12, Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992:4, Roach-Higgins et al., 1995:11, Synnott, 1987:382, Trzebiatowska, 2010:56). Trzebiatowska's (2010) study exemplifies this particularly well. Drawing on the theoretical approaches to dress of Roach-Higgins and Eicher, Craik and Entwistle, Trzebiatowska (2010:52) explores perspectives on the habit amongst Catholic nuns in Poland through a thematic lens which sees religious dress as having both communicative and symbolic functions, but also, concurrently, the ability to generate a sense of change for an individual. As Trzebiatowska (2010:62) explains, the habit in this context is:

> *a material expression of the collective values of the religious order as well as an active participant in the creation of such values and understandings.*

For the nuns in Trzebiatowska's study, wearing the habit is a 'reminder' of their vows and life choices which they share with other nuns, but it also directly affects their conduct and manner of deportment, particularly in public (Trzebiatowska, 2010:61). In this way, she argues religious dress 'embodies…values…and it grounds them in everyday reality' (Trzebiatowska, 2010:61). However, she does indicate that her participants remain nuns even when the habit is removed, and for those who chose not to robe after the Vatican II pronouncements, uniform religious dress is seen as 'superfluous' (Trzebiatowska, 2010:61). This suggests that, although wearing religious dress has an important function, it may not be the sole thing which creates a nun's identity.

The importance of attributing a more dynamic and generative role to religious dress is highlighted by Gökariksel (2009) in her study of veiling practices in contemporary Turkey. Drawing on both Mahmood (2005) and Entwistle (2000:11), particularly the latter's idea of dress as 'situated bodily practice', she asserts that the veil 'transforms (the) self, physically and emotionally' because 'through veiling, belief is formed, enacted and embodied' (Gökariksel, 2009:661). Subsequently, Gökariksel refers to the veil as an 'embodied spatial practice' (Gökariksel, 2009:658). Entwistle (2000:9) states that, 'dress in everyday life cannot be separated from the living, breathing, moving body it adorns.' Therefore, for both Entwistle and Gökariksel, understanding dress necessitates analysis which incorporates not only its symbolic and 'communicative' significance but also the 'embodied experience', creating 'the means by which individuals orientate themselves to the social world' (Entwistle, 2000:39 and 66).

Mellor (2007:587) highlights that 'religion is an embodied phenomenon…all religions, though in different ways, consciously seek to shape bodily experiences, actions and ways of thinking'. He therefore argues that, in taking an 'embodied focus', scholars are better able to 'account for the ways in which very particular, often very different, religious experiences and identities are able to emerge' (Mellor, 2007:604). Whilst the focus of this study is not an analysis of 'the body' and 'embodiment' per se, I certainly acknowledge the importance of giving attention to the ways that my participants perceive, engage and interact with the dress that they wear on their bodies, what they do with their hair, and the names that they use. I recognise, in turn, the potential function of their dress in shaping

their religious experience. With this in mind, in Chapter Seven, I give close attention to the ways individual ordained Buddhist women in Britain interact with the various dress practices that are suggested by their specific Buddhist groups, and I argue that dress is a key means through which ordained Buddhist women put Buddhist teachings into practice in the contemporary British context.

Conclusion

In this chapter, through a thematic lens, I have discussed the theories and concepts relating to religious conversion, Buddhist precepts and discipline, and dress (including religious dress). In conjunction with the literature discussed in Chapters One and Two, this contextualises the data collected and analysed in this study. In the chapter that follows, and prior to the five data analysis chapters where I answer the primary research questions set out in the introduction to this thesis, I will present the methodology and methods used to gather and analyse my data, alongside a reflection on the ethical issues that arose and my position in relation to the research.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods - Feminism, Participation, and Ethics

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which I have approached the data collection and analysis in this study, as well as the ethical issues that I faced. The first sections of this chapter are divided into 'methodology' and 'methods'. In making this distinction, I have been influenced by Harding (1987:2) who argues that the concepts of 'methodology' and 'methods' (along with 'epistemology' which she defines as 'a theory of knowledge') have frequently been conflated. For Harding (1987:2-3), 'method' includes the practical and logistical ways in which research data is collected, and 'methodology' is 'a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed'. Separating my overarching methodological approach (which, in the case of this study, relates particularly to feminism) from the practical tools by which I collected data, provides an increased level of transparency as to the ways in which I conducted this study.

Throughout my research, I have adopted what Knott (1995:209) terms, 'a commitment to process rather than results alone'. In doing so, I have been concerned not only to focus on achieving a completed thesis, but also to foster respectful, professional relationships with my participants as well as applying a level of reflection as to the impact of my research approach throughout the fieldwork and beyond. Whilst I sought to critically examine their narratives, my 'commitment to process' included firstly ensuring that my participants were comfortable with their involvement in the study, especially in relation to levels of anonymity, and secondly, enabling several participants a level of engagement with my analysis (including reading and commenting on chapters or excerpts). Indeed, the ways in which I related to my research participants had a significant impact on the approach that I have taken and the conclusions that I have drawn. This will be explored further in this chapter and the conclusion to the thesis.

Methodology: Doing Feminist Research?

I began this study intending to adopt a broadly feminist methodology, both in terms of research motivation and design. Although I recognise the difficulty of prescribing a 'single feminist method' (DeVault, 1996:29, see also, Harding, 1987:1), I have always been influenced by an overarching feminist perspective characterised by 'longings for justice, for equality, for recognition' for women (Anthias, 2002:275). However, my 'feminist' position was frequently challenged during my fieldwork, and I no longer hold this stance uncritically. Initially, I struggled to reconcile what I deemed to be my 'feminist goals' (specifically, the promotion of women's complete equality with men) and the views of some of my participants who were not always concerned with the same outcomes as I was, or the ways I thought these outcomes should be achieved. I quickly became aware that using my interpretation of a 'feminist' methodology was likely to be problematic with those women who did not, on the whole, see themselves as feminists (an issue also recognised by Millen, 1997).

I found that this particularly arose in discussions about *bhikkhunī* or *bhikṣuṇī* ordination and whether my participants viewed this in 'feminist' terms. Whilst I began this study assuming that most, if not all, of my participants would be concerned with gender equality in Buddhism given their social and cultural location in contemporary Britain, it quickly became clear that ordained women held a variety of views on this issue.[108] I was therefore faced with the dilemma of balancing and making sense of the views of those participants who seemed to be actively challenging Buddhist institutions and traditions in relation to female ordination, and those who were not. How should I interpret those who did not seem to want to overtly challenge gender inequality within their chosen Buddhist traditions? Should they be posited as oppressed or 'falsely conscious', in line with some feminist thought (Castelli, 2001:5)? Taking this stance felt highly inappropriate and in many ways disrespectful to the experiences that my participants were sharing with me.

In addition, when I questioned whether my participants felt 'empowered' by their ordination, I was met with some confusion. Although I was initially interested in this concept, which is typically used by feminist scholars and activists in relation

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[108] I analyse ordained women's attitudes to feminism and gender equality in Chapter Eight.

to improving women's lives, it was not seen by many of my participants as relevant for them as they described themselves as concerned with 'letting go of' rather than gaining power and status.[109] For example, one participant stated:

> *'Empowerment' has the sense of something to help build you up... whereas* (Buddhist) *practice tends to be more, let go of stuff and find out what else is underneath all this.*

As a result, I stopped routinely asking questions about empowerment.[110] It became increasingly clear to me that the Western feminist philosophical thought that I had, in an academic sense, grown up with was not always helpful in understanding the perspectives of some of my participants, who seemed to understand the world and their role in it in different ways. In coming to this conclusion, I was particularly influenced by the work of anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005). In her study of the Egyptian *da'wa* (piety, or mosque) movement, Mahmood connects feminist trajectories of analysis to political liberalism, and argues that we should allow for varying interpretations of concepts like 'agency' without being influenced by 'liberal assumptions' about autonomy, or 'resistance', confrontation, and opposition (Mahmood, 2005:5,14,29,157). According to Mahmood (2005:15), one can show 'agency' even when one is not seeking to change social structures and hierarchies and therefore women's lives must be evaluated within their particular social, cultural, and historic context. She rather poignantly asks: 'does a commitment to the ideal of equality in our own lives endow us with the capacity to know that this ideal captures what is, or should be, fulfilling for everyone else?' (Mahmood, 2005:38). Thus, reading Mahmood forced me to question the assumptions that I had brought to my research, and this has, inexorably, shaped my 'feminist' position.

However, I remain influenced by research styles which have typically been championed by feminist scholars, such as the use of qualitative methods to build

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[109] For a history of the use of the term 'empowerment' particularly in relation to feminist activism, see Batliwala (2007) and Mosedale (2005).

[110] After my fieldwork had finished, and whilst I was in the middle of writing the thesis, Salgado (2013:185) published a book which includes a consideration of the scholarly usage of the term 'empowerment'. She questions its relevance, as it is commonly understood by 'liberal feminists', for some renunciant Buddhist women. She draws on Mahmood (2005) to help unpick this term, but instead of abandoning it as I did, she undertakes a re-definition to incorporate a Buddhist perspective (Salgado, 2013:5,10,15,185). If Salgado's text had been available whilst I was undertaking fieldwork, I might have questioned my participants in more detail about their perspectives on 'empowerment' and been able to analyse whether there are any similarities in their narratives in comparison to Salgado's informants.

rapport with participants, and a commitment to problematising hierarchical relationships between researcher and researched (see, for example, Oakley, 1981).[111] Furthermore, like many feminist scholars, I still hope my research will 'make a difference' (Phillips, 1995:32) and raise the profile of ordained women in the British context, who have, overall, received limited attention by scholars. Therefore, a feminist methodology is both a formative force and a tension in this study.

Methods

The following sections detail the specific methods of interviewing and participant observation which I used to gather data for this study; how I gained access to participants, the sampling techniques used, and how I approached the data analysis. This study takes a broadly ethnographic approach, using qualitative research methods to investigate the lives, attitudes, experiences, and practices of ordained women within seven Buddhist groups in Britain. However, my study is not a typical ethnographic one in that I did not spend more than one week at any one fieldwork site and, in some cases, spent only one or two days with participants, although I did communicate with most on several occasions.[112] Bryman (2004:267) describes ethnography as a process 'in which the researcher is immersed in a social setting for some time to observe and listen' (see also Aull Davies, 1999:5). Whilst I was not physically 'immersed' in one particular location, I do feel that I was 'immersed' in the lives, stories, and experiences of my participants over the course of four years, whether in person, by Skype or email, or simply reading and re-reading interview data and fieldwork notes.[113] Therefore, I have borrowed techniques (particularly the integration of interviewing and participant observation) from ethnography. As Brasher (1998:6) argues, 'a cardinal goal of any religious

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[111] Although qualitative methods have typically been prioritised by feminist researchers (Aull Davies, 1999:41), quantitative approaches are being increasingly used (for example, see Aune, 2011, Sanchez Taylor, 2001). As Neitz (2011:64) explains, 'the current view holds that 'methods' are neither feminist nor anti-feminist: rather it depends on how a method is used'.

[112] The reasons for this, and the challenges that this approach created, will be discussed later in this chapter.

[113] 'Skype' is an internet-based telephony service that I used to communicate with several of my participants (www.skype.com).

ethnography… is to advance our understanding of lived religion' and it was to this end that I consciously strived in my study.

Interviews

In this research, I conducted formal, semi-structured, interviews with twenty-four ordained (and one formerly ordained) women with long-term connections to Britain. I interviewed nine participants more than once, and I continued to have regular contact with almost all of my participants using email, telephone, or Skype. The fieldwork element of this research officially began in September 2011 and whilst the initial formal interviews were completed by July 2012, contact was on-going, including whilst I was writing the thesis. The dates of the initial interviews are included in Appendix One. Interviews took place in various locations: retreat centres, monastic communities, domestic houses, cafés, on the telephone or Skype, depending on what was most convenient for the participant in question. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in full, and field-notes were taken simultaneously. Interviews were usually between one and two hours in length (some were over four hours, but split into two or more interview sessions), although there was one exception to this.[114] All participants were given an information sheet about the study and were asked to sign a consent form. The schedule of interview questions is included Appendix Two.

During the data collection and analysis, I adopted a broadly 'grounded' approach. Whilst I did not follow 'Grounded Theory' in the strict sense as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), I used, as Ezzy (2002:10) describes, 'an on-going simultaneous process of deduction and induction, of theory building, testing and re-building'. I did not conduct a formal pilot interview or series of interviews, but adapted questions at each interview. As themes arose in the data that I may not have predicted at the outset, I was able to then ask additional questions of participants (often by email, although sometimes by phone, Skype or in person) and I also ensured that any future interviews included questions relating to these themes. I did not start my research with any particular testable hypothesis

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[114] The interview with Himavaddhi was short (10 minutes) as this was all the time that was available. It is included in the overall sample as her evidence is valuable, although I acknowledge that the detail obtained from other interviewees was not obtained.

(although, naturally, I had ideas, impressions, and expectations) but taking the lead from a grounded approach enabled me to draw conclusions from the data.

Participant Observations

Whilst I recognise that participant observations are rarely *the* most important method of information collection in ethnography, their use in this study contextualised the interview data and allowed me to learn more about daily practices (Aull Davies, 1999:71). Participant observations also enabled me to build rapport with my participants as I joined in communal rituals, meditations, and work periods.

During my fieldwork, I attended and participated in an array of retreats, teachings, meditations, communal gatherings and ritual events, such as prayers and chanting.[115] When I stayed within a Buddhist community, be it a monastery, retreat centre, or small community, I abided by their rules. For example, at Samye Ling, I followed the 'Five Golden Rules', and during a Tibetan Gelug weekend retreat, I adhered to 'the Eight Mahāyāna precepts' which included not eating after mid-day.[116] At Throssel Hole, the principal monastery in the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition in Britain, I learnt quickly how to behave during a communal meal, how to greet people in the corridors (*gasshō*, a ritual 'bow' with hands in prayer position, see Oliver, 1979:196). I followed guidance on mindfulness during mundane practices such as cleaning my teeth or showering, I maintained periods of silence when instructed to do so, and participated in communal work periods with monks and lay people, including, once, digging a ditch. I felt that by doing these things, I was not only being respectful to the tradition, but also gaining some insight into a life guided by precepts and community schedule. I made notes during participant observation periods and sometimes after; scribbling notes for some time in my car or in my room at the retreat centre, or outside if I were able to take a walk after periods of meditation or teaching. To minimise disruption, I never took notes during a meditation session. Indeed, during most meditation sessions, I

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[115] These were, typically, residential introductory retreats as I felt that this would give me the basic understanding of the key points of teaching and practice amongst the different Buddhist communities.

[116] For a discussion of the 'Five Golden Rules' and their similarity to the five lay precepts typically followed by Buddhists, see Bluck (2006:120-1).

felt more like a participant rather than an observer, as due to the nature of meditation (introspective, often with eyes closed, in silence), once posture, practice, room-layout and teaching style are noted, there is little else to observe. Therefore, more often than not, I simply did the meditation practices myself. The most useful means to explain the different positions that I took during the fieldwork period is found in Gold's 'observer-participant' continuum. Knott uses this continuum to identify the positions that a researcher might adopt, ranging from complete observer, through to complete participant (Knott, 2005a:246). I took different positions on this continuum at different times during my fieldwork; most often ranging between 'observer-as-participant' and 'participant-as-observer'.

Alongside observing communal or individual practices, I also I joined various e-mail mailing lists and discussion forums (notably, the Network of Buddhist Organisations) and signed up to receive email newsletters from the Buddhist groups involved in my study, where these were available. Whilst I did not engage in any formal observation and analysis of discussion forums (nor did I post comments), they were useful to keep abreast of news.

Sampling, Access, and Inclusion Criteria

I began this study planning to interview fourteen ordained women living in four Buddhist communities. I wrote letters of request to each group and included my information sheet. Whilst I had a positive response from five women initially, by September 2011 I had not heard from anyone else. In an attempt to encourage more participants, I attended the *International Bhikkhunī Day* celebration in September 2011 at the London Buddhist Society. Although I did not meet any potential participants at this event, I met someone who agreed to promote my study amongst the ordained women she knew. This elicited an almost immediate response and I recruited five more participants, including one from a group I had not previously been aware of (Amida Trust) and one woman who had formerly been ordained. I was told by these participants about other ordained women living both inside and outside monastic communities (some outside of the UK). I also met two participants at teachings and retreats that I attended, and I became aware of three participants as a result of an internet search. As the number of potential participants and groups increased, I decided to spend a shorter amount of time with a larger number of participants. In widening my sample, it is possible that some of

the detail I would have gathered by spending longer time with fewer communities has been lost. However, by including a larger sample, I have been able to reflect a wider range of ordained women in Britain. In addition, whilst it was unfortunate that I was never able to witness an ordination ceremony, I did obtain some detailed verbal descriptions (and occasionally, written descriptions) from my participants, which I reflect on further in Chapter Six.

I deliberately chose to include only ordained women and not approach ordained men or lay people, primarily because the relative lack of attention given to ordained women in a British context is a gap I am seeking to fill. I appreciate Gutschow's position when she argues that in order to get a full picture of the lives of nuns, their interactions with monks and lay people cannot be overlooked (Gutschow, 2004:12). However, this would have created a much larger study, and may have lost focus. Where possible, however, I have mentioned relationships that ordained women have with the lay members of their communities and the male monastics from the testimony given to me by women themselves, although I recognise that this is an issue which would be fruitful to explore further in future.

To be included in this study women had to be ordained (or formerly ordained) within the definition of their tradition, they had to be over eighteen years old, and either be British or have a strong connection to Britain, most commonly having lived in Britain for an extended period of time. My focus is on 'converts' to Buddhism rather than those who have been raised in Buddhist families, as I felt that this was one way of exploring the relationships between British cultural values and traditional Buddhist practices.[117] Of the sample, twenty three women were British nationals (including Scottish, Welsh, and English), and three were not, although the three who were not British were from Western Europe or North America. Only one of my participants was not ethnically white. This was not a deliberate exclusion, but a reflection of the individuals who agreed to participate. I did not set out to undertake a study that would be representative of all ordained women in Britain and there are other Buddhist groups in Britain where women ordain that are not included in this study (for example, the New Kadampa Tradition or the Community of Inter-Being). Indeed, given the heterogeneity within my sample, I could argue that a 'representative' study would be impossible. However,

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[117] In Britain, there are ordained Buddhist women who are not British or 'Western' and who were brought up in families outside of the UK where Buddhism was the predominant religion, including in some of the groups involved in this study. To cite an additional example, the Fo Guang Shan temple in London houses a small community of Taiwanese nuns.

the sample that I have selected does reflect a range of ages (although many were over fifty), living situations (for example, some in monastic communities, some in lay communities and some living alone), and Buddhist traditions. I also interviewed women who had been ordained for different lengths of time, who had taken different numbers of precepts, and who held various roles within their organisations. Numerically, the largest group in my sample were women in the Triratna Order, where I interviewed nine participants in six different locations. The size of the sample reflects that Triratna are one of the 'three largest Buddhist groups in Britain' (Bluck, 2006:16). Triratna, having an ordination which is seen to be 'neither lay nor monastic' is, in some ways, a very different group in comparison to the monastic traditions in this study (Bluck, 2006:167,172, Vajragupta, 2010:108, Vishvapani, 2001:29-30). However, I felt that it was important to include them as they reflect the spectrum of practices within the term 'ordination' in the British context.

Overall, I had a high response rate and only two women refused to participate after I had had initial discussions with them. My overall impression is that ordained women were happy to help (a number of them had done research for an academic qualification themselves and sympathised with the process of asking people to participate in research). Several felt that women's experiences had been overlooked in work on Buddhism in Britain to date. Some participants also wanted to raise awareness of the higher ordination issue and about concerns that they had in terms of gender inequality within Buddhism. In analysing the research data, I remained aware of the motivating factors for women's involvement and the impact that this might have on the content and tone of their interviews.

Despite perceived problems with their replicability (Bryman, 2004:284) and the impression that ethnographic qualitative methods are 'too particular, too local' (Cole, 1995:198) they remain the most relevant method to best explore my research questions. I selected qualitative methods because the aim of this study was to analyse the lives of ordained women through the prism of their individual experiences and I needed to seek their views in some depth. This would not have been as readily achievable using a quantitative research method, such as a survey. Whilst a quantitative survey of all ordained women in Britain might have been a useful companion to the qualitative data, given the small numbers of ordained women across Britain it might not have added in any substantial way to the research and was, ultimately, beyond the scope of this study. However, I will

reflect further on the impact of these methods on my results in the conclusion to the thesis.

Coding and Analysis

In line with a 'grounded' approach, I began analysis and data coding as soon as the first interview had been transcribed. I chose not to use a computer data analysis programme (such as NViVo) as I was working with a relatively small number of interviews and I wanted to be intimately acquainted with the data. My approach consisted of reading the transcripts and field-notes in detail and manually drawing out initial themes, grouping quotations from participants using a number of different codes, then reading transcripts multiple times to see if anything had been overlooked. I did this after each interview and then again several times when all the interviews were completed. I initially created around thirty 'codes', for example, 'community', 'support', 'belonging', 'discipline', 'dedication', 'initial interest', 'motivation'. I then reduced the number of codes by re-reading transcripts to find the most relevant for my research questions. I also routinely read through whole transcripts to ensure that individual quotations were not taken out of context. As Warren and Hackney (2000:56) explain, 'analysis in the social sciences is an interpretative rather than an objective process – one that takes place at the intersection of theory, method, discourse and the historical moment'. In addition to this thematic analysis, I also adapted Knott and Khokher's (1993) perceptual maps when examining attitudes to feminism and gender equality, and I shall discuss this technique in Chapter Eight.

Ethical Issues

The final section in this chapter explores the ethical issues that I faced in this study, specifically my approach to working with small communities and the issue of participant anonymity. This study received ethical approval from the University

of Leeds Faculty Ethics Committee in February 2011.[118] Whilst I considered a range of ethical issues in the review process, I detail the most important here.

Researching Small Communities: Confidentiality and Anonymity

Central to the 'Statement of Ethical Practice' of the British Sociological Association is a commitment to participant confidentiality. It declares that 'the anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected' (BSA, 2002). When researching participants from small communities where they may be potentially identifiable, it was necessary to consider carefully the boundaries of anonymity, and work to engage participants to ensure that they were able to give fully informed consent. Participants were told about the limits of anonymity both before and during the interview, and I continued to work closely with many of them to ensure that they were described and represented in a satisfactory way. Each participant was given a randomly selected pseudonym, and although most were happy to be linked to particular Buddhist groups, some were not. Therefore those participants who requested an extra level of anonymity are linked only to a broad tradition, such as 'Tibetan'. Throughout this thesis, I adopt, at times, a more inclusive writing style, referring to 'a number' or 'some' ordained women, for example. Occasionally, I might use a participant quotation that is not attributed. This is not because I am being unwittingly imprecise, but to give some measure of disguise to participants where exact numbers or use of pseudonyms do not aid the discussion as a whole.

I offered each participant their completed interview transcript and allowed them to make changes to it, and eleven women did so.[119] When I was writing sections of the thesis, particularly those which dealt with sensitive or controversial issues, I also sent these to various participants to comment. Taking this more collaborative approach allowed me to build the trust of my participants and ensured that they felt comfortable discussing sensitive issues, helping to improve the accuracy of my work. However, there was a cost to this style of research

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[118] After approval, I made several changes to the project plan, primarily in relation to where the interview data would be stored. I received approval for these changes on the 12th July 2011.

[119] This is with the exception of Himavaddhi. Her interview was very short and I felt that it was not necessary to send the transcript to her.

interaction. During interviews, I was sometimes told interesting anecdotes that would have been useful to include, but in order to protect my participants I chose not to. I also had to balance carefully the wishes of my participants with my responsibility to carry out a rigorous academic critical analysis. Although I wanted my participants to feel that they had been protected and well-represented as part of this research study, it was clear that my job as a researcher was not just to act as their mouthpiece, a tension that Knott (1995:205) also recognises in her research within a Hare Krishna community. I reflect further on these issues in the conclusion to the thesis.

Being an Insider and an Outsider and 'the Overused Binary': My Position in the Research Field

Critical dialogue about the relationships between researchers and the groups and individuals they are studying has become familiar in religious studies.[120] Whether a researcher is an 'insider' or an 'outsider' has been much discussed and critiqued in the study of religion, particularly if you are, or you become, an insider during the research process (Mc Carthy Brown, 1999:350). Without acknowledging our own position and its influence on our research, 'we simply leave the subjective realities of our research uncontrolled' (Hufford, 1999:295). In light of this, it is important to identify that to some extents I am an 'insider' to Buddhism and had some connection to three of the organisations before my PhD research began, although I am not currently a regular part of any one Buddhist community in Britain.

I was brought up in an atheist/agnostic household but I spent my formative years in various South East Asian countries. I have family in Thailand and I have visited fairly regularly in child and adulthood. Buddhism was the religion that was most present during my childhood and teenage years before I moved back to England permanently at eighteen years old. The impact of this on my research is complex. My 'insider', or at least 'believer', status did help me to build rapport with my participants and possibly may have granted me a greater level of access to some participants, although my affiliation was often only discussed when an interview was in progress. Most participants asked about my connection to the subject area, and I freely volunteered information. One participant stated that it

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[120] For an edited collection of scholarly perspectives, see McCutcheon (1999).

was easier talking about Buddhism to me, as she did not feel that she had to 'defend' it. However, like Wolf (1996:16), I want to critique the 'simplistic dichotomy' of the insider/outsider categories. Although I may have an affinity with Buddhism, I am not a complete insider to any one group. Although I have taken refuge, I am not ordained and would be an 'insider' only to lay practice. My status as a researcher also separates me from my participants. Therefore, at one and the same time, I am situated as both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. Narayan (1993:676) challenges how the positions of insider and outsider have been differentiated and argues that 'even as insiders or partial insiders, in some contexts we are drawn closer, in others we are thrust apart'. Indeed, Wolf concurs, and states that the terms are an 'overused binary' (Wolf, 1996:16-17).

So, whilst I have a complex but lifelong connection to Buddhism, my interest in Western women's ordination and their ideas about gender equality is relatively recent. It was inspired by a confrontation of sorts that I witnessed between some Tibetan nuns and Western Buddhist lay women over the 'higher' ordination issue during the *International Conference on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha*, in Hamburg in July 2007.[121] In one side session, a few Western women loudly and confidently spoke about their desire that 'higher' ordination should be accessible for all Buddhist women, but this was not met with universal support from the Tibetan nuns. This sparked questions for me about Western women's relationships with Buddhist tradition, with feminism and ideas of gender equality, and motivated my desire to analyse these issues in relation to ordained Buddhist women in contemporary Britain.

 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered both the overarching methodology and the methods employed in this study. I have positioned myself in the research, given an indication of my role in relationship to the various organisations in this study, and given attention to the ethical issues that influenced my approach. In the next chapter, I consider the first theme drawn from the research data and focus on the narratives of conversion amongst ordained Buddhist women in Britain.

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[121] See Salgado (2013:222) for a further discussion of this incident.

Chapter Five: Ordained Buddhist Women and Narratives of 'Conversion'.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse how the participants in this study initially came into contact with Buddhism, and why they decided to commit to a Buddhist path in the contemporary British context. I will first present biographical information which serves to introduce the participants of this study and I will then examine participants' narratives through a typology consisting of three themes: dissatisfaction, answers, and connection.

When I began interviewing ordained women, I included the question about their first contact with Buddhism merely as a conversational 'ice-breaker'. Whilst I was interested in how, and where, women came into contact with Buddhist groups, I did not at first see this as having much relevance for a study that took ordination as its core focus. This was especially because an initial decision to commit to a Buddhist group does not automatically mean that someone will later decide to ordain. Yet, as the interviews progressed, I began to notice some interesting points of similarity in the narratives, despite some of the different biographical details that women presented. Foregrounding relationships and bonds with others (including with the historical Buddha and members of their immediate Buddhist community), the sense that suffering or dissatisfaction is pervasive and the desire to investigate and make some sense of this, appear relevant beyond the early connections that ordained women made with particular organisations or Buddhist teachings. Although an analysis of the narratives of ordained women's initial contact with Buddhism does not, at first glance, seem to directly answer one of my three principal research questions, I will argue that by paying attention to what initially drew women to Buddhism, we also begin to appreciate why they ordain, and what ordination means in this context.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first, entitled 'Connecting with Buddhism', explores the different backgrounds of the women in this study, giving particular attention to their previous religious affiliation, their age on first coming across Buddhist teachings, groups or teachers, and their socio-economic circumstances. This section also presents the route that individual women took to the Buddhist group which they eventually ordained within. The second section, 'Why Buddhism?' builds on this biographical data, and introduces

my tripartite typology of 'dissatisfaction, answers, and connection'. The final section of this chapter explores how ordained women in the contemporary British milieu understand 'conversion', thus situating this study in relation to wider research concerned with Buddhism and religious change in a British (or Western) context. Ultimately, I will argue that although ordained women's involvement with Buddhism does not always require a complete disconnection from the past, the significant moment of change (or 'light in the dark' experience) is nevertheless a feature of some of the narratives and therefore should not be discounted. However, I will also highlight that, because their biographies are narrated through their later experiences of ordination, this is likely to colour the way they describe their 'conversion'. I will then discuss the subsequent implications of this evidence for understanding religious change amongst Buddhists in Britain.

Connecting with Buddhism

Biography and Background

In the opening phase of my interviews with ordained women, I asked how they first came across Buddhism and what drew them to a Buddhist group or tradition. Whilst none of the women used the term 'conversion' (as I will discuss later in this chapter), they were all able to identify a time when they remembered first coming across Buddhist teachings, teachers, or practices.

Of the twenty-five participants in this study, ten recalled their first contact with Buddhism when they were in their twenties; a time of questioning previously held assumptions and practical independence (including through travel). Five of the women were in their thirties, and four in their forties, having experienced careers, romantic relationships and, for some, motherhood. Two women had their initial contact with Buddhism in their fifties, and four in their teenage years. None recalled being exposed, in any significant way, to Buddhism prior to their teenage years and, although Sumitra (Triratna) remembers being taken to the London Buddhist Society as a child by her mother who was interested in spirituality and mysticism, she did not place much weight on this.[122] None of the women in this

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[122] As discussed in Chapter One, the Triratna community was, until 2010, called the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO). Although the participants in

study were born into families where Buddhism was the sole religion practiced. If the sample is divided up into sub-sets according to Buddhist group or tradition, the age when women made initial contact with Buddhism appears to be fairly evenly spread, apart from within the Forest Sangha/ Theravāda, where all the women had initial contact with Buddhism in their late teenage years or twenties. However, as the sample size is small, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about this.

For most, their first significant contact with Buddhism occurred immediately prior to sustained involvement with a particular group or community. However, four of the women described reading books or watching documentaries about Buddhism or Buddhist monks at an earlier stage, which had what Suvanna (Forest Sangha) describes as 'a deep resonance'. Lobsang (Kagyu) had studied religion at University and recognised that she felt an affiliation with Buddhist doctrine (it 'struck a chord'), although it was some years before she investigated further and committed to a particular group and teacher. So, although this initial exposure did not always lead to an immediate search for a Buddhist group to practice within, or indeed even prompt an inquiry about other reading or viewing material about Buddhism, it was highlighted by these women as an important moment. As I will explore in more detail in the final section of this chapter, not every woman's initial involvement with Buddhism could be categorised as smooth or linear. For example, Charumati (Triratna) made initial contact with Triratna in the 1990s, but this was then followed by a period of years when she was not involved, before she returned to the group in early 2000. Furthermore, three of the women also described some early exposure to Buddhism that they did not think was particularly significant. Edwina (OBC) explains that she first read a book about Buddhism when she was 17, but 'couldn't make head nor tail of it'; Dalha (Tibetan) describes how she had some exposure to Zen Buddhism through popular culture and the 'beat poets' but hadn't really engaged with the philosophy any further, and Elizabeth (Gelug) had come across images of the Buddha but they 'just came into (her) visual field and then left'.

Twenty of the women in this study had their initial contact with Buddhism in the 1980s or 1990s, and one in the 2000s. Only four women became involved with Buddhist groups prior to the 1980s. Although there are not many discernible differences in the paths that they took as defined by the era of their first contact, those who became involved with Buddhist groups in Britain in the 1980s or earlier

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this study sometimes used the term FWBO when talking events that occurred prior to 2010, I will use the term Triratna for expediency.

do mention that their group approached newcomers in different ways in the early days. For example, several participants indicated that Buddhist groups in Britain had become more organised as the decades progressed, including offering introductory training, workshops and retreats that were not previously widely available. Indeed, for Chandrakala (Triratna) as there was no Triratna group in her city at the time she became interested in Buddhism, she had to set one up herself which she describes as 'hard work at first' but also 'quite exciting as well'. All but three of the participants in this study first came across Buddhism whilst they were living in Britain. Of those who were outside Britain, two were travelling in Asia, and one was in the United States. Although Priyarati (Triratna) was already part of a Buddhist group where she practiced meditation, it was only following a six-month long work trip outside of the UK that she decided that she wanted to be more involved with Triratna and make a formal commitment as a *mitra*. This formal commitment process in Triratna will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the religious backgrounds of participants. 'Religious background' in this context refers to the religion that their immediate families were practicing at the time of their birth/childhood, as reported by the women themselves. In this sample, there does not seem to be any particular link between affiliation to a particular religion in childhood and the later choice of Buddhist tradition (for example, a preponderance of former Catholics in Tibetan traditions, for example).[123]

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[123] Ploos Van Amstel (2005:47) notes that the majority of the Western nuns in the Tibetan tradition who she interviewed had Christian families. Henry (2008:341) indicates that half of those whom he interviewed who had made a commitment to Socially Engaged Buddhist organisations in Britain had some form of Christian upbringing. Bluck (2006:190), however, states that 'many "convert" Buddhists in Britain have grown up with no Christian background'. Of my participants, a majority were raised in families where Christianity was the practiced religion, although some only described this as nominally Christian. What is interesting, however, is that the vast majority of my participants listed some form of religious background, even though this might be nominal, with only one stating that she was brought up with 'no religion'. This might be a reflection of the ages of my participants, many of whom were over fifty at the time of interview (which I discuss in Chapter Six) as this generation were arguably more likely to have a Christian upbringing in Britain. Although I am unable to assess it reliably in this study, this experience might change for future generations of ordained women.

Table 1: Religious Background of Participants

Religious Background	Number of Women
Catholic	6
Church of England/Church of Scotland	10
Other Christian (Baptist, Christian Scientist)	4
Other/Not Stated	4
No Religion	1

For some women, like Ailith (OBC) and Prasanna (Theravāda), although they had some family ties to a particular religious group, they highlight that this was fairly limited and they only went to Church for weddings, funerals, and occasionally Christmas. Others, such as Ceola (OBC), Sumitra (Triratna), and Charumati (Triratna) describe religion as being clearly present throughout their childhoods. Charumati described how she had, since childhood, 'a very strong sense of a spiritual path' and had, at one point, wanted to be a Catholic nun. However, whether or not they had any formal links to a particular religious tradition, a number of participants described an early interest in religion and had raised spiritual questions. This is exemplified by Kalinda (Tibetan) who states:

> *I suppose I was always interested in… Who am I? What's the meaning of life?*

Dolma (Gelug) reinforces this by saying:

> *I'd been interested in spiritual things all my life, I can't remember not being.*

In the testimonies of the participants in this study, perhaps not surprisingly, there are two common reactions to the religion of childhood – ambivalence or outright rejection. Dhatri (Amida) recalls being 'angry with religion' which led her to adhere very strongly to an atheist position. Similarly, Aarya (Amida) went through a period of rejecting her parents' Christian faith as 'too closed minded'. The majority of participants began to question their religious backgrounds in their teens or early twenties, and often whilst at university. For example, Charumati (Triratna), who had described herself as 'full of faith' as a child, began to question Catholicism after taking a Sociology of Religion module. Several describe reaching university and not liking the Christian groups or societies on offer, and deliberately distancing themselves from them as a consequence. However, others had more

mild reactions, for example Lobsang (Kagyu) who, although was brought up in a Christian household, states 'I didn't really rebel against it, I just didn't take it on', or Ailith (OBC), who felt that Christianity 'just didn't work for me'.

As will be explored later in the chapter, the search for answers to questions about life is a significant theme for ordained women in their early contact with Buddhism, and the feeling that a childhood religion did not provide these answers is apparent in a number of the testimonies. For Elizabeth (Gelug), a former Catholic, 'things didn't really make …sense, certain parts of dogma didn't seem realistic to me'. Similarly for Alura (OBC) who although she had enjoyed attending Church, particularly Sunday school, felt that when she became a teenager, 'it just didn't make sense anymore' and it was therefore abandoned. Yet, several of those who had rejected their religion of childhood felt that that something was missing. As Charumati (Triratna) states:

> *I gave up Catholicism because I couldn't believe in God any longer, but I kind of missed it.*

This certainly adds some weight to the findings in Kennedy's (2004:144) study where several of his participants had 'undirected and unfulfilled childhood religiosity', although this was by no means described by all the participants in this study. However, having questions about life and death (and a desire to make sense of these) certainly led a number of the women towards Buddhism, and, as I will explain in the next section, this was sometimes via other (non-Buddhist and Buddhist) religious communities and practices. However, before discussing the route by which participants came into contact with Buddhism, I will present brief information on their socio-economic backgrounds. Given that some scholars have presented 'convert' Buddhists as typically highly educated and 'middle class' with relatively high incomes, it is interesting to see how far the participants in this study conform to this socio-economic demographic (Baumann, 2002a:100, Bluck, 2006:190, Waterhouse, 1997:8) .

Whilst I didn't enquire as to participants perceived 'class', I was, in most cases, able to ascertain their educational and employment history from which some conclusions might be drawn. Sixteen of the sample were university educated (two of these to MA or PhD level) and a further three undertook vocational, art or drama school training after leaving school. This certainly lends support to the perception that 'convert' Buddhists in Britain are highly educated. Fifteen of the participants had high-profile careers; five were teachers or in professions related to teaching,

four were in nursing or health professions, four were in artistic professions, and two were in IT. At least fifteen women had been (or continued to be) home-owners and had some independent financial security.

Initial Contact

In the following section, I will explore how my participants initially made contact with Buddhist groups. I will show that ordained Buddhist women in the British context were typically more likely to make a firm commitment to the first Buddhist group they had contact with, rather than visiting multiple groups and experiencing the teaching and practices that they offered.[124] This is, in the main, due to the importance of relationships and strong personal connections that are made to particular teachers, teachings and communities which are a key feature of the experiences presented by women in this study. The implications of this will be further analysed in the final section of this chapter.

