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Transculturation of Tibetan Buddhism: adoption or adaption?

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ABSTRACT

This monograph analyzes the formation of translocal Tibetan Buddhism from the viewpoint of convert Tibetan Buddhist organizations and communities. The study addresses the boundaries and the effect of "culture", and the changing form and function of religion from pre-modern to postmodern society, as well as the role of information and communication technologies in this process. The literature review describes the position of Tibetan Buddhism in the modern world by mapping the global religious landscape and the historical development of the spiritual from pre-modernity to postmodernity. The theoretical frameworks informing the analysis in this study are the concepts of transculturality (Welsch, 1999) and transculturation (Rogers, 2006). The study also highlights the role of mediated communication, allowing for translocal and glocal manifestations of small narratives.

The empirical basis of this monograph is based on the analysis of three data-sets. The first is seven years of forum discussions among the students and Elders of a study program, offered by FPMT (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition), an organization offering teachings in Tibetan Buddhism for converts around the world. The second data-set is sixteen semi-structured interviews with the members of two Tibetan Buddhist groups in Helsinki, Finland (Tara Liberation (FPMT) and Danakosha. The third data-set is five interviews with monks, who received a traditional Tibetan Buddhist education and now work around the world, teaching (predominantly) Western followers. The findings are structured into five thematic clusters and presented in opposition to common assumptions, claimed in the literature on Buddhism in the West. The analysis challenges the understanding of cultural factors and regional influences as imperative, demonstrating contingency of culture and identity and fluidity of cultural flows of meanings and physical elements. The research highlights the importance of focusing on the narratives and practices of specific organizations and lineages, rather than on conceptual impositions, like "Western Buddhism" or "American Vajrayana", because the Buddhist formations are confined by their specific meanings and operate on the global level. The study includes predictions about possible future developments of Tibetan Buddhism and expresses some recommendations for its stake holders.

Keywords: transculturality, transculturation, Tibetan Buddhism, postmodern religion, social constructionism

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Tämä tutkimus tarkastelee translokaalin tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden muodostumista kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen keskipisteenä ovat tiibetinbuddhalaiset järjestöt ja yhteisöt, jotka suuntaavat toimintansa pääsääntöisesti uusille käännynnäisille. Tutkimus käsittelee kulttuurin käsitteen rajoja ja siihen liitettyjä oletettuja vaikutuksia. Tutkimus ottaa kantaa myös uskonnon muuttuviin muotoihin ja tarkoituksiin eri aikoina sekä tieto- ja viestintätekniikan rooliin kääntymisprosessissa. Kirjallisuuskatsaus kartoittaa nykymaailman uskonnollista maisemaa ja hengellisyyden kehittymistä, erityisesti tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden asemaa ja historiaa. Teoreettisina kehyksinä toimivat transkulttuurisuuden ja transkulturaation käsitteet (Roger, 2006; Welsch, 1999). Tutkimuksessa korostetaan teknologiavälitteisen viestinnän merkitystä translokaalien ja "glokaalien" kulttuurin ilmentymien mahdollistamisessa.

Tutkimuksen aineisto on kolmetahoinen. Ensimmäinen aineisto koostuu FPMT:n (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition) tiibetinbuddhalaisen opetusohjelman keskustelupalstoilla käydyistä keskusteluista. Toinen aineiston osa koostuu kuudestatoista haastattelusta kahden tiibetinbuddhalaisen ryhmän jäsenten kanssa (Tara Liberation FPMT ja Danakosha). Kolmas aineisto koostuu viidestä haastattelusta perinteisesti koulutettujen tiibetinbuddhalaisten munkkien kanssa, jotka asuvat eri puolilla maailmaa ja opettavat pääsääntöisesti länsimaalaisille seuraajille. Tutkimuksen tulokset ovat järjestetty viiteen osaan. Analyysi haastaa kulttuurin oletettua roolia välttämättömänä vaikuttavana tekijänä ja nostaa esille kulttuurin joustavuutta ja kulttuuristen tekijöiden ja merkitysten liikkuvuutta. Tutkimus korostaa, että ymmärtääkseen buddhalaisuutta "lännessä" on tärkeä kiinnittää huomiota konkreettisten järjestöjen ja perimyslinjojen diskursseihin ja käyttötapoihin ennemmin kuin yleisen tason käsitteellisiin ilmiöihin kuten "länsimaalaiseen buddhalaisuuteen" tai "amerikkalaiseen buddhalaisuuteen". Tämä näkökulman muuttaminen on ajankohtaista koska buddhalaisuuden ilmentymät nykymaailmassa muodostuvat kansainvälisen ja paikallisen tason risteymissä, buddhalaisuutta harjoittavien järjestöjen konkreettisessa toiminnassa.

Keywords: transkulturaatio, tiibetinbuddhalaisuus, postmoderni, sosiaalinen konstruktionismi

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To my teachers.

TABLES

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1   INTRODUCTION

> As I develop the awakening mind
> I praise the Buddha as they shine
> I bow before you as I travel my path to join your ranks,
> I make my full time task
> For the sake of all beings I seek
> The enlightened mind that I know I'll reap.
>   ("Bodhisattva Vow", Beastie Boys, III Communication, 1994)

This song by the punk-rap band *Beastie Boys* features in an article titled "Buddhism in America" in the influential TIME magazine among other peculiarities of the religious phenomenon. Beastie Boys' lead singer, Adam Yauch (33 at the time), is quoted as saying: "It's at its inception, it's birth; it's kind of helpless right now. But as it takes root, it will evolve into American Buddhism." Yauch is also adamant that becoming a real practitioner demands finding a "real lama and direct link to the heritage" (TIME, 1997, p. 81). Many other examples of the traditional meeting the contemporary, the divine meeting the crude fill the pages dedicated to topic. The issue cover anticipates the article on the topic of the "America's fascination with Buddhism" with a pensive-looking young Brad Pitt dressed in a traditional Tibetan shirt, playing the Austrian mountain climber Heinrich Harrer in a recently launched Jean-Jack Annaud's adaptation of Harrer's *Seven Years in Tibet*.

Over two decades later, we can observe whether Adam Yanch's hope of seeing "American Buddhism" has been fulfilled. Scientific research into Buddhist meditation has been thriving (Lopez, 2008), promoting the practice into virtually every social sphere and even into other religions. The living Buddhist icon, the Dalai Lama XIV regularly meets with politicians and celebrities, and gives lectures to mass audiences. Buddha statues are on sale in stores, ready to embellish homes and gardens of modern middle-class Westerners (Borup, 2016a). However, the Buddhism of Western converts to Tibetan Buddhism seems to lie on a different plane. Parallel to the global modernization of the Buddhist religion "more accurately called a science of mind than a religion" (TIME, 2008, p. 50), there is a Buddhism of "real lamas" and "direct links to the heritage", as Yanch

put it. This monograph looks into the paradoxical relations between the two. The focus is on Tibetan Buddhism as an actual religious choice of modern-day Westerners, globally, as reflected in an online educational program, and locally, as seen through the eyes of Finnish practitioners. The interplay of traditional and modern, global and local, digital and embodied creates a vibrant holographic picture. The main message of this portrayal is that in the 21st century, the complexity of transcultural flows and personal histories of Tibetan Buddhists leaves no space for rigid and simplistic national borders and cultural labels.

1.1   The relevance of the topic

The spread of Buddhism in the West has been a topic of interest for researchers in many disciplines beyond religious or Buddhist studies. I would argue that the adoption of a Buddhist worldview and identity is an essentially intercultural phenomenon. Therefore, the insights of the field of intercultural communication offer a strong toolbox of lenses and approaches, which can help contemporary researchers make sense of this process.

On a broader scale, Buddhism in the West has been studied from various perspectives. The social-scientific line of thought shaped an understanding of the issue by sketching a demographic portrait of a Western Buddhist: their percentage of the population, age, sex, education, political views and behavior (Coleman, 2001; Prebish & Tanaka, 1998; Smith, 2009). The postcolonial paradigm considered the ethics of appropriating the religion and traced its modifications during the time of resistance to missionary and political pressure (Turner et al., 2013; McMahan, 2008; Mullen, 2001; Roth, 2008). A critical approach questioned the position of minorities, race and gender in Buddhism (Goodwin, 2012; Gross, 2004; Hickey, 2010; Tsomo, 2009). The ethnographic approach discovered the deep meanings shared within Buddhist communities and drew a detailed picture of their members' experiences (Capper, 2002; Eddy, 2013; Danilyuk, 2003; Grieve, 2016). An interpretive approach allowed researchers to see the reality of these experiences from the participants' perspective (Cirklova, 2012; Gleig, 2014; Lienau, 2007). Different perspectives have their own strengths, but no study has yet addressed the issue from the point of view of intercultural communication, or included a bilateral perspective. This research is grounded in the social-constructionist paradigm, focusing specifically on Tibetan Buddhist communities, online and offline, and also on the opinions of native Tibetan Buddhist teachers working in the West. The data analysis challenges many assumptions made in the media and academia about Buddhism in the West, and invites conclusions which may sound counter-intuitive. I draw on the theories and models of Intercultural Communication for interpreting the results of my empirical inquiry.

Tibetan Buddhism in the West is a rather marginal topic for researchers studying Buddhism, and Buddhism, as such, is barely ever mentioned among religions studied within the field of Communication. An analysis of academic

journals in Communication, issued in 2002-2012, performed by Croucher, Sommier, Kuchma and Melnychenko (2016), showed that religion and spirituality in general are, in fact, understudied phenomena in the field. Croucher et al. (2016, p. 49) called for broader and more versatile research:

> Having religions so unevenly represented in the academic discourse is problematic for several reasons. First, it gives a disproportioned and biased picture of religious practices. Second, it represents one faith as being the dominant faith, and others as being minority religions. The academic journals reviewed for this study are all English language journals, and more of them are published in the US and the UK. Nevertheless, the journals are aimed at a global audience and could endeavor to be more representative. Furthermore, the results of this study reveal an increasing need to study under-represented religious denominations, to give voice to such groups in scholarly journals.

Following these criticisms, the present interdisciplinary study attempts to satisfy this need.

Generally, it may seem that religion is losing its importance in the public sphere and among individuals, as reflected in global surveys (eg. Pew Research Center, 2017). However, religious belief, or a decided lack of it, is still among major factors contributing to one's identity and values. In particular, most relevant issues in contemporary Intercultural Communication are very often infused with religious problematics. Negligence towards this social sphere in the study of intercultural encounters maintains a lack of knowledge or, more dangerously, an illusion of it. The present dissertation aims to bridge this gap. By analyzing three data-sets I aim to examine how the adoption of a new cultural framework takes place in the case of Tibetan Buddhist converts. With respect to this phenomenon, I evaluate the relevance of culture as a term is understood in geographical terms and essentialist labels, versus culture as a constantly (re-)constructed framework of meanings.

1.2   The focus of the study

Choosing the phenomenon of Tibetan Buddhism, adopted among Westerners for these purposes is also dictated by my personal long-established interest in the religion, as well as the peculiarity of the phenomenon that I see as a researcher in Humanities. This research is also novel in terms of the local context, prior to my starting this dissertation work no research had been conducted on any form of Buddhism in Finland, while Buddhist communities in even the smallest European countries (eg. Belka, 1999) have received scholarly attention. Globally, the encounter of Tibetan Buddhism with Western societies brings together opposing forces: contemporary West and medieval Tibet, science and religion, rationality and superstition, online technology and flesh-and-blood presence, and many others. In this monograph, I want to offer a fresh insight into the phenomenon through the prism of intercultural communication models, as well

as challenge the often simplistic but prevalent essentialist understanding of identity and culture. Among other important academic discourses this research contributes to are postmodern religion, digital communication and culture, transculturality and cultural appropriation, as well as the problem of implicit ethnocentrism.

Broadly speaking, the research question in this monograph is essentially: How is Tibetan Buddhist culture and identity constructed by the students and teachers? What this enquiry implies is finding out a) How much emphasis is given to participants' national or regional origins and culture in their adoption of Tibetan Buddhism, i.e. their tacit construction of a new local Buddhism (Western Buddhism or American Buddhism, Finnish Buddhism etc.); b) What kind of cultural conflicts, contradictions and perceived differences can be found in adopting Tibetan Buddhism, and whether such issues are prevalent at all; c) The ways in which Tibetan Buddhist doctrine and practice is being transformed or altered into a new shape in this process, and whether that transformation is significant; d) What parts of Tibetan Buddhism are considered essential or unchangeable by its convert students and teachers, and how the boundaries between essential and changeable elements are negotiated; e) What role is played by power imbalance and issues of representation in the process of becoming a Tibetan Buddhist. The implications of the answers to these question will reveal the relevance of different categories and factors in the study of Buddhism in the West. The role of regional culture as a powerful factor in the transformation of the religion is being assessed in view of these answers, and based on the data, other factors, arguably more important, are brought out. The ethics of adopting a foreign cultural framework is informed by the voiced perceptions and reports of the research participants, providing an understanding of cultural appropriation rooted in consequentialism and non-essentialism. The view of the holders of the religious tradition is analyzed as a yardstick for the ethical evaluation of Tibetan Buddhism's transformation, as well as serving as an illustration of the fluidity and contingency present in the so-called traditional Tibetan Buddhism, as they are manifested in the varying and changeable views the monks demonstrate.

This paper approaches these issues and addresses these questions by analyzing three sets of data: (1) seven years of forum discussions between students and mentors of an online education program in Tibetan Buddhism; (2) sixteen semi-structured interviews with members of two Tibetan Buddhist groups in Helsinki, Finland; and (3) seven semi-structured interviews with native Tibetan Buddhist teachers, working with Westerners, including in Finland. The research required a deep and critical understanding of the socially constructed reality of the participants, as well as its relation to the larger conceptual and value frameworks of Tibetan Buddhism and those of the contemporary West. The epistemological facets of this research, such as the first-person enquiry, the subjectivity of the researcher as an insider (Ruegg, 1995), as well as seeing the context under scrutiny as a meaningful paradigm with its own internal validity, demand a combination of qualitative methods (Patton, 2015). These methods

include content analysis of naturally-occurring data, employed to obtain the first insights (Silverman, 2015), thematic analysis of interviews, combined with participant observation to gain a more intricate picture, and insights from discourse analytic methods, introduced occasionally to contrast the findings with cogent assumptions about the topic made in academia and authoritative media (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018).

The findings reveal a sharp discrepancy between the common representations and understandings of (Tibetan) Buddhism found in academia and media, and how it is approached and adopted by students and practitioners I had a chance to observe. A chaotic harmony of hybridity, flexibility, and the re-establishment of Tibetan cultural and religious elements is evident in the data and contradicts the assumed origination of a "New", "Western", or "American" Buddhism, which is sometimes even called Navayana (eg. Wiering, 2016), following the list of major branches of Buddhist philosophy and religion: Hinayana (Theravada), Mahayana and Vajrayana. The original classification itself is not unproblematic. These three terms are commonly used to differentiate between South Buddhism (Hinayana), East Buddhism (Mahayana) and North Buddhism (Vajrayana). Hinayana is considered a derogatory term historically used by Indian proponents of Mahayana in relation to the philosophic view of mainstream early Buddhism, now preserved in the Pali Canon tradition, and represented by Theravada Buddhism. Vajrayana is associated with forms of Tibetan Buddhism, involving tantric elements, but the school is essentially a sub-school of Mahayana. Nevertheless, these imperfect terms reflect the developments of Buddhism, which took place over many centuries across a large geographical terrain, and they are in fact so different, that many researchers prefer to talk of Buddhism*s* in the plural (eg. Skilton, 2016). A superstructure of "Navayana" implies by its morphology a similar uniqueness and developmental outcome, while at a closer look there does not seem to be enough reason for such an implication. While at the beginning of the research my expectations concerned the transformation and development of the religion in the new environment, following the pressure of modern and novel cultural influences, the actual data revealed that the framework of Tibetan Buddhism possesses a considerable inherent momentum for self-perpetuation and for influencing individual lifestyles and the worldviews of its newcomer followers.

1.3   The structure of the monograph

In the Context part of this monograph, I am going to first, give an overview of how the role of religion has changed from pre-modern times, through modernism, to postmodernity, focusing on academic insights into postmodern religion. After that, I will draw a general picture of the contemporary religious landscape in the West and globally. Finally, in the light of these concepts and facts, I will talk about Buddhism's spread to the West, with a brief description of how Buddhism made its way to Finland.

In the Theory section I am going to briefly overview some fundamental theories and frameworks used in the field of Intercultural Communication, and show how the approaches in the field have developed over time. Specifically, I will discuss the concept of *transculturality* as a lens for studying culture suggested by Welsch (1999), as well as the relevant issue of cultural appropriation as a problematic notion. Additionally to that, I am going to share some tentative insights into the related issue of online religion and digital culture.

After the Theory section, I will explain the strength of the social-constructionist paradigm in studying culture, religion, and identity in the 21st century, and how this approach helps to make sense of the issue in question. Then, I will describe the methods I used for each data-set, as well as the rationale for choosing them, and the whole process of data collection and analysis.

The empirical findings are going to be presented thematically in five portions, with the discussion of the findings following the presentation of each portion. Although this might make the structure of this dissertation slightly unconventional, the goal was to make the Findings and Discussion section more readable and coherent. Each point includes (1) a short analysis of how the issue is presented to the broad audience by academics, and popular intellectuals representing Buddhism; (2) an analysis of the forum discussions related to the issue; (3) how the issue is understood through the analysis of the interviews with the Tibetan Buddhists in Finland; (4) how it is perceived by the Tibetan Buddhist teachers.

The main foci of the Discussion section are the notion of 're-contextualization' of Tibetan Buddhism, some novel insights into the Buddhist postmodernism, as opposed to Buddhist modernism (McMahan, 2008), as well as some epistemological dwellings, related to perception of culture, religion and identity in contemporary academia, inspired by the present study. Discussion also includes Limitations of the research, and is followed by Conclusion and Implications.

2   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

0h, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

(Rudyard Kipling, the Ballad of East and West, 1889)

This section encompasses the contextual information and various theoretical frameworks relevant to the empirical study. I will start by discussing the contemporary understanding of "religion" as a concept and a topic for research, then describe the history of Buddhism's global spread, after that I will critically examine theories and paradigms available in the field of Intercultural Communication in terms of their relevance to understanding a complex phenomenon such as the focus of the study.

2.1   Studying a religion interculturally

2.1.1   Relevance

Academic study of religion in the twentieth century took for granted the implications of the so-called secularization thesis, a theory that social and scientific development is accompanied by a fading public interest in religion. IT was predicted that religion would be gradually driven out not only from public institutions, but also from the private worldviews of individuals (Aden, 2012). However, the twenty-first century has shown that religion is in fact, persisting, although its form is changing. Religion is becoming more fluid and individualized, and less institutional and uniform (Mobert and Grandholm, 2014). While it does step back as a grand-narrative for the diverse society, its importance for individuals, who do take up religious practice, only increases in this situation. Further, religious views remain among major identity-shaping factors in pressing intercultural

communication issues, such as migrant adaptation (Croucher, Galy-Badenas, Condon, Sharapan and Salonen, 2021).

The form of religions today is unprecedented due to globalization, digitalization, and social freedoms we have experienced in recent decades. As the world is changing rapidly, religions change with it. Even the frames of the concept, the criteria of what makes a religion, and what does not, are losing their distinctness. Western academic inquiry into religion has been heavily dominated by Christianity, and most assumptions rooted in the understanding of Abrahamic religions are taken for granted when approaching other religions. For example, The Cambridge Dictionary defines religion as "the belief in and worship of a god or gods, or any such system of belief and worship". Oxford, Meriam-Webster and, Google dictionaries offer very similar definitions, stressing "superhuman controlling power", "belief" and "worship". Many non-Abrahamic religions, such as Buddhism, Taoism and Jainism do not include or reject a concept of a personal or creator God. This has even led to claims that Buddhism is not a religion, which would be a gross misconception (Faure, 2009). Roth (2008, p. 1) calls such implicitly ethnocentric attitudes in the study of Eastern traditions "cognitive imperialism". These attitudes are rarely malevolent or even intentional but they still form serious obstacles to understanding and appreciating Eastern religious traditions, particularly since those traditions are becoming an integral part of the Western world, with yoga and meditation penetrating individual households and public institutions. Often taught in secular contexts, such practice does not involve changing one's religious views for most people turning it. However in some individual cases it actually leads to adopting of a new value system, lifestyle and religious identity (Antony, 2014; Borup, 2016b). To understand this process, researchers in the humanities investigate the why and how of it.

2.1.2   Religion from pre- to postmodernity

When discussing the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to the West, it is important to consider it not only in spatial, but also in temporal terms. To a Western eye, the "difference" of Tibetan Buddhism is accounted for by its clear connection to an Eastern culture. However, additionally to the geographical distance of its homeland from the "Western" world, there are also factors connected with the time, or age. Therefore, it is important to consider how religion, and Buddhism in particular, has developed over time.

Before the ideals of Enlightenment started spreading in European societies, religion played a major role in the public sphere. Social, judicial, political and private life were inseparable from religious discourses. Bauman (1998a) describes the pre-scientific times as being filled with uncertainty in relation towards natural phenomena, and with certainty about the supernatural. In both East and West, religious discourses shaped the order of societies, the hierarchy, as well as lives of individuals within it, as well as their deaths and even afterlife. Explanations to problems were sought in what modernity later categorized as superstitions; religious truths were absolute, universal and unquestionable. Religion was such an integral part of life there was no need for the term. As Aden

(2012) argues, referring to the historian of religion, Jonathan J. Smith, the term "religion" receives its modern meaning after the Reformation, when the need to differentiate between the Catholic church and Protestant churches first arose. Later the establishment of contacts with far-away lands also brought the need to distinguish faiths other than Christianity and paganism.