After rejecting the religion practiced in their childhood, and before making contact with a Buddhist group, five women in this sample got involved first with another religion. For two of the five women, this was as Quakers, and the remaining three both explored a number of major world religions, including Hinduism. A further two became aware of Buddhism through what Eddy (2012:197) refers to as 'alternative spirituality' including yoga, although for both of these participants, these practices were done not as part of a 'spiritual' search necessarily, but for physical health. All but two of the participants had a period of no particular religious affiliation before visiting a Buddhist group for the first time.

Only nine out of twenty-five participants in this study visited or tried out the practices of different Buddhist groups or traditions before making a commitment to the group that they later ordained within. What is important to recognise here is that, for most women, their initial contact with Buddhist groups appears unintentional, rather than as a result of a deliberate pursuit of a new religious group

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[124] This show some similarities to the participants in Eddy's (2012:198) study who, she argues, were unlikely to follow a model of 'simultaneous or serial involvement' in more than two different Buddhist groups (see also Phillips and Aarons, 2005:224-8). As I discussed in Chapter Three, the importance of a connection with one particular teacher influenced women's early affiliation to particular Tibetan groups in Ploos Van Amstel's study (2005:45), similar to the Forest Sangha monks and *sīladharā* in Goswell's (1988:2/90) study.

to join. Davidman and Greil's (1993:89) 'paths of entrée' amongst converts to
Modern Orthodox Judaism is a useful framework through which to present and
analyse this. I have used these categories in Table 2, and will describe these
positions using more detailed examples from my data, mirroring Davidman and
Greil's approach.

Table 2: Davidman and Greil's Paths of Entrée

Mode of Initial Contact With Religious Group	Number of Ordained Women
Accidental Contact	16
Casual Search	4
Committed Search	5

Those participants who fall under the 'accidental contact' path, who form the
majority of the sample, describe becoming aware of Buddhist groups almost
without meaning to.[125] As Davidman and Greil (1993:89) describe: 'not
deliberately or self-consciously seeking a spiritual path'. These women were not
looking for a religious group to join (although this doesn't preclude asking
questions about life, for example, which will be discussed later). They were often
introduced to particular traditions through existing friendship networks, including
through romantic partners. To cite one example, Elizabeth (Gelug), who was
travelling in Asia, became ill and was advised by a friend to travel to a Tibetan
monastery to recover. Although she hadn't been initially keen to do so, distancing
herself from '1970s spiritual seekers' she knew (and stating clearly that since her
rejection of her religion of childhood, she was not immediately interested in
finding another spiritual practice), she did go to the monastery to recuperate.
Although she thought, at first, that this would just be a good dinner party
conversation topic, she was strongly affected by the teachings being given and very
quickly committed to this group as a result, asking for refuge within two weeks.

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[125] This idea of 'accidental' contact might be questioned by those who understand
kamma/karma as influencing life-choices and circumstances. If a *kammic/karmic*
explanation is invoked, then nothing is 'accidental', but is instead a result of
actions in current and past lives. However, I adopt Davidman and Greil's term in
order to highlight the differences between those who make a very committed and
deliberate effort to find a Buddhist group to get involved with and those for whom
the initial contact was seemingly more unplanned.

Women who I've placed under the title of 'casual searcher' had, like Ceola (OBC), been interested in learning meditation techniques for some time (she describes being attracted to meditation early in life), and had done a few *sesshins* (an intensive period of meditation in the Zen tradition) with some other Sōtō Zen groups. However, she felt that it was difficult to establish a meditation practice where the teachers were not based permanently in Britain. She later met a friend who informed her about Throssel Hole and the Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition, and she attended a weekend introductory retreat which she said 'sat right' with her. Although she later visited two or three other Buddhist centres, she said she felt immediately attracted to the community at Throssel Hole and the way they taught meditation, so did not feel the need to give much attention to these other groups.

Those who I have placed within the 'committed search' category were, like Dalha (Tibetan), deliberately and actively searching for a Buddhist group to join (in Dalha's case, after she read a book about Buddhism). Dalha wrote a list of all the Buddhist groups in her area and made an organised plan to visit them before making a commitment to one that 'felt right'. Why women like Dalha chose Buddhism, and how they became increasingly involved, will be explored in the following sections. However, although Padma (Gelug) has been placed within the 'committed search' category (as she made a deliberate attempt to research Buddhism, and Buddhist groups), she did not feel that she 'became' a Buddhist, but instead felt that she had *always* been one. The significance of past-life connections will be discussed later in the chapter.

By analysing the data through the framework provided by Davidman and Greil's 'paths of entrée', I am able to show that only a small number of women participated in what would be called a 'committed search' for new religious affiliation. So, although Puttick (1993:6) presents Buddhist converts in the West (including in Britain) as 'active seekers', the evidence from this study provides some challenge to this. Instead, amongst the ordained women in this study, there are a variety of trajectories of initial engagement with Buddhism, a point also made by Chodron (1999:xxvii) in relation to the experiences of 'western Buddhist nuns' more generally. Amongst the participants in this study, affiliation to a particular Buddhist tradition has typically as much to do with circumstances as a conscious, methodical choice to select one tradition over another.

How, and why, the participants in this study became involved with Buddhist groups is the subject of the next section.

Why Buddhism?

In this section, I discuss in more detail why my participants initially became involved with Buddhism. Whilst ordained women describe diverse life-histories, three inter-related themes have emerged from the data: dissatisfaction, answers and connection. Whilst my use of this typology is not intended to function as a predictive model, I have structured my data in this way as it emphasises the reasons and circumstances that initially motivated the participants of this study to become involved with Buddhist groups, teachers, and communities. However, whilst there are some shared features within the narratives, there remains a level of diversity in the accounts which cannot be glossed over in a rush to offer a singular picture. Furthermore, a number of women offer multiple reasons for their involvement in Buddhist groups which undermines any attempt at rigid classification. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the implications of this data for understanding the process of religious change as narrated by ordained Buddhist women in Britain.

Dissatisfaction

As I discussed in Chapter Three, acknowledging the pervasiveness of 'unsatisfactoriness', 'dissatisfaction' or 'suffering' is one of the cornerstones of Buddhist teaching, and it is mentioned in several studies as a motivating factor for prompting initial interest and engagement with Buddhism (for example, see Goswell, 1988:2/76). It is perhaps no surprise, then, that it also features in many of the narratives in this study. 'Dissatisfaction', as a motivating force to propel an individual towards involvement with Buddhism, is experienced in various guises, ranging from severe crisis to a more general unsettled feeling that something is missing from life-as-lived (see also, Kennedy, 2004:145). Yet, dissatisfaction (albeit variably explained) is a key motivating factor for ordained women's initial involvement in Buddhist groups.

Six women explained that it was a period of significant crisis which directly influenced their decision to get involved with a Buddhist group. This included divorce, death of friends or family members, and periods of mental ill-health (including post-natal depression).[126] Dolma (Gelug) sought out a Buddhist group following the death of her father and a close friend principally because 'she had heard the Tibetans were quite good on death and dying'. For Prasanna (Theravāda) it was after the untimely death of her mother that 'questions about life… just exploded into (her) face' and led her to want to connect with someone who could help her make sense of this. Interestingly, only one participant mentions experimentation with illegal drugs as having some influence on her desire to find out about alternative religious movements (although a further two mention this was part of their life experience), which directly contrasts with those in Goswell's (1988) and Bell's (1991) studies. This, of course, does not mean it did not occur, only that in the re-telling of the story it was not deemed relevant.

It does not automatically follow that all women experiencing crisis always engage in a 'committed search' for a Buddhist group. Whilst Tanirika (Triratna) made a concerted effort to find a group that would teach her meditation, another participant was by no means looking for a resolution to her crisis through a change in religious affiliation. Instead, she was looking for somewhere to live and a friend recommended a Buddhist organisation that might be able to help. For Siladakini (Triratna), her concerns were also rather more practical. Following her graduation from college, she explains: 'I had a whole crisis around how I worked… what I could do in terms of jobs'. This was experienced at the same time as a period of questioning her relationship with her parents and she credits this as significant in her decision to explore a Buddhist path. For one participant, although she experienced major crisis in the form of the death of a family member and this inspired her to attend a Buddhist meditation retreat, she did not really understand what was being taught as a result of her emotional distress (although she did recognise that it was supportive). It was therefore some time before she made a more regular commitment to a specific Buddhist group. It does not always indicate, therefore, that the experience of an immediate crisis invariably provides the impetus for religious change in this context. Indeed, Vasundara (Triratna) had what could be termed a significant life-crisis *after* her initial contact with the Buddhist

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[126] Although a further four women identified that they had experienced events like these they did not identify that it was this event that had a direct influence on their decision to get involved with a Buddhist group.

group. She had been attending a regular Buddhist meditation class, but then experienced the death of her mother and close friend in quick succession. Whilst she was already in contact with the group, she explains that the reaction of other group members (particularly, their ability to openly talk about death) more deeply integrated her into the group. The role of relationships in connecting women into their Buddhist groups will be discussed in the following section.

What appears most common amongst the participants in this study is a more general sense that something was missing from life. A feeling of sustained dissatisfaction, however successful an individual might be in terms of career or financial security, was described in this study as both a rationale for initial involvement in Buddhism, and a later desire to ordain. This is best exemplified in the narrative provided by Delia (OBC). Whilst Delia had a secure job, a house, financial security and a romantic relationship, she described a 'vague restless unhappiness' that couldn't be appeased using ways often adopted by people in mainstream British society such as going to the cinema, going out drinking with friends, going on holiday, or getting a new job:

> I'd always had a sense that there was something I was looking for, but you know, life was fine, nice career, nice house, nice friends, whatever, but something was missing and I'd had that pretty much all my life to be honest, just feeling, just sort of slightly, you know, the things which were nice, just weren't complete.

This is mirrored by both Chandrakala (Triratna) and Suvanna (Forest Sangha):

> I was in my mid-40s, and everything was going pretty well really, got a job I enjoyed, family, husband, children, everything, but I felt that there was something missing... How it came to me was 'is this all it is? (Chandrakala)

> I was pretty secure and comfortable but I was looking for something else, I wasn't fulfilled (Suvanna)

Yet, although Delia, Suvanna and Chandrakala report being aware of this feeling of dissatisfaction with life prior to their involvement with Buddhist groups, Lobsang (Kagyu) reports only noticing that something wasn't quite right *after* she met a Buddhist teacher and listened to him speak. She explains:

> I'd done all the things that you do, you know, grown up, gone to University, got a job, a relationship, got married, I had my own flat and got a job that gave a car, so I was alright, but I wasn't you know, exactly satisfied.... although I wasn't really aware of that.

In fact, Lobsang only made initial contact with a Buddhist group through a friend who persuaded her to come along to a teaching given by a Tibetan monk. She explained that she hadn't been particularly keen to go and hadn't known much about Buddhism, although when she got there she was so moved by the teachings that she took refuge on the same night. This sense of 'rear view mirror dissatisfaction' highlights that not all women in this sample fit the model of 'active seeker', who, following some personal crisis, single-mindedly pursue a new religious affiliation. This parallels some participants in Goswell's (1988) study of the Forest Sangha, which I detailed in Chapter Three. However, whilst only a minority of women in this study thought they were consciously looking for a new religious affiliation, considerably more described a subtly different type of search that propelled them towards Buddhism: a search for answers to questions that had been troubling them.

Answers

As I have exemplified through the narratives of Delia, Suvanna and Chandrakala, most of the participants in this study explained that their initial reason for being attracted to Buddhism was because it provided satisfactory answers to questions that they had about life and living. As they demonstrate, these 'answers' could not be found solely through advancing their careers or by engaging with the religions with which they had affiliated in childhood. For example, Rajana (Forest Sangha) describes feeling concerned that she found it difficult to respond to existential questions, despite her previous involvement with several different religious traditions. She was drawn to Buddhism because;

> it seemed to provide answers and just a way of dealing with the suffering of humanity that was incredibly practical.

For Dalha (Tibetan), her first connection with Buddhist teachings was profound and, as she explains, 'answered every question I ever had about … life and why do I exist'. Including Dalha, seven women defined the 'life questions' that they had in terms of a conscious 'search for meaning'.[127] As Suvanna (Forest Sangha) explains;

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[127] This echoes Kennedy's (2004:145) findings amongst Western Buddhists in Leeds that, following a sense of 'crisis' (albeit variously construed), individuals became engaged in 'a search for explanation and meaning'. A desire to understand

> *I got on with my life, and went through getting a career and a house and stuff like that. And the more I got the less satisfied I was, the less it gave me a sense of meaning or the gratification I was looking for. I realised* (pause) *I needed to understand that.*

Yet, not all the participants felt that they were actively searching for meaning, and Chandrakala explains that whilst she felt there had to be 'more to life than survival' she felt very unclear exactly what questions might need answering or indeed, what might make life more meaningful. Indeed, both Vasundara and Charumati (Triratna) preferred to couch their motivations in terms of wanting a *purpose* or a more clearly defined *direction* in life (which they both distinguished from a more deliberate search for meaning). Dolma (Gelug) felt that she clearly desired a particular spiritual path to follow, with the structure and the clarity that she thought would come from that.

Interestingly, Tanirika (Triratna) felt that it was either 'carrot' or 'stick' which typically motivated engagement with Buddhism in Britain. Whilst she acknowledged that some people might be looking for meaning or explanations (the 'carrot'), she personally related more strongly to the 'stick' – feeling anxious or unhappy and needing to feel better. Whilst these two reasons are often rather blurred in the narratives, it is necessary to acknowledge that the theme of 'looking for answers' is perhaps more nuanced than it first appears. Furthermore, even those who identified they had some questions about life did not necessarily engage in deliberate search for a religious group to answer them.

Yet, even though the participants might have initially approached Buddhist groups in diverse ways and with different motivations in mind, the outcome was that Buddhism was believed to be more able to provide adequate solutions to the issues they were facing than any other resources at their disposal. Mirroring testimonies from Kennedy's (2004:144) and Goswell's (1988:2/85) studies, the feeling that Buddhism 'made sense' was prominent in many of the narratives. Indeed, as Rajana (Forest Sangha) explains:

> *I didn't actually realise it was Buddhism, it just sounded like good sense.*

This rather pragmatic rationale for early involvement with Buddhism is provided in very clear terms by six of the women. Within two weeks of her first stay at a

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'the meaning of life' was also present in Goswell's (1988:2/78) analysis of Forest Sangha monks and *sīladharā* in Britain.

Buddhist monastery, Elizabeth felt that the meditation techniques she was learning were very 'practical' (and the importance of meditation being immediately useful in dealing with negative emotions such as anxiety is also emphasised by Aarya, Priyarati and Charumati). Elizabeth describes her early reflections in practical terms:

> *I thought to myself, if I really applied myself to this, it doesn't matter what happens in my life, the most horrible thing could happen or the most wonderful and I would be able to cope with it. Is there anything that could happen that this path doesn't show a way through? And I couldn't think of any.*

However, it was not only the teaching or the practices that drew and continued to attract these participants to Buddhist groups. Equally significant were the connections made to individuals and communities. As the prominence of this 'affectional motif', to use a term coined by Lofland and Skonovd (1981:379), separates these women from the 'experiential' and 'intellectual' themes that are each notable within Coleman (2001), Eddy (2012) and Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels' (2008) studies, it is necessary to analyse this in more detail in the following section.

Connection

When I questioned how my participants initially connected with and were drawn to particular Buddhist groups, I was struck by the number who mentioned the role played by other people. Although Goswell (1988:2/89) and Kennedy (2004:147) indicate the significance of relationships in drawing people to Buddhism in Britain, given the emphasis on the 'intellectual' attraction in Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels' study, the prominence of 'spiritual practice' over personal connections in Coleman's (2001:197) study and the 'experiential' theme prioritised in Eddy's work, I was somewhat surprised at the importance given by the participants in this study to personal relationships. These 'connections' appeared in this study in various forms including powerful associations with individuals (including teachers); a feeling of being attracted to a particular group or community; and a strong sense of personal connection with the Buddha's teachings. Although as the thesis progresses I will show that these relationships do shift and change, they are extremely important in motivating women to become involved with Buddhism and, furthermore, supporting them as they become increasingly engaged.

Fourteen participants mentioned that they were initially informed about particular Buddhist groups and encouraged to visit them by people that they already knew. For six participants, this person was a romantic partner. Those who initially encouraged this interest in Buddhism were either already connected to the groups, or they were at a similar stage of involvement as the women themselves. For example, Ailith (OBC) explained that although she was 'initially reluctant' to visit a Buddhist monastery, her husband at the time was very keen to find out about Buddhism, and she recognised that visiting a monastery for the first time and learning how to meditate was a 'nice thing to do together'. Rajana described how both a friend and her boyfriend attended a teaching given by the Forest Sangha and although she felt she was 'initially snooty' about their burgeoning interest in Buddhism, she noticed a positive difference in their attitude following the teaching, and this encouraged her to attend a couple of weeks later. Interestingly, both Rajana and Ailith recognise they were initially reluctant to follow their friend's encouragement. Echoing this, Lobsang (Kagyu) in particular spent a number of months refusing a friend's suggestion to visit Samye Ling, and even told her friend 'no thank you… sounds very weird, not really for me!' However, although Sumitra (Triratna) identifies that her initial connection to Buddhism occurred because she 'fell in love with a Buddhist', she is careful to highlight that, although this was what sparked her initial interest, it wasn't the reason why she became a Buddhist, which had more to do with her attraction to the teachings, particularly the ethical precepts and the way they might guide a moral life. This would, no doubt, be mirrored by all the women who mentioned the role of other people as significant.

Despite this, it is important to recognise that friends and acquaintances, particularly for those women who became involved with Buddhist groups before the advent of the internet, were a vital source of information about newly established Buddhist communities. This provides support for Davidman and Greil's (1993:90) finding that women's initial connection to religious groups is most often facilitated via other people. However, although Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels' (2008:111) study (which only included men) prioritises intellectual engagement with Buddhism over the role of relationships (aside from with Buddhist teachers), more research is needed to establish whether this is an issue that relates solely to the gender of participants. Indeed, Goswell (1988:2/101) cites a Forest Sangha monk who was strongly inspired by his initial contact with Buddhist monastics.

Beyond initial contact and information provision, it is the Buddhist communities themselves, and the people that they meet within them, that become

intensely attractive. Over half of the participants in this study reported feeling drawn to the people within the Buddhist communities, which makes Goswell's (1988) findings applicable beyond the Forest Sangha. Comments such as 'the people struck me', or 'they listened to me' were frequently given as reasons for initial attraction. Priyarati (Triratna) exemplifies this feeling:

> *I was so impressed by the women, I still didn't want to be a Buddhist* (but) *I kept going back because they had something that I wanted.*

This 'something', for Priyarati, was described as peacefulness, a lack of anxiety, and a way of relating to others that she felt was deficient in her existing way of relating to life-events. The feeling of being immediately 'accepted' by the communities themselves was emphasised, as Delia (OBC) describes:

> *I know the first time I'd been down the corridor* (at Throssel Hole), *somebody made gasshō to me, I nearly fell over! I thought…wow, but they don't know me, why are they doing that? Of course, I realised that that's something that you just do to everybody. I found that quite stunning, that kind of acceptance.*

For Elizabeth (Gelug) and Prasanna (Theravāda) it was the initial connection that they made with a particular Buddhist teacher that was also an important factor in their decision to involve themselves in a Buddhist tradition. This therefore broadens Ploos Van Amstel's (2005:45) findings of the importance of the teacher beyond the Tibetan tradition. For Suvanna (Forest Sangha), although she had regularly attended a meditation group, it was only on meeting one particular teacher that she felt her commitment to Buddhist practice deepen as she felt he very effectively explained the Buddha's teachings. Indeed, it is this sense of feeling an immediate connection to particular aspects of the *Buddha-dharma* that also provided what Elizabeth (Gelug) describes as the initial 'hook' that piqued their interest. For Dalha (Tibetan) this was a description of *bodhicitta*; for Elizabeth it was an account of *karma,* which she states went 'straight through into my heart'.[128]

Four participants described a sense of feeling immediately 'at home' in the Buddhist group they later joined. Dalha, who had undertaken a deliberate search for a Buddhist group to join, stopped visiting other centres after she attended a Tibetan group, and she recalled thinking 'I'm home, I'm home. I've found it, this is the one!' This feeling of a very strong affiliation with a particular place or group is described by several of the women as a *kammic/karmic* or past-life connection, and

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[128] Harvey (1990:91) describes '*bodhicitta'* as 'the heartfelt aspiration to strive for full Buddha-hood, by means of the *bodhisattva* path'.

these are often experienced in a very intense and powerful way.[129] For example, Dhannadipa (Theravāda) describes what she calls a 'very strong connection' with a particular Buddhist monastery; Padma (Gelug) similarly when she first heard Tibetan longhorns, and Suvanna (Forest Sangha) describes how she felt a strong 'sense of resonance' on seeing images of monks. Dolma describes her first experience of a Tibetan Gelug centre and teachings in similar terms:

> *it felt very familiar, it felt very comforting, and it felt very good.*

This feeling of 'connection', however, isn't always described explicitly in relation to past-life or *karmic* experiences. Three women described being attracted to particular Buddhist groups because the values they openly promoted (notably, gender equality and social engagement) accorded with their own principles. As Dhatri (Amida) explains:

> *I had looked at other traditions, and I've very deliberately selected this one because it was engaged and because of the equality, in all ways there's total equality in this tradition, which is not there in others.*

The testimonies of these three participants certainly supports Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels' (2008) 'test for fit' approach. However, although this might be described in various ways, the idea that one's own strongly held principles are also valued by the new group reinforces the importance of 'connection', which is a key theme, both of this chapter and the thesis as a whole.

Despite the significance given to relationships and feelings of connection, it is important to recognise that there are some participants in this study whose very first contact with Buddhism did reflect the more 'intellectual' approach described by Coleman (2001:197-199) and Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels (2008:118). Although the sense of connection with other people (both in terms of the behaviour of the community, and the *'karmic'* connection) became important to Dalha (Tibetan) when she chose a Buddhist community to practice within, her first meaningful contact with Buddhism (and the motivation to find out more) came through reading about Tibet. Similarly, Padma (Gelug) initially learnt about Buddhism through reading an encyclopaedia. Although Padma then went on to describe how she had a past-life experience which further propelled her to enquire more about Buddhist teachings, it was her reading which piqued this curiosity,

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[129] Ploos Van Amstel (2005:45) also recognises this in her study of Western nuns in the Tibetan tradition, but refers to it as a 'dharmic connection' where 'they instantly felt at home and familiar'.

rather than a connection with specific people or a community.[130] Furthermore, there are some differences in how women initially found out about different Buddhist groups that are dependent on the methods employed by that particular group to attract new members. For example, as Bell (1991:170) has highlighted, Triratna takes a rather more proactive approach to advertising their retreats and centres and therefore this becomes a significant means by which certain women find out about Buddhism. Priyarati, for example, found a leaflet in a health service building advertising a Triratna retreat centre and was intrigued enough to visit. Dhatri also found out about Amida thorough a psychotherapy course which they were facilitating that she attended through work. Some of the women attended formal introductory courses and meditation 'tester' sessions run by Buddhist groups, open to the general public, particularly those who got involved with Buddhist movements in more recent times where the courses on offer were becoming increasingly well-structured and widely advertised. Others attended weekend retreats, or one-off talks given by Buddhist teachers affiliated with particular groups. These means of contact do not minimise the value of connections between individuals, communities and teachers, but highlight that there are different ways that women initially find out about, and subsequently get involved with Buddhism in Britain, and this bears some relation to the style adopted by the groups in question.

Using this tripartite typology of dissatisfaction, answers, and connection, I have highlighted the important features of ordained women's early contact with Buddhist groups, and the motivation they gave for their initial involvement. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the implications of this, situating this study in the context of wider research into Buddhism and conversion. Whilst this final section will not provide an examination of the various 'stage models' of conversion available, it will contribute to the debate about the uses of the term 'conversion' amongst Buddhists in Britain and deepen our understanding of the experience of religious change in this location.

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[130] Whilst Goswell (1988:2/85) emphasises the role of reading about Buddhism in piquing the initial interest of Forest Sangha monks and *sīladharā* in Britain, this was not generally such a prominent theme for the participants of this study whose narratives tend to prioritise relationships and the attraction of communities. The prominence of this theme in Goswell's study may be because she undertook her fieldwork research in the 1980s, and all of her participants would have found out about Buddhism at a time where arguably there were fewer accessible Buddhist groups in Britain. This was reinforced by one of my participants who felt reading about Buddhism was one of the easiest means of accessing information in Britain when there were fewer groups to join, particularly in rural areas.

A Light in the Dark? The Implications of Ordained Women's Narratives of Religious Change.

As I noted in Chapter Three, Kennedy (2004) and Eddy (2012), amongst others, take issue with the application of the term 'conversion' (as it has been conventionally understood) into the British or Australian Buddhist contexts. Although there are differences in their approaches, one common reason for this unease is that commitment to Buddhism is understood as 'on-going' or 'gradual and cumulative' rather than one singular 'dramatic' moment of all-encompassing 'self-transformation' (Eddy, 2012:205, Kennedy, 2004:144). The aim of this section, therefore, is to assess the narratives collected in this study against this 'gradual and cumulative' model. I will argue that although early engagement with Buddhism for some participants was as a measured, accumulative process, for others the singular moment of change (or 'light in the dark' experience) and its subsequent impact should not be minimised.

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, all of the participants in this study were able to identify the time where they first came across the teachings of the Buddha, or Buddhist communities, and were able to narrate how they progressed from this experience, to ordination and beyond. However, none of the participants independently referred to their experiences as 'conversion'.[131] Terms such as 'discovery', 'met the movement',[132] 'was drawn to', 'I became more involved' or 'finding the true way ahead' were used instead. A description of steady involvement over a period of time was certainly a feature of some of the narratives given by women in this study. This is well described by Ailith (OBC) who began her introduction to Buddhism after being shown round a monastery with her husband, then progressed to attending an introductory retreat. This involvement increased exponentially, over an extended time period, until she was spending all her weekends at the monastery. Dhatri (Amida) also describes a process of increasing involvement over a period of years, where she states she 'got more and more hooked' the more courses and practice evenings she attended. Delia explains

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[131] I did not directly use the term 'conversion' either, preferring a more broad approach that enquired about what drew women to particular Buddhist groups. This terminological absence is also mirrored in Exon's (1999:206) study about Hindu converts in Britain. Although my choice of words may have impacted on theirs, I assume that if the term 'conversion' was widely utilised by the participants, then it would feature, at least occasionally, in their narratives.

[132] The term 'met the movement' was particularly used by those within the Triratna Order.

that her involvement in the OBC 'wasn't like a big flash of lightening' but instead, she was drawn to the people and the teachings and therefore started attending retreats more regularly, using her weekends and annual leave. In these accounts, the precise moment that one 'becomes a Buddhist' is somewhat downplayed in favour of a picture of steady and increasing interest, akin to progressing through Coleman's (2001:187) 'circles of involvement' from informal to committed participation.

However, as in Eddy's (2012:205-6) study, these more steady narratives of commitment do contain particular moments that are significant. The act of making a formal commitment to Buddhism, either through taking refuges and precepts, lay ordination (*jukai*) or as a *mitra,* for example, is one such moment for my participants.[133] Whilst not all participants in this study mentioned their participation in a formal ceremony, for those who did, it was described as highly meaningful. Whilst the ceremonies themselves were not described as the most important part of their commitment to Buddhism (and in fact, a private commitment would, for most, have occurred prior to participating in a communal ritual), they do mark a change, particularly in terms of recognising commitment and formally connecting individuals to a particular Buddhist group or tradition.[134] Ailith (OBC) describes her experience of *jukai* in terms of the connection that she made with the community, and states that after participating in this ceremony, 'it is like I have a family'. However, this formal commitment ceremony (in whatever way it is enacted) is often described in this study as the beginning rather than the apex of one's relationship with Buddhism. As Dhatri (Amida) explains:

> *affirming* (the refuges and precepts) *and knowing I was embarking on a path…was incredibly scary and powerful, and meant a lot* (to) *me this affirmation.*

Yet, this description of 'gradual and cumulative' involvement is not the only narrative present within this sample. For some, it is one precise moment that heralds significant change, reminiscent of the more conventional understanding of

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[133] *'Jukai'* is the 'lay ordination' ceremony undertaken in the Sōtō Zen tradition (see Bluck 2006:70). *'Mitra'* is a Sanskrit term meaning 'friend' and it is used for those who have made an official commitment to the Triratna community (Bluck, 2006:157, Hayes 2008:125-126, Smith 2008). I discussed these terms in Chapter One.

[134] Formal commitment ceremonies are also important within some organisations as they enable access to retreats or study groups that are not open to individuals who had not made such a commitment. This was most recognisable in the accounts from Triratna Order members, several of whom asked to be *mitras* in order to study and practice Buddhism in greater depth.

'conversion'.[135] Dhannadipa (Theravāda) describes her initial reaction to the Four Noble Truths:

> *when I read them, it was really like a light streaming into a mind that had been dark for a long time.*

As a result, this created:

> *a huge kind of epiphany really; a life-changing moment. From that moment I had confidence in the Buddha as one who knows the way out of suffering.*

In a similar way, Elizabeth (who initially had not wanted to go to a Buddhist monastery and was persuaded by her friend) describes her reaction to hearing Buddhist teachings as 'startling'. She joked that she wondered whether or not they were 'putting something in the food' because she had not expected to have such an intense initial reaction which led her to ask for refuge almost immediately:

> *for the first time, I was listening, and it was almost like it was going straight through into my heart, and first of all I distrusted that totally because it was so out of character for me... I was having all these strange thoughts and ideas, I was having vivid dreams that had nothing to do with my experience so far... spontaneously bursting into tears when I heard certain names, it was all very odd.*

Furthermore, unlike in Eddy's (2012:18-19) study where 'commitment' to Buddhist groups comes typically after a more measured experience of the practice and a reasonable understanding of the doctrine, women like Elizabeth felt sure they wanted to make a formal commitment to Buddhism (including taking refuge in public) *before* acquiring any in-depth knowledge. Dalha (Tibetan), for example, describes how she had a formal refuge ceremony within two weeks of her initial connection with a Tibetan group. She recalled some friends who questioned her decision and who asked 'how can you know so quickly when you knew so little?', yet, she felt that she 'just knew' it was what she wanted to do. Those who described an intense experience also identify making substantial changes to their lives as a result. The best example of this is provided by Edwina (OBC) who describes a process of 'dismantling everything' in a significant re-structure of her life (including changing her career and living situation) after attending her first introductory course at a Buddhist centre. Lobsang (Kagyu) explains that, whilst she had a 'minimal' amount of knowledge about Buddhism before she took refuge for the first time, it was after listening to the teachings that same day that she

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[135] Goswell (1988:2/73) in her study of Forest Sangha monks and *sīladharā* includes the testimony of at least one monk who experienced an intense reaction when he initially heard Buddhist teachings.

experienced what she called a 'cataclysmic change in life' and within a few months had progressed from no substantial involvement, to visiting her local Buddhist monastery every weekend:

> (Life) *just went from fine, plodding along, a bit aimless…to just being spectacularly happy, and feeling motivated and totally involved.*

This 'cataclysmic change' appears less reminiscent of the 'quiet illumination' prioritised by Eddy (2012:205) and more akin to turning on a powerful headlamp which immediately lights up a dark room and changes the way that you see that room forever. Despite this, it is equally important not to overstate the universality of these 'cataclysmic' moments. Indeed, Eddy (2012:206) does identify that amongst some of her participants, more intense experiences were noted, although she draws less attention to these in her overall understanding of the 'commitment' process. However, it is possible that one reason why these singular moments seem more apparent in this study is because all the participants are ordained, and are narrating their initial involvement with Buddhism through the prism of these later experiences. This is not to say that ordained people necessarily have more vivid initial responses to Buddhism (and, indeed, there were two ordained women in Eddy's study) but that for these women, their contact with Buddhism did change substantially the trajectory of their lives and this may affect how they describe their initial experiences, giving them a more intense flavour in retrospect. However, more research into the potential differences between ordained and lay narratives of religious change in a Buddhist context would be necessary before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

However, despite the participants' lives being significantly affected and indeed altered by their connection to Buddhism, it does not automatically follow that this requires them to reject, in entirety, all previously held values and ideas, a point which Eddy (2012:207) also highlights. As I discussed earlier, several of my participants underwent more of a careful process of 'test-for-fit' particularly in relation to selecting Buddhist groups that prioritised values in relation to gender equality that they previously held (Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels, 2008:112-113). In this sense, if conversion is seen solely as a 'bridge-burning act' that requires absolute rejection of any previously held perspectives then it is not an entirely relevant term amongst ordained Buddhist women in this setting (Hine, 1970:63). Although it has not been the purpose of this study to explore theories of identity formation in relation to religious change, there is evidence within this sample to

support the argument that if conversion is understood *only* in terms of a comprehensive 'break with the past', then it is not entirely suitable here. This is not to say that involvement with Buddhism did not substantially affect the women in this study in terms of both outlook and life-style, as it did Eddy's (2012:206) participants, but previously held values and ideals continue to have some influence over both initial decisions about the suitability of particular Buddhist groups, and in how some women approach issues of gender equality in relation to Buddhist traditions and practices. However, this may not always be a straightforward or unproblematic integration, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

Overall, the evidence given by the participants in this study does not fit neatly into either a model of 'gradual and cumulative commitment' or all-encompassing, comprehensive change. Features of both are present, which belies simple classification and appears to more readily reflect Bryant and Lamb's (1999:12) description of conversion experiences being situated on a 'sliding scale'. As a result, the available terms such as 'commitment', 'alternation' or 'conversion' each feel somewhat deficient in this context. However, by highlighting this difficulty and emphasising the range of experiences described by ordained women, evidence from this study helps to raise questions about the nature and definition of religious change and contributes to deepening our understanding of involvement in Buddhism in a contemporary British context. Ultimately, the narratives of ordained women challenge any one-dimensional view of religious change.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced the participants of this study and discussed several key themes that are significant within the thesis. Using a tripartite typology of dissatisfaction, answers and connection, I have analysed the narratives given by ordained Buddhist women in Britain and highlighted that the process of religious change in this context belies any simple classification. I have shown that the prominence given to interactions with others (both individuals and communities) provides a challenge to an image of singularly intellectual initial engagement and reinstates the salience of communities and social relationships which although subject to change over time, remains significant in the lives of ordained women across each of the Buddhist groups included in this study.

In a study that takes ordination as its focus, it has been beyond its scope to explore how ordained women's narratives compare to the stage models of 'conversion' (such as those provided by Rambo, or Lofland and Stark) or indeed, to analyse these narratives in relation to theories of identity change and formation. However, I have identified unifying themes which, as I will show as the thesis progresses, contribute to our understanding of why women ask for ordination and what it means in this context. The significance of relationships and communities and the centrality of Buddhist teachings and practices in helping women to make sense of the world are key factors in initial involvement, which later become significant motivations for ordination. I will discuss this in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: The Journey to Ordination

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the journey from conversion to ordination, concentrating on my first research question: Why do women in Britain, in different Buddhist groups, choose to take Buddhist ordination, and what does ordination mean in this context? Whilst inquiring about motivations is common in scholarly work on Buddhist monastics (as I highlighted in Chapter Two), in this chapter I will I conduct a comparative analysis, which will be completed in three ways. The first involves dividing the participants in this study by their Buddhist group affiliation and exploring areas of similarity and difference between them. The second involves comparing my data with selected studies which include a consideration of women's motivations for ordination in the British context (notably, Goswell, 1988 and Ploos Van Amstel, 2005). Finally, I will draw some comparisons between the data in my study and the motivations given by ordained or renunciant women in different geographical contexts (in studies such as, Cook, 2010, Crane, 2004 and Kawanami, 2013). This comparative approach, which is woven into the structure of this chapter, will allow for a deep investigation of the rationale for Buddhist ordination amongst women in contemporary Britain. It opens a line of interrogation into the significance of the British location in shaping women's practice; a key research question in this thesis, which will be explored further in Chapter Nine.

In addition to an analysis of motivations, I will also investigate the meaning of ordination according to my participants. By focusing on the meaning that ordained women attribute to their ordinations, I am able to add further detail to an analysis of why they might choose this path, and what it means in this context. However, I will not be describing in detail the structure and ritual involved in the various ordination ceremonies themselves. Whilst I would have liked to have witnessed an ordination ceremony on British soil over the course of this research, my intention was always to concentrate on the testimonies of participants rather than a discussion of the ordination rituals.[136] Despite the benefits of this narrative

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[136] Other scholars do provide highly useful accounts of the ordination process for women and of the various ceremonies, drawing on Buddhist textual sources and ethnographic data (for example, Cook, 2010, Gutschow, 2001, Heirman, 2008, Wu, 2001). Goswell (1988: 2/Chapter 12) also describes the *anagārika/ā* ordination ceremony within the Forest Sangha in Britain.

approach, one difficulty I encountered was in unravelling the ordination process in the testimonies of my participants. Some women clearly described their time as lay-woman, then a postulant, and then as a novice and as an ordained person; however for others, these time periods were discussed in a more indistinct, and general way.[137] Therefore, in analysing the meaning attributed to the ordination, where possible I will be clear which stage of ordination participants are referring to in their narratives and I have supplemented this with details of the ordination process for each tradition involved in this study in Chapter One.

In this chapter, I will show that the participants in this study were motivated typically by an aspiration to follow the Buddha's teachings purposefully. Ordination was often perceived as an opportunity to do this with dedication and focus.[138] However, my participants' interest in belonging and contributing to a Buddhist community were also equally significant, which provides some challenge to the image of Western Buddhists as motivated solely in relation to enhancing their meditation and individual practice. Yet, there are points of both commonality and diversity in relation to motivations and the meaning of ordination between the participants in this study. I will show that these do not only occur along the lines of Buddhist group affiliation and there are some reasons for ordination which are held in common between participants in both monastic, and non-monastic, traditions.

Before I explore these inter-linked questions of motivation and meaning, I will first extend the background information about the women in this study that I provided in Chapter Five, examining several relevant biographical issues. These include where ordination was taken, the age at which participants took ordination (and their age at interview), the timescales from initial engagement with a Buddhist group to asking for ordination, and the era in which the participants ordained. An examination of these issues provides useful context for an analysis of motivation, and further develops a picture of the lives of the participants who were involved in my study.