The Reformation deprived religion of its mystical untouchability by making it accessible to people and relevant to their needs. Astronomy and physics demonstrated the power of human intellect in explaining laws of nature, and exposed discrepancies between religious doctrine and empirical enquiry. Age of Enlightenment shifted the emphasis from faith to reason, from dogma to scientific discovery, from rigid order to social progress. This shift in the European intellectual landscape brought separation of church and state and a right to question religious assertions. Charles Taylor (2007) investigates this phenomenon in his monumental *A Secular Age*. He looks back at the modern age to analyze how belief in God gradually became one option among many, making one's religious convictions a constant negotiation and reiteration. Religion fell into the realm of private, optional, de-universalized (Taylor, 2007), although preserving its personal importance for many individuals among most of the Western Christian world.

Modernists and scientists associated religion with superstition, irrationality and self-deception. Masterminds of the scientific enquiry of the 19th and 20th centuries, such as Karl Popper, Bertrand Russel or Thomas Huxley, made their best to remove any religious implications from science. While originally and essentially science and religion were not mutually exclusive, they came to be perceived this way (Lessl, 2007). In addition to philosophy of science Naturalism gradually claimed more and more of personal lives of Western intellectuals, becoming a lingua-franca of intellectual conversation, and a dominant world outlook for science (Bishop, 2009). The universalism of religious claims was undermined, leading F. Nietzsche to proclaim notoriously in his *Genealogy of Morals*, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." (Nietzsche, 1887/1967). Glover (2012) connects the expressed loss of a universal moral narrative with the violence of the twentieth century world wars, dictatorships, and genocides. He reflect that although Enlightenment ideals have brought more security than destruction to the world, the modern shift from the divine towards the human gave way to the inhuman.

William James brought another shift of perspective in relation to religion. In his investigation of personal religious experiences, James (1902/2003) undertook to approach self-claimed mystical experiences of individuals on their own subjective accounts. However, during his time interpreting these experiences to indicate a presence or absence of "God" or any form of transcendence would not be justified from scientific perspective. A common naturalist response to subjective claims, untestable by objective scientific evidence, would be to dismiss them. But the shift of focus towards mystical experiences of individuals away from religion as an organized, institutional force, shaping public life, to a large extent could be traced to James' work (Carrette, 2004).

In the twentieth century, modernist ideals of naturalism and secularism are more vocal than ever in the public realm (Bishop, 2008). In contrast to James' introspection, neurological approaches have become the toolkit for studying religious experiences. Although the study of a religious brain has brought a justification for the reality and actuality of these experiences, it has also brought a new way to naturalize them by reducing the mystique to physiological processes in the brain (Aden, 2012). While the dominance of the materialist paradigm in the sciences is predominant, the second part of the twentieth century was colored by intellectual trends, which could give religion the green light in the disenchanted world.

The four decades from 1960 to 1990 are commonly associated with the prominence of postmodernism in science, culture, literature, art and architecture (McHale, 2015; Ward, 2009). While modernism looked at human endeavor, reason and rationality with optimism, postmodernist thinkers expressed frustration with and pessimism about modern ideals. Postmodern literature writers challenged the canons of style and border between fact and fiction, interacting with the reader (McHale, 2015). Postmodern art and architecture abandoned the stern and lean shapes of modernism in favor of bricolage, expression and experiment (Ward, 2009). While modern philosophers elaborated over objective truths and their discovery, postmodern ones were praising subjectivity. While modern culture anticipated the future, postmodern culture reminisced the past. But the strongest criticism of postmodernists towards modern ideals was aimed at the holiest fruit of modernism: science. Lyotard (1984) conceptualized science as a self-explanatory narrative, defining itself with its own regulation, and claiming authority based on a self-ascribed ownership of the truth. His definition of postmodernism, "the incredulity towards metanarratives" (p. xxiv), meant incredulity towards scientific truth-claims. He clothed them as power claims akin to those of religion, ideology and myth, and proposed shifting focus to varying small truths within the society, or little narratives. His works received a lot of criticism and appreciation at the same time.

All spheres of human existence reflect the concepts, ideas and explanatory systems, dominant at a certain time, and religion is not an exception. Postmodernity affected the role and form of religion in the society in many remarkable ways, and many researchers and thinkers have expressed their observations related to it (Bauman, 1998a; Lyon, 2000). Postmodern philosopher Zygmund Bauman (1998a) described how the social change of modernism caused an unprecedented existential anxiety, moral insecurity, and philosophical uncertainty against the background of material and social development. Modernism took away the enchantment of the old world and promising to fill the gap with material things and a flourishing society. Bauman (1998a) argues that religious narratives became a natural filler for the void, this time on a personal and communal level. Taylor (2007) marks on resurgence of religion in the social sphere as well. Analyzing his own experience, and that of other people, he doubts that the rational Enlightenment or intuitive Romanticism of the modern age had equal potential to maintain a moral explanatory framework in

the same way as religion did. He looks into the future and wonders where the observed resurgence of belief within the anticipated increase in secularization is leading the world.

Religion in postmodernity is affected by the specific features of the post-modern period. While some thinkers speak of postmodernism in the past tense, placing it in a certain time of the 20th century (1960s till the end of 1990s) (eg., McHale, 2015), others argue that postmodern trends have not yet ceased to be seen. The example of Tibetan Buddhism adopted in the West and the data I have collected on the topic reveal many features of postmodern religion.

The fading border between high and low culture could be regarded as one maker of postmodernism, as it reflects on how religion manifests itself in society. Postmodern art and architecture, as well as entertainment culture, such as theater, are marked by a bold fusion of styles and direct dialogue with the audience. They also merge elitist cultural phenomena, such as opera, into mass and urban ones, such as rap-music. At the same time, down-to-earth and daring elements are brought into high culture, such as fine arts (Bauman, 2013). A vivid example of that could be Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*, a painting of a dark-skinned blue-robed woman, made using random materials, including pornographic collages and elephant dung (Ward, 2009). As another example, religious performance, church and liturgy would traditionally be associated with high culture, Andrew Lloyd Webber's rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar", first staged in 1971, would be associated with the postmodern fusion of high and low. Lyon (2000) illustrates postmodern religion with the example of Jesus Christ presented in Disneyland along with cartoon characters.

Another feature of postmodernism, is a much greater tolerance towards mystical, 'supernatural' narratives, than modernism was capable of. This can be explained by the common skepticism of postmodern thinkers (Lyotard, 1984; Foucalt, 1969/2013) about the scientific truth-claims. In additionally to that, some scientists of the postmodern age were also balancing on the edge of the modernist naturalism, turning scientific inquiry into typically "supernatural" topics. In the 1960s the Czech psychiatrist Stanislav Grof was researching the effects of LSD on the human psyche, and inspired by prenatal and perinatal experiences in his participants, became a founder of the field of transpersonal psychology. In the 1970s Harold Puthoff and Russel Targ were experimenting with remote viewing at Stanford Research Institute, and working as full-time psychics for the CIA (Targ and Puthoff, 2005). A Canadian-born psychiatrist Ian Stevensen performed research on children remembering their past lives (Stevenson, 2000). Further, much of postmodern fiction represents or includes what is called "magical realism" (McHale, 2015). While the real and the magical had been two distinct realms for a truth-seeking modern mind, postmodernism has brought the supernatural elements, such as prophetic dreams, visions, premonitions, and otherworldly contacts into an otherwise ordinary mundane narrative. This would include science-fiction and surreal writers, such as Philip K. Dick or G. G. Marquez, but also popular TV-shows, such as the X-files or Twin Peaks. Postmodern literature boldly weaves in supernatural elements into the fabric of the story, making them feel

normal and real (McHale, 2015; Ward, 2009). The implications of this for religion may be that believers or otherwise spiritually inclined individuals can feel inspired and empowered by the culture around them to interpret and share their extraordinary experiences. According to the Pew Research survey (Pew, 2009), the percentage of American Christians claiming to have had a religious or spiritual experience has been steadily rising since 1962 (22%) until recent times, hitting 49% in 2009.

Another important feature of postmodern religion is the tendency towards hybridity. In societies characterized by the accessibility of knowledge on different religions, as well as the freedoms to practice them, individuals may opt out of or adopt any religions or parts of them. According to Pew surveys (Pew 2009; 2017), about a quarter of American Christians believe in reincarnation and about a third attend places of worship, other than Christian churches. New religious movements started to gain popularity in the 20th century, marking the apogee of hybridity in religious views. Predated by the modern spiritualistic endeavors of the modern era, such as the Theosophy society, the New Age spirituality movement drew upon various religions and doctrines, incorporating spiritual practices from East and West (eg. Indian tantra and Native American rites). New Age followers may demonstrate a wide range of beliefs - often competing ones - as well as tolerance towards the usage of hallucinogens. In the current world it is much easier to combine the practice of one religion while simultaneously adhering to another one. With respect to Buddhism, one can find Christian Buddhist groups, who enhance their Christian faith with Buddhist meditation tools (McMahan, 2008).

One further characteristic of postmodernism, relevant to religion in the society can be nostalgia for tradition. Modernity irreversibly separated the postmodern individual away from the tradition. But the overall pessimism of postmodernism is often marked by a distant memory of how everything used to be more authentic, purer and better in the old times. A strong appeal to tradition marks the rhetoric of religious fundamentalism (Emerson and Hartman, 2006). The longing for the authentic past appears in the face of a threat, posed by modernism, secularism, as well as by the marginalization and individualization of religious meanings. The tradition longed for can be the idealized version of one's own culture of belonging, or a foreign tradition. The postmodern age invited an idealization of everything primordial and indigenous, as a contrast to the modernist trends of urbanization, cultural homogenization, industrial progress and environmental threats. How Tibet was imagined and idealized became an object of critical discussion by some prominent authors (Lopez, 1998; McLagan, 2002). The elevated narratives of a peaceful, spiritually meaningful life, ordered according to Buddhist principles, in the remote and pristine land of Tibet was nevertheless in conflict with what researchers knew from the historical and anthropological accounts of pre-modern times in Tibet (Goldstein, 1989). Religious, spiritual or even superstitious elements, as cultural artifacts of the idealized tradition, have traction in imaginations of believers, and reflect on how

they prioritize and co-construct the practice of their belief (Sharapan and Swann, 2019).

The last characteristic, that has attracted critical comment from some authors (Lyon, 2000; King and Carrette, 2004) is the tendency towards commercialization and the superficiality of spirituality in the late-capitalist era. Materialistic tendencies in religious institutions, perhaps, are as old as the institutions themselves. But postmodernism coincided with rapid economic growth in most Western countries, and was a cultural trend of late capitalism, with its freedom of sale and purchase. The further increase in globalization, and the appearance of technologically mediated trade, including the dotcom boom made the commodification of religion and spirituality even easier.

2.1.3   The global religious landscape

If we imagine that there is a general, average trend among people's religiosity around the world, we could say that in the twentieth century it had been going up and down. A resurge of religion in the first decade of the 21st century, highlighted by many scholars of religion (Aden, 2012; Juergensmeyer, Griego, Soboslai, 2015), could be connected with and reflected in many globally significant events. The post-Soviet world demonstrated a growth in religious consciousness, right after the imposed extreme secularity imposed by socialist ideology was lifted, and another Communist chunk of the global population, China, showed a greater interest in religious activity (Juergensmeyer et al., 2015). As a sort of mirroring of the Western trend for Eastern religions, prominent specifically in highly educated and liberally minded social strata (Smith, 2012), Asian countries, like the PRC or South Korea demonstrate a demographically similar interest in Christianity (Juergensmeyer et al., 2015). The turbulence in the Middle East, as well as the subsequent formation of brutal terrorist formations lead many researchers to think that religion was not only reluctant to decline and yield to a global trend for secular individualism, but was capable of taking distinctly pre-modern tones. The technological progress was not an automatic drive for modernization, but could instead work in the service of such pre-modern formations (Schachtner, 2015). However, global surveys of the second decade of the 21st century demonstrate the continuing of secularization of the planet (Inglehart, 2020).

Global numbers, however, have only a slight effect on specific manifestations of religion in different places. The complexity of historical circumstances and deployments of religious discourses for various purposes, as well as the ever-expanding scholarly understanding of what constitutes a 'religion' or a religious movement, are vast and diverse. An inevitable degree of eurocentrism also distorts both lay and scholarly understanding of global religious trends (Roth, 2008), while most of the globe remains non-European. The conceptualization of religion in terms of individual belief and experience may not be useful for studying the re-emergence of religion in the social and public life in Thailand or Japan (Taylor, 2007; Mullins, 2015). Such re-emergence can be seen emancipatory, a reaction to globalization, a mark of nationalism, or a local

process of secularization, not through individualizing the religious, but through altering the religious narrative to its contemporary specifically local public purposes (Juergensmeyer et al. 2015; Mullins, 2015).

The connection between tradition and globalization also becomes problematic when seen through historical and post-colonial perspectives. Since translocality and migration are marks of the spread and development of religion (Tweed, 2011), the intricacies of specific discourses and their application become more important than general labels of religious identities. For example Omer (2020), using two examples of international peacebuilding practices (the Philippines and Kenya) discusses the applications of religious and secular discourses for addressing issues of extreme poverty and violence, with a neoliberal agenda. Among the more privileged strata of global populations, Carrette and King (2005) address the commodification and instrumentalization of religious formations that are seen by the lay public as exotic and oriental, and raise issues of colonial histories, ownership and the negotiation of meaning.

All of these examples in no way disprove a trend for secularization not only in the Western world, but even in most "oriental" places. To resort to a relevant example, Gayly (2016) describes a movement among Tibetan bloggers, contesting not, as one might hastily imagine, the Chinese occupation, and not even the Western cultural hegemony, but reforms of the Tibetan clergy. She raises issues of diversity and privilege *within* the movement, considering that most bloggers represent educated urban populations, criticizing the infringement of religious rights and secular freedoms of members of the rural Tibetan Buddhist parish, who may not be able to access or contribute to the debate due to poverty and lack of access to the online realm. In any case, the purpose of this chapter, especially of its last section on the "global religious landscape", is not to provide a ready-made framework and to stencil in answers to the peculiarities described in this dissertation. On the contrary, it is to show the complexity and diversity of the multiple cultural flows and global trends, which instead of developing in an orderly well-designed fashion, collide, debate and merge in surprising and captivating ways.

2.2   Buddhism in the West

2.2.1   Spread in history

Buddhism is considered to be one of the most internally diverse world religions, to the extent that researchers could instead talk about Buddhism*s* (Gombrich, 2009; Lopez, 2001; Skilton, 2016). However, all the developments and versions of Buddhism do share a common core and can be traced back in history. Before I investigate the adoption of Buddhism in the West, including in Finland, it is important to give a brief description of what happened in the time between the deemed enlightenment of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni and the adoption

of Buddhism by 21ˢᵗ century Westerners, such as Adam Yauch from the Beastie Boys.

It is not always easy to draw a clear picture of events there are happening today, so analyzing events, which took place 2,600 years ago is bound to be a difficult and often even dubious enterprise. There are certain things we can know from historical records, archeological findings and other relatively accurate methods on the one hand, and on the other hand, while on the other we can learn from the myths and stories of the religions themselves (van Schaik, 2016). Religious myths and stories may provide great coherence and richness of detail, but as a genre they may often appear at odds with the historical evidence and a contemporary understanding of common sense. In the same way, the story of Buddhism, which is told to Buddhists, and the one, which is taught at universities, might have certain contradictions (Gross, 2013). In this section, I will be drawing from the works of historians of Buddhism, and from the narratives of the religion, aiming to achieve a balance between fact and the phenomenology of how Buddhism appeared, spread and survived.

The enlightenment of the historical Buddha is the first instance where modern historians and Buddhists would, perhaps, discover themselves talking at cross purposes. Buddhists, the followers of the Buddha, inherit their label from the Sanskrit verb *budh* ("to awake"), which shares its root with many words found in modern Indo-European languages, for example, the Russian word *будильник* (an alarm clock). The word Buddha literary means "the awakened one" or "the enlightened one". Traditional Buddhist texts and traditional Buddhist practice both create a rather precise understanding of the term, contrary to the way we usually use it in every-day language, when we ask someone to enlighten us about their schedule, or note that a cup of coffee makes us feel awake. Although Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists understand the word differently, all of them agree that it stands for a complete eradication of negative mental states (*duhkha*, often translated as suffering or dissatisfaction), and a full blossoming of positive states, triggered by a perceptional change, which eradicate ignorance about the nature of oneself and of reality. Enlightenment, originally called *nirvana* (Sanskrit), or *nibbana* (Pali), means a liberation from the beginningless and otherwise endless chain of uncontrolled deaths and rebirths, or *sansara*. Buddhists would consider this to be a desired goal, if not the ultimate purpose of existence, while historians of Buddhism probably would not be interested in enlightenment, at least not during their office hours. Modern Western academic scholarship relies on principles of secularism and methodological naturalism, treating claims of liberation from alleged rebirths as narratives. Gombrich (2009, p.1), for example, places the Buddha among the world greatest philosophers:

> My admiration for the Buddha, whom I consider to be one of the greatest thinkers – and greatest personalities – of whom we have record in human history […] I maintain that the Buddha belongs in the same class as Plato and Aristotle, the giants who created the tradition of western philosophy.

His enlightenment, in such case would be understood as an insight into reality, perhaps, very also shrewd, yet mundane, resulting into a philosophy, or a set of ideas, potentially useful to people and societies. Although many historians and scholars can also be sincere Buddhist practitioners (Williams, 2008), the framework of academic discourse does not tolerate metaphysical explanations being served as fact.

The biography of Prince Sidhartha Gautama, later known as the Buddha Shakyamuni (the name of his clan), is a well-known story. Born from the side of his soon deceased mother Maya, he was raised by his father Suddhodana and his maternal aunt Mahapajapati to be the successor to his wealthy and powerful father. His father was told a prophecy that his son would become either a great ruler or a great spiritual leader. Being a regional ruler himself, his father was more comfortable with the former, so he surrounded his growing son with great beauty, abundance and luxury, and confined him to the palace to protect him from seeing the frustrating reality of life. Siddhartha grew into a handsome and capable young man, schooled in various disciplines. He married his cousin Yasodhara and they had a son he named Rahula (meaning "a fetter") (Lopez, 2001). However his career of a future ruler was interrupted when, aged 29, he went for an excursion into the world outside the palace, accompanied by his assistant Channa. During his tour, he saw a sick person, an old person, a funeral procession and an ascetic. The sight triggered in him what we would nowadays call an existential crisis. He sought spiritual help and advice from many teachers, who were available at that time; he learned and progressed quickly, but he was not satisfied. So he left the palace and joined a group of ascetics, surviving on a grain of rice and a drop of water a day only to discover that this path brought him nothing but ill health (Lopez, 2001). He broke his fast accepting a bowl of rice pudding from a village girl, and he then resolved to attain enlightenment, which he is reputed to have done after practicing overnight under a Bodhi tree (*Ficus religiosa* or sacred fig) in Bodhgaya. In the first watch of the night, he saw all his past lives in detail, in the second one he conceived the law of karma, cause and effect, and in the third one he was liberated from the chain of karmically conditioned rebirths by recognizing the absence of any agent behind these processes (Lopez, 2001). The Buddha is believed to have first stayed there for three weeks, savoring his new state, and doubtful whether there was anybody in the world, who was ready to accept what he had to share, until the god Brahma came down to him, pleading with him to go and spread his teaching. He did so by walking 250 kilometers from Bodhgaya to Sarnath to talk to his former group of ascetic practitioners. He quickly drew their trust and taught what is nowadays known as the Four Noble Truths. A more accurate, although less common translation would be the four truths for the spiritually noble (Lopez, 2001). He devoted the rest of his life to travelling and telling others about his experience, teaching them the means to achieve the same state of liberation from suffering, until he died from food poisoning at the age of 80. Lopez (2001) provides a more romantic account of his death: his attendant Ananda is said to be among the few close disciples, who failed to achieve liberation during the Buddha's life. Ananda

misinterpreted the Buddha's hint that the latter could live in the world for a kalpa if requested, and caused the Buddha to accept demon Mara's offered meal, which he knew would bring his death (Lopez, 2001; Prebish, 1975).

Several orders of monks and nuns have been formed during and after the Buddha's life, but for several centuries his teachings were passed on orally, mainly by monks, who remembered and recited them by heart. Their impressive memory was a result of a traditional Brahmin education, emphasizing accurate memorization of large portions of text. These people served as walking archives of the age, until the texts were written down in Pali, a relative of Sanskrit, as the *Tipitaka*, consisting of the *vinaya* (monastic code), *sutta* (sermons of the Buddha), and *abhidhamma* (the doctrine of Buddhism). From the suttas, which were preserved this way, we can now learn not only what the Buddha taught, but where, to whom and in what circumstances, including what food was served on the occasion. This has allowed Buddhists, as well as historians, to make sense of seeming contradictions in the Buddha's words, and create a hierarchy of the teachings.

The pre-scriptural era of Buddhism is often called early Buddhism, and is a matter of dispute among historians (Anālayo, 2015). Some academics prefer to abstain from any conclusions related to that time in view of the lack of historical evidence, and even refuse to speak of any early Buddhism as such, while others try to restore the meanings of that time through textual analysis (Anālayo, 2015). What we know of that time and place from various sources is that it was unique and unprecedented in terms of its spiritual and social dynamics. The area where the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment and taught (south of modern Nepal and north of modern India), was on the outskirts of the Vedic civilization, and was relatively free of brahmanic influence (Prebish, 1975). It was the time, when the centuries old intellectual hegemony of the Vedas was rivalled by the contemplative insights of the Upanishads. Agricultural prosperity allowed for a formation of a farmer and tradesman middle class: people, who had leisure and resources for spiritual activities, but were spiritually marginalized within the Vedic cast system (Gombrich, 2009). Contemplative practice and monastic vocation was a rare, but a growing choice for young men of various backgrounds, giving rise to a *sramana* (wandering contemplative) movement and a vibrant spiritual landscape (Skilton, 2016). The Buddha's career was predated by that of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, and it was his followers whom the Buddha was mortifying himself with (Gombrich, 2009). While religious followers of Buddhism see the Buddha as the seventh in the succession of enlightened beings appearing in this world in this age, historians would see him as the great product of his unique epoch.

The Buddha's various teachings which have reached us today were written down in several different time periods and in at least two different languages, and contain significant differences. The first collections of Buddhist texts (*sutta nikaya*, or collection of sermons) were written down in Pali in Sri Lanka c. 1st century BC, and reflect what could be called early Buddhism. The most foundational Buddhist source, the Pali Canon was compiled in Sri Lanka at an

estimated five centuries after the Buddha's death. It includes the *Tipitaka* (*sutta*, *vinaya* and *abhidhamma*) and is recognized by all Buddhists. Followers of Theradava Buddhism, which spread beyond Sri Lanka to South East Asia, treat the Pali Canon as the actual words of the Buddha, transmitted unchanged right up to today. Mahayana Buddhisms, however, rely on the Mahayana sutras, written down during a later and a more extended period, up to the 10th century CE. But the earlier of these sutras date back to the same time as the Pali Canon, the first century BCE (Skilton, 2016). These sutras were written in Sanskrit, hence a different spelling of the word: the Prakrit Pali *sutta* became *sutra* in classical Sanskrit. A pivotal role in compiling the Mahayana sutras belongs to the Indian philosopher Nagarjuna. Traditional Mahayanists portray him as living during the six centuries from the 1st to the 6th century CE. Historians agree that Nagarjuna had a long and fruitful life, though they limit it to the confines of ordinary human longevity in the first and the second century CE (Lopez, 2001). Nagarjuna is believed to have retrieved the lost Mahayana sutras from the king of *nagas*, or water dragons, (hence the name, Nagarjuna) at the bottom of the sea, compiling them into the elegant Mahayana Buddhist doctrine of emptiness he defined as the Middle Way. The philosophy is still studied as a "standard model" in practically all Tibetan Buddhist schools, though understanding of it may differ. While the early Buddhism accepted emptiness, or the absence of self, the Mahayanists went as far as to challenge the inherent existence of all external reality.

The Mahayana sutras bring differences not only in the Buddha's teachings, but also in accounts of who he was: unlike the early Buddhist records, Mahayana sutras perceive him as a transcendent, omniscient being (Anālayo, 2010). While the Tipitaka teachings serve as guides to liberation from personal suffering, the Mahayana sutras hold to the ideal of a bodhisattva, a person, who is resolved to attain complete enlightenment and omniscience for the sake of leading all sentient beings to that state as well (Powers, 2007). Mahayanists see the enlightenment of an *arhat* as a lower and incomplete path, denoted as liberation, while they reserve the term enlightenment for the resultant goal of a *bodhisattva*, i.e. attaining the complete state of Buddhahood.

The Mahayana sutras have reached us in their Sanskrit versions, as well as in Chinese and Tibetan translations. Skilton (2016, p. 101) accounts for their appearance in addition to the Pali Tripitaka from three possible factors: (1) the teachings are attributed to the Buddha, but were missed when the Tripitaka was collected; (2) they originated in profound meditational experience, bringing one in direct contact with the Buddha teaching in a non-material form; (3) an inclusive and pragmatic attitude in adopting any teachings aimed at enlightenment.

Mahayana literally means the "Great Vehicle", and is often juxtaposed to *Hinayana*, the "Smaller Vehicle". The two schools, however, did not form two different Buddhisms in ancient India, but rather referred to different levels of understanding and motivation. Lopez (2001) points out that while in the ardent discourses of Mahayana sutras Hinayana is seen as a weaker and lower school, it was in fact historically the mainstream Buddhism of the time. Ironically,

Mahayana was a fringe teaching within Buddhism of the time, comparable in its situation to Sufism in Islam or Christian mysticism in Catholicism, but in spite of that it spread the widest, across a large proportion of the East and Central Asia (Skilton, 2016). Lopez (2001) explains the spread of Mahayana partly as a consequence of the marginalized position of the school back at home. In this way the term Hinayana seems to have been a rather defensive one used by Mahayanists, and nowadays many scholars and Buddhist teachers consider it inappropriate.

Among the first peoples to receive Mahayana Buddhism were the Chinese. Through a gradual engagement with the Indian Buddhist tradition, despite occasionally fierce political resistance from the nationalist and traditionalist Chinese authorities of the period, the Buddhist tradition established itself in various schools. The two vastly different branches of Chinese Buddhism still surviving in our age are Ch'an (the elder relative of the Japanese Zen), and Chin-T'u (Pure Land) (Skilton, 2016). The followers of Ch'an engage in rigorous meditation under the mentorship of a master, using concentration and intuitive insight as means to attain the Mahayana goals. Believers of Chin-T'u Buddhism, on the other hand, shift the effort to Buddha Amitabha. Following Sukhavati Sutras, they believe that Buddha Amitabha created a metaphysical realm, a Pure Land, which is blissful and conducive to achieving enlightenment, where one can be reborn as a result of engaging in devotional practices, such as prostrations and mantra recitation (Prebish, 1975; Skilton, 2016). The Chinese tradition shaped the traditions of Korea, Vietnam and Japan, giving birth to the (1) Japanese Pure Land schools, tantric, or Vajrayana, schools (Shingon and Tendai), Zen (a Japanese domestication of 'Ch'an'), coming in the Rinzai, Soto and Obaku variation, and finally Nichiren (emphasizing the Lotus Sutra as the Buddha's final teaching); (2) the Korean Sonjon (derived from Chan and Zen) and Pure Land Buddhisms; and (3) the Vietnamese Zen and Pure Land schools. All Chinese schools have been exclusively Mahayana Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhists would definitely consider themselves Mahayanists.

However, whether scholars would call them such depends on whether the scholars consider Vajrayana (tantric Buddhism) as a subschool of Mahayana, or as a separate subdivision. Vajrayana is even more problematic historically, and only a fraction of religious Buddhists follow that line, but it is clearly not traced back to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, at least in the mundane understanding of historians (Lopez, 2001). Vajrayana texts were written down and circulated within and outside of Buddhist communities for several centuries. The earliest *kriya* tantra (lower class of tantra) texts can be traced back to the second century, and their translations into Chinese to the third century CE, while the latest tantra practice (and the most complicated) would be Kalachakra tantra, written down in the 11th century India, in classical Sanskrit, indicating its monastic and institutional origins (Skilton, 2016). While many tantras were translated into Chinese and into Tibetan, it is important to note that in India and China tantric Buddhism was a fringe branch and often highly controversial (Skilton, 2016; Prebish, 1975), whereas in Tibet it rooted itself as *the* Buddhism.

Although it is maintained that tantra practice is a secret one, it permeates not only the religion, but also the culture of Tibet, with its representation in art and folk beliefs. The Vajrayana teachings are rooted in mysticism and pragmaticism: tantric practices are considered to be *upaya*, or skillful means, which the Buddha in his non-material form communicated to chosen beings (often non-human), aiming to transform rather than overcome delusions, allowing enlightenment to be attained much faster than through ordinary methods. The texts describing these practices are deliberately cryptic, ensuring that a non-initiate would not be able to practice them without the guidance of a tantric guru. They differ according to their class, and involve a worship of deities for meditation, visualizations, special behaviors, in some cases including ritualized sexual intercourse, breaking social and religious taboos, visiting cemeteries and so on. Any tantric practice requires initiation and entails vows and commitments, one of which is seeing the teacher and co-students of the tantra as pure and impeccable in their nature.

At the time when Buddhism was establishing itself in Tibet, it had already been established in China, and it was still flourishing in India. Although the Chinese Buddhism took its roots from India, by that time it had developed into a Buddhism of its own, accentuating ideas which in India were marginal, and absorbing considerable influence from Chinese native philosophies, particularly Taoism (Skilton, 2016). The story goes that the first Tibetan King to introduce Buddhism to the country was Songtsen Gampo. He was inspired by two of his five wives, who were themselves Buddhists, one from Nepal and the other from China. He started by ordering a translation of some Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Tibetan. His successor Tritsong Detsen made Buddhism the official religion of the state and invited some Buddhist teachers from India, namely Santaraksita (to establish a monastic order and found monasteries) and Padmasambhava (to overcome obstacles by taming the fierce local spirits). The historical interpretation of "taming the local spirits" may be understood as overcoming the resistance of the Tibetan court and clergy who practiced the shamanic pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet, Bön. For Buddhists, Padmasambhava was not a political mediator, but a mystic who is credited for much esoteric Buddhism. He is especially venerated in the Nyingma tradition, which includes practices based on his *terma*, or hidden treasures revealed by advanced masters after his death, either physically found as texts, or as psychic visions (Skilton, 2016; van Schaik, 2016). Tibetan Buddhism of the time copied the Indian tradition in its organization and doctrine, copying both the monastic institutional structure and the marginal wandering yogi movement that is remarkably preserved until the modern age (Skilton, 2016).

The preference for the Indian influence was a result of the historical debate between Santaraksita's disciple and successor Kamalasila, who came from India, and Hoshang Mahayana, a Ch'an master, who was from China. The case is still a part of the Tibetan scholarly education, where the victory of the Indian Kamalasila over the Chinese Hoshang is especially joyous to Tibetan monks and nuns in exile in view of the Chinese Maoist invasion and occupation of Tibet

(Lopez, 2001). In this debate, Hoshang is normally portrayed as a representative of a nihilist view, claiming that everything is empty and therefore there is ultimately no cause and effect, and morality is unimportant for the spiritual path. Speaking from a critical historical perspective, the decision made by Tritsong Detsen was likely motivated by the social and political impact of Indian Buddhism that emphasized morality and would definitely be a better choice for a state religion (Skilton, 2016). The debate cannot be considered separate from the previous connection between Tibetan rulers and Indian clerics. It would be a fair guess that the Chinese Buddhists would not have sent a disgraceful or controversial representative of their religion to a debate of national importance. The Ch'an school, rooted in Huayan philosophy, has undeniably a Buddhist scriptural basis, and remains a reputed Buddhist tradition up to today, perhaps more recognizable in the West than Tibetan Buddhism, through its Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese offshoots. However, similar Ch'an-based elements have found their place in Tibetan Buddhism within the Dzogchen practice of the Nyingma tradition (Skilton, 2016; van Schaik, 2004).

Speaking of Tibetan Buddhist traditions (or *sects*, as they are often referred to), it is important to give a short overview of how they came into being. Nyingma literary means "the old one". It is based on the teachings and practices spread by the first Indian masters who came to Tibet, and especially by Padmasambhava. The legacy of Padmasambhava (or Guru Rinpoche, as Tibetans call him) includes a number of "hidden treasures", texts and practice manuals, left by him for the future generations. The masters, who revealed these treasures (either by physically finding them, or through a visionary experience), are called *tertöns*, and hold a special place in the hierarchy of teachers (Powers, 2007; Skilton, 2016). Nyingma, however, was ironically not the first tradition to start, but rather a name for a set of lineages of masters, who did not join the traditions, which were starting up. Skilton (2016) accounts for the beginnings of different Tibetan Buddhist sects through the importance of certain teachers, rather than through any kind of schisms or doctrinal divisions.

The first tradition, Kadam, was established by the followers of Atisha, the Indian monk who brought a revival of Buddhism to Tibet in the 11th century. It did not survive into the modern times, but it did become a foundation for the modern Gelug, founded in the 15th century by Je Tsonkhapa, and its methods and teachings have found place in other still existing traditions. Between the Kadam and the Gelug, three more traditions were founded. At about the same time the Kagyu order was established, based on the teachings of (in reversed succession) Gampopa, Milarepa, Marpa, Naropa and Tilopa. Naropa was a former abbot of a Buddhist monastic institution in India who became a disciple of a tantric yogi Tilopa. Marpa was a lay translator and scholar, who went over the Himalayas to receive tantric teachings from Naropa, and who was the teacher of Milarepa, vastly venerated by the Kagyus. Milarepa was an ascetic yogi and a poet, who transmitted his legacy through the two main disciples, the monk Gampopa and the lay yogi Rechungpa (Powers, 2007; van Schaik, 2016). The Sakya tradition was established by another scholar and translator, who studied with Indian masters,

Drogmi. Nowadays this school is less represented than Kagyu, but it had a strong political support in Tibet (Skilton, 2016; van Schaik, 2016). The third tradition, which formed in the same period and has, perhaps, the smallest representation, is Jonang. Followers of that order rely on a different philosophical position than other traditions, and were fiercely suppressed by the Gelugpas throughout the history of Tibet. They follow *Chittamatra* or the Mind-Only school of philosophy, while other traditions rely on variations and their different interpretations of *Madhyamaka* or the Middle-Way philosophy (Powers, 2007). The Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism is currently the largest and most prominent, largely due to the personality of the Dalai Lama XIV, who is often mistakenly considered to be the head of the tradition, or even all of Tibetan Buddhism (Lopez, 2001). It is the most rigorous and the most institutionalized sect, with a history of political struggle against other sects, and nowadays is characterized by a schism around the propitiation of a sectarian protector spirit (Kay, 2004). The current ecumenical and peaceful stand of the tradition is largely because of the Dalai Lama XIV. Partly as a result of this stance, he is venerated by all Tibetan Buddhists, except for the propitiators of that spirit, and one offshoot of the Karma Kagyu order, the Diamond Way, following a disagreement around the successor of the head of the Karma Kagyu school, the Karmapa XVII. Karma Kagyu is the most prominent among all the various Kagyu orders, which stem from different teachers within the same tradition (Skilton, 2016). Sakya and Jonang have a more centered structure, while Nyingma is the most scattered, made up of lineages, who do not report to the same authority. And finally, the native religion of Tibet, Bön, is nowadays also considered as a Buddhist sect. Its institutional and monastic structure is borrowed from the Gelug, while it shares many teachings and practices with Nyingma lineages, and the Dzogchen practice, which stems from the previous Buddha (Kashyapa), and bears more shamanistic elements than other Tibetan Buddhist traditions (Skilton, 2016). While the modern day Bön bears a large influence from Buddhism, it should be also noted, that Tibetan Buddhism itself had included many of the folk and Bön elements, such as the worship of certain spirits and other physical elements, such the globally popular Tibetan prayer flags.

So the religious formation of Tibetan Buddhism takes its origins from the early Buddhist sutras (both Pali suttas and Mahayana ones), as well as later developed insights and practices of Indian Buddhism, and elements of Bön. The tantric Mahayana form of Buddhism, which became the main religion of Tibet over twelve centuries, was likely a fringe and marginalized version of elite Buddhism at home in India. This differs, however, from the version of the religious history of Tibetan Buddhism, which traces both Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, framing them as his original intent, while Theravada Buddhism would be seen as an adaption to the limitations of the Buddha's contemporaries (Lopez, 2001; Gross, 2013). There are some differences on the level of specific practices, physical elements and stories among Tibetan Buddhism's various sects. Nevertheless, its social structures, as

well as its basic doctrinal tenets, have perpetuated themselves with little alteration over more than a millennium.

2.2.2 Global spread in 19-21 centuries

Various Buddhist teachings did not avoid the attention of European intellectuals during the ancient, medieval and modern era (Prebish, 1975). In fact, the oldest Buddhist statues discovered bear resemblance to Greek and Roman sculpture (Rowland, 1942). The shapely representations found in part of the modern Afghanistan and Pakistan, can be traced back to the age when this area was inhabited by Buddhists and under the conquest of Alexander the Great. The direct or mediated exchange between the philosophers of ancient India and ancient Greece are a matter of heated speculation due to striking similarities between the two philosophical traditions. Some historians look for common Indo-European origins, others theorize mutual influence, debating its direction, and others look for similar socio-historical circumstances taking place in both regions at the same time, such as the formation of cities and monetization (Seaford, 2019). In the later ages, there was some episodic cultural exchange during the Renaissance times, mostly through exploration and missionary activity, but a real academic study of Buddhism started only in the 19th century, and gained importance in view of the Western colonial endeavor. A gross and proud Western ethnocentrism of the time, as well as the power of Christianity and the rise of modern Enlightenment values imparted a special character to the cultural exchange of that period.

McMahan (2008) describes the intellectual history of that era, and its repercussions for the Buddhism that was shaped as a result, by the use of the term, coined by Bechert (1966): Buddhist modernism. Buddhist modernism is a fruit of the Western post-Enlightenment values of the colonizers meeting the adapting, adjusting and reiterating attempts of the colonized, i.e. of the Eastern Buddhist clerics and intellectuals. Facing threats of losing their political and cultural sovereignty and yielding the interest of lay parish to Christian missionaries, prominent Buddhist monks and leaders were fierce at renewing, purging, and adapting their religious tradition to make it look worthy of local and global acclaim (McMahan, 2008). This resulted in several major features, identified by McMahan (2008): individuation and psychologization, perceived compliance with science, rational and secular ideals, and a turning back from the "tradition" to the "origins", as well as a weakening of hierarchy. The modern scientific Buddha became the new ideal of Western intellectuals, who were losing their respect for Christianity and imagining Buddhism in ways which still have a strong effect on the popular perception of the religion (Lopez, 2008). This particularly applied to the Theravada school of Buddhism, being as it is the least flavored with mysticism and transcendental elements, and deemed the closest to its ancient Indian origins. However, the modernization also affected the way East Asian Buddhism, particularly Zen, was received and embraced in Western countries (McMahan, 2002). Particularly in the case of Zen, simultaneously with the rationalizing forces, the opposite movement of Romanticism influenced the

perceptions of East Asian Buddhism to a large extent (McMahan, 2008). Asian American proponents of Zen, particularly D. T. Suzuki, spoke of their tradition as a universal spirituality, rooted in mystical experience, uniting Eastern and Western religious, political and scientific minds into a cocktail which many Westerners found rather palatable (McMahan, 2002). As a result of that encounter, the modern Western understanding of Zen, McMahan (2002) argues is more prominently influenced by "the popular culture's odd embrace of the term Zen", rather than the meditation tradition of Zen, "of which most Westerners remain largely ignorant" (McMahan, 2002, p. 218).

Western colonialism and the resultant interest in Buddhism from the side of the Western intellectuals was one factor in the religion's spread to the

West. The other factor was the immigration and resettlement of Buddhist

Asians in Western countries (Baumann, 2002b). After WWII the Buddhist Asians from Japan, Burma, Thailand, and from other countries torn by political tensions, came to the USA and Europe. They brought their Asian Buddhism, with its congregations, temples, incense, art and folk beliefs (Baumann, 2002b; Seager, 2002). They settled side by side with the often rigorously meditating, iconoclastic, authority-questioning, scientific Western Buddhists, and formed an equal or even a larger part of some Western countries' Buddhist populations (Numrich, 2006; Baumann, 2002b). The "two Buddhisms", as they had been often clumsily talked about in academia (Hickey, 2010), shaped what we now understand as Western Buddhism. Far from being a homogeneous cocktail, it is, in fact, at least nowadays, a mixture of various schools of different origins, doctrinal bases, ethnic composition and ranges of practice. Researchers still who prefer to juxtapose the "two Buddhisms" often associate one Buddhism with Westerners, usually white and middle-class, who do meditation and occasionally other Buddhist practices, filtered through the sieve of Buddhist modernism, and the other Buddhism with its communities of immigrants who like to gather in their Buddhist temples to meet similar looking people, speak a common language and seek some superstitious help in their mundane affairs (as described eg. in Baumann, 2002a). However, as the "Western Buddhist" landscape becomes more complicated, and the hereditary Buddhist community becomes more acculturated and included in society, the border between the two becomes somewhat questionable (Nelson, 2016).

In any case, looking at the history of the adoption of Buddhism, especially in the 20th century, we can identify forms and manifestations of Buddhism which are specifically Western. The most original of these forms could be the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, established by Sangharakshita (born Dennis Philip Edward Lingwood) in 1967, and recently renamed into Triratna Buddhist

Community. Apart from establishing a new Buddhist order, FWBO also followed an ecumenical approach, combining teachings of Theravada and Mahayana, due to the fact that Sangharakshita had been ordained as a Theravada monk in India and later in his life developed an interest in Tibetan Buddhism. Instead of adhering to a strict monastic sangha, the followers of FWBO emphasized "spiritual friendship", which meant close mentorship (which has caused

some scandals related to sexual abuse), and communal practice and living (Bell, 2002).