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[137] As I detailed in Chapter Two, for the Triratna participants, there are no 'novice' or 'postulant' stages, as a person progresses from asking for ordination and preparing, to being accepted for ordination as a *dharmachari/dharmacharini*.
[138] I briefly examine both the reasons why the monastic women in my sample had taken ordination and what ordination meant to them in Starkey (2014).

From Conversion to Ordination

Twenty-one out of twenty-five participants in my study took their first steps on the path to ordination (taking postulant or novice vows, or Triratna *dharmacharini* ordination) on British shores. This was mainly because they had connections to particular communities or teachers in Britain, and they were able to take ordination from them. Some participants, most notably in the Tibetan traditions, took ordination in Britain when particular teachers were visiting, even if these teachers were not ordinarily resident locally. However, there were four Triratna participants who had asked for ordination in Britain and who undertook most of their preparation in the UK, but had their ordination ceremonies on retreat in either Spain or Italy. Generally, Triratna ordination retreats and ceremonies are held outside of the UK, in dedicated retreat centres for men and women, as I detailed in Chapter One.[139] However, some Triratna participants in this study did not attend an overseas ordination retreat and instead took their ordination in Britain. This was either because they had family commitments that would prevent them from being abroad for an extended period of time, or because particular retreat centres were not available at the time. In addition, six participants, following their earlier ordination in the UK, took further vows (for example, *getsulma, sikkhamānā/ śikṣamāṇā, bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī*) outside Britain. This was because they were either unable to take the ordination that they wanted in communities in Britain (as is currently the case with *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination), or because they wanted a particular teacher to ordain them who lived in a different country.

The time between first involvement with a Buddhist group and taking initial ordination does vary for the participants in this study.[140] For those women who

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[139] I was informed by one of my participants that Triratna ordination retreats are usually outside the UK, and are three to four months long, because this assists ordinands to 'leave behind their current concerns'. She explained that this subsequently represents 'a 'Going Forth' from everyday life as one knows it'. Land was purchased for the current women's retreat centre, Akashavana, in Spain because sizeable land was available and it was affordable. For ordinands from the UK, the location in the Spanish countryside offers a secluded retreat environment that provides a significant change from every-day life.

[140] When I refer to 'initial ordination' here, I mean *anagārikā* ordination within the Forest Sangha; novice ordination in the OBC, Amida Trust, and Tibetan schools (and I also include *rabjungma* ordination; the stage before novice for the Tibetan tradition). For those ordained in Triratna, I am referring to the *dharmacharini* ordination. For more detail of the ordination processes in each group, see discussion in Chapter One.

join the Triratna Order, the time between early involvement in a Buddhist group and becoming a *mitra,* and ordination is often comparatively lengthy. This is because those who have asked for ordination are involved in a relatively long process of preparation which includes study, attendance at various retreats, and a deepening engagement with Buddhist philosophy and practice before they are considered ready to be ordained. Although those who were ordained in the early days of the Order described shorter time-scales, in the main, those participants in this study involved in Triratna took at least six years from asking for ordination to participating in their private and public ceremonies, and some (for example, Chandrakala, Tanirika and Vasundara) described a period of between seven and twelve years. This was in addition to a period of at least two years regular involvement; attending a Triratna Buddhist centre in the town where they lived and going to Triratna retreat centres prior to asking for ordination.

This differs from the process for participants in the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, Amida Trust and in the Forest Sangha, who typically describe a shorter time before ordination, with the focus falling more on preparation during a postulancy or noviciate period. For example, of the five participants in this study who were ordained into the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, it was only Ailith who was involved with the organisation for more than six years prior to asking for ordination. Most had, on average, three years of involvement with the Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition before moving to the monastery, first as a lay person. There was typically between a year and two years postulancy before ordination as a novice. Within the Forest Sangha, most women identified a period of involvement with Buddhism of between two and six years prior to moving to a monastery as a lay person and then becoming an *anagārikā,* and then between two and five years before ordaining as *sīladharā*. Of the two women in this study who took ordination within Amida Trust, one was involved for approximately four years, and the other took the first steps towards ordination within a year of her initial involvement.

Some participants involved in Tibetan schools show a longer pattern of participation prior to taking *rabjungma* (renunciant), and then *getsulma* (novice) ordination, although, in my study, this appeared more to do with personal circumstance than institutional practice. Although Dalha requested *rabjungma* ordination after a year of being connected to a Tibetan group, and Lobsang (Kagyu) took her novice ordination six years after her first refuge, Elizabeth, who took refuge in India in the 1970s, was involved with a Gelug group for approximately

thirty years before taking *rabjungma* vows. Kalinda, Padma and Dolma also describe a period of interaction with Buddhism of approximately twelve to fifteen years.[141] For some women, the decision to ask for ordination was reasonably straight-forward, but for others the journey they undertook was far less linear and involved several moments of indecision and uncertainty. Although both Goswell (1988:2/130-136) and Ploos Van Amstel (2005:83) identify that several of their participants reported a certain predictability in their decision to ask for ordination, it was certainly not a universal experience in this study. Whilst Padma (Gelug) highlights that *rabjungma* ordination, although important, was experienced as 'the combination of…where I am going' and Edwina (OBC) described feeling convinced that the monastic path was appropriate for her, Prasanna (Theravāda) found the idea of being a celibate nun far more challenging and subsequently had a far longer period as an *anagārikā* than some others. Consequently, alongside what is customary practice for different groups, these personal factors also contribute to the variation in times between initial contact and ordination which are reported.

Although I have already provided some basic biographical details in Chapter Five, it is worth highlighting in addition that, at the time of ordination, twenty-two participants were divorced or had previously been in long-term relationships, and seven had children (although only one woman in this study had a child under the age of eighteen when she requested ordination).[142] At the time of their ordination, three women were married or were in long-term relationships.[143] Even though the sample numbers in this study are small and therefore might not reflect organisations in entirety, it is still relevant to note that none of the women from the

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[141] Here, this sample differs from the Western women in Tibetan traditions in Ploos Van Amstel's (2005:85-87) study, who she shows were ordained in a much shorter time-frame and often, she argues, before they thoroughly comprehended the intricacies of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. However, there are also a number of similarities between the social situations of women in this study prior to ordination and those in her study, including that, many of her participants across various geographic settings had been married (or in relationships) before asking for ordination, and several had children (see also Chodron, 2000:81). The majority of Ploos Van Amstel's sample were educated and had careers, although she does recognise a greater variety in education and employment than I identified. However, her participants were not all connected to Britain, which might provide some account for the points of difference.

[142] I will discuss the effect of familial responsibilities on the lives of ordained Buddhist women in Britain further in Chapter Nine.

[143] As I described in Chapter One, it is not a requirement for all ordained women in either Triratna or Amida Trust to be celibate, therefore some women maintained relationships through asking for ordination and beyond, and some women started new relationships following ordination.

OBC or the Forest Sangha sample had children, and fewer women from these groups had been married prior to ordination. This is quite possibly because both of these groups include women who entered onto the ordained path at a younger age, who had, arguably, less time to marry and raise a family. For example, amongst the Forest Sangha group, Dhannadipa took *sīladharā* ordination when she was twenty four years old, and Rajana, Prasanna and Suvanna were each in their early thirties, a demographic pattern which Goswell (1988:2/18) also recognises. Monastic practice, particularly within the Forest Sangha, is arguably more physically arduous (including only eating one meal a day) and this might possibly account for a younger audience who feel more able to practice within these circumstances. From the OBC, Ceola, Edwina and Alura were all in their late twenties to mid-thirties when they ordained. Although, Ailith was in her fifties and Delia her mid-forties, they both connected with Buddhism when they were comparatively older, and Ailith did not decide to follow an ordained path until after her marriage had dissolved.

In general terms, by comparison, those within the Triratna movement tended to be older on ordination, with only Priyarati and Siladakini in their mid to late thirties. The remainder of the Triratna participants were in their forties and fifties (with Vasundara ordaining in her sixties). This may be because the Triratna ordination process is lengthy, but also because there is seen to be an increasing number of older women attracted to Triratna communities in Britain, and comparatively fewer younger women being ordained. I was informed by one of my participants that this pattern of older women's ordination was becoming fairly common within Triratna and it was thought to be a result of older women (who may have retired and have adult children) feeling that they had more time to focus on Buddhist practice.

A pattern of ordination at an older age can also be ascertained between the participants in my study ordained in the Tibetan schools. Whilst Dalha took her *rabjungma* ordination in her mid-thirties, Elizabeth, Kalinda, Dolma, Padma and Lobsang were all between the ages of forty and sixty when they first took ordination vows. For some, this was because they had not come into contact with Buddhism until later in life, and for others it was because they were initially happy to integrate Buddhist practice with their lay responsibilities, such as marriage and children. They only later began considering ordination as an option when their children had grown up and when they no longer had responsibilities to husbands or partners, either because of death or divorce.

Whilst it would be incorrect to argue that ordination for women at this life stage is a unique feature of Buddhism in the British context (indeed, in other countries such as Myanmar there are groups of women ordaining later in life, see Kawanami, 2013), it is important to acknowledge that there seems to be, in general, far fewer very young adults (for example, in their early twenties) opting for ordination in Britain, providing a more mature demographic picture.[144] This is likely to be because as Buddhism is still in relative infancy in Britain and none of the women in this sample were introduced to it as their familial religion in childhood, it therefore takes time to explore it as an option in adulthood, and further time to decide to make a formal commitment through ordination.

As a point of information, at the time of interview, the majority of the women who participated in this study were over fifty years old; with a high proportion over sixty (see Table 3).[145] There were no participants under the age of thirty, even though I did not deliberately exclude any age group. Although I did not obtain any statistics from each organisation which would indicate whether this was a representative pattern, at least two of my participants (in different traditions) mentioned that they felt part of an ageing population.

Table 3: Age Range of Participants at the Time of Interview

Age Range	Number of Women
30s	1
40s	2
50s	10
60s	10
70s	1
80s	1

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[144] For example, in Myanmar, according to Kawanami (2013:61) alongside the older women are a sub-set of younger nuns, many of whom take vows as teenagers. None of the groups participating in this study indicated that they offered ordination to children or teenagers, even temporarily.

[145] Participants' dates of birth were not routinely sought, or given, during the interviews. When precise dates of birth were not collected, I was able to extract information about participants' age from the information that they provided about how old they were when they ordained and how long they had been ordained for.

Finally, in terms of the era in which they ordained, only one woman took initial ordination prior to the 1980s. Six took ordination in the 1980s, nine women in the 1990s, and a further nine women after the year 2000. Therefore, the majority of the women in this study had over twenty years' experience of ordained life, and some were involved in the early days of particular Buddhist communities in Britain, which I shall explore further in Chapter Nine.

With these biographical details in mind, in the next section of this chapter, I will analyse the reasons why the participants in this study asked for ordination.

Why Ordain?

Ploos Van Amstel (2005:84) notes that the explanations her participants gave for being initially attracted to Buddhism and their later motives for asking for ordination sometimes appeared blurred in their narratives. In analysing the data from my study, I certainly recognise this dilemma, although I found that most of my participants were able to describe their motivations for ordination, and did separate the reasons for conversion and the reasons for ordination. Yet, on closer examination these were, in many ways, intensifications of the reasons why they were attracted to Buddhism in the first place. Therefore, the typology which I introduced in the previous chapter to account for the reasons for conversion to Buddhism (dissatisfaction, answers, connection) can also be applied here. The following section is structured with this framework as its basis, in order to analyse this progression from conversion to ordination and also to give shape to the three levels of comparative analysis outlined in the introduction to this chapter.

Dissatisfaction

When I discussed the element of 'dissatisfaction' within in the conversion narratives of my participants in Chapter Five, I highlighted that it included both dissatisfaction with specific events and a response to 'crisis', along with more moderate feelings of disquiet. This is exemplified in Delia's testimony that 'the things which were nice just weren't complete'. These feelings of 'dissatisfaction' again come to the fore, and are intensified, when women describe the reasons why they decided to consider ordination. The reason for ordination given by the vast

majority of the participants in this study is the aspiration to concentrate, with maximum attention, on Buddhist practice and teachings. This echoes much of the literature on motivation presented in Chapter Two. For example, Rajana (Forest Sangha) explains;

> *I put a lot of energy into…attending meditation groups and stuff like that, but the idea of just being able to make a whole-hearted commitment to one thing was very attractive and that's one of the things that really drew me to monastic life and keeps me going.*

Making this 'commitment' to a monastic lifestyle was also important for Delia (OBC), as it supported her 'to make practice (her) life'. Similarly, Kalinda (Tibetan) explained that she wanted to take ordination to give attention to 'spiritual development' which she felt was difficult to do when she had many other interests vying for attention and she 'didn't feel as though (she) was getting (her) teeth into (Buddhist practice) properly'. Although Kalinda had made a connection to Buddhism a number of years prior to making this decision, she described herself as 'just so unhappy' and subsequently was motivated to focus intensely on Buddhist practice as a response. Ailith (OBC) explained that, although she was a regular visitor to a Buddhist monastery and going on retreats almost every weekend, she felt as if she was 'living on the fence'. As a result, she was not paying much attention to her life outside the Buddhist community and therefore she felt she had to 'either pull back a bit, or just jump in the whole way' and ask for ordination as a monk.[146] Finally, Dalha (Tibetan) felt that whilst she had found benefit in learning about Buddhist teachings and practices as a lay person, she was dissatisfied with what she called 'worldly life', particularly in terms of the emphasis on social status through work or career. This sense of 'dissatisfaction' is certainly a feature of Goswell's (1988:3/8-9) analysis, and the data from my study shows that this is an issue beyond the Forest Sangha which was Goswell's focus.

For four women, the 'dissatisfaction' preceding their consideration of ordination was rather more acute and arose after an experience of a challenging life event, such as a period of ill-health.[147] Certainly, as Kawanami (2013:63) writes, 'the impulse to renounce seems to become especially appealing when one is confronted with a personal grief or an experience that is deeply traumatic.' In this

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[146] As I detailed in Chapter One, both ordained men and women in the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives are referred to as 'monks'.

[147] These were not the same women for whom a 'crisis' prompted initial attraction to Buddhism. For these four participants discussed here, the experience of a traumatic life event occurred after their initial connection with Buddhism and was attributed, by them, as an element in their decision to ask for ordination.

regard, some of my participants noted a similar experience. However, these events in themselves were not the reasons my participants gave for ordination, but rather they were seen as prompting a questioning of priorities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the average age of the participants in this study, several cited 'ageing' as a factor which made them consider ordination. However, this wasn't expressed as dissatisfaction with ageing per se, or because they felt that they might face infirmity and wanted institutional support, but was described more as realisation that life was short and it should not be 'wasted'. As Elizabeth (Gelug) explains;

> *there was a kind of small determination really grew I was getting ill, who's to say when it was going to end? Suddenly all the concepts and the teachings of death that I'd had, came to fruition and it ... was a window into my own mortality, and looking at the rest of my life and what I really wanted to do.*

However, this fear of 'wasting life' wasn't just expressed by those over 50. For example, both Aarya (Amida) and Alura (OBC) were in their 30s when they made the decision to ask for ordination, and both described a similar underlying feeling that they wanted to use their life in a way that they perceived as most effective. This is best exemplified in Alura's testimony:

> *I realised I could make a nice life for myself* (without being a monk) *but I'd just be filling in time until I died and that's genuinely what it felt like, I'd just be filling in time.*

However, the desire to focus in totality on spiritual practice is not only a feature of the narratives of women in monastic traditions living in communal environments. Although there are different considerations made by those asking for ordination in Triratna, who, for example, are able to combine marriage, children, and career with ordination, the wish to dedicate focused attention to Buddhist practices and communities remains prominent. There are clear parallels between Ailith's (OBC) desire to stop sitting 'on the fence' and the following statement from Siladakini (Triratna), who questioned, in relation to asking for ordination:

> *why would you bother doing a bit, why not just do the whole thing?*

Charumati (Triratna) echoes this sentiment, showing clear similarity to the motivation expounded by Rajana (Forest Sangha):

> *I didn't want my Buddhist practice to be just part of my life, I wanted it to be the main thing in my life and so I wanted to commit myself as fully as I possibly could and so that meant being ordained.*

None of the women in this study cited reasons for ordination which might be considered 'mundane' as described in the literature on motivation presented in Chapter Two. Although some mentioned experiencing events such as divorce prior to ordination, these were not attributed much significance beyond the practical and logistical. For example, for those who had divorced it meant they were able to commit to celibate monastic life in a communal setting when previously they had had other responsibilities. There was no sense that those in this study opted for ordination out of concern about having to get married and not wanting to as in Crane's (2004) and Gutschow's (2004) work. The element of social 'fear' noted by Kawanami (2013:59-61) is also absent here. There was no indication that my participants had a desire 'to escape abuse and drudgery' as expressed by some of those in Kawanami's (2013:45) study. Indeed, none of my participants described having had these experiences in life.[148] In addition, none of the women in this study were motivated to ordain to ameliorate the experience of financial problems or because of career difficulties, as identified as possible factors by Tsomo (1988f:58). In fact, as several of the women in this study explained (including Alura, above), life would actually be quite 'nice', and certainly comfortable if they chose not to take ordination.

How, then, might these differences be accounted for? It is certainly possible that the women that I interviewed played down the 'mundane' reasons for ordaining, whilst simultaneously highlighting the more 'spiritual' reasons such as deepening Buddhist practice. Whilst I cannot discount this possibility, those who participated in this study were often extremely honest with me about their experiences and I got little sense that they only wanted to adhere to a 'party line' in their narratives. Given that there are a number of similarities between my

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[148] Kawanami (2013:45) notes that the desire 'to escape abuse and drudgery' was most typically expressed by Myanmar women who became *thiláshin* at a later stage in life, after being married. Often these women conceptualised their aspiration in terms of 'an opportunity to fulfil their spiritual aspirations' (Kawanami, 2013:52). Younger nuns, according to Kawanami (2013:52), were more typically motivated by a 'utilitarian' rationale, including being teachers of Buddhism. I did not note any clear differences in the way motivation was described between the participants in my study who took ordination at a younger age without having being married, and those who were older and divorced or widowed. I also got no sense that those who took ordination at a younger age without being married were given preferential treatment within Buddhist groups in Britain, unlike those in Kawanami (2013:46)'s study. This is likely to be because divorce or widowhood is not necessarily seen as a taboo in contemporary Britain, including within Buddhist groups.

participants and those in Goswell's and Ploos Van Amstel's studies, even though these both only concentrate on one specific tradition, what is more likely is that the differences are related to circumstance and context.[149] The participants in this study were typically educated prior to ordaining, they lived in countries where extreme poverty was marginal and they were mostly financially secure, many with stable careers. This mirrors the experiences of Western nuns more generally, as identified by Chodron (2000:81).[150]

Each of the participants in my study opted for ordination as adults (and for the majority this was when they were over 30 years old). None mentioned concerns about being unmarried or divorced, nor did they identify that they felt pressured in the eyes of family and friends to marry. For white, middle-class women in contemporary Britain, the stigma surrounding being divorced or unmarried may not necessarily be as severe as in other contexts, in Taiwan as presented by Crane (2004), for example. Each of the participants in my study described having the choice, to a greater or lesser extent, about what to do with their lives. Furthermore, none of the women were raised in a country where Buddhism is the religion of the majority, and their attitude towards Buddhism and ordination will certainly be coloured by this. One example of this is in relation to the role of 'merit-making' in seeking ordination. Whilst Gutschow (2004:135), Havnevik (1989:158) and Kawanami (2013:76) highlight that accruing 'merit' is central in the rationale given by many women they interviewed for following a religious path, this was not explicit in the testimony of my participants. Whilst ordination was viewed as a worthy path, it is possible that this was not cited as a reason for ordination because of different attitudes to 'merit-making' amongst some Buddhists in Britain, as suggested by Bell (1998). All these features contribute to constructing a picture of women who want to ordain because they feel that it is the most appropriate spiritual route for them.

Yet, despite this, I am wary of making too bold a statement about inevitable differences in motivation between women in the British context and

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[149] It may be possible that I might also share participants with both Goswell and Ploos Van Amstel, although I did not seek to ascertain this. This might also account for some of the similarities. Of course, one of the reasons why certain similarities in motivation might arise across different groups of Buddhist women (both in studies of Buddhism in Britain and elsewhere) is because, as researchers, we are likely to be asking very similar questions – a case of research method shaping results.
[150] Shaw (2008:160) also makes this observation about the backgrounds of the *sīladharā* in Britain.

those in other countries such as Myanmar or Thailand. It is clear from the literature that it is not only the 'mundane' reasons that motivate women in other geographic locations to ask for ordination but the 'spiritual' reasons too (and indeed, there is no sense from the ethnographic literature presented in Chapter Two that the 'mundane' reasons are given priority in women's narratives). Also, the connection with, and desire to emulate, other ordained women (which is a reason given for choosing an ordained path within this study, as I will show later in the chapter), could be seen as a 'mundane' reason, albeit a different one to poverty or career failure.

Importantly, the need to explore the 'suffering' that is seen as inherent in life is a motivating cause (both for initial attraction to Buddhism, and for ordination) which is shared across studies of ordained or renunciant Buddhist women in Britain and beyond. For example, Kawanami (2013:52, 66) highlights that a number of her participants had the aspiration to 'escape suffering' and this was not simply on a physical basis, as they were not all exposed to extremes of poverty prior to ordination. Similar to this, when asked about her inspiration, Prasanna (Forest Sangha) stated, 'my suffering basically motivates me'. Consequently, she chose to commit to Buddhist practice in order to investigate this further. Overall, the testimonies of the women in this study more readily reflect the 'positive' motivations rather than the 'negative', using Wijayaratna's (1990) phrasing. This remains the case both for women who opt for monastic and non-monastic ordinations.[151]

Answers

For some of the participants in this study, a feeling of dissatisfaction is closely related to the sense that ordination (particularly the disciplinary regime which might accompany it) provides some answers to the difficulties that they may have been having in putting the teachings of the Buddha into practice. Although an initial engagement with Buddhist teachings and practices was certainly seen to provide answers, different issues begin to arise for some women after they had been practicing Buddhism for some time. Both Dalha (Tibetan) and Kalinda

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[151] There is an additional sub-set of participants in this sample who, after taking initial ordinations, were motivated to seek further ordination, particularly *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination. Their motivations will be analysed in Chapter Eight.

(Tibetan) recognised that they needed 'boundaries' and that taking ordination might be an effective response to this.[152] Whilst Dolma (Gelug) was not wholly clear as to all the reasons why she was attracted to ordination, she did feel that it would 'simplify things' and help minimise 'distraction', particularly with her meditation, and she subsequently hoped it would act as 'a wake-up call' to help her realign her priorities in life. Whilst I will discuss in more detail the relationship that ordained women in the British context have with the various disciplinary practices (focusing, in Chapter Seven, on dress specifically), it is important to note that ordination is attractive, not because it is, in and of itself, an answer to difficulties, but because it can provide a helpful structure for Buddhist practice. These types of rationale echo the motivation for monastic ordination cited by Tsedroen (1988:205) which I discussed in Chapter Two. Prasanna (Theravāda) described ordination and the lifestyle which accompanied it as a 'strong holding' that helps to manage and facilitate the process of 'transformation' that can be experienced by those following the Buddhist path. Although she described it as having both 'limitations and opportunities' she felt that, ultimately, it was 'geared towards liberation from confusion', which was her aim.

However, there exists a slight variation between the participants within different Buddhist groups in this study. Although monastic discipline was seen as providing an answer to the difficulties experienced by some, this was not viewed in the same way by those in Triratna who, in general, did not emphasise the attraction of any particular disciplinary structure in influencing their decision to take ordination. However, Charumati (Triratna) did stress that the 'ethical framework' which underpins the Triratna approach was attractive to her. Therefore, although the practices might be explored in different ways between the different Buddhist groups, the investigation of and the aspiration to engage with these types of guidelines remains significant. Additionally, not every participant within the monastic traditions described being predominantly attracted to the lifestyle. Although Delia (OBC) explained that following an ordained path was 'the greatest opportunity that I've had' and she noted 'a sense of having found what I needed to

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[152] This was also recognised by Goswell (1988:3/8-9), who asserts that the reason why both men and women typically opted for ordination in the Forest Sangha was because although they had tried to operationalise the Buddha's teachings in conjunction with work and family life, it had not been a wholly successful integration and 'the need is seen for a discipline, a guide and a form, and for supportive companions in leading the spiritual life'.

do, a true way ahead', this was not about being attracted to being a monk per se, but instead, a chance to address questions that she had about life. As she explains:

> *Why I became a monk, it's not actually all that significant to me, because my life is just about practice. I suppose the main thing it means I'd given my life to practice… I didn't particularly want to be a monk; it just seems to go with what you need to do.*

None of the participants in any of the groups of this study suggested that ordination was the only efficacious spiritual trajectory that should be followed in terms of commitment to Buddhism. However, the perception that an ordained path was appropriate for them at the time they chose it is a feature of all of the narratives. As Ceola (OBC) explains:

> *the doors happened to open for me in that way, at that stage, and came about in this form, if you like.*

For Priyarati (Triratna), asking for ordination gave her access to retreats and study groups that she was not able to participate in whilst she was a *mitra* and, by accessing these, she hoped to further her understanding. There are parallels in this regard with Kawanami's (2013:52) study, particularly with the younger women who were drawn to studying Buddhist texts. Yet, in my study, it was not just those who ordained at a younger age that expressed these sentiments. This is also mirrored in Goswell (1988:3/10) and Cook's (2010:6) studies, where Goswell identifies ordination as 'an opportunity to go deeper into oneself' and, for Cook's Thai participants, 'ordination is conceptualized as an opportunity to "do work" on oneself through meditation'.

In my study, the sense that the Buddha's teachings continue to provide answers to fundamental questions was both a reason for being attracted to Buddhism initially, and also a reason for wanting to make further commitments through ordination. Rajana (Forest Sangha) described a process of 'falling in love' when she began to increasingly spend time within the monastic communities. However, this 'love' was not with a person, but with, as she explains, 'the whole way of practice'. Similarly, Siladakini (Triratna) asked for ordination after realising that the Buddhist path really provided the most significant answers for her. She described a period of time when she was exploring her connection to Buddhism and ultimately realised that it was 'the only thing that gives my life meaning', which then provided an aspiration to further commit to the practices and community that had helped her through ordination.

However, a few participants in this study did not articulate their initial motivations for ordination with quite the same clarity. For example, Priyarati (Triratna) states that when she initially asked for ordination:

> *I don't really think I knew what I was asking for on a rational level…I knew that I wanted something, but I didn't really know what I wanted… I don't know… if I knew what I was asking for.*

This idea that a motivation for ordination might not be wholly 'rational' was identified by Goswell (1988:2/123-125) amongst her Forest Sangha participants, and evidence from my study indicates that this could equally be applied to women across different Buddhist groups in Britain. Indeed, in asking Ceola (OBC) about her motivations for ordination, she questioned how difficult it was to have absolute certainty about the origins of a decision that was likely to be shaped in complex and multi-faceted ways by individual people's backgrounds and experiences, alongside other factors that were perhaps difficult to put into words. Four participants stated that they did not feel that their decision to ordain was a deliberate 'choice' but was instead, as Tanirika (Triratna) explained, 'something I had to do'. Dhannadipa (Theravāda), Prasanna (Theravāda), Dhatri (Amida) and Alura (OBC) each describe their decision to ordain as 'a calling' and indeed, Prasanna felt that rather than choosing to be a nun, 'the nun's life (chose) me'. The sense of ordination as a vocation was particularly emphasised by Dhatri, who, as I described in Chapter Five, chose to get involved, and later take ordination in Amida Trust because she was attracted by their commitment to social engagement.[153]

For the participants in this study, ordination can facilitate both personal and communal development. Whilst a personal wish to, in Rajana's words, 'make a whole-hearted commitment' is of great importance to this group of women, this does not preclude the importance of helping others and contributing to a community. This connection both to personal Buddhist practice and to other people remains significant for the participants in this study, both in their initial interest in Buddhist groups, and also in their later request for ordination, which will be discussed in the next section.

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[153] The aspiration to be of service through ordination has also been noted amongst Western Buddhist monastics in other settings (Ploos van Amstel, 2005:173, Tsomo, 1999a:10).

Connection

As I identified in Chapter Five, in terms of their initial attraction to Buddhism, a substantial proportion of the participants in this study were drawn by the people and the communities. This sense of attraction that women feel towards individuals and groups remains significant when they describe their motivations for ordination. For example, for Priyarati (Triratna), although she was unable to ascertain precisely her initial incentive for ordination, she felt that coming into contact with other female Order members was a powerful motivating force. She explains:

> *I wanted what they had, I wanted to be like them - they were calm, they were centred, they were kind, they gave wonderful talks and were eloquent teachers of the Dharma.*

For Priyarati, her connection with Order members fostered her initial interest in Buddhism (which I discussed in the previous chapter), yet this feeling that she 'wanted to be like them' intensified after she became a *mitra* and began engaging more intensely with the group and the practices. In a similar way, Dalha (Tibetan) explained that after she had been involved with her Buddhist group for a short time, she saw a group of Western nuns in the Tibetan tradition who had come to visit her centre and she explains that she was 'drawn, very drawn' to them. This sense of interest in other Buddhists, particularly ordained monastics, was also recognised by Ploos Van Amstel (2005:110) and Goswell (1988:3/8-9). However, this feeling wasn't a wholly comfortable one for Dalha (Tibetan). She explains she was 'terrified' when she had such a strong connection to the nuns and their practice because she did not understand why she might be interested in what she perceived would be an austere and challenging lifestyle.

Several participants, particularly those linked with the Tibetan tradition, described feeling motivated by a connection to specific teachers.[154] This included requesting for them to ordain them personally, although it was more common amongst this sample to feel an association with the idea of ordained life more broadly and an affiliation to specific individuals as a representation of this. Only Chandrakala (Triratna) mentioned that this connection with others and the desire to be like them contained an element of wanting, as she puts it, 'to be important' or

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[154] Ploos Van Amstel (2005:99-125) emphasises the salience of the interactions between Western Tibetan nuns and their teachers, as I discussed first in Chapter Three. Evidence from this study suggests that a sense of connection to teachers for ordained women goes beyond the Tibetan traditions considered in Ploos Van Amstel's study, although this issue has not been a focus of my research.

'to be notice(d)'. She states that this feeling was 'weeded out very fast', so it is likely that these types of motivations for ordination (which might be considered 'mundane') will come under scrutiny, particularly during the lengthy Triratna ordination process, or the postulancy periods within the other groups. However, motivations are complex, as Ceola (OBC) identified, and it is impossible to say whether this desire for status featured more widely than I have been able to ascertain. Nevertheless, the reality of ordained life for some women in contemporary Britain (particularly, although not exclusively, those without financial support, as I will detail in Chapter Nine) is a challenging one, and it is unlikely that individuals would remain ordained if 'wanting to be noticed' or 'important' were their only motivating factors.

In this study, taking ordination was seen not only as part of a furthering of personal practice, but also as a contribution to the development and maintenance of Buddhist communities in Britain. Suvanna (Forest Sangha) reported feeling strongly connected to the monastic community at Amaravati and wanting to contribute to the ethos that they were promoting. Although the relationship that some women have with their communities changes over the years (as I will detail in Chapter Nine), the sense that some women describe of community spirit (particularly in the early days of organisational development) is certainly experienced as compelling. Aspiring to belong to a group of people who share your values, particularly when those values and practices are not necessarily mainstream, is a key motivating factor for Buddhist ordination amongst women in the British context. Sumitra (Triratna) explained that one of the ordination vows that they take within Triratna was 'in company with friends and brethren, I accept this ordination' and therefore, when she took ordination, she was committing to a group of people and to what she called her 'personal part in communal awakening'. This is echoed by Delia (OBC), and she states that when she took her novice ordination, even though she had been living at the monastery as a postulant, 'it felt like I was really joining something'. Of course, this is not likely to be a unique experience for Buddhist women in Britain, and Chodron and Kacho (2001:42) highlight that 'ordination is not only about living ethically; it involves becoming a member of a community'.

It is to the meaning attributed to ordination by my participants that I will now turn.

Ordained Women in Britain and the Meaning of Ordination

For Elizabeth (Gelug), her initial *rabjungma* ordination was an extremely happy occasion and one where she felt 'complete joy'. She explains that this was because:

> *There wasn't anywhere else I wanted to be, there wasn't anything else I wanted to do, there was no ifs or buts, or whatever, I couldn't wait. In fact, they had to get me to slow down!*

Although Elizabeth later went on to take novice ordination, it was her description of taking the *rabjungma* precepts that really stood out in her narrative, not least because it was the first time she put on monastic robes. Both Aarya (Amida) and Dolma (Gelug) echoed this, and reflected that their ordinations were happy and highly significant occasions for both themselves and their communities. For Dolma, taking her *rabjungma* vows in front of her family, friends and her Buddhist community was a celebratory occasion and one where 'there was a huge feeling of joy in the *gompa*'.[155] Aarya (Amida) explained that each of their ordination ceremonies is meaningful because they reflect, through taking certain precepts and vows, what is most important to community members. As a result, she says:

> *It's hard to sit through the ceremony and not be moved to tears because this is ...devoting your life to the Dharma.*

As the Triratna ordination ceremony consists of two separate events, a private and a public ceremony, participants articulated slightly different feelings at each. The private ceremony was typically described in terms of being personal, reflective, and poignant, and the public whilst certainly still poignant, was more communal and celebratory for the whole group. However, both were felt to be very happy and positive occasions.

Goswell (1988:2/177-179) notes this element of 'joy' experienced on ordination in the Forest Sangha.[156] However, Goswell (1988:2/134) emphasises that following *anagārika/ā* ordination, some men and women also experienced early challenges, a point also made by Ploos Van Amstel (2005:97) in relation to Western nuns in the Tibetan tradition. A number of participants in my study, across

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[155] '*Gompa*', a Tibetan word, refers here to the shrine room where the ordination took place.
[156] Kawanami (2013:52) also highlights feelings that included 'joyous sentiments' and 'a...sense of relief' amongst the *thiláshin* that she interviewed, particularly the older women.

each of the Buddhist groups, likewise mentioned early periods of difficulty in their ordained lives, either as postulants or novices, or for those in Triratna either in the time building up to the ordination, on their ordination retreat, or just after returning home. For some, ordination ceremonies were not conducted in a language that they could easily follow and therefore, their experience was not always one of unbridled joy. Indeed, quite a few women mentioned rather mixed emotions about their ordination ceremonies, including nervousness, worry and also excitement, likening their ordination ceremony to other 'big days' that occur in life. Therefore it is important not to over-romanticise the experience either of an ordination ritual, or of the process leading up to it. For example, Ceola (OBC) described her postulancy period as akin to 'being out to sea' as a result of the changes she was making in her life. She explains further:

> *I wouldn't* (think) *anybody would probably say 'oh I had a plain sailing postulancy'…You literally have so much* (that) *is… getting left behind and you are sort of in a state of general turmoil of some kind or another.*

Lobsang (Kagyu), who took novice ordination as part of a four year closed retreat, described the experience as 'every part of it life-changing'. Rajana also followed this narrative trajectory, but she stated that it was her *sīladharā* ordination and the lifestyle changes that accompanied it which heralded a 'very significant shift' from her previous eight-precept ordination. However, other participants mentioned a range of issues they had with various aspects of ordination. Whilst Rajana highlighted not being able to drive or cook as a *sīladharā* as salient for her, Ailith (OBC) stated that the monastic schedule, particularly of eating at regimented times each day, was a significant 'adjustment' that impacted immediately after she moved to the monastery. What was most significant for Delia (OBC), however, was giving up her job, and the security that accompanied it. From the testimonies provided by women in this study, the process of ordination is clearly not a standardised experience (Starkey, 2014).

Whilst those who join the Triratna Order do not have to undergo the types of physical and lifestyle changes mentioned by those who relocate to monastic communities, the need for a period of adjustment following the ordination retreat, including at work, amongst their family, and with their Buddhist community, featured in several of their narratives. Moreover, the feeling of 'dying to the world', highlighted by Goswell (1988:2/134) in relation to the experience of *anagārika/ā* ordination in the Forest Sangha, was also present in the narratives of some participants in this study, but was not limited to those in monastic traditions. In fact,

amongst the Triratna Order members, it was a rather commonly reported experience, particularly during the ordination retreat itself and is best exemplified in the narratives of Siladakini and Tanirika.[157] Just prior to her public ordination ceremony, Siladakini describes walking around a graveyard in which there were a number of head-stones on which were inscribed the first name she had been given at birth. She describes sitting in the graveyard with the strong sense that 'your old self is going to stop on some level'. Tanirika describes a similar experience. On her ordination retreat, she ate her breakfast in the enclosure that also contained the communal compost bin and she felt that this symbolised her own personal 'composting down' before she was 'turned into something else' through ordination.[158] Ordination, in this sense and in this context, is certainly described as a significant journey.

Yet, conspicuous in the narratives of several Triratna Order members was the idea that ordination was also experienced as, in Charumati's words, 'a recognition of my commitment, a recognition of my practice'. Priyarati describes feeling 'really seen' by senior Order members when her ordination was approved, and Sumitra defines the experience as one which gave her 'an enormous vote of confidence as a person'. No doubt this is particularly the case within Triratna where the period of time between asking for ordination and being accepted is generally lengthier than in other groups. Thus, when women are eventually invited to take ordination there appeared to be a feeling of achievement, although not withstanding the recognition that Buddhist practice continued after ordination. Although these descriptions of ordination appear more prevalent amongst Triratna participants, Delia (OBC) describes both becoming a postulant, and later her transmission, using similar terms of 'recognition' and 'acceptance'. She acknowledges that she felt touched to become part of a community of people whose practice she valued so highly.[159]

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[157] Bluck (2006:165) argues that 'spiritual rebirth' through ordination has been a commonly articulated theme within Triratna narratives and it also features in the description of the Triratna ordination ceremonies provided by Moksananda (2004:97).

[158] Ploos Van Amstel (2005:73) argues that amongst the Western Tibetan-tradition nuns involved in her study, ordination marked a different understanding of 'self'. Goswell (1988) was also concerned to explore the changes around ordination from a psychological perspective. Whilst this was not an element that I gave attention to in my study, it is important to acknowledge some similar feelings of change that several of my participants describe.

[159] The process of 'transmission' in the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives was discussed in Chapter One.