Another milestone in the shaping of the original Western Buddhism, this time across the ocean in the USA, was the establishment of Spirit Rock meditation center. It started with the teaching activities of some American practitioners of Vipassana, particularly Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield. They were followers of Asian teachers such as Mahasi Sayadaw and Sri S. N. Goengka, and they became instrumental in introducing Buddhist ideas and practices to a broad Western audience, including non-Buddhists, making them into best-selling authors. The Burmese tradition emphasizing Vipassana meditation was adopted by the founders of Spirit Rock and was itself a fruit of modernity, stemming from the colonial period. While *vipassana* (Pali) or *vipashyana* (Sanskrit) – special insight - is commonly considered in most Buddhist schools to be a more advanced practice, which is supposed to be performed with perfect concentration, developed to its fullest through the practice of *samatha* (Pali) or *shamatha* (Sanskrit), the Burmese monk Ledi Sayadaw shook the Buddhist world by teaching vipassana to relative beginners, and even to lay people (Braun, 2013). It was largely a reaction to the threat of Christian missionaries causing the members of the lay Buddhist parish, on whom the monastics depended for living, to turn away from their native Buddhism, which at the time many saw as detached and incomprehensible, to a down-to-earth faith offering salvation through Jesus Christ. Vipassana, unlike samatha, gave a quick insight into the Buddhist claims, becoming a real referent for meditators and inciting their interest (Braun, 2013). The Burmese tradition had leant strongly towards practicing vipassana prior to developing samatha, which gave it somewhat of a controversial reputation among more conservative Buddhist traditions within Theravada and beyond (Braun, 2013). Vipassana has turned out to be a huge success among Western intellectuals of our time, considering the fact that the best-selling historian Yuval Noah Harari and the militant atheist Sam Harris are both ardent practitioners of vipassana in the Burmese tradition (Harris, 2017). As for Spirit Rock, it developed a truly ecumenical orientation, drawing on teachings from far beyond the vipassana movement, from Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, and even from Advaita Vedanta (spiritrock.org). Hybridity, ecumenicalism and emphasis on meditation above worship and doctrine, are associated with the spiritual formations, considered as the emerging Western forms of Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhism's journey to the West was a different story from the journey of Zen and Theravada. The main reason was the political situation in Tibet in the 20th century. Of course, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the world seemed a bigger place than now. Globalization was not yet a phenomenon, and many civilizations could still live their traditional ways, knowing little of each other. On the other hand, it was also the time of colonialism, world wars and significantly greater possibilities for travelling and information exchange, than in earlier periods. Through the emerging modern means of communication, starting from creating political alliances to printing books and mass literacy, Asian religions became available for Western minds. While the Asian Buddhisms of

Theravadan and Chinese Mahayana origins used 19th and 20th centuries to prepare ground for what we now see as Western Zen or the Insight meditation movement, Tibet was like a parallel reality. Its geographical location on a plateau behind the world's highest mountain ranges, together with a severe climate and a high altitude with virtually no infrastructure for wheeled transport, ensured Tibet was safely protected from modernity (Sharapan and Swann, 2019). The xenophobic and conservative mind-set of much of its elites and clergy added another factor (Goldstein, 1989). Migrants and tourists were not just unwelcome in Tibet, but on some occasions were threatened with capital punishment or physical mutilations for the crime of trying to visit Tibetan lands (Paine, 2004). At the turn of the century Tibet attracted some Western minds hungry for adventure and spiritual mysteries, but most of the time they had to be disguised when travelling inside the country. One such explorer, the controversial Swedish geographer Sven Hedin, managed to compile the first maps of Tibet during his several expeditions, only by being thoroughly disguised and hidden from the authorities (Hedin, 1974). A perilous expedition by the British explorers, Frederick Bailey and Henry Morshead, was conducted without authorization, as the British Empire was competing with the Russian Empire for political influence over the territory (Znamenski, 2012). Russia was the home to many explorers of Tibet, partly due to its populations of Mongolian origins in Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva, who practiced Tibetan Buddhism as their official religion. Buryat-born Agvan Dorjiev left his home village near Lake Baikal for Drepung monastery in Tibet, where he received a degree of Geshe Lharampa (roughly equal to a PhD in Buddhist philosophy). He became a regent and a close friend of Dalai Lama XIII, and contributed to establishing Tibet's political ties with Russian Tzars (Znamenski, 2012).

In the later period, in the decades before the Chinese invasion, during the time of the young Dalai Lama XIV, we have the memoirs of a few other Westerners. One of them was the British diplomat Hugh Richardson, who spent about eight years serving as an official and a trade representative in Lhasa. He spoke fluent Tibetan, and became an author of numerous works on Tibet's history and society, including the co-authored Cultural History of Tibet (Richardson and Snellgrove, 1965). Of course, the visitor to pre-Chinese Tibet who received the most publicity was the Austrian mountaineer Heinrich Harrer (1912-2006; Harrer, 1952), and his less well-known but also prominent co-traveler Peter Aufschnaiter (1899-1973; Brauen, 2006). Harrer received acclaim for his book *Seven Years in Tibet* (Harrer, 1952), later turned into a film starring Brad Pitt. His travel companion, Peter Aufschnaiter (played by David Thewlis in the film), stayed for another ten months, despite the spreading Chinese occupation, learnt Tibetan and contributed to the welfare of Lhasa. A trained agricultural engineer, he is credited with establishing the first sewage system and building the first hydroelectric plant, as well as with drawing an exact map of Lhasa (Brauen, 2006). His memoirs were reflected in the less well-known *Peter Aufschnaiter's Eight Years in Tibet* (Brauen, 2006).

Outside of any political realm, among the most prominent first travelers to Tibet was Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969). The groundbreaking feat of her

travels to the world's most closed region was more difficult because she was a woman – in her times it was unthinkable, if not immoral, for a woman to travel alone in faraway lands (Paine, 2004). Dressed as a Tibetan beggar, with her face covered in soot, she travelled into Tibet accompanied by a young monk (her future adopted son). Before that, she had been staying in Sikkim and India, where Dalai Lama XIII during his exile agreed to have an exclusive audience with her, despite the rule of not meeting Western women (Paine, 2004). In Tibet she not only survived, but over her several visits spent several years in the country, receiving teachings and practices from Tibetan monks and yogis (Paine, 2004).

Another similar prominent figure was Walter Evans-Wentz (1878-1965). A graduate of Stanford and Oxford, he followed his burning interest in "the Orient", and spent a long time in Darjeeling, India. He became a disciple to the Tibetan Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup, and translated *Bardo Thödöl*, widely known as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Evans-Wentz, 1967). He also authored several other contemporary books on Tibetan Buddhism, which became pivotal at the time, and other works, related to spirituality. Ironically, Evans-Wentz turned a *terma* text (recognized only in the Nyingma sect), which Bardo Thödöl is, into a "canonical text amongst Westerners turning to Tibetan teachings" (Oldmeadow, 2004, p. 135). He translated its name (literally: 'liberation through hearing during the intermediate state') to his own taste, being inspired by the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, and added a good portion of his own interpretations, influenced by the Theosophical Society of which he was a member. Even more surprisingly, he did not have a firm command of Tibetan and never went to Tibet (Lopez, 1998).

The lack of knowledge and access made Tibet a topic just as forgiving of forgery as it was alluring. Lopez (1998) describes the story of a book, The Third Eye, written in 1956 by Tuesday Lobsang Rampa. Rampa was a Tibetan priest-surgeon who channeled himself into the body of an young Englishman, possessing and gradually taking over on a molecular level. In England, he wrote his autobiographical account, sharing his story of being recognized as a reincarnation of a lama in his childhood and sent to Chakpori lamasery, where he underwent his thorough education in mathematics and the Buddhist canon. His story is dense with description of ordinary and extra-ordinary life in Tibet, of spiritual techniques for reading auras, crystal-gazing and astral travelling. In the two other parts of the trilogy that followed, Rampa described his flight from Tibet, the torture and hardship he underwent in China, Japan and Russia, and how he resettled in the USA, Canada and finally, Ireland. Before being accepted for publication his ethnography was studied by experts on Tibet, particularly Snellgrove and Harrer, who were appalled by it. The author's accounts and language use revealed a person who not only could not be Tibetan, but had never even read any available contemporary literature on Tibet. Rampa, however, insisted that his work was entirely true, and after it was eventually published, it received enormous publicity. It took a police investigation to discover that Lobsang Rampa was in fact Cyril Hoskin, the son of a plumber and going about under the name of Kuon Suo. The case made newspaper headlines, and it soon became very clear that *The Third Eye* was just as accurate a description of Tibet as

Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* was a description of Mars. In Lopez (1998), even more incredible than the description of the trilogy story is the story of Lopez's presenting the book to university students:

> I recently used *The Third Eye* in a seminar for first-year undergraduates at the University of Michigan, having them read it without telling them anything of its history. […] The students were unanimous in their praise of the book, and despite six prior weeks of lectures and readings on Tibetan history and religion …, they found it entirely credible and compelling, judging it more realistic than anything they had previously read on Tibet, appreciating detail about "what Tibet was really like", giving them "a true understanding about Tibet and Buddhism." (p. 104)

Indeed, despite the opinions of scholars and travelers, the book seemed to have an alluring reality in its description, winning more appreciation than criticism among a broad audience. At the present time, the book is rated four stars on Goodreads.com, based on 3,074 ratings. Lopez's Prisoners of Shangri-la (1998), where he described the experiment, also got four stars, but only by 170 voters.

The drastic change in the physical availability of the religion to Westerners took place in 1959, ten years after Maoist troops first entered Tibet-controlled regions aiming to liberate the people. As part of Mao Zedong's Marxist experiment, Tibet had to join other parts of China in their struggle for a utopian future. As a price for the uncalled-for Communist future, Tibet had to abandon the Four Olds: customs, culture, habits and ideas, which in practice meant an eradication of their religion, language, traditional elements, most religious objects and architecture, and approximately a quarter of population (Sperling, 2004). The invasion and consequent destruction resulted in the Lhasa uprising of March, 10th 1959, which claimed thousands of Tibetan lives. Dalai Lama XIV, 24 at the time, accompanied by his court and eventually about 100,000 ordinary Tibetan people, monks, lamas, and peasants walked across the Himalayas into India to seek refuge. India was far from prosperous at the time, and the reception was hardly luxurious. Tibetans often had to live outdoors, they were suffering from a shortage of food and clean water, and often dying of diseases and infections caused by the differences in climate and poor sanitary conditions. The Indian government at the time was nevertheless sympathetic to the refugees, and granted them land in the south (Karnataka state) and north (Himachal Pradesh), where the largest Tibetan communities in India are still settled (Dorjee, 2006). The large and smaller Tibetan monasteries were established in these areas, drawing monks and nuns from among the Tibetan diaspora and the Buddhist inhabitants of the Himalayan region. The temporary homes turned into centers for the preservation of Tibetan culture and religion (Goldstein, 1989).

Even though Tibetans and their culture became more accessible in the 1960s, the mystified image of Tibet largely affected the way Tibetan Buddhism was rooted in the West in the later age (Lopez, 1998). Additionally, since religion has a tendency to be interconnected with the culture and social ways of the area, it would be true to say that many elements of Tibetan Buddhism are already rather exotic for modern Western individuals. The society where Tibetan Buddhism

was preserved was largely opposed to modernization. It was feudal in its structure and economically stratified. Most of the population were peasants who arguably were hereditary serfs, or near that status (Goldstein, 1989). Monasteries owned nearly half of all the land, while about a quarter belonged to the aristocracy (Goldstein, 1998). Few people were literate. Education was provided in rare schools for members of aristocracy and in monasteries, while the latter did not guarantee education, because low discipline and reluctance to study were easily tolerated (Goldstein, 1998). On the example of one of the largest monasteries Drepung, Goldstein (1998) notes that following the "mass monasticism" principle monks were brought to monasteries by their parents at a small age, and were kept there against their will and despite occasional attempts to run away. While Buddhist education and literacy were encouraged, they were not a condition for staying at the monastery, and often the monks were deliberately taught to read, but not to write, so that they did not feel tempted to escape and find a job in a city (Goldstein, 1998). The author also notes that despite their ownership of land, monasteries did not provide food for the monks, forcing them to work part-time or rely on donations. The monastic lifestyle did not consist of meditation and study of the doctrine, but of mass liturgical activities, taking care of the monastery and younger monks and occasional farm work. The social position was high in such theocratic society for those who nevertheless managed to receive a traditional religious education and win some retreat time. A Buddhist career served as a social ladder in a society where social roles and economic opportunities were otherwise very fixed and limited. Religious authority enjoyed the unquestioned respect of the laity, and sometimes understandably so. Various external marks of homage were common and can still be observed at traditional teachings and ceremonies: high elaborate thrones next to opulent altars, brocade robes and conspicuous hats, artisan ritual belongings, and of course lavish donations (Powers, 2007). As for lay people, active Buddhist practice was uncommon, though sharing belief in the Buddha and respect for his teachings and the monastic community were a given (Powers, 2007). A small number of lay practitioners were yogis who were actively engaged in meditation and tantric practice, and were often in an unspoken conflict with monastic Buddhists (Powers, 2007).

As for intellectual environment of the area, Tibet had (tantric) Buddhism as its ideology, science and culture (Goldstein, 1989; Dorjee, 2006). At the center of nearly all intellectual and artistic spheres was Buddhist doctrine, meditation and ritual, and Buddhist mythology and symbolism. The paragon of education was monastic education, and Dharma (*chos*, in Tibetan) stood for cosmic law and order, the way things exist. This way, when we speak of philosophy in the West, we speak of sets and streams of competing ideas, which come from logical and creative investigation of ordinary (though presumably very intelligent) people, who may err and change their minds. When we speak of the Buddhist philosophy in Tibet, the analogy would be a peculiar hybrid of theology and physics. The fundamental assumption is that the Buddha discovered the true nature of the universe by attaining enlightenment, and the task of the learners is to understand the doctrine in order to do the same (Powers, 2007; Wallace, 2013). It is therefore

conceived of as replicable and coming from a religious source at the same time. While there were competing philosophy schools with their competing interpretations, the purpose was not to invent the best school, but to develop a closer interpretation of the original meaning of the Buddhist sutras and the Buddha' experience. As for the practice, the attitude was even closer to that of the Western science. Brown (2006) writes:

> Toulmin[1] categorizes scientific disciplines along a continuum, from "would-be", to "diffuse", to "compact," depending on the degree of explicitness and consensualness of the basic ideas, commitment to use standard procedures without undue dispute, and the degree of precision of its technical language. Chemistry, for example, is considered to be a compact discipline, while psychology, with its methodological pluralism and division into numerous schools of thought, is considered a would-be discipline.

> Comparing spiritual traditions according to Toulmin's criteria, Western mysticism meets the criteria of a would-be discipline while Tibetan Buddhism meets the criteria of a compact discipline, not because the spiritual realizations in these respective traditions are more or less compelling, but because of the differences between the technical precision by which these realizations are expressed and transmitted. (p.4)

However, a huge distinction between science in the Western sense and Buddhist dharma in Tibet is that while science is future-oriented, constantly developing through refutation and assertion, the dharma is constantly turning towards the past and the original sources, aiming to preserve, rather than to change. For those whose socialization happened in postindustrial Western countries, where fashion and technologies become outdated every decade, it can be hard to conceive of the fact that the culture, technology, fashion and political system of Tibet barely changed throughout twelve centuries. Its religion changed just about as much. Whereas in Europe, the *modern* world we live in is vastly different from the worldview, level of development and way of life even of the so-called "modern times" of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Another crucial factor is the circumstances of the encounter between the Western public and Tibetan Buddhism. The re-establishment of Tibetan culture and religion was taking place mainly India and in Nepal at the same time as the wave of young and spiritually thirsty Westerners was moving into the Orient. The economic conditions in Western countries and the basic level of life in the East, together with a relative availability of long-distance travel, made it easy for contemporary seekers to visit Asian Buddhist countries and remain there for a long time, living off their savings. The intellectual environment in the West was colored by being frustrated with the modernist values and disillusioned with authority and the constant striving for material prosperity (Bauman, 1998b). In the USA, the two or three decades after the exodus of Tibetans were the time of social movements and opposition to war. Pacifism, the hippie movement, sexual liberation and a fight for equality for people of all genders, races, sexual orientations

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[1] Toulmin "Human Understanding" (1972)

and so on, were in the air (Paine, 2004). Psychedelic drugs became a fashion and often a gate into the spiritual dimension (Osto, 2016). While contemporary Tibetan Buddhists from Tibet knew nothing about LSD, sexual liberation and other passions of their Western students, they managed to create an impression of their religion as an answer to the ills of the West (Paine, 2004).

Several Tibetan lama-superstars assisted in rooting the religion in Western minds and living rooms. One of them became known as Lama Yeshe. As a young Tibetan monk, Thupten Yeshe was in the middle of his traditional education when the uprising of 1959 happened. Among other Tibetans who saw no future in occupied Tibet, he trekked across the Himalayas into the hot and unwelcoming climate of India. As his monastery was re-established, he preferred to focus not just on the ordinary curriculum, but also on secretly studying English. Teaching Westerners was not a common ambition at that time; it was, in fact, commonly considered a futile and even disgraceful thing to do (Paine, 2004). Lama Yeshe, a truly intercultural man, saw it as an opportunity and a responsibility. His first disciple was not just a Westerner, but a Western woman, Zina Rachevsky. Despite her royal descent (she was a daughter of a Romanov dynasty prince) and being a Hollywood actress, and her history of wild parties and substance abuse, she became a Buddhist nun and a sponsor of Lama Yeshe's center for studies: the Kopan monastery in Kathmandu. The place started drawing Western hippies, who could be seen hanging around, and eventually FPMT[2]'s big and beautiful main temple was constructed, with its popular courses that had to be booked months in advance. Lama Yeshe had a thirst for picking up Western influences, and was strikingly skillful at adjusting the dharma to the needs and capabilities of each particular disciple he had. He would prefer using French perfume instead of incense in the shrine room and drinking Earl Grey instead of Tibetan butter tea (Paine, 2004). He would pick up idioms and phrases from the hippie culture to illustrate the teaching he gave. Paine (2004) quotes him as saying: "Dharma is like American bed – anybody can join in. … Change misery into blissful chocolate" (p. 55). Lama Yeshe was ready to travel and adapted easily to any place he went, remaining nevertheless, his unique personality, an ingenuous Tibetan monk with a funny accent and a lot of knowledge. Unfortunately, his teaching career was not very long, due to the heart condition he had been suffering from since childhood. Despite his doctors prohibiting him from traveling anywhere, he spent most of his last years going around the globe, giving teachings and founding new centers. He died in March 1984 in California, leaving more than a hundred groups of loyal students, and his closest disciple, Lama Zopa Rinpoche as the new head of FPMT (Paine, 2004).

Another ambassador of Tibetan Buddhism was Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (Paine, 2004). He escaped Tibet as a young boy after he had already undergone substantial training in Buddhist doctrine and practice. At an early age he was identified as a *tulku*, a reincarnated master, the eleventh embodiment of Trungpa. He had escaped Tibet into India, and from there he received an opportunity to study philosophy at Oxford. He remained a monk, even though

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[2] Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition

he managed to conceive a son (with a nun) back in India, and was enjoying the dolce vita of the liberated West. On one occasion it played an evil trick on him, when, having consumed a few drinks, he drove his car into a shop. The accident left him partially paralyzed for the rest of his life. After that, he decided relinquish his monastic vows and married a upper-class British girl, who was only sixteen years old (Paine, 2004). The disapproval it caused among some British students and especially among fellow Tibetans forced him to move to the more open-minded (as he hoped) America. He was the first Tibetan to establish a Tibetan Buddhist meditation center in Britain, and also the first one to establish another center in the US, and this time he became a great success (Paine, 2004). His lectures, often delivered with a glass of sake and in the company of beautiful ladies, drew many intellectuals of the time, such as Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. His personality still remains a topic of heated debate (Bell, 2002; Scherer, 2012). On the one hand he was a playboy, who broke monastic vows, smoked cigarettes, engaged in orgies, slept with his female students and with male students' wives, and then with the male students themselves, and who was chauffeured around in a Mercedes, and eventually drank himself to death. On the other hand he established a still thriving organization, promoting education in the dharma among Westerners (Shambhala), founded Naropa University, authored best-selling and ground-breaking books, brought up a number of diligent and often monastic Western teachers (for instance, Pema Chödron), and is generally credited for shaping American Vajrayana Buddhism (Lavine, 1998). It is hard to judge his deeds of that time, since it was the era of shunning away all taboos, of sexual revolution and liberation, feminism, rock-stars and groupies, when swing parties, drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco were much more common than, perhaps, nowadays. Trungpa was open to adapt to the most fashionable cultural behaviors at the expense of his vows, and of his health. The largest scandal broke out soon after Trungpa's death. The successor he had chosen, Tenzin Ösel (born Thomas Rich), was accused of engaging in unprotected sex with several women and men, while knowing that he was HIV-positive (Bell, 2002; Scherer, 2012). Tendzin Ösel was sent into retreat, where he died of AIDS. Trungpa's son, Sakyong Mipham, became the next successor and the head of Shambhala. A spiritual teacher and a family-man (Sakyong has a wife and three daughters), in 2018 he had to temporarily resign from his post following accusations of sexual harassment and coercion (Tricycle, 2018a). In these ways the legacy of Chögyam Trungpa was indeed of mixed value.

Chögyam Trungpa was a teacher in the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions, and although it was definitely the most memorable one, it was by no means the only one. A number of highly regarded lamas made a substantial contribution to Tibetan Buddhism taking root in the West. It feels invidious to mention some and not others, since there were many who were as highly respected as gurus by their devotees. Nevertheless, a few from the Kagyu school could be mentioned: the Karmapa XVI, Kalu Rinpoche, Akong Rinpoche, and Traleg Rinpoche (all deceased).

A Western offshoot of the Kagyu school was the Diamond Way, a huge organization headed by Lama Ole Nydahl from Denmark. He and his wife, Hannah Nydahl were Western disciples of Karmapa XVI, Ranjung Rigpe Dorje. The death of their teacher in 1986 brought a schism in Karma Kargyu over identifying the reincarnated successor. Two associates and close disciples of the Karmapa, Tai Situ Rinpoche and Shamar Rinpoche identified two different boys, Orgyen Trinley and Thaye Dorje respectively and chronologically (Scherer, 2012). The Dalai Lama supported the first choice, and many other lamas of the order adhered to it. However some lamas and students associated with Shamar Rinpoche, preferred his choice. Ole and Hannah Nydahl were among the latter. The schism led to their organization becoming increasingly alienated and resentful towards the central Karma Kargyu authority, the Dalai Lama and Tai Situ Rinpoche The separation also allowed Ole and Hanna to start building their own Westernized version of Tibetan Buddhism, where elements they deemed to be solely cultural were downplayed. The Diamond Way has over 650 groups and centers around the world, and wraps the teachings into accessible, liberal and pseudo-secular form (Scherer, 2012; Wiering, 2016). Some other peculiarities of the Diamond Way groups include mostly of the eccentricities of its nearly octogenarian leader, Lama Ole Nydahl, in particular his machoist behavior, homophobia, racism and Islamophobia (Scherer, 2011). The relations between the two strands of Karma Kagyu remain cold, while the subjects of the schism, the two Karmapas XVII, have been competing in courtesy towards each other. In reaction to Thaye Dorje's marriage, Orgyen Trinley published a statement, apparently addressed to his colleagues and followers, which ran: "Be spacious, patient, and forgiving so as not to lose control of yourself. Please be sympathetic and understanding so as not to disturb anyone else's mind." (Phayul, 2017) Soon after that, a statement he had made during his teaching also became publicized. During his address, he mentioned having been depressed about the situation and he expressed his hesitation about being on a par with other Karmapas of the lineage (Tricycle, 2018b). In the same year, the two Karmapas XVII held a historical personal meeting in France, signaling an end to sectarian rivalry (Tricycle, 2018c).

In the Nyingma tradition the masters, who became as prominent in the West, as in the East were Dudjom Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Penor Rinpoche (all of whom have been elected as administrative heads of the lineage), as well as Chatral Rinpoche and Yangtang Rinpoche. All of them are now deceased. Another Nyingma master who has enjoyed a mixture of fame and notoriety in the West was Sogyal Rinpoche, who died relatively recently in 2019. A recognized reincarnated master (of which the title Rinpoche is usually indicative), he studied with several highly regarded Nyingma masters and translated for Dudjom Rinpoche. At the end of 1970s he established Rigpa, an organization teaching Buddhism to Westerners. He is also famous for his best-selling book *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Nowadays Rigpa is a broad network of numerous centers around the world and online courses, and it organizes retreats and teachings with many famous Nyingma masters. The notoriety of

Sogyal Rinpoche, and as a consequence, of the organization as a whole, is connected with a long-going series of allegations concerning his sexual behavior, which had been questioned since early 1990s. Following the "me too" campaign around the notorious Harvey Weinstein, there was another wave of dissent in Rigpa in the summer of 2017. An article published by Mick Brown in the Telegraph (2017) based on the testimonies of people involved, described the events and the hidden personality of Sogyal Rinpoche with painful detail:

> At Lerab Ling, more than 1000 students were gathered in the temple as he walked on stage, accompanied by his attendant, a Danish nun named Ani Chokyi. Sogyal, who is 70, is a portly, bespectacled man who re-quires a footstool to mount the throne from which he customarily teaches. Approaching the throne, he paused, then turned suddenly and punched the nun hard in the stomach.

His physical, psychological and sexual violence behavior was as obvious to the people in his close circle, but it was covered-up and even condoned. His students claimed that he broke no monastic vows (being a layman, not a monk), and his "unorthodox" style of teaching and mentoring, was part of the "crazy wisdom" tradition. The first lawsuit was filed against him in 1994, detailing sexual harassment. The suit was settled, and the behavior continued. A new wave of dissent was triggered by an open letter submitted to him by a group of his close disciples, many of whom held high positions in Rigpa. The letter listed his offences and his attempts to hide them by blackmailing and pressuring the students, and it described the luxurious lifestyle he led financed by the organization's budget. Sogyal was asked to resign from the post and go in retreat. The authorship of his best-selling book is also a matter of debate, considering the ongoing (and well-grounded) rumors, that Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey, credited as "editors" of the book, actually wrote it, inspired by (rather than relaying) Sogyal's oral teachings (Behind the thangkas blog, 2010). With all the information and Sogyal's own implied confirmation when he stepped down, it was very clear that the emperor had no clothes after all.

The exposure of Sogyal has been a source of much debate among Western disciples and a difference of opinions among other prominent lamas. The remarkable aspect about the Sogyal phenomenon is that he was by no means a sectarian figure, separated from the rest of the Buddhist establishment. Numerous renowned Buddhist teachers, men and women, have taught at his centers, he has appeared on numerous occasions with well-respected figures, such as Dalai Lama XIV. His teachers are considered to be among the masterminds of the Nyingma school, and his co-students are the contemporary stars of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, such as Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche. Both Rinpoches are traditionally trained and relate well to a Western audience, having been involved with Rigpa as visiting teachers and students, and they were taught by the same teachers as Sogyal. While Mingyur Rinpoche in his open letter made an explicit point, that the students are not obliged to follow abusive teachers at any level of Buddhist practice, Khyentse Rinpoche made it clear that tantric disciples must see their

guru as pure and preserve their *samaya* (connection) no matter what (Lion's Roar, 2017; Lewis, 2017). Both teachers are themselves monks, and have not been accused of any misdemeanor, but their different takes highlighted a sharp ethical dilemma, particularly in Tibetan Buddhism, where tantric teachings are so pervasive. Khyentse's position was already clear in his recent book, issued in 2016, where he made a point that gurus come in all shapes and sizes, and failing to see them as immaculate results in a failure on the tantric path (Khyentse, 2016). In view of the immoral and distasteful behavior of Sogyal, these instructions may leave many aspiring Western practitioners disillusioned.

Rigpa remains among the biggest and the most visible Nyingma organization, but there are others of similar size and scope, although not stained by a history of misbehavior, such as the Dzogchen community of Namkhai Norbu. Due to the ecumenical *Rime* movement, popular in Tibet in the 18th century, and a modern adaption to the minority global position of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, many teachers of Nyingma, Kagyu and Sakya are lineage holders in more than one tradition. Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, who heads the Ranjung Yeshe Institute in Kathmandu, is an example of a Kagyu-Nyingma lama, and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche of Sakya-Nyingma. Apart from Khyentse Rinpoche, there are not so many Sakya teachers established and actively teaching in the West. The most prominent ones are, perhaps, the former head of the school, Sakya Trinzin, and the young Avikrita Rinpoche.

The Gelug lamas on the other hand seldom join with other lineages. The Rime movement did not include Gelugpas, largely because it was a reaction against the spread of Gelug's influence in Tibet. Yet the Gelug tradition may currently have the firmest global presence, largely due to the popularity of Dalai Lama XIV. The bespectacled octogenarian, who has authored and co-authored more than fifty books, has received a Nobel Peace Prize, and numerous other awards, honorary doctorates and honorary citizenships around the world. Virtually every Tibetan Buddhist temple or monastery in exile in India has his portrait displayed. He has received unprecedented media coverage for an Asian monk and has engaged in unprecedented diplomatic activity for a leader of an now non-existent state. Tibetans view him as a physical manifestation of the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara. Westerners respect him as a simple monk, whose "religion is kindness". The first Tibetan Buddhist monastery, however, was established in the USA during the time, when Dalai Lama XIV was still a young leader of Tibet residing in Lhasa. Before the huge Tibetan monasteries were re-established in India to cater for Tibetans fleeing Maoism, Labsum Shedrub Ling in Washington DC was supposed to serve for the community of Kalmyks, fleeing Stalinism. Geshe Wangyal, a Kalmyk, born in Tsarists Russia and trained in Tibet, was appointed spiritual councilor for the growing community of American Kalmyks. His emphasis on learning, rather than ritual practice, has attracted some Western seekers of that generation, the most famous being Robert Thurman and Jeffrey Hopkins of the University of Virginia (Lopez, 1998). Despite being the first, the learning center is hardly the most prominent. In fact, there are only two Gelug organizations of the size of

Rigpa or Shambhala: the FPMT and its offshoot, the NKT. Other Gelug groups and centers around the world are usually subsidiaries of the big Gelug monasteries, such as Drepung Gomang.

The history of Gelug in the West is closely connected to Lama Yeshe whom I have written about above. Unlike the structured and monasteries of Gelug, re-established in India, Lama Yeshe's FPMT was a meritocratic success. Lama Yeshe could not present the traditional claim of being a reincarnate lama (a *tulku*, a Rinpoche), nor did he complete the traditional twenty-year long training to become a Geshe (a doctorate in Buddhist philosophy). His closest disciple, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, was identified as a reincarnation of a yogi, named Lawudo, from the Everest region of Nepal, bordering Tibet. Although Lawudo lama, a lay Nyingma yogi, who meditated in the cave until his death, was considered a local saint, his prestige would not have been enough to win the support of the Tibetan community in exile. Both Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche studied and trained with the Dalai Lama's tutor Trijang Rinpoche and with Geshe Rabten (also famous for founding a learning center in Switzerland, and tutoring many Westerners, among them prominent authors like Alan B. Wallace and Stephen Batchelor). Lama Yeshe's charisma, language skills and adaptability brought him success among Westerners, and his reputation was strengthened by similar qualities in his disciple, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and with the admiration and support they received, they managed to establish the global FPMT network.

FPMT currently lists 164 centers, available on each continent, and as well as Lama Zopa Rinpoche (who has headed the organization since Lama Yeshe's death) it employs many traditionally trained geshes (and now also geshemas). While Kopan (in Kathmandu, Nepal) has been the center of the organization, its main Western branch was the Manjushri Institute in Cumbria, England. It was one of the first Buddhist centers established in the UK, a vibrant center for learning and also the place where the schism started. The resident teacher of the center, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, started his own center in 1979 in parallel with Manjushri Institute. This action was not easily accepted by Lama Yeshe, the head of the organization, and it was not the only source of conflict between the two lamas. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso was deeply dissatisfied with Lama Yeshe's liberal and ecumenical style of teaching, and the Lama's perceived negligence concerning the preservation of the purity of Gelug. He desired a more academic and rigorous practice, loyal to the lineage masters. This led to Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, armed with a petition signed by a group of his disciples at MI, overthrowing the FPMT authority and turned the center into what he perceived to be a seat of pure Gelug teachings, headed by himself.

The mutual hostility increased even more after Lama Yeshe's death, around the so-called *Shugden* issue. Tibetan Buddhism includes beliefs in various protector spirits, or Dharmapalas, Shugden being one of them. Both his propitiators and his opponents link him to the rival of Dalai Lama V, Trulku Drakpa Gyeltsen. Kay (1997) describes the history of rivalries within the hegemonic Gelugpa going many centuries back. He particularly highlights the conflict between the more purist Gelugpa clergy, and the modernist and inclusive

Dalai Lamas, V, XIII and now, XIV. The pro-Shugden side considers him to have been murdered, while those who are anti-Shugden one believes he killed himself. In any case, the ghost was revered as a minor worldly protector of the Gelug sect for a couple of centuries by some Gelugpas, probably symbolizing their opposition struggle for purism (Kay 1997). Shugden received some praise through a Tibetan lama of the twentieth century, Pabongka Rinpoche, who was the guru to Trijang Rinpoche, one of Dalai Lama XIV's tutors. Pabongka's willingness to emphasize the practice of Shugden was connected with his apprehension about Tibetan Buddhism losing its rigor because of the Rime movement and especially to his fears for the purity of the Gelug tradition when faced with influences from Nyingma Dzogchen (Kay, 2004). Non-Gelug Buddhists remember Pabongka as a severely sectarian leader, who incited violent raids and attacks on non-Gelug monasteries, as well as forced conversion to Gelug (Kay, 2004). Gelugpas however see a more gentle side. They consider *Liberation in the palm of your hand* among the most powerful recent jewels in Gelugpa Lamrim-style texts. He was also famous as a passionate speaker, giving mass public teachings, which were open to lay people, as well as monastics. His charisma won him the love of ordinary people and rich patrons among the elites. His sectarian purism was colored by revivalism, as he popularized Buddhist doctrine, made Vajrayogini his trademark tantric deity, and, incidentally, Shugden his trademark protector (Repo, 2015). Where his modern propitiators (Geshe Kelsang and associates) disagree with their opponents (Dalai Lama XIV) is on the question of whether the spirit is an enlightened being (a buddha) and therefore wise and benevolent, or whether he is just a powerful, but very delusional ghost. In fact, Pabongka seems to have never claimed that Shugden was enlightened, but rather admitted he was a wordly deity in form and a manifestation of Manjushri in essence (Repo, 2015). It was Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and his loyal disciples who went as far as worshipping Shugden as a buddha and taking refuge in him (Dreyfus, 1998). In this way, an embarrassing politico-religious schism became not less, but more prominent by being transplanted to the West.

The NKT is by no means the only organization, which embraces the Shugden practice. The International Shugden Community and Western Shugden Society are well-known because they are both large and based in the West. Apart from organized propitiation, there are also some Shugden practitioners among Gelug teachers in exile and in Tibet, where the practice is immune to the Dalai Lama's opinion of it. Historically, Dharma protectors in Tibetan Buddhism have occasionally been complicit in various acts of violence for the "right cause". Dorje Shugden also has some blood on his ghostly hands. In 1996 Lama Lobsang Gyatso, the head of the Buddhist School of Dialectics, and two of his students were stabbed to death in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India. Lobsang Gyatso was an ardent critic of Dorje Shugden propitiation, and even though he already obtained some enemies among the local geshes and lamas for criticizing Trijang Rinpoche on that matter, his murder has been attributed to ardent supporters of the protector spirit, though nobody was

charged with the crime. The Western members of the NKT, deny any responsibility and generally feel unfairly treated by the global Tibetan Buddhist community (Kay, 2004). Even the very name Geshe Kelsang Gyatso to describe the organization aims to align it with the pure Kadam masters of the past, and distance it from the contemporary Gelug, and the whole Tibetan Buddhist establishment (Emory-Moore, 2020).

The NKT do not just tolerate their situation though. At many public talks and visits of the Dalai Lama around the world, there is often a relatively large group of indignant protestors. They are mostly monks and nuns, almost exclusively Westerners, very angry, and accusing the Dalai Lama of infringing their religious freedom and lying, through their slogans and picket signs. These are Westerners, who have learnt Tibetan Buddhism with the NKT. They are angry at the Dalai Lama speaking publicly against the practice of Shugden. In response, the leader has repeatedly given assurance that he does not required Buddhists to abandon it in private, but simply to exclude it from the curriculum of monasteries, and he also requests those who choose to practice it to avoid visiting his teachings and serving in organizations related to him. He says he is concerned about the reason for his caution he names to be the "sectarian overtones" of the practice, as well as about his own safety, due to the fact that his own personal practice and behavior are deliberately eclectic (Info-Buddhism, 2018). The general status of the isolated NKT in the West has been somewhat controversial.

On the one hand, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso is a qualified and knowledgeable teacher of his tradition, and his books are accurate presentations of the common Gelug Tibetan Buddhist teachings. His endeavors are popular and he has had financial success. The NKT currently run approximately 1200 centers and study groups around the world, while FPMT, although also being a very popular organization, comprises 163. Their YouTube videos and book adverts are often sponsored, and one of their nuns, Gen Kelsang Niema has a TEDx talk with four million views. So after all, their spirit seems to have been grateful to his propitiators. Nevertheless, the other side of the coin is obvious sectarianism. The only books available to NKT students are those of their teacher, visiting other groups and doing other practices is not allowed, and, finally, the organization has "survivors". The survivors of the NKT are people, who were in the community once and had to quit due to abuse and unethical or inappropriate practices. Their stories can be found on the internet, as well as on several websites, revealing some inconvenient information about the organization. People are massively attracted to the NKT through courses, books and talks, which sound very relevant and are advertised as "modern" psychological Buddhism and then drawn into various deity practices and sectarian schisms. There is a disproportionate amount of monastics, and people are apparently encouraged to abandon their ordinary life in favor of a monastic vocation (Kay, 2004). However the procedure of ordination is not performed in compliance with the 2600 year old tradition, but rather consists of purchasing the robes and taking up several vows (instead of 253 of them), including celibacy. The newly "ordained" monks

and nuns are recommended to continue at their workplaces, because the organization relies on lavish donations. The celibacy also turns out to be a formality, since at a closer look the vow of celibacy is often broken without consequences (www.newkadampatruths.org). On top of that, the organization officially admitted accepting large amounts of money from the Communist party of the PRC for contributing to disparaging the Dalai Lama's person, now on the basis of infringing their religious freedom (Reuters, 2015). The role of well-intentioned Western converts in these developments has been crucial.

While my account above is disproportionately dedicated to Gelug, it is merely to describe the complexity of the Shugden schism and its implications for how we perceive modern Western Tibetan Buddhists. There is also a disproportionate focus on all sorts of power abuse. In contrast to the impression that may have been given, abuse has overall been more marginal than normal. There are many traditional Tibetan masters who serve in Western countries and have enjoyed popularity among their students and have contributed with unblemished reputations to the establishment of the religion outside of Tibet and India. Their teachings have enjoyed popularity due to their authenticity. There are plenty of organizations, big and small, in all traditions, which have never been implicated in any embarrassing stories. However, it is the controversial and sensational cases that receive the most publicity and threaten to give Tibetan Buddhism a bad name.

Another factor to which controversial organizations owe their publicity is their frequent use of rather aggressive techniques to obtain financial support, which is then used for spreading the organization's influence further by advertising it to potential new members (Emory-Moore, 2020; Kay, 2004). The groups I collected the data from for this dissertation are of a benign kind. For a rough comparison, the Nyingma group Danakosha I was collecting the data from runs a painfully amateurish website, and charges a membership fee of 35 euros per year (although the sum is as of 2014, according to the website), which is a price of one dinner with a drink in Helsinki. By contrast, the NKT website design strongly suggests that it was created by a highly-paid professional, and the PR-side of their enterprise is cutting-edge. Its activists are sponsored to stalk the Dalai Lama around the world, including by the Communist Party of the PRC (Reuters, 2015). A non-profit religious organization, can hardly afford such expenditures without receiving considerable donations. In any case, this study is not about abuse, but about a transplantation of a culturally different religion in a modern Western environment.

This transplantation can hardly be understood without some big picture of how other forms of Buddhism and meditation have adapted themselves to the global public domain. At the moment of writing this dissertation, meditation is a common and respectable thing to do, and there is nothing particularly Asian about it. How has meditation managed to change its oriental stigma for a fashion label? Buddhism in its loosely interpreted form penetrated Western philosophy through the works of Schopenhauer, who appreciated the "pessimism" of the religion. Carl Jung drew inspiration from Oriental cultures as well, composing

his classic foreword to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which despite its wide acclaim in the West, is actually a terma-category text within the Nyingma tradition, rather specific and not universally recognized (Lopez, 1998). Having displayed its presence to a public interested in psychology, meditation gradually crept into the neurology lab. The growing interest in meditation in the West coincided with the explosion of neuroscientific research. The first studies of Buddhist meditation were based on the modernized and secularized practices, related to Vipassana and Zen. In fact, the most scientifically tested kind of meditation program, MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction), was developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn on the basis of vipassana practices and Zen philosophy (Husgafvel, 2016). The most striking breakthroughs, though, happened, when Tibetan Buddhist meditators were asked to participate. It was largely due to the Dalai Lama's interest in Western science, and his ambition to bridge it with Buddhism, that the studies of long-term practicing meditators appeared (Davidson and Begley, 2013). The Mind and Life Institute, which he established in 1987, drew the attention of the Western public to Tibetan master-meditators, and, on the other side, made the master-meditators warm up to the idea of being studied by scientists in a lab (Davidson and Begley, 2013; McMahan, 2017). The initial interest was in calming kinds of meditation, but recently the emphasis has shifted to practices, which are employed to enhance compassion and kindness (Loizzo, 2014). In both cases, experienced meditators in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition occasionally caused the devices to go off the scale (McMahan and Braun, 2017). A French Tibetan Buddhist monk, Mathieu Richard even won the title of the happiest man on earth[3]. Endorsed on the cover of TIME magazine in 2003 and 2014, National Geographic in 2005, and Scientific American in 2013 and 2014, Mindfulness became a real hype. It has been broadly applied to the clinical context, to public education, the corporate sector, and even to the military (Lopez, 2008; McMahan and Braun, 2017). But success came at a price. McMahan and Braun (2017) note:

> Representing meditation as a non-religious, non-sectarian technique is what allows it to function freely in secular contexts, and renders it eligible for the public funding, that has supported a great deal of scientific research, not to mention freeing it to some extent from the stigma of foreignness and mysticism. (p. 12)

The irony about the hype around the benefits of Buddhist meditation is in the fact that the benefit, described in the studies, do not correspond to the goals of meditation as practiced by Buddhists over 2600 years (McMahan, 2017). While meditation is applied to all possible contexts of the public domain, its sole purpose in any of the Buddhist traditions has been accumulating causes and conditions for attaining enlightenment (Lopez, 2008). While Tibetan texts generally proclaim that any practice done for the benefit of this life only does not qualify as a Buddhist practice, the scientific studies do not entertain the idea of any other life. While the Buddha was contemptuous about mundane happiness and identified desire and grasping as the main causes of suffering, his methods

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[3] https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/69-year-old-monk-who-scientists-call-world-s-happiest-man-says-secret-being-happy-takes-just-15-minutes-day-a7869166.html

have proven to increase worldly happiness and even improve desire (Wilson, 2017). While the Buddha recommended his followers to focus on the body to realize how futile and disgusting it was, the followers of scientific meditation befriend and accept their body through practice (McMahan, 2008). While in all Buddhist traditions, meditation was always embedded in a broader religious, soteriological and ideological context, the scientifically-proven meditation had to be stripped of anything that could make it in any way unfit for universal application (Lopez, 2008).

Many scholars have expressed concern with this (Lopez, 2008; Heuman, 2012a; McMahan, 2002). However their readership cannot compete in numbers with TIME magazine, National Geographic and even Scientific American. Any positive effects measured by hard science have to be seen through measurable material effects, reduced to images and numbers, obtainable through existing technology. This way, what traditionally were minor side-effects of meditation become its true and science-tested benefits, and what traditionally were time-tested goals and motives for meditation, were left in a realm at least outside science, if not necessarily in opposition to it.