Conclusion

In answering my first research question – why ordain, and what does it mean in this context – I have explored the testimony of my participants under a typology consisting of three principal themes: dissatisfaction, answers, and connection, building on the framework I presented in Chapter Five. In this chapter, I have specified both the areas of commonality and discord in the narratives provided by ordained women across each of the Buddhist groups involved in this study. I have also shown that there are both similarities and differences between the motivations given for ordination by the participants in my study and those in other geographic settings. It has been valuable to make these comparisons, not least because they indicate what might be unique about ordination for women connected to Britain, a theme I shall return to in Chapter Nine. Furthermore, a detailed comparative analysis of motivations across different groups of Buddhist ordained women has not been, to date, a common feature of scholarly literature. The analysis in this chapter therefore deepens our understanding of the meaning attributed to Buddhist ordination amongst women in the contemporary context.

Overall, I have argued that a common rationale given by the participants in this study was a wish to prioritise Buddhist practice, and make it a primary focus of life's activities. In this study, ordination typically means an opportunity to enhance one's commitment to Buddhism, dedicating oneself to Buddhist teachings. However, it is also a chance to be part of, and contribute to, a community of like-minded others. Importantly, this was not just a feature of the narratives of those women ordaining in monastic traditions in Buddhism, which has been the focus of much of the existing academic literature on motivation. There is, however, one question that has been prompted by the analysis in this chapter but that was beyond the scope of this study, namely whether there is any indication that the motivations and meaning attributed to ordination presented here would be different to those experienced by their male counterparts in the same groups. A similar comparative study looking at both ordained men and women across the different Buddhist groups in Britain would be a potentially valuable complement to my research.

Chapter Seven: *Buddha Couture* – Ordained Buddhist Women and Dress

Introduction

I like to say, my designer is the Buddha! (Lobsang, Kagyu)

In this chapter, I will analyse the meaning, function, and significance of the dress practices of ordained Buddhist women in Britain. Dress has not received adequate academic attention within studies of Buddhism in Britain and this chapter will redress this gap in knowledge. My inquiry into dress elicited a wealth of detailed data, which not only contributes to my understanding of how my participants relate to their Buddhist tradition, but also provides an original angle to explore the ways in which the British location might influence Buddhist practice. Despite the range of disciplinary practices which ordained Buddhist women participate in, I have chosen to focus on dress because its examination provokes salient questions in relation to the points of diversity and difference between my participants. Furthermore, it illuminates key ways in which ordained women engage with Buddhist practice, tradition, and discipline in contemporary Britain. These are significant themes for my thesis as a whole.

As I discussed in Chapter Three, I employ the term 'dress' to include robes or monastic clothes and also styles of head-shaving, incense scars on the head, various items given or made within certain traditions on ordination such as a mat, bag and alms-bowl, and the adoption of a Buddhist name (often, although not exclusively in this context, in Pāli or Sanskrit).[160] These are all considered together because the ordained 'outfit' is, in many Buddhist traditions and groups, more than the material of the robes.[161] As Triratna Order members change their names on ordination, but are not required to wear robes or shave their heads (although do wear a white or gold *kesa* for formal occasions or teaching), the term 'dress' needs to be inclusive. While dress is only one part of an ordained person's disciplinary life, in this chapter I argue that it is a significant one, warranting detailed investigation.

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[160] Within the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, names given on ordination are neither Pāli nor Sanskrit, but are generally English/Celtic names, or occasionally Japanese.
[161] The various dress practices adopted by my participants have been detailed in Chapter One.

In this chapter, I move the focus of this thesis from an analysis of motivation for ordination to an examination of one aspect of every-day life for ordained Buddhist women in Britain.[162] I will first explore the symbolic and representative functions of dress for ordained women in this context, showing that they are a means by which to identify those who have taken ordination and a way of visually connecting ordained women to their traditions, to the Buddha, and to his teachings. Whilst these are salient functions, I argue that dress in this context also has a role beyond the symbolic and should be seen as a physical practice of dedication to Buddhism. Described from another angle, Buddhist dress can help put Buddhist teachings into practice. Yet, at the same time, I also suggest that the centrality of dress for ordained Buddhist women in Britain should not be over-stated. This is both as a result of the differences of opinion amongst participants in relation to the significance of dress in this setting, but also because dress is equally understood by ordained women as a form of expression that can be used, but to which one should not become too attached. This suggests that material religion in this context functions within two simultaneous spheres: the every-day or conventional, where dress is significant, and the ultimate, where dress is inconsequential. How ordained women navigate these simultaneous meanings will be explored in this chapter.

Clothing myself in the Buddha's Words: Symbolism and Representation

A change in dress, whether it involves adopting robes and shaving your head, taking a Buddhist or *dhamma*/*dharma* name, or wearing a particular *kesa* or *wagessa* for a ceremonial occasion, symbolises the change in life made by ordained Buddhist women in Britain (Starkey, 2014:216). For Dhannadipa (Theravāda) the robes she wears, in conjunction with her shaved head are an important 'symbol of renunciation and simplicity'. When she initially changed out of lay clothes and cut her hair, 'it was just a very clear statement of leaving behind my old life and persona and cultivating a new way of living', which included adopting a celibate lifestyle. In certain Buddhist traditions, one enters the ordination ceremony in under-clothes (a white under-robe in the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, or the yellow petticoat or *mayok* in the Tibetan traditions, for example) and is given a set of robes (and other items, such as mat, bowl or bowl set, or *kesa*). These are, as

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[162] The complexity inherent within the term 'Britain' or 'British location' will form the basis of the analysis in Chapter Nine.

Ailith (OBC) explains, the 'pieces of clothing that make you a monk'. Indeed, amongst many of the participants in this study who wear robes, these 'pieces of clothing' separate them from those who are not ordained and also from those who are not affiliated with Buddhism.[163] In addition, in the OBC, for example, as you move from a postulant, to a novice, through to a transmitted monk and then to being a senior and Master, the dress that you wear also correspondingly changes, most notably in its colour (Bluck, 2006:83, Hollenbeck, 2010, Kay, 2004:187). As Delia (OBC) explains, this helps you to see 'where somebody's at'. For Edwina (OBC), the adoption of robes and clipped hair in her period of postulancy was significant of major life adjustments, even prior to her official ordination. As she explains;

> *I think becoming a postulant…is more significant for me than my ordination, because the day I became a postulant, was the day that my hair was cut and I put on robes, and that to me just made that big difference…**that was when my life changed**.*

For the participants in this study, robes, a shaved head, and indeed a new Buddhist name go some way to letting other people know what you are doing; highlighting the primary motivation of your life. For some women, their dress was also one means to make a statement about beliefs and values, particularly offering an alternative to materialism, capitalism and consumerism in contemporary Britain. Aarya (Amida) exemplifies this:

> *It's important to pin your colours to a mast sometimes. It's important to stand up and actually say what you are, what your foundations are; and what you are willing to wear represents that.*

Rajana (Forest Sangha) echoes this sentiment:

> *I think the benefits of actually your whole appearance making a clear statement about what you're interested in, I think they far outweigh the possible benefits of looking like everybody else.*

Furthermore, Dhannadipa (Theravāda) explains that through wearing robes, shaving her head and using a Buddhist name, it is, in actuality, 'like being a living symbol' of Buddhist values, strongly representing 'another way of doing things'

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[163] An exception to this would be the giving of refuge names to lay people within the Tibetan traditions. Not all the women in this study from the Tibetan groups used their refuge names, and most received new names when they took novice (*getsulma*) ordination. Furthermore, one of my participants identified that, within some Tibetan schools, lay teachers also wear robes. However, in the testimonies of the participants in this study, dress was most often used to signify the changes that they made either in the build up to (as in the case of a postulant) or following ordination.

within contemporary society. This subsequently provides support to Tarlo's (1996:318) 'identification/ differentiation' thesis and also reinforces the perspective on Buddhist monastic dress exemplified by Wu (2001:253), which I detailed in Chapter Three. As Aarya (Amida) emphasises;

> *One of our precepts is to wear red, as an outer layer, just to show that we are part of a religious order.*

Evidence from this study confirms that in wearing a particular style of dress, ordained Buddhist women in Britain are symbolising their affiliation to religious communities and to their particular *saṅgha*. As Dhannadipa explains, when you take an ordination name;

> *so you become part of a different family... you leave your blood family and become part of the saṅgha family, the monastic family.*

An additional example of this can be noted in the practice of eyebrow shaving, which signifies an affiliation with the Thai *saṅgha*.

However, in this study, it is not just identification with individual religious communities or traditions that are represented in dress, but also the sense of being aligned and connected to the Buddha and his teachings. Several participants mentioned the importance of the 'lineage' of the robes that they wore and the fact that they were designed by the Buddha and have been used by numerous monks and nuns, in various guises, throughout Buddhist history. Even though Lobsang (Kagyu) explained that the robes she adopted on ordination were culturally unfamiliar, she felt secure wearing them as a result of this pedigree. Furthermore, Kalinda (Tibetan) also indicated she felt a 'sense of a blessing' in wearing robes and in their connection to her lineage and to Buddhist tradition and practice. In fact, this strong sense of connection to the Buddha and Buddhist teachings through dress is also highly significant for Dhatri (Amida), who explains;

> *The precepts hold me; the robe holds me as if I'm clothing myself in the Buddha's words and the Buddha's teachings.*

The themes of belonging and connection, as exemplified by Dhannadipa and Dhatri, have been significant throughout this thesis. They are also themes which have been highlighted by Goswell (1988:3/328) in relation to function of dress (including head-shaving) amongst the Forest Sangha *sīladharā*. Although Goswell does not dwell on dress in any particular detail, her identification of these motifs in conjunction with the testimonies that are drawn from within my study points to an enduring symbolism inherent in Buddhist dress practices in this setting, beyond the one tradition which was the focus of her study. The idea of dress representing the

change following ordination is significant even amongst participants who did not wear robes. Both Charumati and Priyarati, ordained within Triratna, emphasised the sense of transformation that they felt during their ordination ceremonies, which was then represented in the new name that they were given (Hayes, 2008:118-19). As Charumati explains further,

> *The giving of the name is ...a kind of spiritual death and rebirth; you're ... dying to your old identity, your old way of being and kind of being reborn with a new name.*

In addition to dress practices reflecting a life-change, several participants from across each of the groups in this study also identified very specific features of their dress that are particularly symbolic, either to them as individuals or to the group they were affiliated with. For example, Delia (OBC) explains that the small *kesa* that she wears around her neck represents the precepts that she has taken. As a result, she described being very mindful of it when eating; wanting to ensure that nothing is spilt on it because it 'symbolise(s) what it means to be a monk'. Furthermore, the bowing mat that is given to newly ordained monks within the OBC has four corners, representative of Guardian Kings, and as one of my participants highlighted, when you place the mat on the floor, it signifies 'a willingness to sit on it together with all beings'. For Dhatri (Amida) the act of offering a tuft of hair for the preceptor to cut during her ordination ceremony is a 'symbolic offering to the Buddha of ourselves as service'; very salient within a Buddhist group which is characterised by its social engagement (Henry, 2008).

As I will discuss further in this chapter, during the Triratna ordination retreat, participants are encouraged to wear blue clothes, which could include robes. This is deemed important both for simplicity and aesthetic reasons, and also because blue is seen here to be the colour of the *dhamma/dharma* and thus symbolises a connection to the Buddha's teachings. This is similar within Amida Trust, whose ordained members wear predominantly red clothes; red being the symbolic colour of Amida and the Pure Land. Similarly in the Forest Sangha, the *sīladharā* chose to wear brown as a connection to the forest and the earth- a reflection of their roots in the Forest monastic tradition - and their begging bowl symbolises the practice of alms mendicancy (Angell 2006a:100, also see Bell 1991:246). There is also symbolism in the embroidery on the *kesa* and *wagessa* within the traditions which use these garments. Within Triratna, the embroidery on the front of white or gold *kesa* that they wear for ceremonial occasions is of the Three Jewels (the translation of Triratna, and representative of the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*). For

Amida, the embroidery on the back of their *wagessa* is of the sun and the clouds; the sun being highly significant within the Pure Land tradition and, according to Dhatri, the clouds symbolising 'obstructions' to be overcome. For those in the OBC, a large and small mountain is sewn onto the back of the *kesa*, representing Mount Shasta (and a smaller mountain, Black Butte) in the United States, where Throssel Hole's sister abbey is located.

In summary, the changes to dress practices in the lead up to, and following, ordination are described as symbolic of deeper changes made within the lives of the participants in this study and reinforce the strength of their affiliation to particular communities and traditions. Dress functions in this context as a way of advertising a change in status and roles, and communicating the commitments made by ordained Buddhist women in Britain. Thus, the data from this study provides support for seeing dress as symbolic of change and commitment, as described in the literature presented in Chapter Three. However, as I will explore in the next section, dress practices are also used amongst the participants in this study, deliberately and self-consciously, to support Buddhist training, including increasing one's attentiveness to points of attachment, craving, and clinging.

Obstruction and Release: Dress as Practice

As I presented in Chapter Three, both Tsomo (1999a:8) and Chodron (2001:29) have attributed Buddhist monastic robes and tonsure with a dynamic functionality, stating that robes aid the development of 'mindful awareness' (Tsomo 1999:8) and help 'lessen our attachment to appearance' (Chodron 2001:29). Yet, given that Tsomo and Chodron are both writing from within an American setting, and because viewing dress 'in context' is emphasised within much of the contemporary literature, it is crucial to explore how this dynamism is experienced by, and indeed 'situated' on, individual women's bodies in Britain (Entwistle, 2000:11). In order to explore these elements of 'dress as practice' and how they relate to ordained Buddhist women in Britain, this section is divided into two sub-sections. The first concentrates on dress as a 'reminder' and a means to draw attention to Buddhist precepts and ethics. The second demonstrates how Buddhist dress is often perceived to be both practical and simple, affording ordained women more time to concentrate on meditation, chanting or other aspects of Buddhist practice. Through both of these sections, I will argue that dress is an active,

physical, expression of a commitment to the Buddhist path, and as such is integrated into ordained women's daily experience of Buddhist practice in this context.

An Active Reminder

For a number of participants in this study across each of the represented groups, dress is a repeated 'reminder' of their Buddhist commitments and thus has an active role to play in helping to put Buddhist teachings into practice (Starkey, 2014:218). Indeed, eight participants used the exact term, 'reminder', sometimes repeatedly, when referring to the function of dress.[164] These eight participants highlighted that the daily activity of being called your Buddhist name, or putting on robes (and indeed, adjusting them throughout the day) and looking in the mirror to see a shaven head, repeatedly emphasises the changes that you have made in life and the direction in which you are travelling. Subsequently, this draws your attention to what you are doing and thinking, improving, what Tsomo (1999a:8) calls, your 'mindful awareness', a key facet of Buddhist practice. As Ailith (OBC) explains;

> *I think wearing robes is important because… it's a reaffirmation that this is what I'm doing, this is the life I'm living, these are the choices I've made, which…for me it's a reminder.*

This is mirrored by Dhatri (Pure Land), who indicates that wearing red is 'a reminder of what I took up this life for, to be of service'. Dhannadipa (Theravāda) also follows this argument when she discussed her robes;

> *They are a constant reminder that I've orientated my life towards awakening and towards the Dhamma. And whatever else is going on, I only have to look down and there's this robe and it's a reminder.*

Yet for many of the participants in this study, using dress as a reminder isn't merely symbolic; it directly affects and influences spiritual practice, on an ongoing basis.[165] Ailith (OBC) calls her Buddhist dress 'a physical

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[164] This echoes the frequent use of the idea of dress as a 'reminder' which appears in the wider literature, both in relation to Buddhism and other religious traditions, which I discussed in Chapter Three.

[165] This exposes certain similarities between ordained Buddhist women in Britain and the Polish Catholic nuns in Trzebiatowska's (2010) research. Furthermore, evidence from this study also supports the findings of scholars such as Gökariksel

acknowledgement' of her Buddhist commitment, and along the same lines, Delia (OBC) refers to her dress as an 'active expression' of her Buddhist practice:

> *From the place of the willingness and deep wish to give oneself to monastic life, to keep shaving the head is both a symbol of this aspiration - and actually an expression of the active doing of it.*

However, for some, the connection between dress and practice begins even before the act of ordination where robes are put on, and instead is initiated when the robes are being made. Although members of other traditions can make their own robes, it was within the testimonies of women from the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives where the links between dress-making and Buddhist practice are made particularly clear.[166] Several of the participants from the OBC described that making their robes (and their bags before they became postulants) was an essential preparation for monastic life. For some, the practicalities of sewing their robes and using a sewing machine, sometimes for the first time, was described as challenging. However, following the discipline of the dress pattern (even when it might not seem to make sense) is seen to be the key to success. This emphasises the importance of maintaining trust in the practice and teachings, even when this seems difficult. This is the point and purpose of the activity, as Ceola explains;

> (Sewing the robe is) *the place where you really see what* (monastic life) *is about, because it can be a nice grand idea to go and be a monk, but when it comes down to the actual nitty-gritty detail of trying to actually tussle with the practicalities…that's where it actually plays out the vow and the wish.*

Indeed, through these times of difficulty (which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter), becoming aware of any less than positive reactions and responses to dress (and discipline in general) is described as a means of investigating and understanding *upādāna* (attachment), *taṇhā* (craving) and *dukkha* (suffering, dissatisfaction). The significance of making a physical commitment to Buddhism through dress is further exemplified through the incense scars on Lobsang's shaven head, which were made as part of a *bodhisattva* vow taken during her *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. Lobsang (Kagyu) described these marks as a highly significant physical manifestation of her dedication to the liberation of all sentient beings, an aspiration that she then seeks to put into action every day. For many of the participants in this

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(2009:658), who emphasise the dynamic, embodied potential of religious dress. The work of these scholars has been discussed in Chapter Three.
[166] See Riggs (2004) for a description of the history and practice of making robes in the Sōtō Zen tradition. She draws a strong link between 'sewing one's own robe' and Sōtō Zen practice in the Japanese context.

study, therefore, the dress that they adopt in the process of ordination is a way that they can physically engage with Buddhism, and is a means by which they embody Buddhist teachings and put the discipline into practice.

Buddhist names, although not a material phenomenon, also act as very particular 'active reminders' in this context. Priyarati (Triratna) referred to her name as her 'daily reminder' and something that she found useful in strengthening her focus and resolve, helping her to 'be her best'. Indeed, she highlighted that at the times when she felt she was responding to situations in more negative ways, she dubbed these moments as 'Jane moments', referencing the name given to her at birth.[167] The name therefore, is perceived as a helpful 'jolt' to re-orientate one's self to Buddhist practice, precepts and ethics should attention to these wane, even if only momentarily. As Dolma (Gelug) states, 'I need reminding because I am very distractable' and her dress and name help her to effectively 'concentrate' and take good advantage of the opportunities afforded to her as an ordained person focused on Buddhist practice.

The name given on ordination, which is often selected to provide a source of inspiration and encouragement along the Buddhist path, can also be a device of motivation in itself. Aarya (Amida) explained that in her tradition, particular names are chosen because they reflect;

> *an aspect of our personality that's there but nascent or weak or dormant and that needs to be brought out to the surface.*

Several participants mentioned the very profound impact of hearing your name for the first time, and the sense of inspiration, and aspiration, that accompanies it. As Lobsang (Kagyu) explains, 'it means you can aspire towards it'. In addition, using an ordained name also challenges a fixed or rigid sense of identity, another central aspect of Buddhist practice discussed by the participants in this study. As Suvanna (Forest Sangha) explains;

> *I think anything that helps you see where you have become familiar with a certain condition is useful…. So when the form works, it helps displace some of those default positions …to see where you just take things for granted.*

Indeed, Dhatri (Amida) mentioned how effective she felt her ordained name had been in pointing her in the direction she needed to go in; so much so that she mentioned she might need a new name, in order to help her in an alternative

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[167] As with all the names used in this study, this has been changed for the purposes of anonymity.

direction. For those ordained within Triratna, and to a lesser extent, Amida Trust and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, names are selected to reflect positive character traits that a person has already developed. As such, they can be helpful reminders of a person's potential, of what effort needs to be made, and what efforts have already been made along the Buddhist path. Delia (OBC) explains this process clearly:

> *Your name is chosen by your Master, and he tends to pick a name that either …already expresses who you are, or a name that expresses a direction he wants you to move in.*

Changing your name on ordination, therefore, does not just advertise a shift in social role, but can be an integrated part of Buddhist practice in this context, and one that is operationalised on an on-going basis.

Practicality and Simplicity

For several of the participants in this study, the changes made to dress following (or leading up to) ordination were experienced as very practical. A number mentioned the simplification of daily routine that accompanies having a uniform dress, a shaved head, and not wearing make-up, which allowed them to focus more quickly, and deeply, on what had become most important to them, namely Buddhist practice, including meditation. As Delia (OBC) explains, a shaved or closely cropped head means that each day;

> *you don't have to mess with your hair! That's one sensible thing… it simplifies life because you just get up and have a wash and, you know, that's it.*

Suvanna (Forest Sangha) echoes this, and articulates that;

> *For me it's pretty simple, I don't have to think about what I am going to wear in the morning… I don't have to think about how I look. It saves energy. And it helps me focus on what I want to do. If I wasn't a nun, I would invest quite a lot of energy into how I look.*

The actual design and material of the robes themselves is also seen, by some, in practical terms. As Lobsang (Kagyu) explains, the multiple folds of fabric allow her to sit comfortably in meditation, particularly keeping warm in the winter months, and her lighter weight robes allow her to feel cool in summer. Furthermore, there are also practical benefits to tonsure, to which Lobsang also testifies. She

describes that when she shaves her hair, her head feels very cold and wet as it is exposed to the elements.[168] This is of direct physical benefit during long periods of meditation, as feeling cold assists you to stay awake. Therefore, dress codes in this context also have a rather practical function.

However, beyond the practical, there is evidence within this study to support Chodron's (2001:29) claim that adopting uniform Buddhist dress is seen as something that 'lessen(s) our attachment to appearance'. This is particularly exemplified in Dhatri's experiences of her first head-shaving. She explains that whilst her hair was being cut:

> *I was thinking to myself, 'Oh I hope it looks alright, I hope he's not making a mess of it'. And that's when I realised how proud I was of it! And that's what made me realise why it's done, one of the reasons is to cut through pride*.

Furthermore, this 'cutting through pride' through the adoption of uniform dress practices was often experienced as 'freeing' and as a 'relief' for women within the British context.[169] Both Dhannadipa (Theravāda) and Alura (OBC) explain in more detail:

> *I felt an immense relief, at… not hav*(ing) *to be somebody through my clothing and my image* (Dhannadipa).

> *Shaving the head was a great relief, personal relief….It's* (a) *very interesting thing but actually it feels very, very free to have no hair* (Alura).

In fact, several participants in this study were at pains to highlight that although the regime of discipline that they followed (including their dress codes) might seem oppressive and repressive in a modern, capitalist context where choice and individuality are paramount, this was not their experience.[170] Prasanna (Theravāda),

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[168] This is similar to a rationale given by Lang (1995:38) in relation to the effect of tonsure.

[169] Salgado (2013:15, 187) questions the meaning of the term 'freedom' in relation to Buddhist renunciant women, and she inquires as to whether it means the same thing across different contexts. She argues that in 'liberal and feminist paradigms', the notion of 'freedom' in relation to renunciation is likely to refer principally to 'autonomy' and 'freedom from patriarchy' and the assumed constraints of the home (Salgado, 2013:187). Whilst there was a sense from some participants that the 'relief' they felt related to not having to engage with mainstream norms of female beauty prevalent in contemporary Britain, and a few indicated that androgynous robes were beneficial, this was not discussed in any depth in my interviews, and thus requires further investigation.

[170] Kawanami (2013:88) in her study of Burmese *thiláshin*, also recognises this. She argues that 'a monastic life of a nun may appear restrictive and harsh from the viewpoint of a bystander, but nuns themselves do not see it in that way'.

for example, emphasised that although discipline, particularly religious discipline 'does not have a good PR', she saw her practices as a 'support system', and one that she chose to engage with freely and without coercion. Lobsang (Kagyu) was clear that she had actively chosen to follow the disciplinary regulations of her tradition, and Delia (OBC) supported this, highlighting that;

>*There is no trace of submitting, because it is in no way an imposition.*

For Prasanna (Theravāda), the discipline, including the regulations around dress, 'keeps you on the ball' and she describes her robes as a supportive 'container' that physically holds together the 'powerful emotions' experienced during monastic life. Indeed, rather than a practice with negative connotations, dress discipline is deemed particularly effective in moving women (and, indeed, men) to a state of mind conducive to Buddhist practice, a point I shall return to at the end of this chapter.

Both Delia (OBC) and Dolma (Gelug) highlighted that when they put on their robes they felt they were, as Delia describes, 'functioning in meditation mode'. As a result, they felt 'more grounded' and, arguably, more effective. Dolma stated, 'I definitely feel differently when I'm wearing them', and even though, as Alura (OBC) highlights, in following a particular code of discipline, one is being 'rein(ed) in', this is viewed in positive, and productive terms. To cite one example, Dhannadipa (Theravāda) explains;

>*I just find it a very beautiful thing to be able to live within.*

Synnott (1987:383) highlights that women often have stronger association with their hair (especially long hair) than men. It would therefore be useful to ascertain whether, in the British context, ordained Buddhist men who shave their heads experience the same level of 'relief' and 'freedom' as highlighted here. Whilst not to deny that men also have particular pressures in terms of appearance in contemporary Britain, it is likely that this will be experienced in different ways. For example, although a man might already shave his head or wear a very short style prior to ordination, a woman may have developed a very strong connection between her hair and her perception of attractiveness and acceptance within mainstream society and thus might find it more difficult when it comes to

removing it.[171] Indeed, an experience of difficulty related to tonsure (and indeed, to ordained dress codes in general) will be a focus of the next section.

Yet, the connection between dress and Buddhist practice for ordained women in this context is not always inexorable and permanent. Indeed, Ceola (OBC) emphasised that robes, a shaved head, and a Buddhist name can also be a hindrance on the Buddhist path, particularly if one gets too attached to the image. This led her to describe dress as having the potential to both 'obstruct' and 'release', and Prasanna (Theravāda) to identify that 'this form has certain limitations and certain opportunities'.[172] On the whole, whilst the participants in this study felt that their Buddhist dress was important in practical ways, particularly in representing their values and commitments, they described that becoming too wedded to any form of dress (be it robes, tonsure or names) might be a hindrance on the Buddhist path which emphasises awareness of, and subsequently letting go, of 'attachments' (Chodron 2001:29). This is navigated by the women in this study in broadly similar ways. Aarya (Amida) emphasised that, although her Buddhist name was chosen to 'bring out' an area of personality that warranted development in order to support progress on the Buddhist path, ultimately 'it isn't who we are'. Mirroring this, Dhannadipa (Theravāda) explains that whilst the image of a robed nun is a 'strong one', for her, it is a generic image rather than an individual one, which afforded her a level of disassociation. In fact, she states, 'it's not personal, it's just the image of a Buddhist nun'. Dhannadipa expresses a perspective on dress that is also present in the testimonies of several other participants, both within and without the Theravāda tradition. She claims that whilst uniform dress is helpful, she does not understand it as:

> *something that would advance my practice, because the practice is internal. It's not about what you are wearing, but it's a support to… practice.*

This does not mean that the form of the robes is insignificant to the women in this study, only that they do not feel the need to identify completely with them or attribute all their practice to them. Indeed, Ceola (OBC) emphasises that, in putting on her robes each day, she does not have 'any great meaning' going through her head, and that for her 'wearing robes is not a matter of any ideal, or thinking about being a Buddhist'. Indeed, when she initially begun training as an ordained monk,

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[171] Kawanami (2013:85-86) makes a similar point in relation to women in Myanmar.

[172] Here, there are parallels with Trzebiatowska's (2010:62) observations on the multiple connotations of the Catholic habit in relation to Polish nuns, which I discussed in Chapter Three.

she described attributing more significance to the robes, but she felt this changed after over two decades of Buddhist practice. She did acknowledge that robes continue to be useful in practical terms so she didn't have to think about what she needed to wear, and she recognises the different effect of wearing a scruffy pair of jeans and a robe for ceremonial, for example. Yet, whilst this might seem somewhat contradictory, it actually exposes that whilst dress might not be important ultimately, it remains useful in every-day or conventional life. Indeed, any understanding of dress in this context must be cognisant of this dual meaning. It appears, therefore, that a number of ordained women in this context use the material to ultimately transcend the material.[173] Ceola illuminates the rationale behind this approach:

> *I think you don't realise that liberation can't be had in a vacuum; it's precisely that it has to come out of embodied existence. So if you try to extract everything out and sort of have it in this pure, clean place where you basically don't get involved in anything, don't, in quotes, 'wear anything' if you like, well that's no good.*

This sense of dual meaning indicated by some of the participants in this study in relation to dress, reflects what has become known as the 'Two Truths theory' in Buddhist thought (Faure, 2003:334). This philosophical approach, as emphasised by Nāgārjuna, posits that it is possible to perceive 'two truths'; a 'conventional', every-day truth, and an 'ultimate' truth (Harvey, 1990:98). In analysing my data, I found that highlighting this distinction was useful, partly because it enabled me to recognise how dress might be seen by my participants as both helpful in the short-term and every day, but at the same time, not something to become too obsessed with. However, whilst emphasising this distinction was certainly helpful for me as a researcher, one of my participants was keen to point out, on reading a draft of this chapter, that what was important in her practice was to see how these distinctions between 'conventional' and 'ultimate' actually dissolved. Zen training, she explained 'was directed at realising the ultimate in the conventional', thereby problematising too rigid a distinction between the 'two truths'. So whilst I retain the distinction in this chapter in order to highlight the different ways in which ordained women interacted with the discipline of dress, it is important to note that the categories which I found useful were not always perceived in exactly the same way by my participants.

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[173] Goswell (1988:3/328) touches on a similar idea when she recognises, although does not discuss in any depth, that the discipline adopted by monks and *sīladharā* in the Forest Sangha 'is a vehicle to reach enlightenment.'

As I have shown in this chapter, dress is one means through which Buddhist teachings are physically put into action by many of the ordained women in this study. However, this is not always a straightforward, or one-dimensional, interaction, an issue to which I shall now turn.

Buddhist Dress in Britain: Diversity and Difficulty

The following section is divided into three parts, and will highlight that attitudes towards dress amongst ordained Buddhist women in Britain are varied, and dress should not be interpreted in a 'one-size-fits-all' way. First, I will examine this diversity by exploring how some women 'wear' their dress in the contemporary British context, and the plurality in their approaches. The second sub-section will look specifically at the experiences of dress as described by female Triratna Order members, as their approach to dress differs from the other groups within this study. Finally, I will explore some of the difficulties that ordained women, across each of the groups, have with specific dress practices and look at several ways in which the British context has shaped ordained women's approach to dress.

Diversity

In general terms, perhaps unsurprisingly given the range of Buddhist traditions and practices that the women in this study adhere to, there is a level of diversity in their attitudes towards dress (see also, Starkey, 2014:218). Whilst there is an evident division to be drawn between women who wear robes and shave their heads and those who do not, the perspectives on dress within this sample of ordained women are more varied than this. For example, even amongst those traditions which support tonsure and the wearing of robes amongst the ordained *saṅgha,* not all require the robe to be worn at all times. For example, in the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, ordained monks are allowed to wear what they refer to as 'town clothes' when they are leaving the monastery or temple or for certain activities (Cush 1990:26). One participant explains the practical nature of the rationale behind this:

If I'm doing something where I'm absolutely being a monk… the robes are on. If it's pouring with rain and I'm going to Tesco's or I'm going to the dentist, then, no, I don't because the robes soak up all the rain, it's very simple.

This participant lives her ordained life in a contemporary context, and is able to make a practical, pragmatic decision about what she wears when she engages with wider, non-Buddhist, society at large. This is a result of her Buddhist group allowing an element of choice, but also reflects her circumstances, including the demands of being ordained whilst living alone and still having to maintain other responsibilities. The points of interaction between ordained Buddhist women and contemporary British life will be further analysed in Chapter Nine.

In addition, several of those who had taken monastic ordination in the OBC mentioned that they were allowed to grow their hair (or wear a wig) when on family visits, although not all actually did this. One highlighted that her mother found it rather distressing to see her with a shaved head, and therefore, I interpreted that the wearing of a wig on visits home was seen as a compassionate action. Similarly, one participant in the Tibetan tradition gained permission from her teacher to wear 'civilian clothes' when with her parents, so as not to 'disturb their mind too much', although she did keep to wearing maroon, the Tibetan monastic colour. This certainly highlights that adjustments are made to dress practices to reflect, and support, a populace who do not have a long cultural history of ordained Buddhist practice. In addition, as I will discuss in more detail in the next sub-section, those ordained within Triratna wear their *kesa* on ritual or formal occasions rather than every day, and within certain Buddhist groups (such as the OBC and Amida Trust), there are different robes that are worn for ceremonial occasions. This highlights a level of plurality even amongst those who regularly robe. There are women in this sample who wore the same style of robes every day and always shaved their heads, most notably in the Theravāda affiliated groups, who were frequently described by the participants of other traditions as those who practice the discipline *par excellence*. Yet, what I wish to emphasise here is that the level of diversity within dress practices in this context is not simply demarcated along the lines of organisational affiliation and, in reality, is influenced by the location and circumstances of ordained women themselves.

There was less obvious diversity, however, in the adoption of a Buddhist name following ordination. Of the participants in this study, only Elizabeth (Gelug) chose not to change her name following her refuge or ordination. She explained

that this was because other women in her tradition had set a precedent for not publicly adopting a *dharma* name (although she and, indeed, they were given names on refuge and ordination). However, more than this, whilst she recognised that other people might see adopting a Buddhist name as 'liberating and a mark of their change', Elizabeth did not feel particularly comfortable doing so. Ultimately, in her view, changing one's name was not an integral part of being a Buddhist nun. Illuminating a further level of diversity, Padma explained that she was given a Tantric name in addition to her refuge and ordination names, but she did not use this in public, only in particular ritual practices. Furthermore, although the remaining twenty-four participants did change their names, they were not always changed legally by deed-poll, and some ordained women used their lay name when they were involved in non-Buddhist settings, such as work, when paying bills, or when seeking medical treatment in hospital. This does not indicate a lack of commitment to Buddhism in this context, but instead shows that dress codes are not, in every case, fixed and rigid and some feel able to adapt their approach in response to the circumstances and environment in which they live.

Yet, it is not always easy for women to use a Buddhist name in one sphere and a lay name in another. Lobsang (Kagyu) explained that on one occasion when she was admitted to hospital under her lay name, it was initially difficult for other members of her community to telephone for updates, as they used her Buddhist name for identification purposes. Beyond practical considerations, Padma (Gelug) explained that by using her lay name in the work sphere, she felt she was 'getting quite schizophrenic' and that this was having negative repercussions on her perceptions of herself as a nun. Therefore, this led her to change her name on her passport.

Triratna: The Question of Buddhist Dress in Modern Britain

In this sub-section, I will look specifically at the attitudes towards dress amongst the eight women in this study who were Triratna Order members. As I described in Chapter One, the Triratna ordination is 'neither lay nor monastic' (Vishvapani, 2001:29). Ordained *dharmacharinis* are not asked to wear robes or shave their heads following ordination (although, of course, they could choose to do so). They are given a Buddhist name (in Pāli or Sanskrit) and for ceremonial or

formal occasions, wear a white or gold *kesa* around their neck, with the Three Jewels embroidered on it.[174] This approach to dress practices for Order members differentiates Triratna from the other groups in this study, and therefore warrants specific attention.

Following institutional practice, none of the eight women in this study who had ordained within Triratna either wore robes on a daily basis or shaved their heads and the rationale they each gave was remarkably similar. Each described feeling that wearing robes would not be practical, and would not suit a lifestyle which included work outside a Buddhist centre in contemporary Britain. As Charumati explains,

> (Wearing robes all the time) *didn't seem very practical and why bother… except to mark you out…sometimes it's nice to be marked out but actually for gardening, even for working in the Buddhist centre, it's just not very practical really.*

Many raised concerns that wearing robes would actually be quite awkward and difficult and might restrict the activities that they undertook. For example, Vasundara explained:

> *When I tried wearing the robes that some women have worn for ordination, they just used to fall about and I couldn't do anything.*

However, beyond this concern with the practical, there was a clear emphasis from these participants that they did not feel it was necessary to wear robes to be committed to Buddhist practice. In addition, monastic robes were seen as very much a part of the temporal and geographic context of India at the time of the Buddha, and thus not necessarily appropriate in contemporary Britain, particularly for those not taking monastic ordination. As one participant explained, a robe was worn by a *bhikkhu* because it was 'an extension of what men in particular wore at the time' but just made out of rags in order to make a statement about the spiritual direction of the wearer. As a result, robes were just 'normal stuff' and therefore, this participant suggested:

> *Maybe we should just be wearing our normal stuff, only we just shouldn't be so invested in what we do?*

In relation to their overall attitudes towards dress, Triratna Order members are shaped by their movement, which arose intending to translate Buddhism for 'the

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[174] The gold *kesa* is worn by those who have taken *anagārika/ā* precepts, which include a vow of celibacy and simplicity. I discussed this in Chapter One.

modern world', emphasising 'ethics' over specific 'lifestyles' (Triratna, n.d.: online, Vishvapani, 2001:5). Several of the participants were concerned that if they wore robes, it might segregate them from *'the world'* which would have a negative impact on their practice as they understood it. As Priyarati explained,

> *My practice is very, very much about practicing in the world.*

This attitude towards dress certainly appears to distinguish those participants ordained in Triratna from those in the other Buddhist groups of this study. Although, as I describe later in this chapter, to see Buddhist robes as 'awkward' or potentially problematic is not unique to Triratna, in general terms, for those ordained in the other groups of this study, upholding Buddhist dress practices is typically seen as an important continuation of Buddhist tradition.