Currently, the hype is dying down somewhat and giving way to a more level-headed scrutiny, and even to criticism. Two comprehensive reports, based on thousands of studies, published on the benefits of Buddhist meditation, appeared in 2007 (Ospina et al., 2008) and 2014 (Goyal et al., 2014). The reports sobered up the proponents of scientific mindfulness by identifying a number of common limitations. It turned out that studies on the benefits of meditation were often based on an insufficient number of participants, lacked any (or any legitimate) control group, showed positive evidence for some benefits (such as reduced anxiety), but contradictory results for others (such as eating habits) (McMahan, 2017). On top of that, they generally suffered from conceptual ambiguity and vagueness.

Another side of the backlash was a growing interest not just in the positive, but also in the negative effects of meditation. Within the tradition it could hardly be shocking news that meditation may have a flipside to it and is generally not a mere pleasure cruise. One early Buddhist sutta describes Buddha giving instructions to his monks to meditate on the foulness of material bodily existence, and on what followed I will allow myself to quote Lopez again:

> This practice was apparently widely prescribed by the Buddha until he left the community to go on retreat for several days and returned to find the ranks of his monks rather diminished. When he inquired of Ananda the reason for the attrition, Ananda explained that during his absence as many as thirty monks had committed suicide in a single day, so overcome were they by loathing of their own bodies as a result of meditating on the foul (Lopez, 2001, p. 212).

Another, later source, a guide to meditation by Dudjom Lingpa (Wallace, 2011), provides a list and explanation of experiences likely to happen on a long meditation retreat. Unlike what one can imagine, hearing of "meditation experiences", inspired by William James and the like, Dudjom Lingpa lists

such "signs of progress", as, among others, "sharp pain in your heart", "intolerable pain throughout your body", "the sense that even food and drink are harmful", "paranoia about meeting other people", "unbearable misery", "insomnia at night", "grief and disorientation", as well as "various speech impediments and respiratory problems" (Wallace, 2011, p.135-138). These descriptions are unlikely to make a good advertising campaign for a mindfulness retreat. As for the scientific study of meditation, researchers use the term the Dark Night of meditation to describe the difficult states of mind, one might encounter, usually during long and rigorous meditation over an extended period of time (Cebolla et al., 2017; Lindahl et al., 2017). Several studies have looked into adverse meditation experiences, but the lack of familiarity with the experiential tradition and tacit knowledge, can make it difficult for researchers to separate the adverse effects, which are "signs of progress" and pertaining to one's mental transformation, from those, which are harmful or indicative of inappropriate practice. Such research, however needed, also may create a simplistic black-and-white impression of meditation, as a failed panacea. There is a danger that this rollercoaster romance between science and meditation may misinterpret issues traditionally deemed to be connected with a lack of proper guidance from the teacher, or with a lack of due preparation by the disciple, as problems pertaining to the meditation itself.

In any case, whether meditation is a magic pill or a Pandora's box, is not the focus of this dissertation. But how this common public interest towards meditation has shaped the ways Tibetan Buddhism has been represented is important. And it has been a mixed blessing (Heuman, 2012a). On the one hand, the dialogue with science has increased publicity of Tibetan Buddhism, advertising its teachers as kings of brain-scans. For example, the young and famous Tibetan teacher Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche wrote his best-selling *Joy of Living* inspired by his experience with Western neuroscientific study on the effects of meditation. Pictures of him plastered with nodes and circuits in a neurological lab can be found on a Google search for "science" and "meditation". His organization, Tergar Meditation Community, is currently among the most popular international Buddhist networks, with 106 centers and practice groups as of 2021. On the other hand, the common science of meditation mistakenly reduces Tibetan Buddhism to meditation, and its benefits to physically measurable ones (Heumann, 2012a). It may give a wrong picture to those interested in a religion offering solutions beyond stress reduction, while it may cause frustration to those who in search for measurable mundane benefits, if they find they are getting involved in a soteriological worship of lamas, deities and protector spirits. And finally, considering the influencing power of modern media, the face of Tibetan Buddhism may be significantly changed.

These and many other encounters (all of which would stretch way beyond the scope and page limit of this monograph) have shaped a certain kind of Buddhism of the West, imagined in modern media, and perceived in academia. Academics have spoken of "Western" or "American" (Prebish, 2015) Buddhisms, ecumenical and non-denominational (Smith, 2008), stressing meditation, rather

than doctrine and worship. It has been called "the New Buddhism" (Coleman, 2008), Navayana (Wiering, 2016), and even the Fourth Turning of the Wheel (Wilber, 2017)! We are witnessing the rise of "secular Buddhism" (Batchelor, 2011; Higgins, 2012), or "Buddhism naturalized" (Flanagan, 2011), a Buddhism stripped of all its doctrinal principles and religious elements. We can engage in Pragmatic Buddhism (Ingram, 2018), offering a transparent toolbox for achieving a perceptional shift, without any external wrappings and mysticism.

Vertically, on the level of the same group, we may encounter a range of motivations. Baumann (2002a) wrote about the Buddhist by-standers, and several other researchers discovered that many visitors to Buddhist groups seek to avoid such a label (eg. Danilyuk, 2003). In relation to Tibetan Buddhism, McKenzie (2012) has classified visitors at the Rokpa organization into four types: experienced lineage-trained Westerners, committed Westerners following guidance of an affiliated guru, regular visitors with partial commitment and no guru relations, and finally, what he called "nonlineage-trained spectators" (p. 22).

On top of that, the situation is aggravated by the fact that the "Western Buddhists" compete with the Buddhists who brought the religion with them when they moved to North American and European countries. Earlier scholarship divided Buddhists in the West into two or three groups. While several researchers (Baumann, 2002a; Numrich, 2006; Prebish, 1993) distinguished the "ethnic", "heritage" or "Asian" from "convert", "modernist" or "white". Layman (1976) also separated Soka-Gakkai International as "evangelical", a third type of Buddhists. In response to this, Hickey (2010) discussed the problems associated with such distinctions, particularly the reflection of a Western bias and even subtle racism in such dichotomies. In her view, the descriptions of either type do not hold in all contexts, downplay the role of "Asian" Buddhists in shaping and creating the "Western" Buddhism, conflate religion with ethnicity or race, and ignore the fluidity of cultural and ethnic boundaries, stereotyping the "Asian" Buddhists into a homogeneous mass of worshippers, preoccupied with community and rituals rather than the dharma. I believe it does make a difference whether a person acquired knowledge of the religion by growing up with it or whether they converted to it from a different cultural and religious background. But I agree with Hickey (2010) that this difference defies any easy binary division. Besides, similar to those Buddhists reared by their Asian parents into Buddhist beliefs we nowadays have a generation (or two) of adults, brought up by converted Westerners, and this makes the "two Buddhisms" issue an even more complex issue. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that "traditional" Tibetan Buddhism is not immune to change either. Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet, Tibetan exiles around the world, and in its other traditional abodes of Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, Mongolia, north of Nepal and parts of Russia, also undergo developments overtime in our modern globalized world (Esler, 2017; Gayley, 2016; Holland, 2014; Wallace, 2008). All compound phenomena (such as Buddhism) are impermanent and free of inherent existence, and only change is constant. With these liberal citations by two of the Buddhist Four Seals, and by Heraclitus, I will conclude this extended

overview of Buddhism's journey to the West and zoom down to how it rooted in Finland.

2.2.3 Buddhism in Finland

The story of Buddhism's spread to Finland appears to be a delayed reflection of its larger global spread. In the days when Finland was still an autonomous part of the Russian Empire, Buddhism was virtually unknown, even though people in other parts of the same empire were practicing it as their official faith. Some of those people (Kalmyks) even had a small community in Finland, but their religious affiliation was registered for a lack of a better word, as "religion of the Kalmyks" (Tolvanen, 2019). The situation has changed somewhat since then, but the academic topic of "Buddhism in Finland" still remains largely unexplored. At the moment of starting this research project, there were virtually no academic sources on Buddhism in Finland, even though there were Finnish academics (some rather veteran, such as René Gothóni), studying Buddhism and publishing research on it. Several years later, a few publications became available, all in Finnish, except the one published in co-authorship by myself. An edited book project on Buddhism in Finland is currently in progress and will be published in Finnish, and apart from that, there is a range of book chapters and masters' theses, also in Finnish. I found these publications to be of reasonable to commendable quality, even though a discriminating reader might regard them as not in the first rank, since they are not research articles in peer-reviewed journals. Fortunately, my command of Finnish allowed me to familiarize myself with them, so that the reader can enjoy a rendering of their most relevant points in this section.

The very beginning of the 20th century marked two important encounters between Buddhism and the Finnish public. First, a prominent Finnish member of the Theosophic Society, Pekka Ervasti, translated a collection of Buddhist teachings by Henry S. Olcott (Buddhalainen Katekismus) into Finnish (Husgafvel and Härkönen, 2017). Generally, some Buddhist concepts and ideas had circulated with the Theosophic Society, albeit in an often modified form (Lopez, 1998). Another important event was the meeting between Dalai Lama XIII and Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim in 1908 in Tibet, during the latter's exploration of Central Asia (Tolvanen, 2019). The encounter drew some interest in the country of Tibet from the contemporary Finnish public, but due to a lack of accurate knowledge, there were some myths and distortions (Tolvanen, 2019).

The first Buddhist group to appear in Finland was Buddhismin ystävät Ry (Friends of Buddhism), which originated after WWII and gradually evolved into the still existing Bodhidharma Ry. While the community started with translating and rendering classic Theravada teachings, and finding Finnish equivalents to Buddhist terminology, it later expanded into a wider array of literary translation, emphasizing the Zen tradition (Husgafvel and Härkönen, 2017). An offshoot of the British FWBO (Friends of Western Buddhist Order), under Sangharakshita, was established in Finland in 1973, and a decade later the list grew by three other groups, Soka Gakkai International, Zenshindojo, and Buddhalainen Dhar-

makeskus (A Buddhist Dharma Center). The latter one was the first group to specialize (mostly) in Tibetan Buddhism (Husgafvel and Härkönen, 2017). Before these official milestones, Buddhist activity was present in Finland in a more free-range way, represented rather by some separate individuals, such as the rockstar Pekka Airaksinen and Jan Olaf Mallander, who later opened a vegetarian restaurant Kasvis, which hosted several visits by Buddhist teachers (Tolvanen, 2019).

In society at large there were some factors that predisposed interest in Buddhism. In the 60s and 70s Finland went through a period of free-thinking, experimentation and counter-cultural movements. In the early 60s works by Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac were translated into Finnish (Tolvanen, 2019), introducing American poetry and prose that was thoroughly seasoned with Buddhism-inspired meanings and narratives. Politically, socialist and communist ideas gained a strong foothold among young people, despite the past war with the Soviet Union in 1939-45. On a physical level, traveling became more accessible, opening European capitals to Finnish youths, where they became exposed to contemporary music, lifestyle and new movements. Tolvanen (2019) mentions in particular chemical interventions in consciousness in the form of psychedelic drugs. She notes, however, that the counter-cultural movements appealed only to a fraction of the society, while the majority of young people lived their normal lives. Among these few, only a fraction were potentially interested in the issues of consciousness, meditation, spirituality and so on, while many others simply partied, occasionally with gruesome consequences. Psychedelic experiences are a big topic in the construction of the "Western Buddhist" discourse (eg. Osto, 2016), and the reception of these mind-altering substances was rather mixed. The Diamond Way's Lama Ole Nydahl had a major impact on the Buddhist circles in Finland at the grassroots level. His personal negative experience with drugs became a basis for his firm position against them as a teacher and opinion influencer (Tolvanen, 2019).

The seminal role for the establishment of Tibetan Buddhism in Finland was played by the several visits of Tibetan teachers. The first one took place in 1976 in Inari during a conference for Transpersonal Psychology, where Khensur Pema Gyaltsen Rinpoche from the Drepung Monastery was invited as a keynote speaker and several other lamas also participated (Tolvanen, 2019). One of them, Tarab Tulku, a young, lay and Westernized reincarnate lama from Switzerland, forged a bond with several Finnish visitors. Just the next year another memorable visit took place, this time by Kalu Rinpoche, a well-known lama from the Kargyu tradition. It was memorable also due to the fact that Kalu Rinpoche got lost on his way from Denmark, and arrived days later. The audience who came to look at and listen to a real Tibetan lama were disappointed to hear that he was not able to make it to the lecture hall on the agreed date. Lama Ole Nydahl was luckily also present at the event and entertained the public with some pictures from trips to Tibet and Tibetan refugee settlements that he and his wife made. Even when Kalu Rinpoche finally arrived at the airport, the delegation was delayed substantially due to the fact that he had no visa and no proper passport,

being a refugee (Tolvanen, 2019). It took some paperwork and newspaper references to him to convince the authorities to allow him to give his talks on Finnish soil. This sequence of events created a meme in Finnish spiritual circles about Buddhism coming to Finland with some delay difficulty, but nevertheless, with eventual success.

Another seminal event was a visit by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche in 1981. A prominent teacher and scholar in the Nyingma Dzogchen tradition, Namkhai Norbu, who had a family, a had been living in Italy, where he held the title of Professor at Naples Eastern University and was generally a very liberal and approachable teacher. His translator at the time, Tuula Saarikoski, who had acted as a translator during the previous teaching visits by other lamas, recognized Namkhai Norbu as her teacher (Tolvanen, 2019). Tolvanen (2019) writes that most Finnish people, attending these events and engaging with the Tibetan visitors were surprised to see that instead of appearing as holy and refined spiritual figures the teachers turned out to be fun and easy-going, liberal and even at times hedonistic. They were often seen drinking wine and smoking cigarettes, and to the shock of their hosts, who often organized the events at the first Finnish vegetarian restaurant Kasvis, at lunch requested to change their vegetarian meals for their favorite meat. However the impact of the first encounter with the teachers, was a very uplifting and memorable experience for many of Tolvanen's (2019) interviewees, and one often accompanied by mystical signs, such as prophetic dreams.

1988 marked the visit by Dalai Lama XIV. His schedule as a representative of Tibetan Buddhists, and as a leader of Tibet and the Tibetan Government in Exile consisted not only of spiritual lectures, but also of press-conferences and meetings with politicians. Sadly, all political figures except Pekka Haavisto, who were invited to meet the Dalai Lama, turned down the invitation. Currently, the Foreign Affairs Minister, and presidential candidate in 2012 and 2018, back then Haavisto was just a young MP from the Green Party with little influence. However he not only met personally with Dalai Lama XIV, he also organized a committee of other politicians for the same purpose, which, despite his best efforts, they later cancelled (Tolvanen, 2019). As for more spiritual events of the visit, the Dalai Lama gave a talk at Helsinki Cathedral (Tuomiokirkko), which was packed full. A talk by a Buddhist leader in a Lutheran church was considered bold by the press, although the message of the Dalai Lama was on the importance of religion and religious peace and dialogue in the modern world (Tolvanen, 2019).

In the following decades, the Buddhist population of Finland started to be swelled not only by convert free-thinkers, but also by immigrants from Asian countries (mainly Thailand and Vietnam). The largest organization is the Finnish Thai Association, with around 1100 members, but the number of immigrants with a Buddhist background who reside in Finland is hard to count, since most of them do not belong in any association (Husgavfel and Härkönen, 2017). In the 2000s non-hereditary Buddhists also started to actively form and join formal organizations, mainly various Tibetan Buddhist and Zen groups. According to

Husgavfel and Härkönen (2017), there are more than 40 various Buddhist groups and organizations working in Finland. As of 2017, 18 of the groups were Tibetan Buddhist ones; only four are registered as religious communities, seven are listed as associations and another seven are informal groups (see Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017, Appendix 1 for an exact list). A disproportionate number of Tibetan Buddhist formations can be explained by the fact that the students of each group prefer to create an organization following a specific teacher or a limited set of teachers. This way, even though many organizations belong to the same tradition, they are registered separately. For example, Palpung Yeshe Gatshal Finland, Palpung Changchub Dargye Ling Finland, Bodhicharya Study Group Finland, Helsingin Shambhala Meditation Group, and Kagyu Samye Dzong (former Rokpa Finland) all belong to the Karma Kargyu tradition under the current Karmapa XVII Ogyen Trinley. Many of the groups have subsidiaries in different cities and towns of Finland, and some of them (even in Helsinki) are very small (Husgavfel and Härkönen, 2017). One could assume that uniting under one umbrella organization could be more practical and financially viable, but this fracturing into smaller communities seems to be rather typical for Buddhist groups in Finland.

Based on my research interviews and participant observation with two of such groups, I believe that one of the factors contributing to this fracturing is a differing balance of "traditional" and "modern" elements within and between the various groups. I will be going into detail on this in Discussion, but it is worth noting that some research (albeit only at the master's level) into cultural simulation, transculturation and de-culturation has provided some insight into how these small cultures of specific groups are constructed. This may manifest more strongly in Tibetan Buddhist groups, since the cultural contrast is higher, but it is not limited to them. Cairns (2011) has written about the Dogen Sangha Finland Blog, which is a local offshoot of Nishijima, a Japanese modernist Zen movement that is broadly popular among convert practitioners. Dogen Sangha International was founded by a flamboyant Zen priest and a hardcore punk bass player, Brad Warner[4]. The Finnish blog was maintained by Markus Laitinen, the head of the organization in Finland. Since the rhetoric is clearly that of detraditionalization and adaption, and the head priest is an American hardcore punk star, it is easy to see Dogen Sangha as a form of Western Buddhism. However, Cairns' (2011) rhetorical analysis shows a recurrent justification for the de-traditionalization being made through references to the history of Japanese Zen and specifically the personality of Dogen. It is also evident that the trend for de-traditionalization is also marked by simplification, which may explain in part why an organization can be more approachable for newcomers to Buddhism. I will argue later that the success of adaptive rhetoric may not be connected su much with cultural adaptation or "westernization" as with simplification, resulting in a greater accessibility of such Buddhist formations. Cairns (2011) also

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[4] blogger and writer, author of *Hardcore Zen: Punk Rock, Monster Movies & the Truth About Reality* (2003), *Sex, Sin, and Zen: A Buddhist Exploration of Sex from Celibacy to Polyamory and Everything in Between* (2010)

mentions conflict views around interpretations of monastic ordination, which arose between Dogen Sangha and another Finnish Buddhist organization he does not name, after which the group left Sampo, the Buddhist center run by another Zen organization, Bodhidharma Ry, the oldest one in Finland, and headed by a Finnish Zen monk Taehye sunim.

The negotiation between "traditional" and "modern" also manifests itself in Tibetan Buddhist groups. Summala's (2019) thesis describes a simulation of an imagined Shangri-la taking place in some Helsinki groups, particularly Aro Gar Finland. She describes how not only physical elements are transplanted, together with the meanings pertaining to the external paraphernalia, but also some traditional Tibetan meanings pertaining to gender, sexuality and family roles are being negotiated. Largely, one can trace the same elements in Danakosha Finland, and to some extent in all Tibetan Buddhist groups. But my own analysis shows a great contingency of such narratives both among and within groups. Summala's (2019) research shows how drawing the "traditional" versus "modern" distinction along ethnic lines is both confusing and irrelevant. As Husgavfel & Härkönen (2017) point out, and this is confirmed by my own observations as well, the "ethnic" composition of Buddhist groups in Finland is very complex, and often includes convert Buddhists practicing and studying alongside hereditary ones, and immigrants from Asian countries practicing Buddhism in a tradition from a different region of Asia, alongside Finns and immigrants to Finland. Among my respondents, a large proportion were immigrants to Finland themselves, and even many of those born in Finland have told about having lived elsewhere during their lives. This cultural contingency, simulation and flexibility seems to be one factor characterizing becoming a Tibetan Buddhist both globally and locally in Finland. I consider that the field of Intercultural Communication has some concepts and frameworks to offer for a better understanding of how small cultures of Buddhist groups and organizations are formed and maintained, so that researchers of the topic may avoid being limited by fixed essentialized categories of national Buddhisms combined with some specific local cultural traits.

2.3 Intercultural Communication lenses

2.3.1 Cultural difference as a focus

It is common knowledge in human research that the questions we ask often guide the answers we get (Silverman, 2016). The field of intercultural communication emerged as a result of certain questions asked by certain researchers for certain purposes at a certain time. If we want to make sense of the answers we have accumulated in the field of intercultural communication, we need to go back to the moment of its birth. When Edward T. Hall, who is commonly considered a founding father of the field, started teaching at the Foreign Service Institute in 1940s, he did so in a certain social landscape (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). The world was just recovering from World War Two, which in the USA had solved many previously existing economic issues and boosted the growth of GDP, placing the country above others in terms of financial status. The moral status of being in the winning team of the war was fortified by the display of power in dropping Little Boy and Fat Man on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, creating an image of a strong and thriving superpower. For decades and even centuries the US had been perceived as a haven for the desperate, the hopeful and the persecuted, where they came in their masses looking for a new chance in life. For so many progressive minds in the world, it embodied freedom, opportunity, justice and merit-based success. At the same time, within the US this time was marked by real day-to-day racism, gross forms of prejudice, be it religious, ethnic, social, gender or sexuality-based (Sorrels, 2010).

Edward T. Hall was an anthropologist, who was summoned to sow the seeds of intergroup understanding before it became a popular trend. His students were FSI officials, preparing for their sojourns in far-away lands. At the time, training in regional studies was not required for a sojourn; in fact, whenever an official had some command of the local language of his (and it was almost always his) deployment, he was already considered a specialist in the local culture (Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002). It was the time of fixed borders and nation-states, keeping people in their information bubbles through TV-broadcasts, newspapers and government institutions. In many countries it meant that the information bubbles could be lavishly filled with untruths, or only available only to a thin layer of population, leaving most people in the bubbles of old-fashioned beliefs and crude poverty (Sorrels, 2010; Bauman, 1998b). For a government official, who has given an oath of loyalty and could face execution for treason, the ethnocentric view that one's own culture is superior to others, - was self-evident. And anthropologists were not the kind of people they would take seriously (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002). Edward T. Hall came up with engaging ways to bring awareness about cultural variability, using the very limited available materials and anecdotes, through conceptualizing it in visible physical terms. His explanations of cultural differences were a novelty, because they went beyond verbal language, into the realms of time and space. He talked about cultural differences relating to proxemics and chronemics, differences in how we arrange

space, keep distance, as well as how we manage time and relate to scheduled arrangements. In line with a common "us" and "them" thinking of the time, he divided cultures into High context and Low context, where low is familiar, explicit, straightforward, and high is tacit, mysterious, and often indirect. "Us", the US, was an obvious example of a low context culture, while yesterday's enemy Japan fell into the other category (Hall, 1959). Hall's insights, although criticized by many modern researchers in ICC and not withstanding an empirical validation (Cardon, 2008), shaped the grounding foundations of the field (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990).