However, a further question to ask is why the female Triratna Order members, on the whole, felt more comfortable adopting the tradition of Pāli or Sanskrit names on ordination, even though, arguably, this practice might still separate them from 'the world' and wider contemporary British society. Amongst my participants, whilst robes were generally seen as somewhat impractical, particularly for hands-on work (both within, and without a Buddhist centre), names were not described in the same way. This appears to be partly the case because an Order member can choose when, or whether, to reveal their name or whether to change it on legal documents, for example. Furthermore, being given an ordained name (more frequently than a robe or shaved head) was understood as useful in emphasising aspects of spiritual aspiration and signifying a commitment to a Buddhist path, and this was a meaningful part of the experience of ordination.[175]

Whilst an emphasis on being 'in the world' and the usefulness of 'civilian' dress in facilitating that was a common feature in Triratna testimonies, a concern about being artificially separated by the adoption of uniform dress was mentioned by other women, most notably Aarya from Amida Trust. Both Triratna and Amida have certain commonalities as organisations, most notably the prominence given to social engagement. It is likely, therefore, that this concern about dress may be

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[175] Regarding name changing within Triratna, Mellor (1990:88) states, 'Sanskrit names are appealing because they are exotic; that is, they are attractive because they are culturally alien'. However, as I explore in the next section, some of the Triratna Order members I interviewed emphasised difficulties with the 'culturally alien' aspects of names (including pronunciation and certain assumptions that might be made about you) and instead, almost all highlighted that Buddhist names were attractive because they related to aspects of spiritual development.

affected by this motivation. However, none of the Triratna Order members mentioned a wish to shave their heads, as is the common practice amongst Amida *amitarya*. As tonsure is commonly associated with celibacy and the restriction of sexual relationships, as I described in Chapter Three, the majority of Triratna participants in my study would not consider it to be appropriate for them. However, interestingly, even the one participant in my sample who had taken Triratna *anagārikā* precepts and practiced celibacy did not shave her head although, equally, she did not describe herself as a monastic.

Yet, there is also a level of variety within the testimonies of those ordained in Triratna in relation to dress which adds some nuance to the analysis. Three of the Triratna *dharmacharinis* in this study wore blue robes on their ordination retreat, and the remainder wore blue clothing of various types and styles. The use of blue clothing is generally suggested on ordination retreats for simplicity, aesthetics, and because blue is seen to be the colour of the *dhamma/dharma.* My participants mentioned that that they made the robes they wore on retreat, to an available organisational pattern. Of the three who wore robes on their ordination, each described this as a useful, and sometimes powerful, experience. The reasons behind wearing robes at this time look similar to the reasons why women choose to robe as a matter of course. For example, Sumitra explains that she enjoyed wearing what she called the 'lower robe' whilst on retreat (referring to the skirt-like piece of fabric worn on the bottom half of the body) and that it did have some impact on her deportment, manner, and attitude:

> *I did enjoy very much wearing a lower robe… its very comfortable to wear, and you can wear a t-shirt and a fleece over the top of it… it does make a difference.*

This was also recognised by Priyarati, who explained that by wearing robes on her ordination retreat she was simplifying her life and giving herself more space to focus on practice and the experience of ordination. In addition, although Siladakini emphasised that she did not want to wear robes on the grounds of practicality, she did recognise that in certain social circumstances, uniform monastic dress more readily explains your choice of spiritual path to others which wearing 'ordinary clothes' does not. This indicates a certain difficulty in explaining a Buddhist ordination which sits between the lay and monastic categories.

An analysis of attitudes to name changing exposes a number of points of similarity between those involved in Triratna and those involved in other Buddhist

movements or traditions. This makes any rigid divisions between participants, along the lines of their associated group, somewhat problematic. As I have shown throughout this chapter, changing your name on ordination is typically seen as a representation of your commitment to Buddhist practice, and for most, is seen as containing an element of aspiration. This is certainly also the case within Triratna and the way that most *dharmacharini* describe name changing and its effects appear similar. One difference, however, is that for Triratna Order members, names appear more commonly chosen to reflect personal characteristics and achievements, as well as aspirations. Even though this approach was mentioned by participants in the OBC and Amida Trust, it was more common in the testimonies of those ordained in Triratna. This is likely to be because the Triratna ordination process takes several years, and one cannot be ordained unless one is seen to have made some progress along the spiritual path. This was not described in the same way by those in the Tibetan or Theravāda traditions. As Sumitra explains, on hearing her name for the first time:

> It was like this incredible moment when you think, someone has really seen my deepest, best self.

In summary, whilst there are parallels to be made between my participant's attitudes towards dress, there are also important distinctions in their approaches. This indicates that the experiences of ordination are not always rigidly shaped by organisational affiliation and there are very different ways of 'wearing' Buddhist dress in this context.

Difficulty

For some participants, across each of the represented groups, the dress adopted following ordination is not done so without difficulty. Not all ordained women in this study felt wholly positive about wearing robes, shaving their head or changing their name.[176] This is particularly the case when women are first ordained (or commit to a period of postulancy, for example) but, beyond this, some continue to find the dress practices an acute point of tension. Robes, in particular, seem to

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[176] In her study of Western nuns in the Tibetan tradition, Ploos Van Amstel (2005:189) also notes that some of her participants had 'difficulties' with the changes they made to their dress following ordination, however, she does not provide a detailed analysis of this.

cause discomfort, at least initially. So, whilst Elizabeth explained that she liked 'what the robes represented' in terms of connection to tradition and the *dharma* and she had never received any negative attention as a result of her dress, in practical terms, she sometimes found them 'awkward' to wear. This was because she saw monastic robes as being designed for slim men, and not comfortably fitting for women who were not slender, a point which was also made by Padma (Gelug). Dolma (Gelug) recognised that going bare-armed was a challenge in a UK environment, and she described feeling often quite cold and therefore having to adapt her robes with a jumper or sweatshirt, although these remained in regulation maroon. Padma (Gelug) also made some adaptations to her robes to suit the British climate and her lifestyle needs. She did not feel that this affected her identity as a nun, but instead was seen as a practical response to her environment. As she explains further:

> *I'm sure if the Buddha had started in England or Scotland, raincoats would be the order of the day…and umbrellas! …Robes are important, but it's important to make them appropriate at the same time.*

The Tibetan *zen* (the large shawl), is described by some participants as somewhat unwieldy (especially when doing certain tasks, such as driving). Although, as the *zen* frequently needs to be adjusted, Dolma explained that this was another sartorial point of 'reminder' for mindfulness.

For Ailith (OBC), the initial difficulty she had with her robes was not down to style, but colour. Prior to her ordination, she had enjoyed wearing bright colours and had a significant adjustment to make when she was required to wear brown robes:

> *At first it was really hard for me, it was like, I want that colour…I want this… teal sweater! Because I've always been visually orientated…and I like colour.*

Ailith also found her initial head-shaving to be challenging, describing her hair as 'one of her biggest vanities' and it was subsequently a rather difficult transition to make. However, Ailith did move through this initial concern, and the reasons underpinning her perseverance will be discussed at the end of this section. For Aarya (Amida) the changes she made to her dress were a particular sticking point, not because of the style or colour, but because of how she felt she was perceived. She described feeling concerned that, through her distinctive dress, she was artificially 'set apart' from lay people (many of whom might also have been very committed to Buddhist practice) and she worried that she was being given

unnecessary 'special treatment'. Whilst she felt it was important to make a statement about what she believed in through her dress, she equally did not feel that she should be afforded privileges solely as a result of what she was wearing. One ordained woman in a Tibetan tradition also felt that her robes increased her feelings of self-consciousness which made her feel uneasy living in a setting where a woman in Buddhist dress is an uncommon sight. In addition, some ordained women highlighted that when they went out with a shaved head, they were presumed either to be gay, or to have had chemotherapy.[177] Whilst this was not highlighted as a significant problem by any of the participants in this study, several mentioned its occurrence, suggesting that certain dress practices are interpreted in particular ways in the contemporary British context.

Several of the participants described feeling that they were 'representing Buddhism' when they were in robes, even when they might not have felt capable of doing so. Thus, it was incumbent on them to make a good impression, which they felt added pressure. Although, arguably, a woman in Buddhist robes (particularly, for example, *bhikkhunī* robes in a Thai Theravāda context) is not without controversy, in general terms, Buddhist robes in Thailand, Taiwan or Korea (to cite three examples) are a more common sight. There is likely to be a different burden of pressure if you are not the only person wearing robes and 'representing Buddhism' in your town or village, and the feeling of standing out each time you leave your front door will be significantly decreased. This affects the relationship that ordained women in Britain have with their robes and shaved head, particularly if they live alone. This is another reason underpinning Ceola's (OBC) rationale for describing dress as being able to both 'obstruct' and 'release', depending on your approach and perspective.

Whilst the vast majority of the participants in this study described feeling pleased at hearing their Buddhist name for the first time and glad to use it in public, Charumati (Triratna) discussed having to go through a process of adjustment before feeling fully comfortable in her new name. She explained that, 'you've…kind of got to grow into it, really'. Ceola (OBC) echoed this, mainly because she did not especially like her name when she first heard it. Two participants also mentioned particular difficulties that their families had with their Buddhist names, and this is exemplified by Siladakini (Triratna);

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[177] This mirrors experiences of other ordained Buddhist women in Western locales, as discussed in Chapter Three.

> *My* (family) *are generally at ease with my name although because they don't hear it they sometimes don't know how to say it, and then it's weird having a sister or a daughter whose name you don't know how to pronounce.*

This indicates a point of difference between adopting a Buddhist name in the British context and doing so in a setting where the Pāli or Sanskrit terms may be more familiar. It also makes ordained women stand out in contemporary Britain, including at times when they are interacting with officials who, on hearing an 'Eastern' sounding name, might make incorrect assumptions about ethnicity. Charumati (Triratna) explained that this put her in the position of having to be very upfront about her religious affiliation in a setting where she might not have ordinarily deemed it necessary to do so.

In the main, however, despite any difficulties or tensions associated with dress, each of the participants in this study continued to work within the structure of the dress regulations imparted by their respective traditions, lineages, and organisations. There was no sense that any wished to deliberately subvert these regulations. Indeed, during the research, when examples of subversion were not forthcoming from my participants, I specifically looked for them. I expected subversion to occur because, to me, at least initially, the discipline seemed strict, particularly for women who had grown up with a free rein in terms of their dress choices. Yet, I still did not find any, at least not in any significant way. The overwhelming reason given for this was that Buddhist discipline (as it is variously interpreted) was seen by the participants as trust-worthy. The ordained women respected the lineage and pedigree, and they had faith that despite any minor difficulties, this was the path they had chosen and was one that either worked, or would work, for them. This did not mean that they never experience discomfort, miss certain things (such as perfume, for example) or do not make minor adaptations to their dress. Yet their commitment to Buddhist practice is paramount, and it is this which drives their decisions. Suvanna (Forest Sangha) explains this clearly;

> *There are things that I want, but there are also the things that I want more. So there is a hierarchy of wants. This gives me the opportunity to live in a way that gives me space to deepen in a way that I value.*

Indeed, Delia (OBC) strongly undercuts the whole question of difficulty:

> *If you were to say to a loving mother 'why do you care for your child when you could be out doing what you want?' the response would be likely to be wordless astonishment as the whole thing of being a mother is so huge.*

> *They might say 'You just don't understand' or 'How could I not?' The depth and breadth of the monastic wish is, from my viewpoint, similar and even greater as it is not restricted to any event of my life, or to any person....From this context and viewpoint, the usual sense of freedom and doing what one wants is seen so differently.*

The participants in this study, exemplified by Suvanna and Delia's testimonies, follow the discipline because they believe that the ultimate importance of doing so outweighs what they perceive as minor inconveniences or immediate preferences.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that dress (including robes, hair and a Buddhist name) is a significant aspect of the disciplinary lives of ordained Buddhist women connected to Britain. An analysis of dress illuminates a number of themes and issues that are salient for this thesis as a whole, particularly the demonstration of ordained women's commitment to particular Buddhist communities, the significance of Buddhist teachings and practices in their lives, and the ways in which dress subsequently helps ordained women to embody these teachings. In addition, I have also shown that giving focused attention to dress is one means by which to explore the relationship between Buddhist tradition and the British location, which will be further analysed in Chapter Nine. Given that my focus is Britain, it has not been possible to explore in sufficient detail the potential differences in the function and significance of dress for ordained women in other Western locales, such as France or the USA, which could be a fruitful direction for future research.

Yet, despite the usefulness of an analysis of Buddhist dress practices, it is important not to over-emphasise dress at the expense of other areas of discipline adopted by ordained women. During my fieldwork, I asked direct questions about robes, hair and name changes, and each of my participants responded. In analysing the interview data, I questioned whether dress would have been so readily emphasised by my participants had I not highlighted it in such a way. Although it is possible it might not have featured so highly in each of the interviews (particularly those who explained that they did not have 'any great meaning' attached to dress) I argue that given the readiness of most of my participants to discuss this issue, it still would have been noteworthy.

Overall, amongst the ordained women involved in this study, dress is significant as a means to symbolise and represent a change of direction in life and also as an on-going sartorial connection to individual communities, to Buddhist teachings, and also to the Buddha himself as the original 'dress designer' (to adapt Lobsang's phraseology quoted at the start of this chapter). Furthermore, central to this chapter has been a demonstration of how dress and religious practice are intertwined, even though becoming too attached to a particular dress or image was also recognised as a potential hindrance along the Buddhist path. I have shown that dress codes are not put into practice in exactly the same way amongst all of the ordained women in this study, and it is important to be cognisant of the alterations that some women and their affiliated Buddhist groups make to their dress in response to their geographic and temporal location. Indeed, there is diversity even within this small sample. Notwithstanding this, I conclude that, overall, dress (as it is variously interpreted) is a physical, tangible feature of being an ordained Buddhist in this context; it not only symbolises commitment, but is a way of living and interacting with that commitment, each and every day.

Chapter Eight: Loaded Words - Attitudes to Feminism and Gender Equality.

Introduction

> *I have to ask myself, am I after doing feminist politics, or am I after doing* (Buddhist) *practice?* (Nun, Tibetan tradition).

In Chapter Two, I described some of the ways in which Western women who take Buddhist ordination are depicted within the existing literature, particularly in relation to their attitudes towards gender equality and feminism. Although a varied picture is typically presented, there is some indication that many Western women, including those who had taken ordination, are concerned with gender inequality within their respective Buddhist traditions, and this appears, in part, to be related to the prevalence of the feminist movement within their countries of origin. This scholarship provokes significant questions for this study, namely, how do ordained Buddhist women in Britain engage with ideas of gender equality and feminism? Are they motivated by an aspiration for social equality with men? How do they position themselves in relation to broader debates about the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination and the international networks which support this? An inquiry into ordained women's attitudes towards feminism and gender equality is one of my three primary research questions, and it will be discussed throughout this chapter.

In order to examine this question in full, this chapter is divided into two principal sections. The first explores my participants' attitudes towards feminism, and the second looks at their views on gender equality. Although 'feminism' and 'gender equality' are frequently presented in conjunction with each other, both in popular and academic discourse, I have deliberately separated them in this chapter. This is because, whilst recognising that they are interlinked, my participants themselves often made a distinction between the two concepts. I felt that it was important to reflect this, and furthermore, to investigate why. Ultimately, what I will argue is that, amongst this sample of ordained women, attitudes to feminism and gender equality are diverse, and this undermines simplistic categorisation. In order to demonstrate this attitudinal plurality in relation to feminism most effectively, I will be adapting a perceptual mapping technique drawn from Knott and Khokher (1993). This will complement the more traditional style of

ethnographic data presentation and discussion which I have used to this point and will provide an alternative analytical framework in order to examine my participants' testimonies. Additionally, in this chapter, there is deliberately more participant anonymity. This is primarily because, as I will demonstrate, both gender equality and feminism remain sensitive and 'loaded words' for many of the participants in this study and few engaged in debate about them with complete confidence and comfort.[178]

As I highlighted in Chapter Four, on several occasions the participants in this study directly challenged the attitudes which I held prior to commencing this research. I expected that most, if not all, of my participants would have sympathy for a feminist position, and all would want structural gender equality within each of their Buddhist traditions; an assumption that I made both from limited personal experience and from the literature I read prior to commencing my PhD research. Yet, like Ploos van Amstel (2005:28) who was also surprised at her participants' general lack of connection to the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination campaigns in the Tibetan tradition and who eventually had to question whether internationally high-profile ordained Buddhist women who raise awareness of this issue were altogether always representative of the whole, I was initially perplexed as to the lack of feminist sympathies and to the varying positions on gender equality in Buddhism displayed by my participants. Typically, the ordained women in this study prioritised what they saw as 'Buddhist practice' over 'feminist politics', to use the words of the Tibetan-tradition nun quoted at the start of this chapter. This is not to say that feminism and ideas about gender equality had no influence on ordained women's attitudes and practices, but that there is a level of diversity amongst the participants that warrants the type of in-depth analysis that I undertake in this chapter.

Feminism

One of the interview questions that I posed directly to my participants was whether or not they considered themselves to be feminist and how they felt about feminism. I deliberately remained noncommittal when I was asked for my

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[178] One example of the different approach to anonymity in this chapter will be a decrease in direct attribution for specific quotations from participants.

definition of feminism, but wanted instead to see how my participants defined the term, in order to assess their initial reactions. In doing this, I discovered a variety of views and definitions of feminism amongst my participants and a range of affiliations to a feminist identity. As a result, I delved deeply into this issue in my analysis, both to adequately acknowledge the array of attitudes held by ordained Buddhist women in this context and also to uncover what might be influencing these different perspectives.

In very broad terms, through analysing the interview data, I identified that ten of the participants in this study described themselves as more positively orientated towards feminism and thirteen participants described being more negatively inclined.[179] However, as I analysed the data in more depth, this division between 'positive' and 'negative' became increasingly difficult to draw cleanly and it occluded a variety in perspectives, even amongst those who described themselves as more positive towards feminism. None of the participants felt unequivocally comfortable labelling themselves as a feminist without some qualification. Some felt happy with certain aspects of feminism but still did not want to be overtly affiliated with any particular movement or label. Others seemed more contented to be labelled a feminist, but explained equally that they sometimes questioned the suitability of asserting a rigid feminist identity for their Buddhist practice and community. Others rejected a feminist orientation in entirety. Furthermore, even participants within the same Buddhist groups held very different opinions. As my interviews progressed, it rapidly became far too unsophisticated to say *x* is a feminist and *y* isn't, without recognition of the heterogeneity of perspectives housed within these two positions, and of the qualifications and justifications that many of the ordained women themselves made.

In order to analyse the interview data in relation to this research question, I plotted my participants' perspectives on a series of 'perceptual maps'. I adapted this tool from Knott and Khokher (1993), who use a perceptual map to analyse and visually document the various affiliations that nineteen (mainly Muslim) girls in a school setting in Bradford had with 'ethnic and religious orientations'. By using

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[179] Two of the participants in this study were excluded from the analysis in this section, because I did not ask them directly about their affiliation with feminism. This was because the interviews naturally went in a different direction in the time that we had available. They have both been re-incorporated into the data analysis in the section exploring attitudes to gender equality. In addition, I have included the testimony of the formerly ordained woman, as she described her attitude when she was ordained.

perceptual maps to chart participants' perspectives between four opposing 'continuum' points, Knott and Khokher (1993:598) assert that they are more usefully able to reflect the overall diversity inherent within multiple testimonies in a qualitative study, as opposed to a more traditional thematic analysis.[180] However, Knott and Khokher (1993:598) are clear that perceptual mapping nevertheless has certain limitations (particularly in the provision of a holistic picture of an individual, or to reflect fluctuating views) and that the positions on the maps, whilst rooted in data derived from participants, are ultimately defined by researchers. Therefore they might not correspond with research participants views of themselves. Whilst cognisant of this, in using this mapping method, I can give an immediate representation of plurality within my research sample, and I am able to see patterns and groupings far more readily than in more traditional qualitative analysis.

The maps that I present in the thesis differ from those used by Knott and Khokher, as I have adapted their tool to suit the aims of my study. Whilst Knott and Khokher use two axes and place participants within four quadrants, my maps have one perceptual vertical axis (feminist orientation/not feminist orientation) and one biographical horizontal 'binary' axis (such as living alone/living communally). This was done to support my primary research interest in understanding affiliation to feminism and to investigate whether there were certain factors that co-existed with a particular perspective on feminism.[181] Furthermore, instead of presenting a single map and then discussing in more detail the various perspectives housed within each quadrant, I will present four maps with differing horizontal axes in order to investigate the issue of feminist affiliation through multiple thematic lenses. Whilst I mapped my participants onto more than four maps during the data analysis stage (and, indeed, there are a number of horizontal axes that could be used), I have selected the most fruitful for discussion here.[182] After presenting each

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[180] These continuum points were 'ethnically orientated/not ethnically orientated' and 'religiously orientated/not religiously orientated'.

[181] Whilst I am interested in the relationships between situations, I am not arguing that each of these particular factors is causal in any inevitable way.

[182] In addition to those presented here, I also used two additional maps that did not show particularly significant patterns. The first of these was in relation to the age of participants at interview. Broadly speaking, the older a participant was, the less likely she was to describe a strong affiliation to feminism. However, given that the number of women under the age of fifty in my sample was comparatively low, it is difficult to assume an inevitable connection between age and feminist affiliation. The second map charts feminist orientation against whether the group participants ordained within is considered socially engaged or contemplative. Whilst I assumed

of the maps, I will provide additional supporting evidence from participants to explore the different perspectives with more specificity.

Living Situation

In each of the maps, I positioned participants first on a continuum between 'feminist orientation' (at the top of the map) and 'no feminist orientation' (at the bottom). As one travels up the continuum, participants described holding an increasingly clear feminist identification and were less conflicted about being associated with the feminist movement, as they defined it. As one travels down the continuum, participants describe being less and less ready to affiliate with a feminist orientation and feminist goals as they perceived them. These positions in relation to feminist orientation stay the same in each of the maps that I will present.

The first map, shown in Figure 1, charts participants' feminist orientation against their living situations. As I will explore in more detail in Chapter Nine, the ordained women in this study lived in various settings, including communal monasteries, in smaller groups of ordained women, with families and partners or living alone, including both as home-owners/renters or in smaller priories, temples, and centres that are connected with the different Buddhist organisations to which they are affiliated. In this map, participants have been positioned along the horizontal axis to reflect their particular circumstances, with those living alone at the far left of the continuum, those living with families and partners moving further to the centre (but still to the left of the vertical mid-line), those living in smaller communities of ordained women to the right of the vertical mid-line, and those living in larger, communal settings at the far right of the map.

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that those ordained in socially engaged movement would be more likely to express feminist affiliation, this was not necessarily the case. I suggest that this pattern has arisen as a result of particular organisational positions taken on feminism within Triratna (who make up a large percentage of those in my sample involved in socially engaged Buddhist groups). I will discuss Triratna's engagement with feminism later in this chapter.

Figure 1: Living Situation
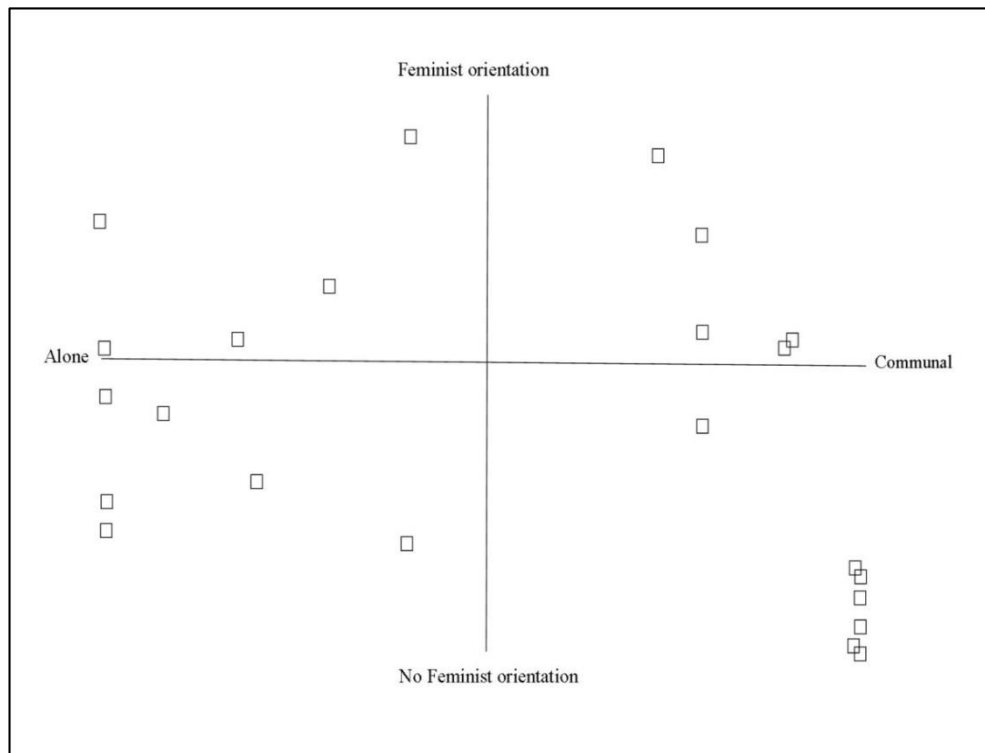
The picture demonstrated in this map is complicated. At first glance, the participants seem to be fairly evenly divided into each of the four quadrants of the map and it would seem that living situation is not a factor which has any bearing on their affiliation to feminism. However, of those six participants who are clustered to the far right of the bottom right quadrant as they express the strongest negative reaction to a feminist orientation, five live in communities that also house ordained men.[183]

Only one participant who was positive about having a feminist orientation lived in a communal situation with men. Therefore, according to this map, as an ordained women you are unlikely to live in a large, communal environment that also houses a male community and also describe yourself as having a feminist orientation or sympathies. This may be for a number of reasons. Firstly, holding an overt feminist orientation was seen by several participants as having the potential

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[183] In the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives both male and female monks share living quarters (although in separate rooms). Similarly, for Amida Trust, both ordained men and women can live in the same community building. At the monastic institutions affiliated with the Tibetan Karma Kagyu tradition (Samye Ling, specifically) and the Forest Sangha (namely, Amaravati or Chithurst monasteries) ordained men and women live in separate buildings. In Triratna, communities are typically, although not exclusively, single-sex.

to challenge the harmonious community relations that attracted many women in the first place to Buddhist organisations. Secondly, participants living in communal situations might not see any particular need to align themselves with feminism. Finally, someone affiliating strongly with a feminist position may also choose deliberately to live alone or in communities only with women. All these reasons, therefore, contribute to a lack of feminist affiliation amongst those participants living in communal situations that also include men.

Prior Feminist Orientation

In this map, I chart whether or not contemporary feminist orientation is affiliated with any feminist sympathies held by participants prior to ordination. Although I did not routinely ask about a history of feminist orientation in all the interviews, more often than not this information was volunteered by participants when I discussed whether they felt currently orientated to feminism (see Figure 2).

Those participants who I determined had an earlier orientation to feminism indicated that prior to ordination (and often, although not exclusively, prior to their engagement with Buddhism) they would have considered themselves to be feminist. They either appreciated the intention behind a feminist analysis of the world (particularly that women had been discriminated against, and that this should be challenged), or alternatively, they may have been involved in groups or social action which they described as supportive of a feminist cause.

Figure 2: Prior Feminist Orientation
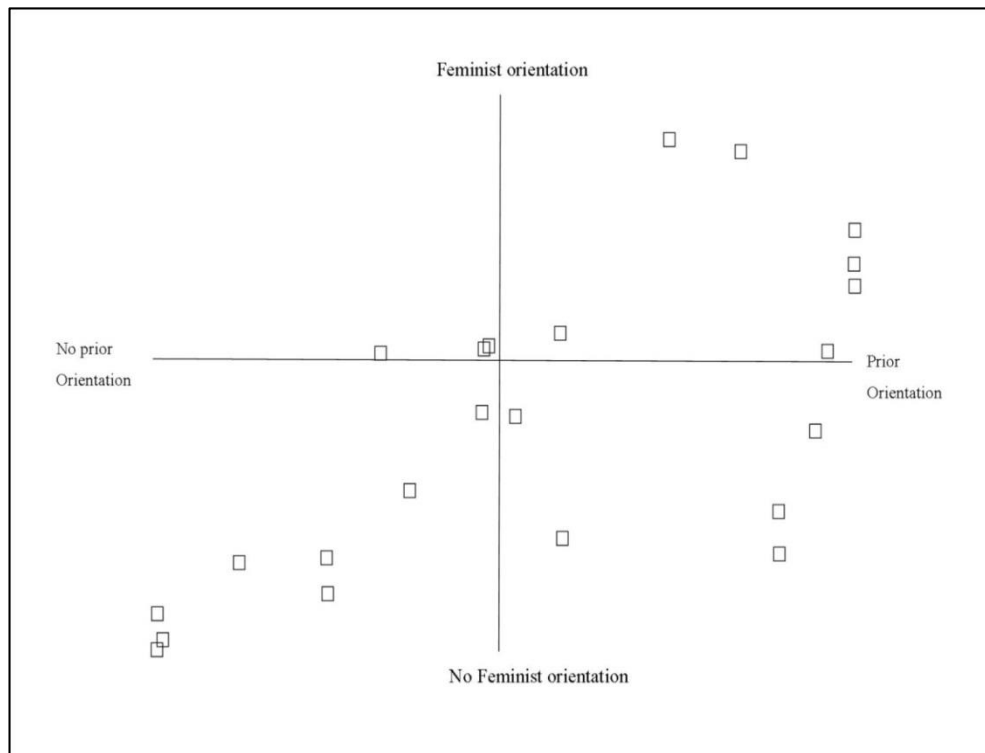
This map shows that, of the participants who were currently more positive towards a feminist orientation, a greater number had been sympathetic towards feminist thought and action prior to ordination. Particularly, of those who had the strongest current orientation to feminism, all had been involved in some kind of feminist adherence prior to ordination. Of those with the most negative orientation to feminism, a majority (8/13) had no prior interest in feminist thought, or involvement in feminist social action. Whilst there are exceptions to this finding (particularly the three participants who were positive towards feminism, albeit not strongly, who had no prior orientation, and the five participants who had had some prior interest in feminism but were not currently orientated to it), it appears from the data charted in the map, that a current feminist orientation has some correlation to previously held inclinations, ideas, and perspectives.

Of particular interest here are those eight participants who stated that they had changed their affiliation to feminism after they had ordained. The reasons given for this shift in attitude were typically related to circumstances. Those who ceased affiliating with a feminist perspective did so because they felt it was currently unnecessary in their life and because they did not perceive they faced discrimination in their Buddhist groups. In addition, some began to question what they saw as the limitations of interpreting society and social relationships solely

through a feminist lens. Of those who had not been particularly orientated to feminism but who became more interested after ordination, this was typically because they perceived discriminatory attitudes in relation to women in their respective Buddhist groups and felt forced to question this. I will look in more detail at specific experiences in relation to gender equality in the various Buddhist groups involved in this study in the second section of this chapter. However, this map indicates that perceptions of discrimination appear to be highly salient in relation to attitudes towards feminist affiliation, and they are the subject of the next map.

Perceptions of Discrimination

The final two maps that I will present are based on two perceptual axes rather than one perceptual, one biographical axis. The first of these (see Figure 3) explores the relationship between a self-defined feminist orientation and whether participants perceived they faced discrimination as women. I placed participants on the right of the map if they expressed concerns about discrimination on the grounds of gender within their Buddhist tradition, and on the left if they did not describe this as meaningful to their direct experience.

As shown on the map in Figure 3, there is a correlation between the perception of gender discrimination and feminist orientation. Whilst this is perhaps a fairly unsurprising finding, it shows that a feminist orientation amongst this sample seems to be connected to concerns about gender discrimination. Seen from the reverse perspective, those who perceive no discrimination also tend to see feminism as irrelevant. In addition, what this suggests is that if one has an existing feminist orientation, then gender discrimination may be more readily identified and emphasised. However, as the previous map shows, this does not preclude the possibility of changing affiliation to feminism if it is no longer deemed relevant. This offers a particularly nuanced picture of ordained women's affiliation with feminism, which will be further discussed as this chapter progresses.

Figure 3: Perceived Discrimination
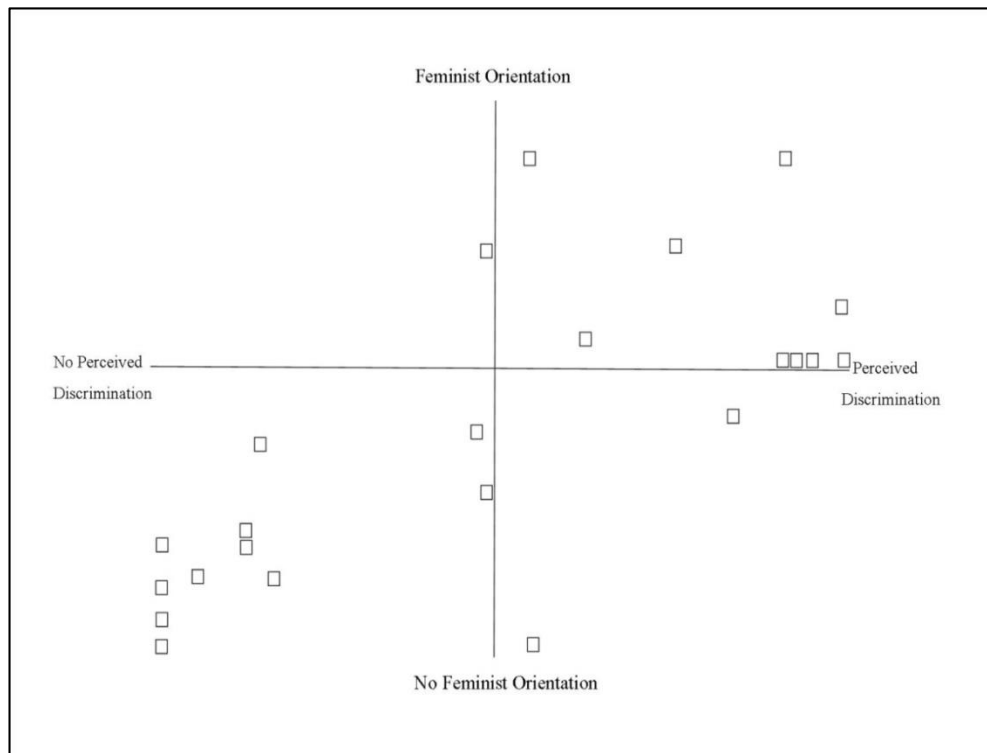
Centre and Periphery

The final map is perhaps the most subjective. I charted participant perspectives in relation to whether they were strongly connected to the centre of power and authority within each of their organisations (see Figure 4). This was not a connection drawn in terms of number of years ordained, but in terms the relationship they described with the established organisational hierarchy of their particular organisations and the roles that they played within them. A placement closer to what I have defined as the 'centre' (on the right of the vertical mid-line) indicates, for example, a participant who had an institutional position integrated into the organisational structure of a particular Buddhist group and who expressed a strong and supportive connection to organisational hierarchy. It is not necessarily about living situation, as those who expressed strong support for organisational hierarchy were not always living within communities associated with certain organisations, but more an integration in terms of attitude and perspective. Those whom I deemed more peripheral in terms of hierarchical connections were those who were more questioning of the established structure and hierarchy of a

particular group and who seemed to be less strongly integrated into an organisational structure. They would be less likely to hold specific hierarchical positions or be spokespersons for that tradition.

Figure 4: Centre and Periphery
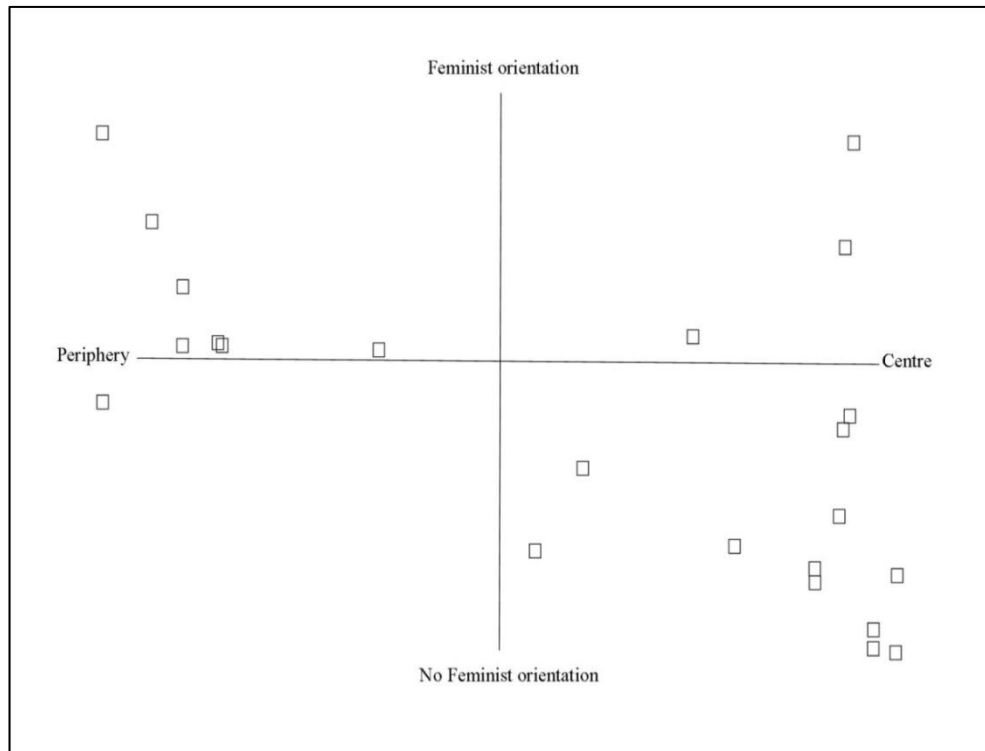
Whilst this was certainly a subjective exercise, the results of this map are the most striking. Amongst this sample, there appears to be a relationship between feminist orientation and the strength (or weakness) of integration into a group or organisational structure. Those whom I judged more central to an organisational hierarchy were significantly less likely to affiliate to feminism. Those I deemed more peripheral to established institutions were conversely more likely to express feminist sympathies. Of course, there are some exceptions to this correlation, highlighting that even within this model there is the potential for diversity.

It is possible that this pattern has arisen because, amongst this sample, feminism was often described as a perspective that has the potential to challenge harmonious community relations, particularly between men and women. As a result, it might be assumed that those strongly integrated into organisational structures and hierarchies would be less likely to want to endanger community relationships, or they may not feel they needed to if they already were part of the hierarchy within an organisation. This map also exposes that those who hold

feminist positions and may in turn be concerned about gender discrimination, might also deliberately distance themselves from (or feel less welcome within) the organisational centres of groups.

Summary and Supporting Evidence

In summary, the data from these maps visually attests to the argument that no universal position in relation to feminist orientation can be gleaned from this sample. However, despite this, there are a number of significant factors that appear to cluster together with a feminist orientation. These include perceiving that you experience discrimination on the grounds of gender; that you have had a prior engagement or involvement with feminist thought and action; and that you take a more peripheral position in relation to organisational hierarchy. From these maps, it also seems that there is a negative relationship between a strong feminist orientation and living in communities that also include men. Yet, even for those who share a broad affiliation with feminism, there remains a plurality of understanding of what it means to have a feminist orientation, and what values and motivating factors might underpin this. As I have indicated, there is evidence of participants changing their affiliation to feminism in response to particular circumstances. I will now explore the attitudes of my participants in relation to feminism in more detail.