Another founding father of ICC, and another anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, brought up a more thorough representation of cultural variability in his *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Geertz was a proponent of "thick description", a method that has broadly spread into symbolic and cultural anthropology. He conceptualized culture in terms of webs of meaning, spun by humans as social animals. This more interpretive understanding of culture pertained to the anthropological thought of the time but had its effects on the field of intercultural communication. The decade of the 1970s brought 52 studies on ICC issues, a stunning number, compared to three in the 1950s and six in the 1960s (Moon, 1996). The notion of "culture" in those 52 studies was flexible, heterogeneous, and the methodological lenses were various. However, as the emerging field was diverging from anthropology, it demanded some theoretical grounding of its own. In the 1980s, when the field was actually born, the fluid interpretive understanding of culture was perceived as too vague and not fully scientific, while quantitative endeavors were growing in popularity (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010).

It was the conflation of culture and nation that resulted in a rise of a shaped field. The god father of it was William B. Gudykunst (Moon, 1996). Together with other researchers, he authored almost a half of all the studies published in the decade (Moon, 1996). Unlike the earlier stress on ethnography, sociolinguistics and thick description, the 80s researchers claimed rigorous quantitative methods and conceptual simplicity. Gudykunst was mostly focusing on testing his own Uncertainty-Avoidance Theory (Gudykunst, 1993; Gudykunst, 2005) across various cultural contexts, equating those with nations for the ease of operationalization. This view also abides by a principle of objective, non-judgmental description of cultures and their members. The legacy of that time is still very much alive in intercultural and especially in cross-cultural research, looking into differences between and among cultures (Gonzalez, 2010).

The fundamental difference between quantitative and qualitative research can be drawn on the level of purpose: to explain (quantitative) or to understand (qualitative) (Prasad, 2015; Lock and Strong, 2010). The shift within the field can also be seen as carrying a reorientation from studying cultures and cultural differences for the sake of understanding varieties of human experience, towards a more pragmatic and predictive research, which could be applied to business, international relations and other affairs, and which became more relevant with globalization. For the purposes of these relevant issues, the operationalization of cultures along the lines of national borders appeared to make sense (Leeds-

Hurwitz, 2010). However the underlying ontological proposition of national cultures being separate independent entities does not follow from this pragmatic demand. A large share of the literature on Buddhism in the West reflects this same delineation along national borders (eg., Gleig, 2019). The imposition of the same ontological category of a national culture as a separate entity with its causal efficacy, sufficient to create a new national form of Buddhism is implied in the subject of research and often in the very title of such publications. While the Buddhist landscape of a certain country is a necessary field of study, using categories like "American Buddhism" or "Estonian Buddhism" feeds off the 'culture equals nation' mentality, which despite its allure has been broadly problematized by critical researchers in intercultural communication (Ono, 2010).

Apart from intuitive appeal, the vitality of this rigid view of culture is maintained by decades of robust quantitative research in cross-cultural differences. After all, if regional and/or national culture were an ontologically existent factor with inevitable causal efficacy, it would make perfect sense to speak of "American Buddhism" or "Western Buddhism". That is why investigating the scientific evidence behind the culture factor is important before the notion can be critiqued based on this research. The pioneer of such quantification was another giant of the field: Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 1991). Based on questionnaires collected among IBM employees, he outlined four cultural dimensions, four ways in which people are different in relation to each other, depending on their nationality. Culture and nation were equated for the purposes of his operationalization, and the role of the cultural environment in shaping individuals was amplified. The emphasis was on differences, clashes and conflicts, making the research insights more appealing to the business world. For the sake of operationalization and universality, culture was conflated with nationality and seen as permanent and imperative. I will not describe Hofstede's dimensions in this chapter, since this information is openly available for the reader who may not be familiar with them. Instead, I will give a brief overview of Hofstede's impact and legacy including reactions to his scholarship.

According to google scholar (as of 2021), Hofstede's 1984 and 2001 editions of *Culture's consequences* have been cited nearly 62126 and 39848 times respectively. His enterprise, Hofstede Insights claims its position as "a leader in organizational culture and cultural management" (Hofstede-insights.com), and boasts customers, such as Ikea or Siemens (Hofstede-insights.com). His impact on the field of cross-cultural research is hard to over-estimate (Kirkman et al., 2006). While he is not the only scholar, who has come up with cultural dimensions (eg., Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2011), he is certainly the most prominent one, and it could be argued, also an inspiration to the following researchers (Kirkman et al., 2006). As for Hofstede himself, he ascribed himself with being responsible for nothing short of paradigm shift (Hofstede, 2001).

In line with Carl Sagan's famous quotation that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, the attention to Hofstede's dimensions provoked some attempts to apply and replicate his claims. Having conducted an analysis

of research applications of Hofstede's dimensions, Kirkman et al. (2006) give their answer to this question: "Can a framework based on data collected in the 1960s and early 1970s continue to add value to the international management /psychology fields?" (p. 307), and their answer was *yes*, though with significant restrictions to their application. As indicated through Hofstede's IBM questionnaires, there are certain average differences in attitudes and behaviors, depending on a country one was born into. However, the question remains whether or not some of Hofstede's very basic assumptions are misguided, therefore making the research a mere "statistical myth" (McSweeney, 2002a, p.111). Taras et al. (2012) indicated that the Cronbach's alpha level of reliability for Hofstede's measurement was 0.68. While it is close to the threshold commonly recognized as acceptable (0.70), they note that the number varies largely depending on the settings and they see the result as "rather low" (p. 368). They state: "The suspiciously low internal consistencies of many of the reviewed culture measurement instruments may be related to the challenges of culture definition" (Taras et al, 2012; p. 368). And this, indeed, seems to be the core issue with Hofstede's research.

The understanding of national culture as a factor tacitly shaping an individual's character and affecting communication has been seen as rather problematic in intercultural communication research (Baskerville, 2003; Ono, 2010). First, culture is itself an abstract notion, which relies on multiple factors, political, economic, historical etc. Second, drawing culture's borders along national ones bears no critical analysis (McSweeney, 2002a). In many countries, there is more internal diversity due to ethnic or social factors, than among countries. And finally, the dimensions claim to describe the "average tendency" or "national norm", while, as Hofstede points out himself: "There is hardly an individual who answers each question exactly by the mean score of his or her group: the 'average person' from a country does not exist." (Hofstede, 1991, p.253, quoted in McSweeney, 2002a). This modest recognition makes obsolete the application of the dimensions to individual-focused research, however, as Kirkman et al. (2006) also pointed out, the large group level dimensions have largely been applied to individuals in research. When it comes to replication, Hofstede proudly claims a relatively good level (Hofstede, 2001), at the same time specifying: "Replications usually confirm most, but not all of the dimensions, but different replications confirm different dimensions." (p. 1358) And McSweeney (2002a) points out, that replications of Hofstede's results "have been disconfirmatory as well as confirmatory." (p.105) For example, Dennehy (2015) applied the dimensions to 327 international students to conclude: "The results did not support the validity of any of the five dimension cultural values in an educational context." (p. 323) The dimensions may, of course, work on the group level, but not on individual level (Kirkman et al., 2006; Hofstede, 2001), but in this case, since any level of interaction includes individuals, that would make the application of the dimensions rather capricious. And even more dangerous consequence of cultural dimensions is Hofstede's own seeming treatment of *individuals* as representatives of the *average* cultural dimensions, which is challenged masterfully by McSweeney (2002b) in his analysis of

Hofstede's analysis of how Austrian values defined the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (p. 1366-67).

Unlike the cross-cultural field, the field of ICC is not primarily keen on comparing cultural groups among each other on different parameters. In fact, very often it deals with the interaction of individuals and their complicated settings (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010). Nevertheless the paradigms, loaned from cross-cultural research, Gudykunst, Hofstede, Trompenaars etc., have dominated the field over several decades (Moon, 1996). Apart from the essentialized category of national culture, the same categorical thinking affects other notions, including that of Buddhism. Some studies, published in ICC journals, really seem to be complicit in an essentialist take on the "influence of Confucianism and Buddhism on business" (Li & Moreira, 2009), or "the study and practice of Buddhist compassion and wisdom" (Brummans and Hwang, 2010, p.16). Be it culture, race, sexuality or in this case religion, discussing the related issues in clear-cut categorical terms is becoming in itself a target of criticism in ICC. The cross-cultural quantitative paradigm is increasingly criticized for being essentialist and deterministic in nature, while a return to a softer and more fluid understanding of culture is observed in the field instead (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Scollon et al., 2011; Piller, 2017). Some critical frameworks have been introduced in relation to cultural identity, a core notion underlying a lot of intercultural issues (eg. Collier, 1998; Hall & Du Gay, 2006). Rather than a collision of cultures (eg. Lewis, *When cultures collide*), there has been some emphasis on creating a third culture (Casmir, 1999), and cultural change and adaptability.

I would argue that the turn (or rather, a partial re-turn) of the field towards a less divisional and more flexible view of ICC's central concepts was connected not only with academic trends, but also with the actual realities of culture in the 1990s and early 2000s, with the spread of new media virtually everywhere. Peculiarly enough, the two issues are seldom studied together, with many journals still preferring to focus on non-mediated communication (eg. JICR), as if non-mediated communication somehow eludes the impact of the media at large. To compensate for this, I will try to focus on overcoming cultural boundaries in the modern mediatized world in the two following sections.

2.3.2 Overcoming cultural boundaries

The perception of cultural boundaries as flexible rather than fixed and inevitable has become stronger in recent decades, and can be explained by a number of factors. First, the political and economic domain was marked by establishing connections with China and the (post)-Soviet world. The neoliberal order of the world called for a closer cooperation, interaction and opportunity, rather than opposition and stability (Giddens, 2003). Second, critical and historical scholarship exposed the origins and motives of the anthropological research into national character of the 1930s and 40s, questioning its influence on intercultural communication (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010). Third, local and global communication shifted to a new level through the introduction and spread of mobile technology and later the Internet. McLuhan's (1964) global village was becoming reality, and

not just a virtual one. It is hard to estimate the implications of spreading digital technology for international trade and politics, media and affordances, and eventually, culture and society at large.

Globalization could be one of those terms, which are easy to understand before you try to define them (Bauman, 1996). Appadurai (1996) conceptualized globalization in terms of flows of physical and abstract elements. He called them *ethno-*, *media-*, *techno-*, *finance-*, and *ideo-*scapes. Ethnoscapes reflect the free movement of people around the globe for purposes of forced and voluntary migration, tourism and business. Of course, globalization did not create migration: people have moved around and travelled since time immemorial. But it took late modernity to bring the possibility for ordinary global villagers to be able to access other countries relatively cheaply, safely, and frequently. Mass recreational tourism became affordable by increased living standards, international trade cooperation compelled business travel, and international treaties provided the possibility to legitimately seek asylum in peaceful countries. These are among key factors, enhancing global migration and shaping ethnoscapes. The next term, mediascape stands for the flux of media content, be it information or entertainment. Because of this radical mark of globalization, growing up as a regular girl in Moscow, I did not find it odd to play scenes from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* or *Sailor Moon* with my friends, rather than some old Russian legends. Entertainment and information is seldom value-neutral, a point which has made some thinkers wonder how the spread of mainly Hollywood-produced content affects the world outside the US (Hamelink, 2015). Appadurai (1996) considered this channel to be complicit in constructing an imagined culture which seldom reflects the complexity of actual reality. Technoscapes is the migration of technological affordances, which connect people with each other and to international corporations. The demand for technology and being connected weaves more and more people into the global network, even when it may seem to be out of their budget. And the budget, in its turn, represents financescapes. Economically, late modernity has brought the idea of money as the most powerful universal asset with no actual physical correlate. Neoliberalist idea of the trickle-down economy, consumer credit, and the free flow of capital have brought tremendous real changes solely through the interplay of imagined numbers and symbols, based on social agreement. Since no one would want to be out of the game, the thirst for financescapes has been pushing many anti-globalist regimes apart (Giddens, 2003). And finally, the force, arguably more powerful in pushing and pulling, than money, is ideas and ideologies. The movement of ideologies is not specifically an innovation of late modern times. It is enough to think just of the spread of world religions, for example. The reader may go a few chapters back to trace the flow of a fringe movement within the Indian Buddhist order, picking up new elements on its way and carrying them over into new lands as *the* dharma. In modern times of post-Enlightenment empires and nation-states, ideoscapes have been mainly about political ideologies: one could think of Karl Marx's ideas being adopted and relentlessly put to practice by Bolsheviks, carried forward to Mao Zedong, on to Fidel Castro, reaching as far as the Middle East and Africa, pressing on the same

old human wants and needs to achieve the same unsatisfying ends. While the mastodons of essentialist thinking, Hofstede and Trompenaars, would diagnose corruption, nepotism and lack of social justice through the cultural values of collectivism, high power distance and particularism, Appadurai's (1996) conceptualization sees democracy, social justice and human rights as *ideas*, moving along in the globalized space, settling firmly in some countries, and creating only slight stir in others.

While Appadurai's (1996) scapes are often seen as *cultural* flows, culture here is not a given, let alone a synonym for nationality. It is rather an imagination of an amalgam of various flows, ways, trends and tendencies, dominating in a particular region, society or a state at a certain time. As an amalgam of things, it carries no stable core or causal efficacy of its own but is simply a reflection of the movement of its *elements*. This dynamic envisioning of culture is reflected well in the concept of *transculturality*, introduced by Welsch (1999). Thinking in terms of inter-, cross- or multiculturality inevitably carries an understanding of cultures as separate entities, rather than figurative slices of the global amalgam of elements. Welsch (1999) disliked this way of imagining or reifying culture, turning it into a potential cause of conflict, since where there is opposition, stability and purity, friction and contradiction are inevitable. Transculturality is not a neoliberalist postmodernist innovation, it is a reality of how cultures have existed for as long as we can trace human behavior: through migration, exchange, borrowing, adopting and dropping, cessation, preservation and development of various elements (Welsch, 1999). There is simply no moment in history to which we can trace the pure origin of any culture, but instead we see a constantly moving interplay of human behavior, where fixed borders of states and cultures are a matter of human invention, especially in modern times (Welsch, 1999).

During the decades of its formation, the field of intercultural communication also reflected this sense of a romantic space of non-contradiction, beyond culture and unbound by one's background. In Adler (1977/2002) this romantic space was exemplified with an image of a person, who in response to the concurrence of cultures in the globalizing world is able to swiftly operate in any environment across cultures. The ideal of the multicultural man is drawn from four public characters who were Adler's contemporaries, and it emphasizes not just behavioral skills, language proficiencies and other observable assets, but primarily a cognitive flexibility (Adler, 2002). What might be an idealized and unrealistic image, has nevertheless highlighted the human potential to be able to transcend their cultural socialization and to adapt to worldviews and mindsets traditionally tied to distant cultures.

The Double-swing model of intercultural communication between East and West (Yoshikawa, 1987) and its desired ideal of a dialogical mode was a more detailed portrayal of this potential. Yoshikawa categorized modes of East-West dialogue into a) control; b) ethnocentric; c) dialectic with three outcomes: domination by either side or fusion; and d) dialogical. While the first three outcomes were inevitably based on the presence of contradiction, essential incompatibility, and duality, the latter mode presumed cutting across the boundaries. He based

this notion on the Zen philosophy of non-duality and Martin Buber's concept of I-Thou, emphasizing bilateral effort in finding common ground, a respect for difference, and willingness to accept one's own limitations. I find the model quite intuitive in its presentation of different attitudes involved in meeting the Other, as well as being mindful of the power balance, which by default lies on the "Western" side of communication. I employed this model in one of my publications, looking into several popular books on Buddhism and spirituality, written by Anglo-American authors for a broad public (Sharapan, under review). The purpose was to observe how different discursive patterns, analyzed with the help of Wodak's (2011) Discourse-Historical Approach, convey the modes of Yoshikawa's (1987) model. In the example I used for illustrating the last dialogical mode, the author actively employed categories of "East" and "West" in various forms, however rhetorically mixing and juggling them, so as to bring forth their internal diversity and contingency, as well as relevant dichotomies *within*, rather than between them. As Yoshikawa (1987) explained under his dialogical mode of communication, the goal of such rhetoric was finding a common ground by cutting across rigid categories.

In this century, one strong factor conducive to cultivating this kind of cognitive flexibility with respect to different worldviews and mindsets, has been deemed to be mediated cultural flows (Wilhelm, 2008). Contemporary digital media, popular culture and tourism allow for an unprecedented level of exposure to various cultural elements (Moberg and Granholm, 2014). Borup (2016a) discussed the mediatization of Buddhism in Denmark as a commodified symbol of things spiritual, relaxing and 'Zen'. The mediatization of Tibet for both political and religious purposes has also been given some attention (McLagan, 2002). The importance of media in shaping the contemporary mindset and lifestyle is beyond debate, but the concept and boundaries of *mediatization* are still being shaped (Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Hepp, 2009; Hjavard, 2008). Couldry and Hepp (2017, p.4) explain that mediatization "is not just one type of thing, one 'logic' of doing things; indeed it's best understood as not a 'thing' or 'logic' at all, but as the variety of ways in which *possible* orderings of the social by media are further transformed and stabilized through continuous feedback loops". I will return to Couldry and Hepp's (2017) understanding of mediatization as a building block and a tool for the social construction of reality in my later chapters, but the relevant idea for this paragraph is that mediatization implies a circular relationship between individuals, society and the media. Online media, digital affordances and algorithms largely shape the way modern-day individuals are socialized, as well as restructure the operation of old established social institutions, such as religious organizations (Cheong et al., 2011). The online space provides not only the variety of choice, but also a possibility to gain a depth of familiarity through mediating experience through "thickenings" (Hepp, 2009). The issue of locality, in Hepp's (2009) view, yields importance to connectivity, which is enacted through various online formations. One formation I focus on in this research would fall under the category of a deterritorial religious thickening. In contrast

to the commodified and redefined imaginings of Buddhism, driven by its commercial mediatization as seen in Carrette and King, 2005, in Hepp & Krönert's (2009) analysis, mediatization also plays a role in connecting people within the online thickening, allowing them to shape and maintain their interests and identity on a deeper level and with a greater agency on their part.

Technological affordances and technoscapes have played a big role in diluting the imagination of fixed cultural borders (Hepp, 2009). McLuhan's (1964) idea of the global village stirred some discussion on whether a globalization of the world means its homogenization or the opposite (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998b; Van Der Bly, 2007). Schachtner (2015) emphasizes one underlying factor important for a smooth flow of transcultural elements: social freedoms and institutions. Technology itself does not induce transcultural thinking, because it can be employed for reinforcing fixed identities just as well. Since technological affordances can be used differently in different societies (Chen, 2012), it could be assumed that for someone who actively uses the Internet to keep contact with their family it will be a tool for reinforcement of their cultural identity. Technological affordances and economic conditions only create a possibility for a free of flow of cultural elements, but not the flow itself. This way, the global circulation of liberal political ideas can be trumped by a divisive rhetoric of local governments (Billig, 1976; Taijel, 1982). Even the powerful global corporations may find themselves helpless in the face of decisions made by local politicians (Giddens, 2003).

In the world of institutionalized social freedoms individuals enjoy the fruits of globalization with more gusto, than those who are deprived of these freedoms (Bauman, 2005). The novelty which late modernity brought is a condition in which many individuals are free not only to alter their identity but to even combine labels which in traditional societies would be incompatible. Gergen (1991) coined a term for this: *multiphrenia*, referring to a possibility and a tendency to identify oneself as someone based on one's personal preferences and decisions, and to keep that identification apart from other parts of one's identity which it may conflict with. Cases of adopting, changing or abandoning a religious identity in a society, where such an identity is uncommon, form cases of multiphrenia. This phenomenon becomes very prominent in the research on Buddhism in the West, creating a lot of hybridity, in-betweenness and contingency within individuals who take up Buddhist practice (Tweed, 2002; Danilyuk, 2003). In the context of Finland, Riikonen (2019) discussed the hybridity of Finnish Lutheran church members, who practice Buddhism and Mindfulness, seeking complementary elements, as well as perceived similarities between the "paths", which are deemed to have the same "destination". The hybridity and flexibility of identification in this case causes little friction with the original religious belonging, even though their experience with the organized church was difficult for some participants.