For a small number of ordained women in this study, a strongly positive orientation to feminism arose because they felt they wanted, and needed, to challenge situations where women had been discriminated against. This position is well summarised by one participant, who stated;

> *I do believe that for whatever reason in our society, women have been somewhat at a disadvantage and…I'm going to look out for that and help it to be less the case.*

Another claimed:

> *I'm a feminist, as I believe utterly in gender equality, and I think it can sit side by side with Buddhism, where Buddhism is not operated by fundamentalists.*

Of those who described themselves as having a feminist orientation, the idea that there should be equality between men and women was routinely highlighted as a

motivating factor. However, understanding what gender equality means in practice to the women in this study is more complicated, as I will describe in the next section. However, a number of participants who stated that they had a feminist orientation were also aware that combining both Buddhist and feminist perspectives was sometimes challenging. To cite one participant who was orientated towards feminism;

> *if you analyse the whole of existence in terms of women's oppression by men ... then that's clearly at odds with Buddhism, because Buddhism says ... the fundamental characteristics of all things are caused by conditionality.*

Therefore, even amongst those who would describe themselves as feminist, this is not done uncritically or without some depth of thought. Indeed, even those who were positively orientated to feminism recognised that the term 'feminism' was indeed a 'loaded' one, and that a number of negative assumptions arose if you were an ordained Buddhist woman who also was seen as a feminist. In fact, one participant explained to me;

> *people misunderstand if you write* (I am feminist) *in your thesis.*

This was because, in general terms, feminism is perceived (including by a number of participants in this study) as political, as somewhat forceful and aggressive, as unhelpful in terms of following a Buddhist path as it mires you in a fixed and rigid understanding of the world, and as potentially dangerous for harmonious community relations, specifically relations with ordained men.[184] In addition, a few of those in monastic and contemplative traditions highlighted that they did not feel their purpose was to make the wider 'social changes' which feminism was seen as championing. Whilst some participants indicated that this definition of feminism might be unjust and wondered if it should be challenged, others were happy to disregard feminism altogether as inappropriate and irrelevant.

Of those participants who described themselves as not being inclined to a feminist orientation, a frequent rationale given was that they did not feel that it was necessary in their current circumstances. As one participant states:

> *feminism is like an extreme that you need when something's out of balance. If it's not out of balance, then there's no need. So, I haven't ever been*

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[184] This perception of feminism is also raised by Cheng (2003:44) in her study of nuns in Taiwan. In this study, the nuns did not describe themselves as 'feminist', with the rationale that 'the label feminist may draw unnecessary political orientated attention upon to oneself'.

> *involved with that kind of thing and I don't feel the need for it… I feel like if* (I) *were to start something like that… it would actually be destructive.*

As a result, several participants highlighted that they didn't spend time thinking about feminism or gender discrimination, a point to which I shall return later in the chapter.

Of course, as I did not offer a definition of feminism, there was a sense that the term was confusing, and unclear.[185] Whilst many of the participants made a distinction between 'feminism' and 'gender equality', it was not always clear where the boundaries between them should be drawn. Overall, even amongst those who were positively orientated towards it, feminism was seen as a political statement, and an affiliation which needed to be clarified and explained. It seems that taking an overtly 'feminist activist' position in this context would require some justification. In the words of one participant:

> *I think going beyond narrow perspectives is important to me and feminism is a way of doing that. But it can also become a narrow perspective in itself. It really depends on how we hold these things, doesn't it?*

To conclude, for the ordained women in this study, feminism was a loaded word and not an affiliation that was adopted without question. Whilst some participants were more comfortable navigating between feminism and Buddhism and holding both orientations in tandem, others were clear that a feminist orientation might be damaging to the community relations that they very much wanted to foster, and this took priority. This therefore provides evidence to support a complex, and multi-dimensional, picture of feminist adherence amongst ordained Buddhist women in Britain.

Gender Equality

This section will analyse ordained women's attitudes and approaches to gender equality. Given that the Buddhist organisations involved in this study take different positions on ordination for women, as I detailed in Chapter One, I have divided this section into three. In the first section, I explore the attitudes of ordained women in the Tibetan schools. In the second, I explore attitudes amongst

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[185] I recognise, as Mohanty (1991:4) highlights, 'the very meaning of the term *feminism* is continually contested' and this certainly provides some account for the lack of clarity sometimes expressed by my participants.

those affiliated with the groups associated with Theravāda tradition. In the final section, I analyse the perspectives of participants drawn from the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, Amida Trust, and Triratna. The reason that I will consider these last three groups together is that, unlike the Tibetan or Theravāda traditions in this study, there are no institutional differences in what is offered for men and for women in terms of ordination. Therefore, they warrant being examined together in this instance although this does not automatically imply that they all approach the issue of gender equality identically.

Within each of the sections, I will give some attention to how the ordained women in this study related to the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* issue, given its high-profile status in much of the contemporary academic discourse about 'women and Buddhism'.[186] However, it is vital to recognise that the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination only relates to those in the Tibetan or Theravāda traditions in my study, which only form a small percentage of my overall sample. While I will mention the reflections of participants who are not affiliated to these traditions, a discussion of the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* issue will consciously not dominate my analysis of perspectives on gender equality in this context. Rather I will accentuate the diversity of attitudes and approaches to gender equality taken by ordained women in Britain. Whilst there are ordained women in Britain across each of the traditions who describe themselves as actively challenging what they see as gender inequality, male hierarchy and dominance, and choose to distance themselves from organisational structures which do not support their views, there are others who understand gender and gender equality in a rather different way, instead preferring to work within the existing structures of Buddhist traditions, even if these do not offer parity between men and women in terms of ordination.

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[186] Whilst I will be mentioning the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* issue, I will not discuss the attitudes of these participants to the *garudharma* (the 8 'special rules' which I discussed in Chapter Two). Few participants in this study had much to say about the rules (similar to those in the Tibetan tradition interviewed by Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:78), even those two participants who had taken them. Therefore, given the range of issues under discussion in this chapter, I have opted to omit the discussion.

Tibetan Tradition[187]

Amongst those who ordained within the Tibetan tradition (which, for this study, include Karma Kagyu, Gelug, and Nyingma lineages) there were a variety of different views on the issue of gender equality. In terms of practicalities, as I discussed in Chapter One, in the Tibetan tradition women are currently able to take up to novice (*getsulma*) ordination using the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, but if they wish to take *bhikṣuṇī* (*gelongma*) ordination, this can only be taken from *bhikṣuṇī* using the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, commonly operational in Taiwan, Vietnam, or Korea. Amongst my sample, there were those who had done just this and had taken *bhikṣuṇī/gelongma* precepts, and there were also those who had taken novice (*getsulma)* ordination (which consists of 35 precepts). In addition, there were also participants who had taken *rabjungma* ordination (5 precepts, in addition to celibacy and wearing robes).

In terms of their attitudes to gender equality, ordained women associated with the Tibetan tradition in Britain can be divided into three broad categories. First, those who were very concerned about gender inequality within the Tibetan tradition, and who were actively campaigning to change this. Secondly, there were women who felt that whilst it would be better if women were able to ordain in parity with men, they were not driven to campaign for this. Thirdly, there were ordained women who seemed to be far less concerned about any structural gender inequality, and instead described wanting to focus on their meditation, ritual practices, and developing their surrounding communities. As a consequence of this, they did not appear to engage directly with the debate around gender inequality in Buddhism.

Of those who raised more vociferous concerns about gender inequality in Tibetan traditions, the rationale they gave was broadly similar. As one participant stated when asked about whether she perceived there was gender inequality in her tradition, she fervently agreed, and explained, *'it's a wrong that needs to be righted'.* Several of the participants in this category described the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in general as *'totally patriarchal'* and there was certainly a level of dissatisfaction at the spiritual and organisational limitations that they felt were

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[187] In Chapter One, I described what was available to women in terms of ordination in each of the traditions of this study. I will not repeat the descriptive detail in full but will focus on the attitudes of my participants to those circumstances.

placed on women and the subsequent *'lower status'* that they felt women were forced to occupy in the religious hierarchy. Amongst these participants, gender equality was of great importance, and it was mostly described in terms of access to *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. However, gender equality was also defined as women being recognised as spiritually able. For example, as one participant highlights:

> *I think that* (the) *original question that Ānanda, the Buddha's cousin, asked him is, is …there any difference in a man or a woman's enlightenment, and he said no. And I think the rest is just pure cultural prejudice.*

Yet, interestingly, even those who did raise concerns and were more outspoken about them still wanted to remain as nuns in the Tibetan tradition. This was because, as they explained, being engaged in Buddhist practice was of the utmost importance. As one stated, whilst she perceived discrimination in her Buddhist tradition: *'it's still better to be a nun… than not be a nun'*. Moreover, even though gender inequality was described as a significant tension, not all of them raised concerns with their teachers directly. They might discuss their understanding of gender inequality with other Westerners (both lay and ordained) but, in general, most described not wanting to seem 'disrespectful' when discussing these issues with Tibetans.

Of those participants who I placed in the second category (being aware of concerns, but not wanting to directly campaign), most prioritised an examination of their own responses to the opportunities available to women, as opposed to getting involved with any campaign for any systemic change. For example, one participant explains:

> *You can either go this is not fair and we need to change this* (but) *then there's the practice…You think, 'what an amazing teaching, I now have the opportunity… where I am now watching my mind. What does my mind do when I'm told, 'no you can't sit there because only the men go there'.*

Beyond this, there were other participants who did not engage directly with the issue of gender inequality. Interestingly, amongst the Tibetan-tradition nuns, those with this approach were mostly affiliated with the Karma Kagyu tradition, linked with Samye Ling monastery.[188] One participant explained that she felt

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[188] This Buddhist group, as I discussed in Chapter One, has taken a particular stance on gender equality. Lama Yeshe, their Abbott, supported a number of women to take *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in a large ceremony run by Chinese nuns in Bodhgaya in 1998 and has also named women as Lamas (Bluck, 2006:122, Khandro, 2007:81, Ploos van Amstel, 2005:125, Samye-Ling, n.d.).

women and men were given similar opportunities and did not feel at any particular disadvantage on the grounds of gender. Although she acknowledged differences between men and women, she highlighted certain spiritual benefits to traditionally 'feminine' qualities:

> *Humility…caring for others, the love that a mother naturally feels for her children, the lengths that mothers go to, to protect their children, to give them health, to teach them, to give them every opportunity, the sacrifices they make; that's like the example of a bodhisattva.*

Another emphasised the importance of equality for all, rather than just for women, which demonstrates that some participants preferred to see themselves as not championing women over men:

> *Gender equality is just equality of human being to human being, irrespective of whether you are male or female.*

In terms of attitudes towards *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, again a variety of perspectives can also be discerned from those affiliated to the Tibetan traditions.[189] Some were very supportive of being able to take *bhikṣuṇī* ordination and felt strongly about wanting it to be available in the Tibetan tradition, both for other women as well as themselves. Some raised concerns about having to travel to Taiwan or China to take *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, the difficulties they had in finding out where it was available, and getting support to go. One explained that it had become more difficult in the past five years to garner this as the controversy over *bhikṣuṇī* ordination had gained increasing global recognition. Of those taking this position, there was a palpable concern that the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy were not really interested in changing the situation for women. As a result, one nun described feeling *'a lack of trust'* and indeed a *'slight despair'* which from her perspective had increasingly evolved amongst Western nuns who wanted to take *bhikṣuṇī* ordination and the Tibetan hierarchy. She explained that this sometimes caused tension between certain nuns and monks:

> *If someone remains a getsul or a rabjung, it should be because they choose to and when I get monks saying to me, 'it makes no difference'… I say, that's great, so you'll be handing back your ordination too then? And they look at me as if I'm mad! What do you mean? Well, it makes no difference! So, I'll be expecting to hear fairly soon that you've handed back your robes and taken getsul?*

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[189] Ploos Van Amstel (2005:36, 180) also highlights this. She indicates that not all the Tibetan tradition nuns that she interviewed showed a similar level of interest in the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and equally, did not discuss the *garudharma* particularly cogently.

However, other Tibetan-tradition nuns in this study, whilst recognising that it was a shame that the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination was not routinely available to those in Tibetan traditions, explained that they did not want to take it themselves. The reasons given were primarily centred on concerns about being able to uphold all the precepts, particularly when living outside a monastic environment, as a number of participants affiliated with the Tibetan tradition in Britain do. Beyond these more pragmatic reasons, there was also one Tibetan-tradition nun in this study who, whilst valuing her *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, did not emphasise she had taken it to make a point about gender inequality in Buddhism or because she wanted to champion equal rights for women, but because she was encouraged to do so by her teacher. What she described as important was the meditation and ritual practice she was involved in, and working to build and support her immediate Buddhist community. However, it is critical not to assume that those ordained women who took a more activist approach to championing *bhikṣuṇī* ordination were somehow less interested in Buddhist practice. Of those who raised concerns about gender inequality in terms of the availability of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, several couched their wish for *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in an arguably Buddhist rationale, rather than in terms of wanting 'equal rights' or 'status'.[190] To cite one example;

> *I personally don't want to die not being fully ordained. I want to live this life as a fully ordained nun because there are benefits of being fully ordained, there are good purification benefits, there are merit benefits, and your ability to help others increases.*

Theravāda

A similar plurality of attitudes can be discerned amongst those I interviewed who were affiliated with the Theravāda tradition. As I discussed in Chapter One, these participants were either *sīladharā* associated with the Forest Sangha or those who had taken *bhikkhunī* ordination outside the UK. Of the participants in this study, there were those who raised very strong concerns about gender inequality in the Theravāda tradition as it is manifest in Britain and beyond, and this affected their involvement in the lineage. There were also those who, whilst cognisant of

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[190] See my discussion of in Chapter Two, including the positioning of some Western ordained women as driven by 'status' and 'rights', for example in the work of Kawanami (2013:7) and Salgado (2013:213).

some of the difficulties that had faced the nuns' community (particularly since the Five Points were drawn up), approached the issue of gender equality in a different way.[191]

For example, one participant emphasised some of the difficulties for the *sīladharā*, and the power that she thought rested firmly in the hands of the male hierarchy;

> *The way I perceive it, the nuns have really struggled from the beginning in terms of being marginalised; not really understood in the particular challenges their position in the community presented to them; and their endeavours to cope with and meet those challenges….. I think the monks just could not put themselves in our shoes and understand our experience…. I think the place of women within this tradition has been corrupted by prejudice from the very beginning.*

Another highlighted:

> *I could see that the women had a lower status than the men in the community and my take on it was that this was an Asian form that was still relatively new in the West, and over time it would just naturally change. I just assumed. So, I was aware of the imbalance, but it wasn't something that I thought would continue for years. I was wrong about that.*

Some participants explained that they experienced a tension between the values of gender equality that they respected, and the inequality that they perceived they faced as *sīladharā*.

> *I think I was kind of born with a sense of equality and through my life, banged up against inequality again and again, and I don't really understand, I feel it needs to change.*

The issues facing the Forest Sangha in Britain in relation to gender equality, which had been building in the lead up to the issuing of the Five Points, were perceived by some as a clash between British and Thai Theravāda values, and as a result were described as *'an accident waiting to happen'*.[192] This caused tensions that for some *sīladharā* were insurmountable (see also Weinberg, 2010:23). They subsequently left the Forest Sangha, either disrobing, to take *bhikkhunī* ordination, or to remain as *sīladharā* but not live within a monastic community.

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[191] I discussed the issues surrounding the Five Points in relation to the Forest Sangha in Chapter One.

[192] My participant's recognition that this issue was 'an accident waiting to happen' does reflect a prevailing academic attitude, which identified potential tensions within the Forest Sangha earlier than the 2009 implementation of the Five Points (see discussion in Chapter One).

Yet, there were also those who saw the situation in relation to gender within the Forest Sangha in Britain somewhat differently. They emphasised that the *sīladharā* ordination was pioneering, given that a ten-precept female renunciant path had previously not been available in the Ajahn Chah lineage. They also recognised its rapid evolution in a short period of time. One participant highlighted that it had had the potential to offer a great deal in terms of supporting renunciant Buddhist practice for women in Britain. She emphasised that, whilst there were differences in what men and women were enabled to do within the Forest Sangha in Britain, rather than enforcing structural gender equality she would prefer to foster good relations between the communities of monks and *sīladharā* more organically. Like some within the Tibetan tradition, some *sīladharā* preferred to work within what was currently available for women whilst equally recognising that the situation would most likely continue to shift and change. Here, there was a strong sense that fostering good community relationships were more important than organisational gender equality:[193]

> *What I realise is that if you have a kind of equality, but a huge amount of suspicion and mistrust, I don't want to live like that….. I don't mind if it's not equal if there's that sense of mutual respect and friendliness, you know those are things that are much more important to me…I've always known we have a place and I've always known that we have a place and an equivalence.*

As she goes on to explain:

> *I think as long as there is a sense of confidence and awareness of one's own value… you can make all the appropriate gestures of respect, standing aside for the monks and so on - and yet, actually, there is a reciprocity in terms of respect…. I feel that the monks have a tremendous respect for the nuns.*

This highlights that whilst some *sīladharā* very much felt that they were forced into a marginalised position in what they described as a male-dominated institution, this was not the view expressed by all.

Amidst these variant perspectives, I also discerned (perhaps unsurprisingly) several views on the *bhikkhunī* ordination, ranging from very positive, to a feeling that it wasn't appropriate or possible in the current climate. For example, one participant who was supportive of the *bhikkhunī* ordination stated:

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[193] The importance of maintaining community relations as a rationale for remaining a *sīladharā* rather than seeking full *bhikkhunī* ordination links this participant to some other Buddhist renunciant women in different geographical location, for example those cited by Kawanami (2013:235) which I discussed in Chapter Two.

> *I think women should have the same support for practice as men because they have the same capacity for liberation. So it's really very simple, you know. I want to see equality for the sake of balance…and because* (bhikkhunī ordination) *was what the Buddha originally offered for women.*

One *sīladharā* approached the issue in a different way:

> *Although I fully support the movement to re-establish the bhikkhunī order, this is not something I am currently choosing to undertake. Mainly because, having recently spent many years involved in attempting to address the* (Forest Sangha's) *community dynamics regarding gender, I simply didn't have the inner resources to face the inevitable challenge of being one of those at the forefront of this movement. In continuing to live as a sīladharā, I feel as though I support the visibility of women's practice.*

Therefore, whilst this participant was concerned about gender inequality within the Theravāda tradition, she equally did not want personally to be a champion of structural change. She preferred to operate within the boundaries of the *sīladharā* training which she felt worked for her, and concentrate her attention on living a life focused on her Buddhist practice, although she did support the idea of *bhikkhunī* ordination in principle. It is important to note, however, that those in this study who supported *bhikkhunī* ordination also saw themselves as focused on monastic life and equally prioritise Buddhist practice in their narratives, but they wanted to do this within different forms and parameters.

In summary, I noted a range of attitudes towards gender equality amongst those participants drawn from the Forest Sangha and Theravāda tradition. Although previous scholars (as I discuss in Chapter One) also indicated this potential for variety between the *sīladharā*, it appears more common in the literature to emphasise that *sīladharā* are typically less concerned with challenging institutional structures and more focused on Buddhist practice. However, it is clear from the testimonies of my participants that the events surrounding the 2009 implementation of the Five Points certainly polarised the Forest Sangha and the *sīladharā* in particular, which caused a great deal of unrest within the communities. Although earlier, Williams (2005:235) highlights that she perceived little incentive for *sīladharā* to challenge the institutional hierarchy, in the immediate wake of the Five Points this was clearly no longer the case, with a number of *sīladharā* opting to disrobe or leave the monastic community, some citing gender discrimination as one of the reasons which provoked their decision. However, as the dust settles on these high-profile events, it is also important to remember that not all the *sīladharā* decided to leave. Amongst those who stayed, I encountered an enduring commitment to continue working within the parameters of the *sīladharā* ordination

within the Forest Sangha communities in Britain. Yet, it remains important not to over-simplify a complex situation by suggesting that those who chose to stay are wholly unconcerned with gender inequality and those who left are somehow less interested in Buddhist practice. Viewing the subtle gradations of my participant's perspectives through this rigid binary undermines the complexity of the situation and their responses to it.

Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, Triratna, and Amida Trust

There was much less of a range in attitudes towards gender equality amongst ordained women within the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (OBC), Triratna, and Amida. Each of these three organisations offers men and women the same ordination, and this was strongly valued by all the participants within these groups. For example, one OBC monk stated:

> *That idea that we are all monks, male, female, it's not just an idea that's written into the rules I think it's actually true, it's actually how things operate.*

For some participants, the emphasis on structural gender equality was a key reason why they initially chose their Buddhist group, and several highlighted that they did not think they would have been able to live happily within an organisation that appeared to prioritise men's practice, opportunities, and spiritual attainment over women's. Another OBC monk explains:

> *I just sort of fell into this Order, but when I look at it… I'm not sure I would have become a nun. Because I think, no matter what you do, it's second class. It's like being a nurse instead of a doctor. That's the closest thing to me. And I think …I would have rebelled against it.*

A participant from Amida Trust reinforced this:

> *One of the things that was already important to me before becoming a Buddhist was sexual equality and gender equality and to actually learn that … some Buddhist organisations have a very funny idea of gender equality and actually have structures that reinforce the inequalities is shocking… I just think that's just that's not Buddhism, that's something else.*

Of all the groups in this study, only Triratna has established women ordaining other women as a matter of course.[194] The value of this was highlighted by many of the Triratna Order members, alongside the importance of 'single-sex' activities. Some questioned the dominance of what has been called in Triratna 'the single-sex principle' or 'idea', and would have liked to have more connections with the men's community. However, most enjoyed having a female-focused environment within which to practice, as they felt that this allowed women the space to develop spiritually, without having to conform to traditional gender roles or patterns of behaviour.[195]

Whilst I did not routinely ask all participants about their views on the other Buddhist groups which did not offer gender-equal ordinations, some mentioned this as a concern. The overwhelming view from this group of participants was that organisational inequality between ordained men and women is not appropriate in contemporary Britain. Furthermore, they typically did not think that it was in line with Buddhist values:

> I hope that organisations like ours can you know at least throw up a light into what's happening to other organisations and say well it doesn't have to be that way, you know, the most junior monk shouldn't automatically surpass the most senior nun, just because its written down in the text, change it!

However, there was not always a comprehensive awareness of the issues facing women in other Buddhist traditions, which indicates that interest typically lies more with local issues in individual communities, a point that I will consider in the next section and in Chapter Nine.

Yet, despite an overwhelming support for gender equality amongst the women in these three groups, it does not automatically follow that there are a large number of women who self-define as feminist. In fact, amongst the women ordained in Triratna, there were very few who described themselves as comfortable being considered feminist. This is possibly because, institutionally, although discussion about gender equality and feminism has been encouraged in Triratna - for example, see Maitreyi (1997), Suvarnaprabha (2008), and Hayes (1995) - Sangharakshita

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[194] The Order of Buddhist Contemplatives and Amida Trust would also allow for women ordaining women (and certainly, in the OBC, this role was taken by Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett before she died). However, at the time of interviews, the most senior person in each of these organisations in Britain was male and he would act as the 'preceptor'.

[195] This was also mirrored in a 2007 survey of the Triratna Order, where Vajragupta (2010:79) tells us that 'over 80% of respondents still valued single-sex situations'.

himself has been openly critical of elements of feminist thought and practice (Hayes 1995:1).[196] One of the participants in this study explained that she understood Sangharakshita differentiated between feminism with a small 'f', and feminism with a large 'F' and, despite strongly supporting gender equality, she felt far less comfortable with what she saw as the blinkered 'large F' approach which took women's oppression as a dominant analytical theme. It is important to note here, however, that despite the institutional attitude to feminism, none of the participants expressed that they felt marginalised by this or unable to hold a divergent perspective. Indeed, their attitudes towards feminism, they explained, were more likely to be shaped by their current experiences, as I shall now discuss.

Some participants felt that discussing gender inequality was rather *'old hat'* and not particularly relevant to their daily lives, most likely because of the equality of opportunity for men and women in terms of ordination which was established in these three organisations. They did not feel discriminated against in their ordination practices or within their respective communities and therefore didn't feel they had to *'bang a drum'* for gender issues. One Triratna *dharmacharini* stated that she didn't feel the need to think about gender equality mostly because she had come to the Order after some difficult issues had already been navigated by other women. These issues included the publication of, and response to, Subhuti's (1995) text, *Women, Men, and Angels*, which was referred to by most of the Triratna participants, and which I introduced in Chapter One. Of those who were involved in the Triratna Order at the time this book was published, some described being strongly affected by its contents as they felt it was an inaccurate reflection of women's spiritual practice and ability. Others, whilst questioning the way the book was written and argued, did highlight that in the wake of publication the book had a galvanizing effect within the women's wing of the Order, which led one participant to wonder whether the text was, in Buddhist terms, *'skilful means'*. Some had more sympathy with the content of the text, and pointed out that women had been at a spiritual disadvantage given that they generally bore the brunt of child-care and could spend less time meditating on retreat, for example. What this case highlights is that, within Triratna, attitudes and experiences in relation to gender equality have changed over the decades since the group was established. The issues that faced women at the beginning (when the men's wing of the Order was arguably

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[196] A number of these papers are collected together on the blog 'FWBO Discussion', available at www.discussion.fwbo.org. Last accessed 13.05.2014.

predominant) are generally not seen to be faced by women joining the Order now, when gender equality is, according to one participant, *'such a given'*.

Yet, even in these organisations where structural equality was established, there were participants who continued to highlight their concerns about certain issues facing ordained women, and a number of participants who very much wanted to support women's Buddhist practice. The concerns they raised included; questions about the impact of a male/female disciple relationship within the OBC; whether ceremonial readings should be changed to reflect gender neutral language; how to navigate teaching Buddhist *sutta/sūtra* that contained less than positive images of women; whether single-sex or mixed-sex groups are most supportive of women's practice; and the ingrained habits of women in terms of deferring to men to complete certain tasks within mixed-sex communities, which could include practical tasks, or making recordings of teachings for distribution. In addition, particularly in Triratna where women are able to ordain and be married and have a family, there were also issues raised as to the difficulties of balancing Buddhist practice with the responsibilities of family life which were seen to affect women in different ways to men.

Furthermore, whilst the majority of the participants within Triratna, the OBC, and Amida Trust described gender equality as vitally important, some began to question how useful it was to invoke a rigid idea of 'equality':

> *I think well, everyone isn't equal, people are different, so people should have access to the things that they need, but I'm not quite sure whether that means a sort of blanket equality.*

One participant also questioned whether always being concerned with gender discrimination actually hindered Buddhist practice:

> *Just sit still with what you've got on your plate and work with it ...you've got to deal with the process of disease and death at some point, so how do you deal with that if you are getting upset about being a woman and being not whatever it is, being given* (something)*.*

Additionally, several of the participants, across each of these groups, were clear that they did not want to promote women above men, and instead preferred to look at gender equality as equality for all:

> *I might say* (I was a feminist)*, but I would have to add a caveat that what I'm more interested in is the equal, fair, just treatment of human beings, because I'm trying to save beings, not women at the expense of anything else.*

Therefore, in summary, whilst there were more obvious similarities in the attitudes to gender equality amongst participants from these three groups, especially in the overall support that they gave to gender equal ordination, there remained some subtle gradation to their perspectives. This highlights that, even within organisations that take a broadly similar approach, there is room for some diversity of perspective and emphasis.

Complicated Embodiment?

The range of views I have described in this chapter challenges the idea that ordained women in the British context are all unequivocally concerned with enforcing the principle of gender equality within Buddhist institutions. Of course, some of the differences between ordained women's perspectives are rather subtle and their narratives therefore need a careful analytical approach. It is far too easy to polarise women's perspectives when in reality they are subtly different, even among ordained women who broadly support *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination, for example. The attitudes of participants in this study could comfortably be plotted on a continuum, ranging from seeing women as discriminated against in Buddhist organisations and taking action to change that, to not feeling as if they experience discrimination and not wanting to focus on gender inequality. A similar continuum could be drawn for attitudes towards *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination, and whether women felt compelled to challenge existing Buddhist hierarchies or preferred to work within the existing structures available to them.

One factor shaping these perspectives is my participant's attitudes to gender identity following ordination. Nancy Auer Falk (2001:204) explains that a person moves beyond gender identification in the process of becoming realised in Buddhist terms. Indeed, Salgado (2013:6-7) indicates that at least one of her participants did not see herself as a woman, and instead identified as a 'renunciant'. The gender identity of ordained Buddhists (especially monastics) is a subject that has received scholarly attention, most notably from Keyes (1986). He argues that male monks, following their ordination and in rejecting their traditional role in terms of sex and procreation became part of a *'saṅgha-gender'* (Keyes, 1986:86). Although Keyes states clearly that, from the perspective of the Theravāda tradition in Asia, women are not able to 'alter their gender through ordination' further

reflections on this idea have been undertaken in relation to Buddhist nuns (Keyes, 1986:86). For example, Mackey (2005:275), writing about nuns in Labrang (Tibet), broadly concurred with Keyes that the *'saṅgha-gender'* ideal is operational from the perspectives of both ordained and lay people. However, she highlights that *'saṅgha-gender'* is not gender-neutral, nor is it a position which demonstrates 'sexlessness', but is one which represents 'a masculine societal ideal' (Mackey, 2005:275). This general point is also made by Crane (2004) who argues that Taiwanese nuns, following their ordination, 'see themselves as men'. Yet, Gyatso (2010:19) has also raised a question in relation to this issue, and she states, 'it is yet to be understood whether the Buddhist monastic has a gender at all, and, if so, of what that consists'.

Whilst it has not been the intention of this study to examine this in any detail and indeed, not all of my participants are monastics, one of the reasons underlying the diversity in attitudes to feminism and gender equality was participants' variant perspectives on their gender identity. Although some participants (particularly in traditions which offered different ordination routes for men and women) asserted that, at times, they felt that ordained practice was rooted in a masculine model, and, for example, they would prefer to govern by consensus seeing this as a female trait, none expressed any sense that they envisaged their gender identity in a masculine form. However, some of the ordained women in this study laid more emphasis on their female gender, and others, whilst not entirely disregarding their sex, underplayed its significance. For example, one OBC monk stated;

> *I'm not particularly thinking of myself as a self…I'm not primarily involved with the sense of me being a woman and the problems that being a woman has caused me.*

This was mirrored in the testimony of one Triratna *dharmacharini*, who asserted;

> (Being a woman) *is important to me, of course… because that's who I am, but I think it's more important that I'm a Buddhist….I just take it as identified too much with a particular physical manifestation...holding too much to a particular conditioning…it can hold you back.*

Yet, one OBC monk questioned whether it was possible to ever completely remove your identification with your physical characteristics:

> *There will always be a male/female dynamic…. if you think you are past it, or its going to go away, you are the one who is going to … get into trouble, sexually, and otherwise. We don't look at men and women the same… I*

may… act very differently with different women, I may act very differently with different men, I'm always aware that they are male or female.

Therefore, whilst it might be assumed that those ordained in monastic traditions might be the ones who were more likely to narrate a sense of transcending conventional gender division, this was not necessarily the case. One participant in the Theravāda tradition explained that prior to her ordination she was not particularly concerned with gender identity, but she became increasingly aware of being female after living in a monastic environment which segregated men and women. She felt that in many ways women did approach monastic practice in a different way to men, but this was not something that had to be eradicated because;

you can't negate the conventional to get to the ultimate, they belong together.

What this demonstrates is a rather complicated approach to embodiment. In Chapter Seven, I referred to the importance of dress in helping ordained Buddhist women embody the teachings of the Buddha in contemporary Britain. However, this sense of embodying Buddhism was far less clear-cut in relation to the ways in which ordained women perceived gender identity. Amongst a number of the participants in this study, priority was given to Buddhist philosophical explanations of the ultimate need to transcend gender duality over any strong connection with being female which was not as universally emphasised in relation to the use of dress. Additionally, this affected my participants' attitude towards engaging with international networks for Buddhist women.[197]

I had expected that most of my participants would have been involved in international Buddhist women's organisations, particularly *Sakyadhita*, and would also be part of campaigning for opportunities for women.[198] Yet, out of the twenty-

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[197] This was a point also made by Ploos Van Amstel (2005:139,147) in relation to Western nuns in Tibetan traditions, who she argues do not readily bond with each other (or even desire to). This was something which she too had not predicted, but which she suggests could be the result of their varied geographical location and diverse countries of origin. As a result, she states that, in relation to groups of Western nuns, 'Building up a community…is often an unusual activity for respondents' (Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:147).

[198] *Sakyadhita* is an international Buddhist women's organisation which has branches in several countries, including Britain (www.sakyadhita.org). Their activities include holding regular conferences (and publishing from them), compiling resources for Buddhist women (including on-line) and supporting women's access to resources, including for the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination. For a discussion of Sakyadhita, see Fenn and Koppedrayer (2008). Also see Tomalin

five participants in my study, only six had any on-going connections with
Sakyadhita. The reasons given for non-involvement included a perception that
whilst Sakyadhita conferences and publications were interesting, they were not
providing what they needed, including detailed information about where and how
to access higher ordination, for example. Some of those in Buddhist groups which
gave equal access to ordination for men and women didn't feel a strong need to
join groups actively campaigning for women's equality in Buddhism, as they felt
that they already had this. Others felt that they had a lack of time, and would prefer
to focus the energy they had on their immediate communities. Yet, others felt that
they did not want to connect with other women internationally solely on the
grounds of gender because they did not feel a strong connection to what they
referred to as 'women's issues'. These participants stated they were more interested
in meeting people who were involved in the same Buddhist practices as they were.
This is not to say that no international connections between women were made by
those involved in this study, and indeed, those who were involved in *Sakyadhita*
were certainly extremely supportive of their aims and activities.[199] However,
overall, the focus of many of the participants in this study was more typically on
their immediate communities, which include ordained and lay men and women, a
point which shall be returned to in Chapter Nine.

Conclusion

    In this chapter, I have shown that it is necessary to deeply investigate the
attitudes of ordained Buddhist women in Britain to the issues of feminism and
gender equality. The analysis I present here provides a detailed contribution to the
existing literature on Western ordained women, which I discussed in Chapter Two.
However, there are certain questions in relation to this complex subject area that I
have not been able to consider as they were not a focus in this study. For example,
in what ways does ordination and subsequent practice in the British context differ
for women and men? How are ordained women perceived by their different lay
communities? What are ordained men's attitudes to ordained women? Each of

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(2009) for a discussion of Buddhist women's 'transnational networks', including
Sakyadhita.
[199] Additionally, some participants highlighted that they had emailed high-profile
ordained women who were located out of the UK to ask their advice on particular
issues (although these did not always result in longer-term relationships).

these questions would require further interviews with both lay communities and with ordained men, which were not in the purview of this research.

However, in conclusion and in answer to my research question, I have emphasised the plurality of perspectives on gender equality and feminism that can be ascertained among ordained Buddhist women in Britain. I have shown that, whilst there are certainly some who cite 'women's rights' and 'equality' as motivating factors (particularly for seeking *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination) and they are very willing to challenge Buddhist hierarchies in relation to gender inequality, this was not a universal position. Indeed, feminism and gender equality remain contested subjects and 'loaded words' for many of the women in this study, including those who had ordained within traditions which offered structural equality in their ordination between men and women. Whilst it was more common for the ordained women in this study to feel comfortable with ideas of gender equality than with a feminist affiliation, there still remains a range of perspectives on gender equality and on gender identity more generally. Furthermore, not all ordained women in Britain see themselves as champions for the *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination.

Not every participant in my study wished to give their gender identity much attention. In turn, this affected their attitude both to gender equality and feminism and also to connecting with other Buddhist women, including through international fora, such as *Sakyadhita*. However, as I have argued, affiliation with feminism and attitudes to gender equality amongst ordained Buddhist women in Britain are complex issues. Therefore, as a group, ordained Buddhist women in Britain resist any simplistic categorisation. From the evidence of this study, it remains crucial to afford Western ordained Buddhist women a level of attitudinal diversity and recognise that they have varying approaches to the contested issues of feminism and gender equality, particularly as they relate to their Buddhist traditions.

As I will discuss further in the next, and final, chapter of this thesis, the perspectives and practices of ordained women in this study are shaped by various things, some of which could be attributed to their geographic and cultural location in contemporary Britain, but others not so. I do not wish to assume that the legal position on gender equality in Britain has had no impact on the lives of ordained women in this context, but that not all of them hold these values in the same way, with the same rationale, or with the same emphasis.

Chapter Nine: Ordained Buddhist Women - An Analysis of the British Location.

Introduction

In this chapter, I will consider my final research question, namely 'how does the British location influence women's experience of Buddhist ordination? I will draw together data that has been presented in previous chapters and examine this alongside new data. This research question is crucial not least because other scholars have emphasised the role of social, geographic, and cultural contexts in shaping Buddhist practice, and, to date, there has been little academic work which has given attention to this issue in relation to ordained women in Britain from the perspective of multiple traditions. When I originally designed the research question, I intended to consider in what ways living in Britain would impact on the experience of women who took ordination, what might change as a result of their geographic and cultural context, and the difference being British, or spending a great deal of time in Britain would make to women's experiences. However, in this chapter, I will show that 'the British location' is a complex term and one which means different things to the individual participants involved in this study. Female ordination amongst Buddhists in Britain is influenced and shaped by multiple factors which are woven together in different ways depending on the individual, their living circumstances and background, and the tradition that they have ordained within. I will begin this chapter by exploring the difficulties with my original research question and discuss the approach I subsequently took. I will then introduce the framework provided by Tweed (2006) in his book *'Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion'* which I have employed to reflect the complexity of 'location' in relation to the ordained women in this study.

It is important to note that the term 'location' has been imbued with multiple meanings, particularly within theoretical academic work. As Knott (2005b:1) indicates:

> *For some, the focus on location may signal a consideration of geographical places, material objects, the built environment, perhaps social institutions; for others it may be read metaphorically to imply "imaginary sites", "cultural spaces", and "ideological positions".*

In this chapter, I will not be undertaking a theoretical analysis of space or ideology, but instead will focus on the ways in which living in contemporary Britain shapes the every-day lives and religious practices of ordained Buddhist women. This will contribute specifically to the academic debate about the development of Buddhism and its adaptation to contemporary Britain, which I discussed in Chapter One.

Problems with 'the British Location'

Given that gathering data for my first two research questions was relatively straightforward, I did not expect that this research question would be so challenging. Yet, from my earliest interviews, I found it difficult to phrase questions clearly and I wasn't certain whether the most significant element of 'location' would be local (for example, the city, town, village or street) or national, as both had the potential to influence ordained women's experiences. I asked various questions about the relationship that participants had with the city, town, or village they lived within, whether they thought there was such a thing as 'British Buddhism', and their interactions with the place where their Buddhist tradition originated from. However, they did not always find it easy to answer these questions. Whilst they often had very little trouble discussing their various dress practices, or their reasons for taking ordination (and it was then possible to analyse some differences in approach between the women in this study and those in other studies situated elsewhere), few found it easy to directly identify in what ways being from, or living in, Britain shaped their experiences more generally.

It may well have been more straightforward to ask and answer this question if I was doing single-site ethnography with each of my participants living in the same place, enabling an in-depth analysis of their immediate locality. Yet as my research progressed, I discovered more ordained women than I had originally anticipated that were living alone and therefore the focus of the research shifted away from an analysis of particular sites, to providing a broader picture of ordained life in contemporary Britain. In addition, many of my participants regularly moved around, both in Britain and around the world, and at the time of interview some lived outside the UK. Furthermore, the ordained women involved in this study highlighted a number of inter-related factors which shaped their practice. Some of these were related to their immediate surroundings in a particular town or village, but equally influential were wider factors such as the lineage that they were part of,

the traditions and philosophies they upheld, or the monastic authorities and hierarchies based outside the UK.[200] As a result, I found it increasingly difficult to confidently untangle 'Britain' from other influences.

Yet, 'Britain' did remain present in my interviews and observations. It was the place I physically travelled across to meet participants; it was present in the way that my participants and I interacted with each other; the assumptions that we no doubt made and the language and colloquialisms we used; the nationality on most of their passports; and the place in which many of them prepared for ordination and lived. There remained no doubt in my mind that although the answer might not be straightforward, the broad theme of location remained critical for this study. I therefore began to think carefully about how my research question was phrased. Instead of focusing primarily on the British influence, I asked: 'What is it that shapes ordained Buddhist women's experiences in contemporary Britain'? By broadening out my research question in this way, I was better able to appreciate both the immediate and the wider issues of significance.

Why 'Crossing and Dwelling'?

The complexity that I found in relation to 'location' was perhaps not so surprising given the scholarly emphasis on the range of different factors that shape Buddhist practice in Britain (see Chapter One). Indeed, several scholars (particularly Kay, 2004:37) warn against seeing Buddhism in Britain in isolation from wider global social, political and cultural influences. Equally, Bluck (2006:185) argues that the frameworks that have been employed so far to evaluate Buddhism's adaptation to Britain, including the one that he adopted, do not adequately reflect the intricate ways in which different Buddhist traditions have adapted to Britain. Whilst I initially tried to decipher whether a certain practice mentioned by my participants was 'adapted' to Britain or not, this approach felt rather unsatisfactory particularly when the experiences that were being described to me by my participants seemed to be influenced simultaneously by various factors.

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[200] The fact that there are likely to be multiple influences on ordained women's practices was also indicated briefly by Ploos Van Amstel (2005:17) in her study of Western nuns in Tibetan schools, some of whom also lived in Britain.

Reading Tweed's (2006) theory of religion, I discovered that these were issues that had also concerned him.

Tweed (2006:5) explains that he was looking for a way of understanding religion that reflects 'movement, relation, and position', inspired by his observation of a Cuban Catholic ceremony in Miami. As he states, 'there seemed to be more to say that other theoretical lexicons allowed me to say' (Tweed, 2006:4-5). Tweed wanted to capture the vigour and dynamism of religious practices, yet at the same time also encompass a human sense of building, constructing, and belonging. He does not try to minimise or reduce the multi-faceted nature of religious practices and their multiple influences, and constructs a framework using two conjoined ideas of 'crossing' and 'dwelling'. In his definition;

> *Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries* (Tweed, 2006:54).

In other words, religions include practices which help them belong in particular places, but they also are shaped by various movements which can be physical (for example, changing country) but also can be emotional (for example, referring to ultimate meanings and understandings of one's place in the world); held together in an intricate web or matrix. I have therefore divided this chapter into the themes or 'chronotopes' that Tweed (2006:97) suggests. I will focus my analysis on the level of individual experience, which has been a cornerstone of the approach taken in this study thus far. So, whilst Tweed often talks at the level of 'religions', I am more concerned with specific religious individuals and how they might experience the process of 'crossing and dwelling'.[201]

Tweed uses his theory to define what religion is. I do not intend to scrutinize his definition of religion as my aim is to operationalise his framework and use it to express the numerous (and sometimes conflicting) influences that

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[201] Hughes (2009:407) has argued that Tweed's work is somewhat flawed because he relies too heavily on 'context-less' or 'encyclopaedic' examples which are drawn from multiple religious traditions. This, Hughes (2009:411-412) suggests, makes his work too generalist, and subsequently unable to adequately reflect the multi-faceted nature of religious belief and practice. Whilst this criticism may be warranted, my focus is on the ways in which Tweed's framework can help analyse the data I have gathered in this study, rather than the accuracy of his theory more generally.

continue to shape ordained women's lives.[202] In doing so, I am able to see both how ordained women 'dwell' in Britain and the influence of their location, without minimising the 'crossings' that they make, both those relating to relocation and ongoing geographical movement and also their relationships to particular Buddhist traditions and lineages, especially where the nexus of power and hierarchy resides primarily outside the UK.

Dwelling

Tweed's idea of 'dwelling' is predicated on the idea that religions 'orient individuals and groups in time and space, transform the natural environment, and allow devotees to inhabit the worlds they construct' (Tweed, 2006:82). To understand 'dwelling' is to understand the process by which religion and religious practices are rooted, changed, and made appropriate for a particular environment or location. It describes how and where religious people are situated (and situate themselves) in various localities and how they go about making those localities familiar through a process of 'mapping, building and inhabiting' (Tweed, 2006:82). Tweed (2006:97) divides 'dwelling' into four areas: 'the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos'. I will structure this section with reference to the first three of these themes in order to analyse how the ordained women in this study 'dwell' in their particular locations in Britain, and in turn, how this 'dwelling' influences their experience.[203]

The Body

To Tweed (2006:98), 'religion begins - and ends - with bodies'. Religions 'transform' bodies, and they also determine how different bodies should behave (Tweed, 2006:100). Whilst there are undoubtedly other examples of how the body

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[202] For different perspectives about Tweed's definition of religion and his theoretical approach, see the special edition of the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, June 2009, Vol. 77, No. 2, pp. 404–459.

[203] I will not consider Tweed's final theme of 'cosmos' here. For Tweed, 'cosmos' refers to the ways in which religions represented the 'realms' of space, including heaven, hell, and purgatory (Tweed, 2006:115-116). Whilst some participants mentioned philosophical ideas such as *karma*, dependent origination, and re-birth, this was not the focus of this study.

shapes Buddhist practice for ordained women in Britain, I shall focus primarily on issues that relate to women's bodies, notably the interaction between gender, Buddhist ordination, and the British location. This is because gender, and particularly gender equality, has been a key consideration for this thesis as a whole.[204] I shall look specifically at two issues. First, the changes that were made to female ordination practices in the various groups involved in this study whilst they were operating in Britain, and the impact of these. Secondly, I will consider the influence of individual women's family circumstances, particularly motherhood, which also has a significant impact on how ordination is experienced amongst some of the women in this study. Both of these issues warrant discussion under the subject of the 'body' because they consider with the ways in which, by very virtue of being located in contemporary Britain, women's bodies are both constrained and enabled regarding the ordination and practices that they undertake and the lives that they subsequently lead.

It was clear from the testimony of many of my participants that, when Buddhist traditions were established in Britain, certain changes were made to what was available for women in terms of ordination. Amongst some groups, new orders were initiated (the order of *sīladharā* in the Forest Sangha, for example). Within other groups, new ordination traditions were established for both women *and* men, for example, the *amitarya* in Amida Trust or the *dharmachari/dharmacharini* in Triratna. Each of these 'new' ordinations and the development of their precepts have roots or connections in various ways to other ordination traditions or practices that exist in Buddhism, so perhaps it is incorrect to refer to them as all entirely 'new'. However, each heralded significant changes which arose in response to the needs of Buddhist communities in Britain. For those ordaining in the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, Triratna, and Amida Trust, women were given the same status and community responsibilities as men, and for the OBC, male and female

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[204] An additional example that relates to the 'body' theme is dress, which Tweed (2006:101) highlights. Dress is, without doubt, one of the ways in which Buddhism 'dwells' in Britain for ordained women and, in Chapter Seven, I discussed the ways in which some ordained women altered their dress practices to suit the British context. As Buddhist dress remains unusual in Britain (especially for those living in more rural village environments, rather than those living in more cosmopolitan cities, such as London) some women are forced to confront a number of assumptions made about them and their lifestyles. This created, for some, a feeling of discomfort which no doubt affected their experience.

monks live and train together which would arguably be unusual outside this particular setting in Britain (or the West more generally).[205]

Within the Tibetan Karma Kagyu tradition, whilst initially following the Tibetan monastic establishment by allowing women to take no more than *getsulma* or novice precepts, Lama Yeshe did provide direct and personal support for some women to take *bhikṣuṇī* ordination in Bodhgaya in 1998, including accompanying them to India for the ceremonies (Khandro, 2007:81). According to one of my participants, Samye Ling provided the largest single contingent of women practicing with a Tibetan lineage at this ordination event. In addition, as I discussed in Chapter One, Lama Yeshe has also named female Lamas and has also allowed a temporary ordination for both men and women. These changes, which were initiated in Scotland, have allowed women to practice Buddhism in arguably unconventional ways, certainly within the contemporary era. According to a participant, one of the reasons underpinning Lama Yeshe's ability to make these types of changes is the fact that he isn't 'high-profile' in the Tibetan monastic hierarchy which allows him more flexibility to be a 'trail-blazer'. Quite possibly, it is also because he runs a well-established monastery that is geographically some distance from the homeland of the Buddhist school it is part of.

At times, ordained women in Britain have also been given greater positions of power and authority within their own communities and in representing organisations to the wider Buddhist and non-Buddhist world. For example, according to one of my participants, when the order of *sīladharā* was initially established, several women were invited to give public teachings far earlier than they would if they were ordaining now. In Triratna, although Sangharakshita initially conferred all ordinations, as the women's wing became more established they took over and women are now the sole preceptors for women, and conversely, men for men (Bell, 1991:296). In addition, there are a number of women running high-profile Triratna Buddhist centres across Britain, supporting the practices of both women and men. Within the OBC, women can ordain both women and men, and indeed, the earliest followers were given their ordination by Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett, a British woman.

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[205] It is important to note here that Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett established Shasta Abbey in California prior to Throssel Hole in Northumberland, so that the developments within the OBC in terms of ordination have occurred in both the United States and Britain.

What these examples indicate is that there have been a number of changes to ordination practice in Britain which have had significant impact on many women's lives. The rationale for these changes varies across each of the organisations, but includes a need to appeal to British lay female supporters (see Bell, 1991:264, 287 in relation to the Forest Sangha); having an existing group of women who have asked to live an ordained life; and because a movement's founder (such as Dharmavidya for Amida Trust, or Jiyu-Kennett for the OBC) was concerned about equal opportunities for men and women and thus wrote these into the structural organisation of the communities. In many ways, therefore, Britain has provided a platform for ordination which has enabled a particular way of living for many ordained women.

Yet, at the same time, the British location has also constrained ordination for women. One example of this, according to some of my participants within Tibetan schools, is the inability, at present, to be given *bhikṣuṇī* ordination on British shores. This means that if women wish to take this level of ordination, they not only have to step outside their lineage but they also have to travel some distance (often to Taiwan or Korea). For some this was a very challenging prospect, both because of cost implications and language issues. Furthermore, one participant highlighted that, because she lived in Britain on her own, she felt rather 'out on a limb' and did not think that information about where to get *bhikṣuṇī* ordination was readily available, even on the internet. A number of participants, notably from Tibetan schools other than the Karma Kagyu, indicated that they felt more support was given to women's practices in North America where there are some larger monastic establishments where ordained women can live.[206] As I discussed in Chapter Eight, gender relations and the opportunities offered to women in certain groups caused a particular strain for several participants who made what they described as very difficult decisions to leave lineages when disputes in relation to gender equality were not resolved in a way that they could accept. In fact, a desire to implement an equality of access in relation to ordination between men and women could be read as a tension between 'crossing' and 'dwelling'; where Buddhist traditions come face-to-face with the legal and cultural emphasis on

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[206] Despite expressing this sentiment, none of these Tibetan-tradition participants had sought to relocate on a permanent basis to monastic communities in North America. This does not mean, however, that this move had not been made by others as a result of increased opportunities to live in more established monastic communities.

equality which is arguably present in contemporary Britain (see discussion in Chapter One).

It is not only organisational issues that shape female ordination practice, but also individual women's personal circumstances. In Chapter Six, I discussed how converting to Buddhism as adults and having previous relationships and careers does, in Chodron's (2000:81) words, mean ordained women 'bring habits and expectations that have been well polished through years of interactions in the world'. This was a point reinforced by a number of my participants and although some put little emphasis on the impact of this, others explained that they found it difficult to adapt initially to a communal monastic environment and schedule. Notably, some participants in my study, most conspicuously in the Tibetan schools, were given a monastic ordination when they still had primary responsibility for children under the age of 18. In addition, one was also permitted to ordain whilst she was living in the same house as a long-term partner, but maintaining a celibate relationship. There are a number of scholars who emphasise that, in various geographic locations, women who take ordination or who live a renunciant lifestyle do not necessarily dissolve their family connections in entirety (see, for example, Chodron, 1996:225, Chodron, 2009, Salgado, 2013:3).[207] However, maintaining primary caring responsibilities for a partner or children (particularly when living with them instead of in a monastery or nunnery) is arguably unusual for those who have taken monastic vows which emphasise the rejection of the householder lifestyle (see Chapter Two). Yet, some women have been allowed to combine ordination with motherhood or other family responsibilities and this has a significant impact on their experiences. Some of the participants who had ordained in these circumstances praised their teachers for their 'broad-mindedness' in permitting ordinations, and the recognition that, in contemporary Britain, given there are no nunneries or monastic institutions for women in some Tibetan schools, it is more likely that there will be those who have less than traditional living situations. However, others felt that it was extremely difficult to balance their caring responsibilities with their ordination. Whilst not monastic, some of the Triratna Order members highlighted that they too had to balance their relationships and caring responsibilities with their commitments to the Order. Although there were no doubt ordained men who also had to do this, most of the participants

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[207] Lopez (2004:329) also highlights that in early Buddhist communities connections were still maintained between those who had taken ordination and their families.

discussed this in terms of the effects on women. Whilst no-one in Triratna indicated that these responsibilities were impossible to overcome, their acknowledgement of the issue does indicate that personal circumstances continue to have a formative effect on their experiences as ordained women.

The Home

According to Tweed (2006:103), religious people 'orient themselves by constructing, adorning, and inhabiting domestic space'. Religion, therefore, is involved in a process of 'home-making' (Tweed, 2006:103). In this section, I will consider the ways in which ordained Buddhist women participate in types of religious 'home-making' in Britain, and the impact of this on their experience of ordination.

Importantly for this study, where ordained women live in various circumstances, Tweed (2006:103) encourages a flexible appreciation of the concept of 'home'. Whilst helping to construct a Buddhist place such as a monastery or retreat centre might not automatically be considered 'domestic space', I argue that for ordained Buddhist women in Britain it should be considered as such, because women (and, indeed, men) were often residing in the places that they were helping to construct. For some of the participants in this study, particularly those who took ordination in the early days of their respective movements' establishment in Britain, an important element of their practice was to assist in physically planning, constructing, and developing the sites that would become either monasteries, community living spaces, or retreat centres. These participants described how they learnt to build and plaster, lay flooring and help put in windows, as well as paint and decorate. As they pointed out the under-floor heating that they had put in, or the brick walls that they had built, they demonstrated a strong sense of their commitment to establishing their particular Buddhist community in Britain. The women who were involved in this building work often described living in austere circumstances, sometimes with little hot water or heating, as they physically constructed their new 'homes'. For the women involved in this process, this helped develop a strong sense of community and fuelled their personal investment

in particular places for Buddhist practice in Britain.[208] Additionally, it increased their sense of commitment to their Buddhist group. For example, Himavaddhi (Triratna) explains:

> *Living and working in the same situation is not easy necessarily… people had to really be committed to do it.*

Yet, even for those who were not involved in the initial construction of Buddhist buildings, the sense of connection to a particular place remained apparent. In Chapter Five, I highlighted that Dhannadipa, for example, felt a very strong early association with a particular monastery and she identified that on arrival it felt like she was 'coming home.' This sense of connection to individuals or groups of people and the places in which they put Buddhist teachings into practice was attractive to many of the women in this study. Being part of, and contributing to, the development of a community was important, even though this was not always straightforward. As Rajana (Forest Sangha) explains:

> *We just had to make a lot of mistakes and that's never a very pleasant experience … the whole process of learning how to work together, learning how to be in community, wasn't easy.*

However, the idea of community was described by the women in this study in different ways. For the majority, their 'community', in practical terms, was understood to be those who lived immediately around them (or who regularly visited the places where they lived) and who followed the same Buddhist practices and teachings that they did. This included not only other ordained women, but also ordained men and lay followers.[209] Some of the participants in this study had a rather more global understanding of community, wishing to foster and maintain connections with other Buddhist practitioners, including teachers, outside of Britain, and a more limited number had a strong sense that they wanted to be united

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[208] Angell (2006a:98) notes the 'hard physical work' when the Forest Sangha monastery at Chithurst was being built, but equally the development of 'mutual encouragement, support, and a great commitment to the monastic life' at this time, amongst both men and women.

[209] Ploos Van Amstel (2005:129) notes that amongst the more senior nuns in the Tibetan traditions in the West, this was also how they understood community. In this study, it was not just those in Tibetan traditions or those who had been ordained for some time who took this perspective. Interestingly, however, Ploos Van Amstel (2005:147) also notes that at her fieldwork sites (which included Samye Ling monastery) the communities of nuns 'still felt very fragile'. Whilst this was not necessarily the impression that I received, either at Samye Ling or in other Buddhist communities in Britain, it was not in the remit of this study to further investigate community development beyond the attitudes of my individual participants.

with other ordained women, including those in different geographic locations, which I discussed in Chapter Eight. However, for many, a strong sense of connection and commitment to particular places and communities in Britain was evident.[210] Thus, 'home' for many equated to the people and the specific places where Buddhist practice was undertaken. Although Western Buddhist practitioners are typically seen as concerned primarily with personal meditative practice (a point I highlighted in Chapter Two) amongst this sample, this was not necessarily at the expense of developing community relationships. This is not to say that attitudes to community remain the same over time, but that, overall, it retains a great deal of importance.

The testimonies of a number of participants in this study indicate that where you live has a noticeable impact on your experience of ordination (Starkey, 2014:219). Your geographical location, particularly if you are in a busy city or a quiet, rural area, influences what you do each day and the roles that you take as an ordained member of a Buddhist community. For example, living in a monastery or retreat centre which is in a more isolated area, an ordained woman has a different relationship with the non-ordained supporters (who may only visit on retreat) than those who live in, or are connected to, city-centre communities, where non-ordained members might visit daily. To cite one example, several of my participants who had ordained within the OBC had had the experience of living at different time both at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey (a rural monastery in Northumberland) as well as living alone in smaller priories or temples which are typically located in cities across Britain. Ceola (OBC) describes that, when living at Throssel, there is more space for 'formal practice' and less pressure to have to manage alone all the issues necessary to keep a building and community functioning, as well as ministering single-handedly to lay supporters. Whilst she explained that she sometimes found it difficult to detach from the needs of the building and the community when she was the only monk on-site, she also felt this experience helped her 'let go and be present'.

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[210] This sense of the salience of immediate community can be noted in both Shaw (2008:167) and Angell (2006b:238) in relation to the Forest Sangha *sīladharā*. Shaw (2008:167) argues that the *sīladharā* have typically developed stronger relationships within Britain (including with Christian nuns and ordained women from other Buddhist groups) rather than with other Buddhist nuns in Asia. Angell (2006b:238) states that because the *sīladharā* represent a rather distinctive ordination tradition, they (unlike male monks) 'lack a wider sense of community'. In addition, Ploos Van Amstel (2005:149) recognised that 'Western nuns in general view themselves as different from Tibetan nuns' and this impacted on the ways that they commonly built relationships.

Although it is no doubt a challenge to manage a priory or temple alone and it certainly affects how you approach your daily life and Buddhist practice, there remains a structure of support to assist monks in the OBC, even if keeping a small community going also requires financial support from lay members. For other women in this study, particularly the Tibetan Gelug and Nyingma nuns who have no monastery or nunnery in Britain, many have no choice but to live alone and manage a domestic household and attempt to integrate this into their ordained lifestyle (see also, Ploos Van Amstel, 2005:89, 135). Of the twenty-five participants in this study, nine lived alone and four others had also lived alone for a period of time in their ordination careers.[211] Of this number, eight had taken monastic ordination vows, and five of these were ordained within the Tibetan schools. For some women living alone (again, notably in the Tibetan tradition), their teachers did not always live in the UK, and not all had lay community members living near to them providing financial and practical assistance. The difficulty of living alone and providing for yourself whilst also trying to uphold monastic vows has been previously noted, and evidence from this study highlights that this is a particular issue for some ordained women in Britain (Chodron, 1996:227, 2000:82, Choedron, 2013, Ploos van Amstel, 2005:190, Starkey, 2014:220, Tsomo, 1999a:11-13, 2002:263).[212] One participant in this study who was ordained in a Tibetan school emphasised:

> *I think it is very hard having to actually be in a lay situation where I am earning a living, basically being a householder.*

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[211] This figure includes those who, at the time of interview, lived in OBC temples or priories. It does not include those living with husbands or partners, although does include those living with children under the age of 18.

[212] The issue of the relationship that ordained Buddhists, particularly monastics, have with wider society has been subject to some scholarly debate, and not only in contemporary contexts. Scholars have shown that, although the Buddhist monastic tradition seems to imply a withdrawal from wider society (Gethin, 1998:88), in actuality and throughout history, monks and nuns have engaged in political and financial interactions with non-monastics (Harris, 1999b, Robson, 2010:8, Schopen, 2004). This is not least because, as Collins (1988:109) argues, monastics require the support of lay society in order to survive, as they traditionally vow not to handle money (see also, Conze, 1982:32, Gethin, 1998:94,107, Silber, 1995:67, Wijayaratna, 2010:88). Furthermore, in Japan and Tibet, ordained clergy have not always had to reject sexual relationships, marriage and children (Covell, 2005, Faure, 1998:189, Heinemann, 1984:212, Kvaerne, 1984:255).What is important to draw from this discourse is that, we require, as Silber (1995:45) suggests, an understanding of monasticism (and I argue, Buddhist 'ordination' more generally) that is not 'monolithic'.

The problems that those women who lived alone had were varied, but ranged from a very basic concern about being able to pay household bills (particularly if they were also supporting young children), to worries about continuing to work whilst wearing robes, to practical home maintenance issues. So whilst FPMT (n.d.) guidance, for example, states that ordained monastics should not 'work in worldly jobs to support themselves', this was perceived as being highly difficult by the participants in this study, as well as those cited in other studies (Chodron, 1996:227, Fenn and Koppedrayer, 2008:68, Ploos van Amstel, 2005:89, 190, Tsedroen, 1988:209). Additionally, several participants in this study in the Tibetan tradition noted that they did not feel particularly supported in resolving these issues by the monastic hierarchy or by the lay communities in Britain. Occasionally, they echoed the sense of 'aloneness and a lack of supportive community' that was noted by Tsomo (2002:263) in relation to the experience of Buddhist ordination in the West.

Yet, living alone was not a tension for all of the participants in this study. Some had saved money and ordained in retirement, and others had sufficient lay support. One ordained woman was able to live outside a monastic community and continue to uphold her vow of not handling money. Most also managed their financial issues in carefully considered ways. For example, although Padma (Gelug) handled money which was contrary to the vows she had taken, she tried to balance this by good financial management; always opting for the '2 for 1' deal in the supermarket, for example. Furthermore, not all those who lived alone actually wanted to live in monasteries, reinforcing Ploos Van Amstel's (2005:71) findings. One participant in the Tibetan tradition, who lived alone, did not think a full-time monastic environment for women was appropriate in a contemporary British setting, as the idea of a nunnery was currently 'not really in our psyche'. She felt that, despite a strong history of Christian monasticism for women in Britain, support was not necessarily forthcoming here amongst those in the Tibetan tradition for nunneries, perhaps as a result of an emphasis on lay practice, an issue I detailed in Chapter One. However, she did want to consider adapting the communal monastic model for contemporary Britain, and suggested it would perhaps be useful to have a 'home monastery' where those who lived alone could visit, but which could also accommodate those who preferred a more communal environment on a longer-term basis. However, another participant raised a further issue in relation to not wanting to live within a monastic community, stating:

It's too late now to be a community person, I'm too old.

Despite these testimonies, those women not living in communal settings still participated in forms of Buddhist 'home-making', albeit different to the physical construction of monasteries or retreat centres. For example, in all of the private houses that I visited, ordained women had constructed shrines and meditation rooms and kept images of the Buddha, *bodhisattvas* and their teachers in prominent positions; making Buddhism a key feature in their domestic space. One Triratna Order member explained that, although she lived alone, she had enjoyed participating in a ceremonial practice where shrines were ritually placed around a British city, marking out and creating a space of meditation and protection; arguably making Buddhism at 'home' in this specific location and increasing a sense of connection to place for those individuals participating in the ritual.

The Homeland

Whilst contributing to community and building a local 'home' for Buddhism is important to the ordained women in this study (albeit in various ways) their ideas about what might constitute their 'homeland', and the impact of this on their experience, was less immediately obvious. Tweed (2006:110) states that 'home-making does not end at the front door' and by formulating and holding an idea of a 'homeland' people decipher 'the boundaries of the territories that group members allocentrically imagine as *their* space'. In many of the interviews that I undertook, I asked my participants about their feelings about being 'British' and practicing Buddhism in Britain and also about their connections to the 'homeland' of their Buddhist traditions, for example particular monasteries in Asia, or countries such as Thailand or Japan. In analysing the various responses to these and other questions, I found that the 'borders' of 'homeland' for the participants in this study were difficult to draw with confidence, mainly because they differed for individual ordained women, even those within the same Buddhist traditions (Tweed, 2006:110).

For three participants, their idea of 'homeland' incorporated monasteries which were considered to be the 'home' centres of their Buddhist school and which were located outside the UK, in this case, in Tibet and Nepal. They described these monasteries as 'a spiritual home' and maintained connections to these places, including visiting and communicating with teachers and friends who were living

there. A further three ordained women who moved to locations outside the UK on a more permanent basis had the boundaries of their 'homeland' subsequently redrawn, and whilst they still maintained connections in Britain, they began to build communities in new locations. For others, their idea of 'homeland' was more localised to particular places within the British Isles, and this was particularly the case for participants ordained in Triratna. Given that Triratna was founded in the UK and looks to different Buddhist traditions in order to shape it's practice (Bluck, 2006:152), there appeared, for my participants, less of a sense of connection with a singular Buddhist 'homeland' outside Britain. This was particularly in comparison to some of those ordained in the Tibetan tradition, for example. Whilst Triratna Order members often referred to a strong sense of being part of a global movement (which I will discuss later), most were very connected and integrated into specific Buddhist centres and communities in Britain. In the main these were local to them, but they also included women-only retreat centres, of which there are currently two in Britain.

Whilst very few participants strongly affiliated with the term 'British', there were more who described a connection with a Scottish, Welsh, or English national identity (even if they were no longer living in these parts of the UK). A small minority described themselves as 'Western Buddhists' (particularly those in groups such as Triratna and Amida Trust which more commonly used this terminology), but this affiliation was far from universal even in these groups. Ceola (OBC) rejected this type of labelling altogether. Although Tweed (2006:110) is certainly clear that 'homeland' can be defined in many ways and can incorporate both large and small 'social spaces', Ceola's emphasis on rejecting fixed ideas of identity ultimately problematises the idea any sort of defined 'homeland':

> *I don't think of myself as a Westerner, I don't think of myself as an Easterner…*(I'm) *not getting too lost in my ideas of who I think I am.*

As I detailed in Chapter Four, of the twenty-five participants in this study, three were not British nationals, and although they had all spent considerable time in the UK, were originally from other European countries or North America. The boundaries of 'homeland' for these participants were therefore different again, and incorporated communities in Britain alongside those elsewhere where they may have been involved in Buddhism initially. These participants discussed some of the differences that they perceived when they arrived in Britain, including that they felt more 'direct and outspoken' than British-born Buddhists, which for some made

them self-conscious, and made them alter their own behaviour in response, at least for a time. These types of cultural connection were also recognised by the British-born participants, and occasionally some indicated that as a result of being having a British 'homeland' there was a way they 'did Buddhism'. One of the Triratna participants offered a light-hearted example that, on ordination retreat in the heat of Spain, the breakfast option was hot porridge. She wondered why they had not ever questioned this 'British way of doing things', even though it was perhaps not appropriate when removed from Britain's temperate climate. Whilst many of the participants might not feel a sense of affiliation with Britain as a 'homeland', when they travelled abroad they began to pay more attention to some of the differences between themselves and others, including other Buddhists. For example, as Kalinda (Tibetan) states:

> *I don't feel particularly English, but when I'm in* (Asia)*, I certainly don't feel Asian.*

What this range of attitudes indicates is that, amongst the participants of this study, there was no one sense of 'homeland' and, in actual fact trying to imagine one did not seem to be a particular concern for ordained women. When I asked about their most important identity markers, all prioritised 'Buddhist' over being English, Scottish, or Welsh (or even being female, which I discussed in Chapter Eight). For example, Vasundara (Triratna) explained:

> *I'm not really interested in nationality, I mean I'm fortunate that I've got a British passport, but I feel…Buddhist… is the primary thing and the second thing would be ordained.*

However, whilst 'Buddhist' might be the principal identity that ordained women wished to promote, not all necessarily described themselves as having strong affiliations with other Buddhists, particularly those outside the UK and their immediate communities. Therefore, it is also inaccurate to draw the lines of 'homeland' amongst this group simply around all Buddhist adherents. This is evidenced by the low number of participants who felt ongoing connections to monasteries or Buddhist communities outside of the UK, where they did not live. This may well be because few of the participants had ever been to the places where their Buddhist traditions originated, and few spoke Asian languages. For others, whilst I assumed that the 'homeland' of their Buddhist tradition would have a deep resonance; it was not always so. This was evident amongst participants from organisations that, although drawing heavily on one Buddhist tradition (such as the OBC with Japanese Sōtō Zen), were originally established in the UK and the USA.

Furthermore, some participants described significant cultural barriers that prevented them from feeling part of Buddhist communities in Asia. For example, one *sīladharā* felt that she had less of a personal connection to Thailand because of the attitudes she sometimes perceived from Buddhist teachers there about female ordination. Even beyond language and cultural barriers, Ailith (OBC) explained that, at least initially, she hadn't always felt connected to individuals in other OBC monasteries, temples, and priories, even when they spoke English or were the same nationality:

> *I still would say my connection is more with my Master and the community here, the community I train with.*

What was more important, therefore, was putting Buddhist teachings into practice and working together with other people in one's immediate location. Whilst I will show in the next section that ordained women certainly maintain important connections and undertake 'crossings' both within and outside Britain and these have a significant impact on their practice, there was no one unified sense of 'homeland' amongst the participants. Instead, for many, the boundaries of '*their* space' were relatively localised, giving greater priority to immediate communities of practice in Britain (Tweed, 2006:110).

Crossing

As Tweed (2006:123) specifies, 'religions…are not only about being in place, but also about moving across…they prescribe and proscribe different types of movements'. Whilst the practices of the ordained women in this study are shaped in various ways by the place in which they lived, they simultaneously undergo a number of different 'crossings' which have equal influence. Tweed (2006:123) highlights three types of 'crossing' ('terrestrial', 'corporeal' and 'cosmic') and, as I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, these can be seen as significant in shaping the experiences of the participants in this study.

Terrestrial Crossing

Tweed's first type of 'crossing' is 'terrestrial'. This describes the physical movements that people and their religious practices have made across the globe, and includes geographical relocation either permanently as a result of migration, or temporarily at times of pilgrimage (Tweed, 2006:125-127). It also includes technological crossings in terms of the passage of information in written or electronic materials (Tweed, 2006:126). As Tweed (2006:158) states, 'the religious never remain anywhere or anytime for long.' Amongst the ordained women in this study, a variety of 'terrestrial crossings' can be discerned. Indeed, one of the reasons why 'location' was so challenging to pin-down was because my participants regularly moved around, both within Britain and globally.[213] Some participants, whilst born in Britain, were introduced to Buddhism whilst travelling in Asia and then brought home their newly acquired interest. There were those who came into contact with Buddhism on British shores, but who relocated both within Britain and around the globe either prior to, or following, their ordinations. There were those who were not born in Britain, but who moved here because of their wish to take ordination in particular movements, with certain teachers, or to live in particular communities, and those who, although not British, came across Buddhist teachings whilst they were living in Britain and subsequently asked to ordain, then remaining in the UK. There were also those who travelled outside the UK to take particular ordinations (including *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination) and who subsequently returned home or relocated elsewhere. There were those who, although at one stage had lived in particular Buddhist communities in Britain, later moved away from them to live more independently.

A number of participants moved either in Britain or globally during the course of my fieldwork, and there were multiple *temporary* re-locations, including travelling to teach or connect with teachers, lay supporters and friends, work in particular projects around the world, visit places of Buddhist significance, see other ordained women (either within or without their traditions), go on retreat, go on holiday or to see family members. Some might be asked by their teachers to relocate to particular places (for example, monks in the OBC who are given the

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[213] This mobility was also noted by Shaw (2008:161) in her chapter on *sīladharā* in Britain and Ploos Van Amstel (2005:32) in relation to Western nuns in Tibetan schools. See also, Starkey (2014:221).

opportunity to manage the various temples or priories across the UK) and others might adopt a more itinerant lifestyle as part of their ordination vows, such as the *amitarya* in Amida Trust or those who had taken *anagārikā* precepts in Triratna. This large number of longer and shorter term 'terrestrial crossings' is evidence that ordained Buddhist women are far from geographically static, even if they continue to maintain connections with particular places or people.

As well as taking part in the physical movement themselves, a number of the participants in this study also moved religious *things* that they had purchased or been given outside of Britain. This could include artefacts, Buddhist statues, pictures, and robes and their patterns. As I discussed in Chapter Seven, some of the women in this study made their robes with cloth purchased or donated in Britain. Many of them used traditional patterns which had been brought to Britain by the founders of the Buddhist groups, or they used aspects of traditional patterns which then were adapted to suit the British climate. However, some of the participants in this study purchased their robes outside Britain and then brought them back to wear in the UK. These material items also make 'terrestrial crossings' and they are important in helping Buddhism to 'dwell' in ordained women's homes and communities. However, they also provide a physical connection between ordained women, people and communities living outside Britain.

A further example of 'terrestrial crossing' relates to the use of communication technology. Most of the women who participated in my study used the internet, particularly for email, thus connecting them to friends, family and teachers both inside and outside the UK. Some used social media such as Facebook, although this was far from universal. Whilst I did not seek to ascertain the attitudes of each of my participants in relation to this issue, one volunteered that she did not feel that Facebook was necessarily entirely compatible with her monastic vows. Therefore, in this instance, whilst she used the internet, her location was constrained to more traditional forms of communication in line with her interpretation of how she should put her precepts into practice.

Beyond these personal movements and the interactions of individual ordained women and their material items, it is important to acknowledge that Buddhist traditions and practices originally crossed terrestrial borders before emerging in the UK (Baumann, 2001:5). Ideas, practices, and lineages were transported with founding members and underwent a process of establishment in Britain, albeit in numerous ways as I discussed in Chapter One. Some Buddhist

groups in Britain remain strongly connected to the religious hierarchies and structures of power and influence within countries outside Britain (Bell, 2000a:397, Kay, 2004:37, Waterhouse, 1997:211). These connections have a significant impact on the lives of ordained women within these organisations. One example of this is within the Forest Sangha. As several scholars have indicated (and I discussed in Chapter One), the Forest Sangha remain strongly integrated within the Thai Forest Sangha monastic hierarchy and is connected to other groups of affiliated monasteries in the West. Permission was sought from Thailand before the order of *sīladharā* was initiated, and the limits of what *sīladharā* are permitted to do in terms of their ordination (particularly with regards the *bhikkhunī* ordination) is shaped in an ongoing way by the Thai Forest Sangha hierarchy (Angell, 2006a:99). This connection was made particularly clear after the Perth ordinations and the implementation of the Five Points.[214] It is vital, therefore, when examining ideas of location, not to overlook that most Buddhist groups in Britain are essentially part of multi-national organisations. Even for Triratna, which maintains no official connection with traditional Buddhist monastic hierarchies outside Britain, the idea of being part of a 'global Order' was a feature in the narratives of a number of participants. As Priyarati (Triratna) explains:

> *I love the Order, I love being part of this body that has as its symbol the thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, and being one of those arms that make the world a better place.*

What these examples show is that being ordained in Britain and having a strong sense of place does not automatically mean that you are permanently bonded to one geographical location. 'Terrestrial crossings' continue to exert a strong influence on the lives of the ordained women in this study; through them they learn new things, connect with old and new friends and teachers, and continue to be shaped by traditions, religious hierarchies and power structures based outside the British Isles. This is not to say that immediate community is less relevant, but that those communities are not entirely isolated within the borders of the British Isles.

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[214] I discussed the Perth ordinations and the Five Points in both Chapter One and Chapter Eight.

Corporeal Crossings

Beyond the type of crossing which incorporates geographic movement and migration, Tweed (2006:136) identifies that religious people also make 'corporeal crossings' which envisage 'the limits of embodied life, and traverse the transitions through the lifecycle'. For the participants in this study, the act of ordination itself is a 'corporeal crossing' where women (and men) make changes to their lives that typically separate them from their previous lifestyle and from others who have not taken this step.[215] Many of my participants highlighted that their ordination, the process leading up to it and the time following it, heralded significant changes to their lives and these were not always easy to navigate. Ordination is experienced as a significant moment of 'crossing' because it is viewed by women as an important mark of commitment. For many of those who take monastic vows, in theory it involves shutting the door to a mainstream existence of marriage, children, and career. For those participants who had not taken monastic vows there was still a strong sense of a significant 'corporeal crossing' in their lives following ordination, and this shift was not always easy to make. For example, several Triratna *dharmacharini* mentioned that, at least initially, there were difficulties in holding an ordination that was 'neither lay nor monastic' (Bluck, 2006:167,172, Vajragupta, 2010:108, Vishvapani, 2001:29-30). Ordination was a very significant moment, and several *dharmacharini* described undergoing a process of distancing themselves from their old lives, yet as they did not wear robes, some felt it was sometimes difficult to explain quickly to outsiders about their commitment. There were also issues to navigate with friends and family, including whether or not to continue sending Christmas cards. However, what the decision to ordain, and the fundamentals of change to be navigated in its wake, highlight is the importance of Buddhism to the ordained women in this study. Many explained that their approach to Buddhist practice was significantly changed following their ordination; typically giving a renewed focus and a sense of purpose.

However, within my participant's narratives, it was clear that there are numerous 'corporeal crossings' that occur, not simply those which occur during the ordination ceremony (Moksananda, 2010:95). Furthermore, some ordained women's feelings about ordination and their attitudes to practice and community

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[215] I discuss the experiences of the ordination process in Chapter Six and also explore the types of changes and separations that the *monastic* women in my study experience in Starkey (2014).

were also subject to change as the years progressed. One reason for this was as a result of the natural ageing process. As I discussed in Chapter Six, most of the participants in this study were aged over fifty at the time of interview, and sixteen women had been ordained for over twenty years. Those who participated in the initial building work that I discussed earlier in this chapter stated that they were now involved in community life in less physical ways, and that their practice had a different tenor as a result. The impact of the physical changes associated with the menopause were also mentioned, and the effect of this on practice and community life when women can 'change their character'. Yet, because many of the original female community members in Buddhist groups in Britain do not have any 'mothers' or 'grandmothers' to help them navigate these 'corporeal crossings', this created, as one participant explained, 'a very interesting challenge' and one that was in the process of being discussed.

A further 'crossing' that might be considered under the rubric of 'corporeal' was the leaving of a community or lineage, either to take an ordination that was not available, or to disrobe. Four participants had received *bhikkhunī* or *bhikṣuṇī* ordination outside the lineages that they originally had taken vows with, and one participant had disrobed.   These were each experienced as significant 'crossings', and impacted heavily on the experiences of the individuals concerned. Although those who had taken *bhikṣuṇī* ordination and continued to practice in Tibetan schools did not part from their original teachers, and indeed they had their support to take this step, those who took *bhikkhunī* ordination were making a life-altering crossing away from their former lineage. They did so not only because they felt that it was the right thing to do in developing personal practice, but also in order to support these opportunities for Buddhist women more generally. The participant who disrobed described a very significant crossing when she made the decision to give back her vows, and one that was fraught with emotion. Whilst she explained that she needed to make this decision because she was struggling to balance living independently with her nun's vows, she also described feeling 'a sense of failure' at the decision that she had made even though she felt that it was the correct one. It is clear then, that each of the various types of 'corporeal crossing', whether they involve taking ordination or disrobing, are formative experiences and ones that underscore the role of Buddhist practice in structuring the lives of the participants in this study.

Cosmic Crossings

The final type of crossing that Tweed (2006:150) identifies is 'cosmic'. By this he means crossings which incorporate the ideas and philosophies which envisage an 'ultimate horizon', intention or purpose (Tweed, 2006:151). Although this crossing might appear initially to have little relationship to an analysis of 'location', in fact through analysing what it is that motivates religious people, one can begin to understand the flow of ideas which contribute to shaping their lives.

The ordained women in this study are engaged in a multitude of 'cosmic crossings'. They each draw on different teachings and interpretations of Buddhist philosophies provided by the traditions that they ordained within. For example, those ordained in Amida Trust explained to me that, rather than starting from the premise that 'Buddha-nature' is inherent in all things as is common in other Mahāyāna traditions, they instead appreciate that all beings are '*bombu*' or foolish, and the ultimate aim of their practice is to 'understand our foolishness' (see also, Henry, 2008:88). Others, notably in Mahāyāna traditions, emphasised the *bodhisattva* vows that they had taken and the significance of their ultimate motivation to help liberate all sentient beings. Some emphasised how it was important to be part of a tradition which had a strong sense of lineage and to be involved in the passing on of ordination through the generations, connecting them to the Buddha and situating themselves in a wider religious 'family' (Chodron, 2001:33).[216] For example, Ailith (OBC) explains:

> *The idea that…the chain has never been broken; passed down, passed down, passed down. It's very nice, and it makes you feel like you are doing something worthwhile; it's not something that was just made up at some point in the 20th century.*

However, different views on lineage were certainly apparent in this study, particularly from those ordained in Triratna. Rather than relating to one particular lineage, several of the Triratna participants explained how they drew on 'a lineage of Buddhist practice' which incorporated a number of teachers and teachings, and which was pictorially represented in a 'refuge tree'. This tree included images of Sangharakshita, as well as the Buddha, *bodhisattvas* and *arahants*, and teachers from Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese and Theravāda schools, highlighting the range of influences that this Buddhist group draws on to shape what they do (Bluck,

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[216] For a brief explanation of the role of lineage in Buddhist traditions, see Bell (1991:57).

2006:162). The fact that the different Buddhist traditions emphasise different teachings, philosophical points, and practices provides a partial explanation of the diversity within the narratives of the participants of this study. The style of practice adopted by the Buddhist traditions themselves also plays a significant role in shaping the lives of followers. For example, if a Buddhist organisation defines itself as 'socially engaged' and deliberately sets out to be involved in social and community welfare projects; this shapes both the daily lives and the ultimate aims of its adherents. What Buddhist traditions require of ordained members, for example in their diet, work, daily schedule, dress, or how they should relate to other people (including in terms of sexual relationships) also has an impact.

The motivations given by individual ordained women, and the ways in which they understand and express their intentions, are also influential. I discussed this first in Chapters Five and Six, highlighting that a feeling of 'dissatisfaction', a desire to seek 'answers' to important questions, and the feeling of 'connection' with others were all strong motivations both for conversion and ordination. However, whilst for some participants these motivations remain, for others they shift and change over the ordained life, alongside the women's appreciation of the meanings of Buddhist teachings, which a number stated became 'deeper'.[217] I asked many of my participants why it was that they remained ordained, even when they were faced with obstacles. The most frequent reply was that the teachings they followed and the practices they adopted were seen as the best way that they could find to truly begin to understand birth, life, and death, and the nature of mind. It was this motivation which had one of the strongest influences on the direction of their lives.

A further 'cosmic crossing' relates to the types of connections that ordained women make with the work of historical teachers. One of the most formative influences on the women involved in this study was the historical Buddha, and his philosophy. Whilst this is perhaps not surprising, Waterhouse (1997:205) suggests (crediting Paul Williams) that a strong connection to the Buddha as well as other early historical figures and high-profile contemporary teachers may be influenced by Protestant ideology, and she noted this tendency amongst Buddhist practitioners in Britain. Certainly, founding teachers such as Dōgen were regularly mentioned by OBC monks, and other participants related to

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[217] The fact that one's relationship with ordination (and understanding of Buddhist teachings) might change after years being ordained was noted by Goswell (1988:3/24) amongst monks and *sīladharā* in the Forest Sangha.

contemporary teachers such as the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa, and Ajahn Chah. Many participants also mentioned the influence of particular teachers that were not within the traditions they ordained within. Interestingly, although none of the participants had ever been ordained or even officially connected to the Community of Interbeing, a number mentioned the influence of Thích Nhất Hạnh, principally because it was felt that his writing expressed important Buddhist principles clearly in English.

What these 'cosmic crossings' indicate is that the lives of ordained Buddhist women in Britain are variously formed by a number of different ideas, teachings, principles, and philosophies. What appears particularly important are the ultimate motivations that women have for following an ordained Buddhist path, as these have a significant impact on the direction of their lives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that there are a number of significant issues relating to 'location' which conjoin to influence the lives of ordained women in Britain. The most significant of these include: the changes made to ordination practices in various Buddhist groups as they became established in Britain; the living arrangements and family circumstances of individual ordained women; the physical creation of spaces for Buddhist practice; and the movement of Buddhist ideas, philosophies, lineages, and practices to Britain from elsewhere.

Whilst these are certainly not the only examples of 'crossing and dwelling' that affect the participants in this study, they do provide a clear indication that the connections, motivations, and ideas that influence ordained women in Britain are multi-faceted. 'Location' is complex here, as although there are some palpable changes made to ordained women's Buddhist practice that have been shaped as a result of living in particular geographic locations in contemporary Britain, there are also numerous other ideas and connections, many of which are rooted in wider Buddhist traditions, philosophies, hierarchies, and practices which also play a role. Recognition of the complex factors which shape the lives of ordained Buddhist women contributes to the academic discussion about how Buddhism manifests on British shores.

However, the evidence analysed in this chapter can be used to stress the importance of immediate Buddhist communities in ordained women's lives, particularly those situated in various locations across Britain. This is not to say that community relationships do not become strained to the point of breaking, or that all ordained women in Britain relate to the idea of community in the same way, but only that having support, connecting with others, and belonging to particular groups remained a recurring theme in the narratives that I collected. In addition, for those participants who lived alone and without financial, practical, or emotional support from wider Buddhist communities, the idea of community remains notable because of its palpable absence.

Yet, I have shown that, whilst the 'dwelling' of Buddhism in Britain is important to the ordained women in this study, its influence is complemented by a number of 'crossings' that they make, including physically across the globe. I follow Kay (2004:37) in emphasising the role of 'cross cultural contexts' in shaping the way that Buddhism is experienced on British shores, and echo the importance that Bell (1991:43) gives to the impact of 'intricate patterns of exchange'. In many ways, I have given more attention to aspects of 'dwelling' rather than 'crossing' in this chapter, and this is because an analysis of the British location inspired my initial research question. However, I have also highlighted a number of 'crossings' of a range of types and I argue that an analysis of ordained women's experiences should not be conducted without cognisance of them. By enlarging my initial research question to include these 'crossings', it has been possible to present a holistic picture of many of the formative issues which shape the experiences of ordained Buddhist women in contemporary Britain.

Whilst Tweed's work was not constructed as a means to investigate 'location' per se, it provides a useful general framework that enables a discussion of the global connections of religions and religious people, as well as simultaneously allowing for an examination of the intricacies of particular places. Knott (2009:413,418) maintains that Tweed's approach promotes 'a series of interconnected tropes to think with, and indeed travel and observe with', which have particular applicability for 'diasporic religions'. Indeed, using the framework of 'crossing and dwelling' to structure the data from this study has enabled an analysis that reflects these myriad influences on ordained women's practices in Britain, and allows them to be mapped together as a whole, allowing for the possibility of flexibility and change.

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However, not all of Tweed's 'chronotopes' were equally applicable for the data in this study. Future research might focus more attention on ideas in relation to 'the cosmos', including ordained women's attitudes to Buddhist concepts such as *karma* or re-birth, for example. Furthermore, Tweed does not give sufficient emphasis to the tensions that might arise between 'crossing' and 'dwelling' and these are certainly present in this sample, particularly in relation to gender equality or inequality and the ways that the British context might constrain female ordination. This tension was certainly very significant for some ordained women, and effectively changed the trajectory of their lives as they made decisions to leave organisations they were previously very strongly committed to.

Conclusion

Introduction

The concluding chapter of the thesis will be divided into four sections. In the first, I reflect on my achievement of the research aims which I set out in the introduction and I will evaluate the effectiveness of my approach, particularly my adoption of Knott's (1995) 'commitment to process rather than results alone'.   In the second section, I will discuss the conclusions of my study, focusing on a summary of the answers to the three primary research questions I have considered throughout the thesis. I will then explore a number of key overarching themes drawn from this research and provide an assessment of their implications for wider scholarship, particularly for the study of Buddhism in Britain. In the third section of this chapter, I will analyse the limitations of this research and some of the challenges I faced. Finally, I will identify the questions for future research that this study has provoked.

'A Commitment to Process': Achieving the Aims of this Study

In the introduction, I detailed the aims of this research project and their rationale. I stated that my intention was to conduct 'a cross-tradition study of ordained Buddhist women in Britain in order to investigate their lives, experiences, and perspectives in a dedicated and focused way'. In doing so, my aim was to 'generate a detailed and current picture of Buddhist ordination for women in contemporary Britain, incorporating multiple Buddhist groups and traditions', thus broadening and deepening the existing scholarship. I established three principal questions to structure my research and, in the next section, I will summarise my answers to these specific questions. In order to gather the necessary data, I adopted qualitative ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observations.

Over the course of this study, I worked with twenty-five participants from seven different Buddhist groups, all of whom either lived or had spent substantial time in England, Scotland, or Wales. None of my participants were brought up with Buddhism as the religion practiced within their families and all had made the

decision to convert in adulthood. In order to present and analyse the narratives of ordained women, I used a thematic analysis of key issues, scrutinising a number of quotations from my participants alongside my observations drawn from fieldwork. Although my aim has been to provide a critical analysis of my participant's narratives, I have been keen to share, as far as possible, their precise words as they were typically articulate and eloquent. In addition, I used two alternative analytical tools, namely the perceptual maps in Chapter Eight and the theoretical framework provided by Tweed (2006) in Chapter Nine. These complemented the thematic approach by allowing me to apply an increased level of anonymity when discussing controversial issues and helped me to adopt a broad perspective in relation to the data analysis.

As I identified in Chapter Four, my approach to this research and to my participants has been driven by 'a commitment to process, rather than results alone' (Knott, 1995:209). What was important to me from the very start of this project was engaging closely with my participants. This was relevant not only when I was undertaking my fieldwork and gathering data, but again latterly as I began to write the thesis. I sought some of my participant's views on my written work, sending some of them excerpts of chapters for checking and comment. Certain participants read full chapters, particularly Ceola (OBC), who became a key interlocutor at the analysis and writing stage, both by e-mail and in person. Of course, engaging with some of my participants in this way was about improving the accuracy of my work, but it was also more than this. A number of my participants, particularly those who lived alone, were interested in learning about the other ordained women in Britain and I was often asked questions about how other participants approached certain issues, especially in relation to daily living and following the precepts. In addition, some expressed a desire to read the thesis in its entirety in order to further their own knowledge. I stated in Chapter Four that I was keen for this research to 'make a difference' and whilst the thesis is a contribution to academic knowledge as I discuss further in this chapter, it is also has the potential to deepen Buddhist groups understanding of themselves and others (Phillips, 1995:32).

From the beginning of my research, I wanted to build respectful relationships with my participants that would last beyond the time-limits of this study and into future research projects. As I discussed in Chapter Four, developing a level of trust and engaging in on-going dialogue with many of my research participants was, in addition, an ethical consideration. I was concerned that some of my participants might be potentially identifiable as there are low numbers of ordained women in

certain Buddhist groups and I felt it was important to ascertain that they were comfortable in the way that they were being involved and represented. I took the idea of 'a commitment to process' to heart and although I didn't spend an extended period of time with each of my participants, I was committed to engaging deeply with the narratives that they offered and establishing the most appropriate ways to represent and critically analyse them.

Working in this way, however, was not always easy. I left information out of the thesis when I thought it might compromise anonymity even though it would have added to the discussion. I remained concerned throughout about how I presented and evaluated certain controversial issues, such as the implementation of the Five Points within the Forest Sangha. In addition, working more closely with a select number of participants had the potential to bias my analysis towards their perspective. As a result, at times I felt I had to engage in a balancing act between critical analysis and representation, a point I will discuss later in more detail, particularly in relation to my analysis of gender equality and inequality in Buddhist groups. Furthermore, a number of my participants challenged the views that I held and the ways that I had interpreted their testimonies, both during the interviews and in reading final drafts of the thesis. This was most notable in relation to the issue of 'empowerment' which I discussed in Chapter Four, as well as my adoption of the 'conventional/ultimate' binary detailed in Chapter Seven. However, although this level of critical engagement with my work was certainly daunting at times, an on-going interaction with articulate informants, without doubt, deepened my analysis.

Whilst I will discuss in more detail the limitations of this study and my approach later in this chapter, in general terms both the methods and the 'commitment to process' were effective in achieving the aims as I established them. My intention was to investigate, in detail and with focus, the lives and experiences of ordained women across different Buddhist traditions and using in-depth interviews and observations certainly enabled this. In addition, working closely with some of my participants beyond the primary fieldwork stage allowed me to garner a more comprehensive appreciation of their perspectives and deepen the comparative element of the study which was particularly valuable when I had not spent an extended period of time living with each of them.

I will now discuss the conclusions made in this study, focusing initially on my three primary research questions, before illuminating the key themes within this

thesis and providing an assessment of their implications in terms of wider scholarship.

Research Conclusions and Implications

My first research question was; 'why do women in Britain, in different Buddhist groups, choose to take Buddhist ordination, and what does ordination mean in this context?' In Chapter Five, I focused on my participants experiences of 'conversion' and here I argued that although an initial engagement with Buddhist groups might not automatically lead to a request for ordination, there were similarities in the ways my participants narrated their motivations for initial attraction to Buddhism and their later wish for ordination. In both Chapters Five and Six, I divided the rationales for conversion and ordination into three tropes: dissatisfaction, answers, and connection. Using this typology, and conducting a comparative analysis with other studies based in Britain and beyond, in Chapter Six I argued that a typical rationale given for ordination amongst the participants in this study was the aspiration to prioritise Buddhist practice in one's life and to make it a primary focus of activity and attention. Buddhist teachings and practices were seen as able to provide reasonable answers to help deal with a sense of dissatisfaction in life, whether this was experienced as acute or rather more nebulous. For Buddhist women in Britain, ordination is a means to investigate religious teachings deeply and a path to help focus the mind which is reflected in the ways in which they typically related to their various dress practices.

However, the aspiration for ordination amongst the participants in this study was not solely driven by the desire to concentrate on religious practice but was also related to a sense of connection with Buddhist communities. Indeed, being drawn to these communities and wanting to contribute to them were often repeated ideas amongst participants. In summary, therefore, and in answer to my first research question, ordination in this context means an opportunity to concentrate on Buddhist teachings and practices, to belong to and contribute to the development of particular Buddhist communities in Britain, and to enable these to be the hub of one's life. Of course, there are significant differences in the ways in which some participants in this study approached ordination and it is clear that it does have varying implications depending on which Buddhist group one is affiliated with. For example, Triratna *dharmacharini* do not have to practice celibacy and have

flexibility in terms of their family circumstances, living situation, and career choices. However, the divisions between the participants in this study should not be seen as solely drawn on organisational lines and I have shown that even some of those who had taken monastic ordinations lived alone or had responsibilities for children and families. Furthermore, whilst my participants readily narrated their initial rationales for ordination, it was clear from some that what it means at the start is not necessarily what it means subsequently. Indeed, there are some determinative factors, such as perceived difficulties in relation to gender inequality within Buddhist groups which do alter some women's attitudes to ordination, either propelling them to seek *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination outside their lineage, choosing to live outside monastic communities, or feeling no other option but to disrobe. For many participants, therefore, the meaning of ordination in this context is by no means static.

Linked to this idea, my second research question was 'how do ordained Buddhist women in Britain relate to ideas of gender equality and feminism?' I dedicated Chapter Eight to answering this and my chief argument was that ordained Buddhist women in Britain hold a complex plurality of perspectives on gender equality and feminism that cannot be easily summarised into one universally applicable response. Through a selection of perceptual maps and a complementary thematic analysis, I showed that there were some participants who self-define as feminist and who are concerned about the perceived gender inequality within their Buddhist traditions and, furthermore, take action to counter this. However, there were others who rejected the 'feminist' label entirely and who felt, for various reasons, that a prevailing concern with gender inequality did not shape their lives. For some, this was because they perceived that they were given complete equality of opportunity within their Buddhist groups, but for others it was because they preferred to commit to a form of Buddhist practice within certain communities that they respected even if they did not offer parity between women and men. For these participants, organically developed community relationships between men and women were more significant than the implementation of institutional gender equality. However, both feminism and gender equality are controversial and contested subjects for the participants within this study, including for those who had ordained within traditions which offered institutional equality between men and women. In answer to my research question, amongst the ordained Buddhist women involved in this study there are a range of attitudes towards

feminism and gender equality that can be discerned and an adequate representation of these is imperative in any scholarly analysis.

My final research question, 'how does the British location influence women's experience of Buddhist ordination', received dedicated attention in Chapter Nine but remained a point of analysis throughout the thesis. This occurred in Chapter Six as part of my comparative analysis of motivation for ordination in different contexts and in Chapter Seven in relation to Buddhist dress and discipline. I argued that Buddhist dress (including robes, hair-style, and name-changing) was one way through which to put Buddhist teachings in to action. However, approaches to dress amongst my participants were shaped by the regulations and conventions of their various Buddhist groups, alongside both their personal attitudes and their relationship to the British location, as some participants made adaptations to their dress to suit their environment, living situation, and circumstances.

However, key to the discussion in Chapter Nine was the idea that in relation to the practices of ordained women across the different Buddhist groups considered in this study, defining and subsequently assessing the impact of 'the British location' is a highly complex undertaking. As a result, this led me to broaden my initial research question. For the participants in this study, their experiences of ordination are shaped by multiple and inter-related factors, some of which could be seen to stem from their geographical location in England, Scotland, or Wales and some of which are drawn from outside, including the complex histories and hierarchies of their adopted Buddhist lineages and their personal movements around the globe. I was able to analyse these issues and the relationships between them using a framework drawn from Tweed (2006). However, despite the range of factors which contribute to shaping the practices of ordained Buddhist women in contemporary Britain, the significance of the immediate community, and the support (or lack of) that the participants in this study experience, appears crucial. Although community relationships shift and change and not all of the participants across the different Buddhist groups related to the idea of community in exactly the same way, the importance of having support, connecting with like-minded others, and contributing to particular Buddhist groups remain formative tropes.

Whilst these brief summaries indicate the answers to the three principal research questions, it remains necessary to highlight, in addition, some of the key overarching and inter-connected themes that arise in my research and then discuss the implications of these for wider scholarship. One of the most prominent and

recurring themes within this study was the level of diversity between my participants. This was notable in their practices, attitudes, and perspectives including to Buddhist discipline. Although this could be attributed to the differences in approach fostered within the various Buddhist schools that my participants ordained within, plurality was also noted within groupings of participants drawn from the same tradition. Whilst this mirrors a point made earlier by Ploos Van Amstel (2005:29, 38) in relation to the range of attitudes and experiences discernible between Western women ordained in Tibetan traditions in various countries, it is vital to highlight and emphasise this plurality amongst ordained Buddhist women in Britain, across different Buddhist groups. This reinforces the idea, as I recognised early and mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, that without further qualification the term 'ordination' or 'ordained Buddhist woman' appears insufficient to reflect the level of variation in women's practices, attitudes, and situations as they have arisen in the contemporary British location. Scholars should therefore be wary of homogenising 'ordained Buddhist women' in this context. Making uncritical assumptions about their experiences and perspectives is highly problematic even within one relatively small geographical area and between a sample of women who have all converted to Buddhism in adulthood and who arguably have similar ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

This is not to say, however, that there is no influence on ordained women's practices that could be related to their geographical and cultural location, but to distil this into a singular picture is imprecise and does not reflect the range of experiences noted. This is particularly the case in relation to ordained women's attitudes to gender equality and feminism. Evidence from this study challenges any singular or simplistic representation of Western women who have taken Buddhist ordination in relation to this issue. Indeed, I have shown that not only is it important to investigate deeply ordained women's attitudes to gender equality and feminism to allow for a range of views and to challenge any assumptions or preconceptions that might be held, but also to see ordained Buddhist women's practices in the Britain beyond the prism of these issues. Whilst gender equality in Buddhist traditions is, and has been, of significance to Buddhist women and their groups including in Britain, it is not the sole issue of consideration in the way that they narrate their lives, and this needs to be reflected in scholarship. Whilst Salgado (2013) has certainly indicated this in her analysis of attitudes held within certain groups of non-Western (or 'non-globalatinized' women), evidence from this

study highlights that it is vital to see beyond this prism in the lives of some Western ordained Buddhist women too.

Notwithstanding this, I have indicated throughout the thesis that there are some points of comparison that can be made between ordained women in this context. Yet, in overall terms, evidence from this study supports the assertion made in wider scholarship that Buddhism in Britain is a complex and multifaceted phenomena which needs much nuance in its analysis. The fact that there are divisions in ordained women's experiences even within Buddhist groups provides further evidence for rejecting the use of a 'spectrum of adaptation' at the group level, supporting the position taken by Bluck (2006:189) and Waterhouse (1997:26). Although, as I detailed in Chapter One, recognition of plurality in Buddhist practice in Britain has been highlighted by a number of other scholars, this study is an original contribution to knowledge precisely because of its specific focus on a comparison of ordained women across different Buddhist groups in one primary geographical setting.

This study provides further evidence that as Buddhism has moved around the globe, there are intricate webs of influences and connections that shape the way it is manifest in different countries. However, it is remarkably difficult to construct a precise model or a framework that is able to encapsulate 'British Buddhism' as a singular entity, as Bluck (2006:185), amongst others, highlight. Although I am wary of making too bold a statement in relation to non-ordained Buddhist practitioners in Britain as they have not been the focus of this study, I suggest that these intricate webs of influence operate differently for those who are ordained. This is because when one has taken ordination, even if it might be conceptualised differently amongst different Buddhist groups, it remains a significant life-decision and one that connects an individual in a specific way to history, tradition, hierarchy and community. Indeed, feeling part of a 'stream of blessings' and allied to a community or tradition following ordination was a key facet of a number of my participants narratives. This study, therefore, illuminates the multiple ways in which Buddhist practices are constructed, interpreted, and lived in a contemporary context. As their numbers grow (particularly, for example in Triratna, where ordained men and women are approaching numerical parity), it is all the more vital to draw increased attention to a form of dedicated Buddhist practice that exists within Buddhist groups in Britain.

For the ordained women in this study, dedication to Buddhism is a defining feature of their lives and it is typically amongst the most important commitments that they have made. One facet of this commitment is the relationship that ordained women have with specific Buddhist communities in Britain. Although 'community' is experienced in different ways, I have shown that ordained Buddhist women are not only inspired by their private spiritual questions and concerns but also by their relationships to Buddhist communities and groups. The idea of community is important even in its absence for those who live alone and who might have limited financial and emotional support from Buddhist groups. Relationships within Buddhist communities are also not without tension or subject to change but an important point to note from this study is the salience of immediate communities in the lives of ordained women in Britain. This highlights that, even in a world that is highly connected as a result of travel and technology, the immediate people and places around you have a formative role in relation to religious practice. For the participants in this study, relationships with others attracted them to Buddhism and inspired them to ask for ordination. Their connections (or lack of) to specific communities have a direct impact on their lives and the way that they interpret their religion in this context. Ultimately, this underlines the significance of religious practices and communities within the contemporary British setting.

Research Limitations and Challenges

One limitation of this study is directly connected to my use of qualitative research methods. Whilst interviewing and participant observation were, on balance, the most appropriate ways in which to answer the research questions I established, it is likely that their use contributed to the attainment of particular results. Had I adopted a quantitative approach alongside the qualitative methods (using a survey, for example) I may have been better able to appreciate the broader patterns and points of similarity in relation to the backgrounds of ordained women and their experiences and practices in contemporary Britain. It is perhaps not wholly surprising that a key finding of a qualitative study relates to a level of diversity in the narratives of participants given the quantity and depth of data amassed.

Furthermore, although recognising the plurality between ordained Buddhist women in the contemporary British context is significant in this study, reflecting adequately the range of experiences and circumstances of my participants was also somewhat of a constraint. Given that this study incorporated participants from seven Buddhist groups, it has been an on-going challenge to represent each with enough depth. On reflection, I am certainly more comfortable analysing some Buddhist groups than others, either because I had more participants from within them or because I had engaged repeatedly with certain interlocutors. Although broadening out my study to include several participants who no longer lived in Britain gave a useful perspective on certain features of Buddhism in this context, this expansion further stretched the original parameters of the research. In addition, whilst I worked with participants who were living, in the main, in England, Scotland, and Wales, I did not seek to get a balanced representation from each of these places. As a result, I had more participants from England and this did not enable a detailed exploration of any potential differences in relation to female ordination in the Buddhist groups which have arisen within different parts of the UK.

However, whilst there may be some loss of ethnographic descriptive detail, I was not trying to present a full and comprehensive history of each of the Buddhist groups within which my participants had taken ordination. I rooted my analysis, consciously, in the narratives of each of the participants in my study because my aim was to investigate *their* perspectives in depth. My intention was always to conduct a study that looked at female ordination through the lens of practitioners within different groups, providing both critical detail and also an overview of the current situation for ordained Buddhist women in Britain. Consequently, I ensured that, in each of the chapters, participants drawn from the various groups were given similar levels of attention.

Yet, at times, I felt a tension between the two tasks of representation and social critique. In writing this thesis, I was careful to highlight the areas where my participants differed in opinion without siding with one over another. However, in relation to issues of gender inequality, in my attempt to balance and reflect the range of perspectives, I could be perceived as being an apologist for the negative treatment of women in certain Buddhist groups. It is almost too easy to be positioned as either 'conservative' or 'radical' in relation to the issue of gender equality in Buddhist traditions, yet this over simplifies a complex issue. Throughout the thesis, I have not shied away from the controversial issues facing

ordained women in Buddhist groups in Britain nor have I attempted to hide those participants who have been critical about Buddhist hierarchies. However, I am conscious that a position of criticism in relation to Buddhist hierarchy and extant power relationships was not assumed by all of my participants and that my role as a researcher is to allow each of these perspectives enough space in the analysis. Highlighting that there are plural views held by my participants in relation to feminism and gender equality is a key contribution of this research and one that should not be occluded by a desire to conduct a social critique. This does not mean that I have a lack of appreciation of the difficulties faced by some of the participants in this study, but only that I was driven by my primary intention to reflect the range of attitudes present between ordained Buddhist women in Britain.

Tweed (2006:14) notes that all theories and scholarly approaches are subject to 'blind-spots'; points that cannot be seen due to a researchers own position and perspective. In reflecting on the approach I took to this thesis, I questioned on more than one occasion whether the significant issues that I was highlighting would be the same if my participants narrated their own life-stories without being directed by my research questions. I felt this acutely in relation to my interest in Buddhist dress. As the various dress practices followed by my participants were often very different to the ones I adopt myself, my interest was piqued and dress subsequently became a key element of this study. However, in my interviewing I was more interested in the practical aspects of dress and how it might be shaped by the British location. As a result, I did not interpret my data in line with a more theoretical approach, including in relation to issues of the body and embodiment which might have been a fruitful trajectory of analysis. Furthermore, as I highlighted in Chapter Seven, not all of my participants felt any great connection to dress, even if it consisted of traditional monastic robes, a Buddhist name, and tonsure. Therefore, my own interest was likely to have driven the attention to this issue in the thesis.

There were several additional issues that I did not investigate in any depth and which were likely to have more salience for my participants than I was able to reflect in my analysis. For example, I did not delve deeply into experiences of certain aspects of Buddhist practice including meditation, chanting or ritual and I did not investigate interpretations of certain Buddhist philosophical ideas such as *kamma/karma* which were indeed mentioned by some participants. Although some of my participants discussed what they referred to as past-life experiences, the constraints of my own research agenda inhibited me from exploring this further.

During my analysis of interview transcriptions, I noted that a number of my participants had been on long retreats, sometimes over a year in length and occasionally alone, and I did not seek to ascertain in any depth their experiences in this area. In addition, I spent little time unravelling their attitudes to the specific Buddhist precepts that they had taken, beyond what I explored in relation to the discipline of dress. What this list of 'blind-spots' emphasises is that, whilst I have given one perspective on the lives of this sample of ordained women in Britain, there are undoubtedly other issues that could also feature in a study of their experiences. Yet, whilst my own concerns inevitably shaped my research design, most participants were quite willing to question the assumptions that I brought to the research either during the interviews or whilst reading chapter excerpts. Therefore, whilst there will always be aspects of the data which remain under-investigated, in working closely and repeatedly with participants, the boundaries of my own research agenda were transformed, within the limitations of a doctoral study.

Areas of Future Research

As I progressed through the analysis and writing of this thesis, a number of additional questions were provoked that I was unable to answer either as a result of the established parameters of my study or due to my approach to participant sampling. Although I indicated some of these in the thesis chapters, I will draw on the most prescient here. In this study, I deliberately set out to speak only to women because I wanted to address what I perceived was a gap in scholarly knowledge. Whilst this decision remains valid for the aims of this research, a future study which included a cross-section of male and female ordained practitioners across the various Buddhist groups in Britain would be valuable. In conjunction with this, interviewing non-ordained practitioners from different traditions about their attitudes to ordination would deepen scholarly understanding of its role and place in this context. Given that the way 'community' is typically understood by the participants in this study incorporating ordained and lay men and women, it would have been beneficial to investigate these broader perspectives on the issue of ordination. Furthermore, whilst I included one participant who was no longer ordained and this provided a useful view on some of the challenges facing ordained Buddhist women in Britain, I did not draw much attention to her experiences of

giving back her ordination vows. Although the participants in this study were certainly dedicated to Buddhist teachings it does not mean that all will stay ordained throughout their lives, and indeed, within some groups (such as the Forest Sangha, particularly since 2009/10) there have been a number of ordained women that have left. Therefore giving increased attention to their experiences is a potentially fruitful area of future research in relation to an investigation of the challenges relating to ordination in this context. In addition, for those participants who were in relationships at the time of their ordination, it would be interesting to investigate if, and how, Buddhist ordination affected their partner or spouse. The impact of parental ordination on children would also be a thought-provoking area to explore.

Although I chose to focus on participants who had converted to Buddhism and who were, in the main, white British or white European in ethnic origin, over the course of this study, I became aware of other ordained women in Britain who were neither converts nor 'white British', for example the nuns associated with the Fo Guang Shan temple in London. Whilst I have incorporated a range of Buddhist groups in this study which reflect some of the more prominent and also some of the smaller movements, my sampling does little to challenge the dominant scholarly interest in 'white Buddhists' in Britain (Bluck, 2006:16). Therefore, a vital future area of research would be on those ordained women who did not choose to convert to Buddhism in adulthood and who are not ethnically 'white British'. This would enable a thoroughly comprehensive picture of female ordination in the contemporary British context and could be compared and contrasted to the picture which I have presented here. It might also allow for a comparative examination of identity, which has been beyond the scope of this study to conduct.

Finally, whilst I have mentioned the salience of belonging and contributing to a community in various places throughout this thesis, it has not been within the scope of this study to examine this issue in more depth. The significance of community and belonging was not a key focus of the interview questions, but was drawn out of my data subsequently. Therefore, in order to reflect in a more focused way on this issue, it would be necessary to return to participants and ask supplementary questions. This could also be complemented by an examination of the idea of community amongst Buddhists in Britain more generally, looking beyond the attitudes of ordained women. Questions could be raised as to whether there are differences between lay and ordained practitioners in their perspectives on the notion of community and furthermore how the attitudes of Buddhists in Britain

might compare with those drawn from other religious traditions in the same context. This would allow for a detailed understanding of the role of community and belonging and enable Buddhist practitioners to be situated within the wider religious landscape of contemporary Britain.

Overall, whilst there are research themes that would benefit from further investigation in future, in this study I have provided a unique window onto the lives of ordained Buddhist women in Britain. I have made visible a number of very strongly dedicated practitioners who have committed to following Buddhist teachings and practices and supporting the development of Buddhist communities. At a time where non-ordained practitioners are arguably most prevalent within many Buddhist groups in Britain and subsequently they receive a larger proportion of academic attention, a focused examination of the lives and perspectives of ordained women provides a useful counter-balance. As a result, this study contributes to a holistic picture of the variety of religious trajectories followed within Buddhist groups in contemporary Britain and accentuates the roles that women play in fostering the growth of Buddhist practice in this context.

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Appendix

Appendix One: Interview Dates

The following table contains a list of initial interview dates. It does not include dates of any subsequent contact I had with participants, including through email.

Name	Date of Interview
Siladakini	29th September 2011
Himavaddhi	29th September 2011
Dalha	22nd October 2011 and 25th February 2012
Rajana	5th November 2011
Ailith	14th November 2011
Ceola	15th November 2011
Edwina	15th November 2011
Elizabeth	26th November 2011
Dhatri	15th December 2011
Aarya	15th December 2011
Priyarati	11th January 2012
Sumitra	27th January 2012
Vasundara	3rd February 2012
Charumati	8th February 2012
Chandrakala	8th February 2012
Alura	10th February 2012
Tanirika	15th February 2012
Kalinda	24th February 2012
Delia	9th March 2012
Prasanna	21st March 2012
Suvanna	28th March 2012
Dhannadipa	1st April 2012,
Dolma	4th April 2012
Padma	4th May 2012
Lobsang	21st July 2012

Appendix Two: Interview Schedule

1. Personal Story:
    a. How did you come to Buddhism? What drew you?
    b. What was your religious background?
    c. Were you involved with other Buddhist groups before this one?
2. Ordination History and Motivation
    a. Why ordain? What motivated you to take this step? What does it mean to you?
    b. How long have you been ordained?
    c. What process did you have to go through? Training, ceremony, different levels? How did you feel?
    d. What does an average day look like?
    e. What motivates you?
3. Changes following ordination: Dress, including hair and name
    a. What changes did you make on ordination in terms of your appearance and name?
    b. How did it feel making these changes? What was the process you went through? What is your attitude to appearance changes following ordination?
    c. Who chose your Buddhist name, and why?
    d. What is your attitude to the role of discipline in your religious practice?
4. Gender
    a. What are the issues facing ordained British Buddhist women today, including in your tradition?
    b. Is gender equality important to you?
    c. Do you consider yourself a feminist? Is feminism important to you?
    d. How do you respond to parts of Buddhist texts which might not be positive for women?
    e. What is your attitude to the issues facing women in terms of *bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī* ordination?
    f. Do you network with other Buddhist women? Why? What does this give you?
    g. Do you feel you have a voice in your order? Is this important?
5. Location
    a. Please tell me a little about the place where you live and practice. Do you mainly practice in the same place?
    b. What does where you live mean to your practice? Would your practice be different if you were somewhere else?
    c. What relationship do you have to the 'home' of your Buddhist tradition?
    d. Do you think there is such a thing as 'British Buddhism'? If so, what does it look like?