However Gergen's (1991) *multiphrenia* should not be seen as a universal characteristic of the modern world, since the freedom of some to mix and match their identities highlights the fetters that restrict others. Cultural identity has been broadly conceptualized within a critical approach as a *project*, maintained

and negotiated by individuals *and* their surrounding environments (Collier, 1998; Hall and Du Gay, 2006; Bauman, 1996). The social forces of institutionalized inequality and political rhetoric and decisions are as ancient as civilization. In the process of globalization the contrast between those who are carried by the fierce waves of global processes and those who are on a pleasure cruise in these waters, becomes both more striking and more limpid (Bauman, 1996; 1998b). Bauman (1998b) divided travelers in the waters of globalization into *tourists* and *vagabonds*:

> The tourists move because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly *attractive* – the vagabonds move because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably *inhospitable*. The tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds because *they have no other bearable choice*." (Bauman, 1998b; p.93)

Bauman's (1998b) concern resonates with many other critical voices in social sciences, who draw attention to the adverse effects of globalization and neoliberalism. With respect to Buddhism going global, King (1999) represents one of the critical voices of that kind. He demonstrates how Indian religions have been commonly misrepresented through the lenses imposed by Western scholars, blind to their own implicit cultural background. His postcolonial agenda resonates with a critique of Orientalism voiced by Said (1978), Spivak (1988), and Bhabha (2013). The postcolonial paradigm sees how Western scholars and the lay public are likely to misinterpret, distort and misrepresent Buddhism. First, their conceptual networks are infused with connotations, connections and meanings, which interfere with the original ones, maintained by the Buddhists themselves. Second, the basic assumptions behind those ways of thinking are often held on shaky empirical grounds, but nevertheless, very ardently. Third, like the proverbial fish which is unaware of the water it lives in, the scholars more often than not fail to detect the cultural limitations and biases of their own thinking (Said, 1978). And lastly there is often a sense of superiority, implicit or explicit, by the West (or the background of the scholar) towards the rest (Hall, 1992; Said, 1978). Carrette and King (2005) describe how in the neoliberal world, where "cultural forms have themselves become commodities" (p.44), ancient spiritual systems become individualized, psychologized forms of spirituality, which are processed to suit the tastes of consumers and marketed for various novel purposes:

> ...the wisdom of diverse ancient civilizations becomes commodified in order to serve the eclectic interests of 'spiritual consumers' in the contemporary New Age marketplace of religions. This fragmentation becomes a key part of the marketing strategy for contemporary forms of 'spirituality'. Historically rich and complex traditions are exploited by a selective re-packaging of the tradition, which is then sold as the 'real thing'. (Carrette and King, 2005, p.88)

In my initial analysis of the data, which I conducted for an article on the FPMT forum (Sharapan, 2018), and for a book chapter (Sharapan and Swann, 2019), I regarded the FPMT learning platform as an online cultural thickening (Hepp, 2009). I employed Welsch's (1999) notion of transculturality to

conceptualize Tibetan Buddhism in terms of cultural elements, or *flows*, which travel their way through history and are adopted by users through online affordances. I approached the data through the framework of Tweed's (2011) *translocative* analysis, which also adopts this aquatic metaphor for studying the spread of Buddhism. The analysis demonstrated how the flows move across times and borders, manifesting in physical elements and practices, attitudinal stands, and most importantly, in ideas and views (Sharapan, 2018). It was especially clear how the online affordances made geographical borders ephemeral, while at the same time highlighted the unseen borders of societal, educational, political and financial inequality. This resonates with Bauman's (1998b; 2005) observations about tourists and vagabonds with respect to access to digitalized sources, as well as with Spivak's (1988) critical discussion of *subaltern*. The logic of subaltern, with people deprived through poverty and oppression of their own ways of representing themselves or positioning themselves, manifests in the fact that the forum on Tibetan Buddhism has no Tibetan users, and is inaccessible in Tibet, a mediatized imagined community, which acts as a third culture for the more privileged consumers of Tibetan Buddhism.

From the point of view of facilitating a deeper level of knowledge and familiarization, the forum as a deterritorial religious thickening (Hepp, 2009) is also seen as a typical element of postmodernity (Sharapan and Swann, 2019). Creation of a non-mainstream channel, an 'echo chamber' (O'Donnell, 1992), furthers access to small narratives that are alternatives to the challenged meta-narrative (Lyotard, 1984). In Sharapan and Swann (2019) this process is broken down into stages: creating space for transculturation, exposure to the foreign and a technical possibility for deeper familiarization, and then bringing back to reality. This echoes the general logic of encountering otherness in the globalized and digitalized world, outlined, for instance, in Martin & Nakayama (2010). The opportunities and threats of such affordances are discussed in the book chapter (Sharapan and Swann, 2019), and the threats are identified as relativization of common sense, ethics and rationality, furthered by submergence into such echo chambers. The discussion resonates with the problematics of digital religion, where online sources and digital affordances become a vehicle for establishing contact with parish (Ostrowski, 2014), proselytizing (Cheong et al., 2011), maintaining identity (Sul and Bailey, 213; Grieve, 2016) and authority (Cheong et al., 2011; Busch, 2010), and simply one of the features of the changing face of religion today (Gleig, 2014; Grieve, 2016; Helland, 2004). The opportunities lie in the benefits for religious figures, organizations and consumers interested in them. However, the flipside is the power that can be imposed on people through such channels, when they fall out of mainstream radar. Digital religion does not exist in the virtual space alone, like some sort of a parallel reality, but rather is a reflection and a facilitating tool of religious ideo-scapes, which turns back towards to real physical world (Grieve, 2016; Sharapan, 2018). With respect to the topic at hand, the potentially destructive, cult-like formations, such as some I discussed in earlier chapters, are also provided with digital instruments to create their echo chambers through

online affordances, and this is bound to have a physical manifestation, which may not be a desirable part of the society at large, or the development of Tibetan Buddhism in the globalized world, in particular.

Another ethical issue discussed in Sharapan and Swann (2019) and in this monograph with respect to Tibetan Buddhist communities in the globalizing world is the notion of cultural appropriation. The idea of culture as an object, or property, pertaining to a certain group of people by right of heritage, takes root from an essentialist understanding of culture, common in early anthropology (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2010). Although being dictated by a moral concern and inspired by Orientalist critique, when used uncritically, the concept relies on erroneous ontological premises. From the perspective of transculturality, human cultures are amalgams of various elements or *flows*. In view of this, talk of pure and original cultures is misguided and misguiding, often deliberately (Welsch, 1999). Discussing cultural appropriation, Rogers (2006) follows a similar logic in his conceptualization of *transculturation*. He maintains that unless there is concrete harm that a cultural group has incurred as a result of their heritage being used by out-groups the negative ethical charge of adopting elements from other cultures is questionable. With respect to religion the matter becomes even less problematic, since world religions are transnational and transcultural and often welcome converts, together with their embracing the physical aspects of the religions. Roger's (2006) concept of transculturation does not deny the effect of power dynamics on studying and presenting a foreign religion or philosophy, but instead seeks to separate instances of a natural circulation of transcultural flows and ideoscapes flow from situations where cultural and material elements are exploited by individuals in positions of power.

I have found that many critical researchers into Tibetan Buddhism in the West (Konik, 2009; Lopez, 1998; Mullen, 2001) put a disproportionate emphasis on emancipatory agenda, overseeing the needs, meanings and motivations of the Western converts which led them to adopt these foreign elements. My intention in this monograph was to maintain focus on the construction of Tibetan Buddhism as a lived culture through online means and embodied experience. From this perspective, coming back to my research question: *How is Tibetan Buddhist culture and identity constructed by the students and teachers?* I want to focus on the tradition as it is being adopted by actual practitioners and transmitted by actual teachers and Elders, possibly reconsidering the top-down normative descriptions, prevalent in many scholarly sources on the topic. In trying to answer this question I do let my own critical voice as a researcher to come forward, but my first intention is to demonstrate a mediated and embodied construction of reality by my participants, so that readers can make their own insights and conclusions. In order to make my reasoning in planning the research, data collection and analysis more transparent, I will proceed by explaining the epistemological stances underlying this research, as well as the methods I used.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Epistemology

Whoever clings to entities is like cattle,
But whoever clings to the lack of entities is even more stupid.

Saraha[5],
Dohākośopadeśagīti, lines 21–22[6]

3.1.1 The (social) construction of (social) reality

In the spirit of good qualitative research, the two main concepts of this dissertation, culture and religion, are understood as socially constructed. The imperative of seeing social reality as a product of human interaction and ongoing negotiation plays a big role in the way I analyze the data in this work and in what conclusions I draw based on this analysis. Therefore, this chapter explains how I understand the idea of social constructionism, especially in relation to such notions as culture and religion.

Social constructionism has been a buzz-word in academia ever since the term came into usage after Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991). In *The social construction of reality* (1966/1991) Berger and Luckmann described the staged process of how the reality we call "objective" and "common sense" is established through human interaction. The sociology of knowledge they lay the grounds for does not see "the truth" as existing outside of the human observer, and does not see science (including human sciences) as a tool for carefully discovering and unfolding this truth. Instead, the authors saw the knowledge of humankind as being a result of asking socially relevant questions, receiving situated answers through man-made means of observation and creating an intersubjective consensus of what should be constituted to be true and valid. Berger and

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[5] Indian sage, revered among founders of the Mahamudra tradition
[6] Cited and translated in Luminous Heart by Karl Brunnholtz (2009)

Luckmann (1966/1991) explained how objective reality of society is established through the stages of institutionalization, legitimation and internalization. Giving examples of how knowledge is allocated among people of different competences, how it is derived, established and preserved historically through religious authorities and scientific institutions, Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991) set up the common core of social constructionist thought.

Since the 1960s an array of thinkers has developed ideas in line with their arguments and views (ex. Giddens, 1984; Harré, 1997; Taylor, 1989). On the level of empirical research, a number of language-focused methods have been shaped by social constructionist thought, bringing up the dimension of how social constructionism can be applied to the actual analysis of the data. As a result of these developments, contemporary social constructionism represents a range of varying viewpoints and approaches rather than a single carefully adjusted line of thought. Within this range researchers have commonly come to distinguish two different strands: strong and weak social constructionism. Lock and Strong (2010) describe their difference in terms of views on the relativity of knowledge, on subjectivity and on social justice, placing their own points of view on the weak side. Instead of the strong and weak distinction, Danziger (1997) suggests distinguishing between dark and light social constructionism. Light social constructionism is associated with the school of conversation and discourse analysis, and is preoccupied with how meaning is created in communication. Dark social constructionism stands for the post-structuralist, postmodern, critical theoretical line of thought, which seeks to reveal the work of the 'dark' institutionalized social forces in creating truth, meaning, and a power imbalance (Danziger, 1997; Lock and Strong, 2010). The picturesque vagueness of the terminology, and the connotations of 'weak' and 'dark' have lead Burr (2003/2015) to suggest the terms 'micro' and 'macro' instead. Micro would stand for social constructionism which zooms down into the textual level, and focuses on the instances of interaction. Macro, in its turn, refers to the functioning of society at large, particularly the creation and maintenance of institutionalized power. Additionally, the two strands also seem to be conceptualized as different based on the gravity of their relativism. Text-focused micro social constructionism is realism-friendly. The 'dark', predominantly Continental version of social constructionism must question reality, and therefore subscribes to a relativist agenda (Lock and Strong, 2010). However it must be noted that the distinction is rather tentative in both theory and practice, because text and context, as well as realism and relativism, are far from being dichotomies (Blommaert, 2005; Wetherell, 1998).

The authors whose distinction between two social constructionisms I have cited so far, are researchers within psychology, and their focus is tightly connected to their field, asking questions related to human behavior and the psyche. Lock and Strong (2014) generously supplied their overview of social constructionism with tips for its practical application in psychotherapy. Burr (2003, p. 3) even goes as far as to claim that: "Social constructionism is a term that is used almost exclusively by psychologists". Of course, qualitative methods

stretch way further than psychology and psychotherapy, so principles of social constructionism may also vary depending on the field of study, as might its classifications. The light, weak or micro side of social constructionism overviewed by Lock and Strong (2010) includes names of influential sociologists, such as Gadamer or Habermas, and many other thinkers, whose interest goes way further than psychology, and their focus is on the macro level.

Another distinction to draw within the discussion of social constructionism has been how much of our reality is constructed. It is not difficult to relate to the idea that social norms and rules are constructed and maintained in interaction, but when the discussion goes into other spheres of social interest, and even into explanations of the above-mentioned norms and rules, things may look more complicated. Postmodern and critical academics since Foucault have pointed out how disempowering rhetoric is often dressed in scientific, naturalist and biological vocabulary (Hacking, 2005). Indeed as social beings humans are also biological, so there is a thick layer of social reality which corresponds to a very basic natural level of existence. Therefore the idea of a socially constructed social reality would either challenge or be challenged by the natural, 'hard' reality. Since my position on these issues affects my analysis, I find it important to outline the grounds for my interpretation of what it means to say that something is socially constructed.

An important remark about Berger and Luckmann's (1966/1991) explanation of the matter is that it is largely soaked in the view of the *tabula rasa*, i.e. human behavior as learned in society, as an outcome of nurture, rather than developing as a result of nature. The view presupposes that individuals come into this world as blank pages, malleable material, which the world shapes into a socialized individual. An innatist view would lie on the opposite side, claiming that most of what matures into a socialized individual comes from their biology, genes and other 'hardware' (Franks, 2014). Insights in linguistics, neuroscience, biology and genetics leave little space for a tabula rasa way of thinking (Bergesen, 2012). The cousin of social constructionism, the constructivism of psychology and pedagogy, has done social constructionists a disservice by basing its core premises on the *tabula rasa* principle and having a similar sounding name. As a research epistemology, constructivism did not win my trust for this dissertation. Despite its resistance to the idea of "truth" as being "out there", constructivism itself seems to be based on a number of implicit truth-claims, or assumptions, which make it self-contradictory, that are therefore unlikely to be true (Lee, 2012).

However I would argue that the case is not lost for social constructionism. The debate over nature versus nurture might have strong repercussions for either of the sides only if we exclude nurture (socialization) from the list of natural human activities. Socialization through language is, in fact, quite natural for social animals who have a language. For example Bergesen (2012) outlines a sociological middle-way between innatist thinking and some social-constructionists who prefer to speak of socialization as the source for human societies and cultures. Admitting "We are not as far apart as it may seem" (Bergesen, 2012, p. 492), he maps out socialization as a staged process of I-Society

(individual innate capacities for socialization), E-Society (external environment), and their interaction. This description does not sound especially contradictory to Berger and Luckmann's (1966/1991) more extended one, despite the shift in focus from society to the individuals and their biological capacities for socialization. The tabula rasa assumption, which was common in sociology at the time of Berger and Luckmann, and shared by them, despite its somewhat contested current status, does not undermine the core idea of their social constructionism. In fact, the view of cultures as being perpetuated through institutions, staged socialization and individual co-created identities, sits very well with humans having innate capacities for socialization, self-identification, and the construction of institutions. The shift of focus from the external (culture, or nurture) towards the individual (biology, or nature) and back is akin to the circular metaphor of the chicken and egg.[7] For example, when defending innatism, Bergesen (2012) says:

> Yet sociology continues to assert, as an article of scientific faith that, for example, "language is a group product that, like other parts of the social heritage must be learned . . ."(Lindesmith, Strauss & Denzin, 1988, p. 71). But there is little support for this. (p. 487)

He strengthens his view by describing how uncannily quickly children tend to pick up a language. However what is striking about his disagreement is that while picking up the language naturally the children do of course *learn* it. They do not *produce* a language (it must exist prior to them picking it up), and they do not magically oust the language out of their brain 'hardware' or their DNA. If it were so, parents of adopted foreign infants would have a hard time. Therefore, humans with their innate capacities for language and socialization can very well live in socially constructed internal and external reality. The same logic applies to seeing culture as innate human capacity *and* a socially constructed phenomenon. The burden of the *tabula rasa* heritage has led some academics to stay away from social constructionism (Peterson, 2012) and others to develop a more direct realist version of it (Searle, 1995). Franks (2014), for example, suggested a new term, *cultural construction*, which includes innatist thinking. Peterson (2012) on the other hand agrees to talk of social constructionism but bases it on three additional layers: social facilitation, social division, and social specification. The layers stand for the need of an existing language, culture and society for human innate capacities to bring about socialization, and the need for creating categories and exhibiting preferences. As another option, Haslanger (2012), approaching issues of gender and race with critical realism, proposes to differentiate between weak and strong social constructions, i.e. socially perceived phenomena with actual physical correlates or mere debatable abstractions (her example of the latter is "cool"). In my view these distinctions do not seem to demand splitting or replacing the term. But the term needs to be explained the

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7 Although biologically speaking, egg is, of course, a more ancient phenomenon than chicken

way it is understood in this work, and I will proceed by outlining a social constructionist understanding of *nature*.

The questioning of scientific assumptions and impartiality began, perhaps, with critical thinkers such as Karl Popper and Michael Polanyi. In line with them, Thomas Kuhn, an American philosopher of science, shook up the intellectual circles of his time with his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). His famous claim was that science is perceived as a linear accumulation of knowledge, while in actuality scientists gather bits and pieces of knowledge into, and in accordance with, a certain paradigm. The dominant paradigm is commonly and justly the one which explains the accumulated knowledge in the most logical and least controversial fashion. Such a paradigm would form scientific truth against non-scientific opinions and outline scientific facts against fictions. However driven by the scientific method, experiments may occasionally register phenomena which do not fit into the common paradigm and cannot be qualified as facts according to it. When this happens repeatedly, the dominant paradigm is called into question. Questioning and probing the borders of a paradigm can lead to what Kuhn (1962) called 'a paradigm shift'. It soon encouraged contemporary minds to challenge the nearly sacred status of scientific truth and knowledge, and to talk with some concern about the power which this sacredness entails (Feyerabend, 1975/2010; Lyotard, 1984; Foucault, 1969/2013; Latour and Woolgar, 1978/2013). In their works scientific knowledge was seen as created rather than unfolded, and scientific truth as learnt and imposed rather than discovered. Some of them, like Feyerabend, despite his daring language and considerable zeal, adhered tightly to the principles of logic and rational discourse (Hacking, 1999; Feyerabend, 1975/2010), and were without doubt pro-science rather than against it. Others, such as the French postmodernists, were more radical in rejecting the power and politics of scientific knowledge and more generous to alternative interpretations of reality. However, there is an anticipated concern around the idea of promoting alternative interpretations of reality, which, unlike science, do not even endeavor to consider basic rationality as a measure of validity. This concern, among others, has turned this more radical postmodern criticism of science's power into a strawman for positivist thinkers (eg. Hicks, 2004). Nevertheless, these critical ideas have laid foundation not only for the thin but bold strand of scientific inquiry (eg. Sheldrake, 2012), but also bore a significant importance for the development of the social constructionist thought within the humanities. In fact, hard science and the humanities may not be miles apart, for what is social and human is intertwined with what we see as physical and study through natural sciences (Franks, 2012; Mallon, 1999; Peterson, 2012).

Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991) themselves did not attack the physical reality and objective scientific truth in the same daring fashion as did Feyerabend or Latour. They were instead preoccupied with the common knowledge that runs the life of all social individuals, scientists and lay people alike. The surest methodological tools which shaped a practical application of their ideas were discourse analytic methods (Danziger, 1997; Burr, 2003/2015). Depending on the side of social constructionism the researcher takes, they would look at different

layers of their research issue, with different purposes in mind. On the 'light' side, the researcher could look at the architecture of conversation, or how things are brought up and talked into being by interlocutors (Danziger, 1997), in order to understand more about human communication and the practice of talking things into being. If one stepped onto the 'dark' side of social constructionism, one could, with the help of foucauldian or critical discourse analysis challenge social structures and institutions with their power. They could expose unwanted social practices by analysing the rhetoric of large impactful masses of texts (Wodak, 2011). Assuming that different kinds of institutional talk create a different social reality by tacitly shaping opinions, a CDA researcher could wish to deconstruct that talk in order to alter opinions towards a happier and a more equal world (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 2001). While I drew inspiration from the works of many (critical) discourse analysts, I have not used specifically discourse analytic methods in this monograph. I did not regard discourse analytic methods as satisfactory for the kind of research issue and research questions I had in mind. Instead my intention was to look at how Tibetan Buddhism is actually done and perceived phenomenologically by its practitioners.

Social constructionism that I resorted to in this work is a well-suited lens for qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis (Patton, 2015), although it is not as clearly operationalized for these methods as it is in the case of, for instance, discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992). My own approach to data was mindful of discourse, but at the same time more phenomenological in nature. This means though that my data analysis is not aimed at interaction, or discourses, but rather at describing the (inter)subjective reality which I can observe manifesting in the data with my perspective (Prasad, 2015). Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018) provide a critical analysis of social-constructionism versus later neorealist (eg. critical realist) schools of thought, and leave the reader lingering between the short-comings of both. While the critical realist belief in an objective reality with its laws placed outside the observer would slip into an idealistic (Platonic) reification of her observations, Berger and Luckmann's (1966/1991) social constructionism would place excessive emphasis on an individual's construction of reality, as well as carrying internal discrepancies, such as being itself a constructed theory (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Burr (2003) sees the underlying misconception behind common criticisms of social constructionism in mistaking constructedness for falsity or illusority. Saying that something is a social construction would therefore sound to critics like something is false, illusory or does not exist at all. "It is sham", says Burr (2003, p. 23) "the idea that the world is a figment of our imagination and has no materiality … was never constructionism's claim".

The key questions for me to clarify with respect to *reality* within social constructionism are centered around the degree of what Hacking (1999) calls *inevitability*. He uses the term to replace the critique of more realist and positivist explanations by social-constructionists and constructivists, which they call essentialism (Holliday, 2011). Essentialism comes from the idea that phenomena of social reality have their own unique essence, existing outside of the processes within

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them, their components and the observer. This philosophical idea would hardly be expressed by anyone explicitly, and is commonly used to attack the more positivist camp (Hacking, 1999). Inevitability, suggested by Hacking, focuses on observed processes rather than hidden entities (such as essences), and is a more philosophically compelling idea. We can agree that (social) reality can be changed, but it is hard to imagine it to be infinitely malleable, i.e. it is bound by some level of inevitability. Therefore a question a social constructionist is encouraged to ask herself is whether the particular element in question and its perceived workings are inevitable, whether it is (un)desirable, and what heir position is with respect to avoiding and eradicating that element (Hacking, 1999).

Asking myself these questions with the purposes of this study in mind, I see that I accept a large degree of inevitability, and I part company with early social constructionists when they account for all of social reality being solely the result of socialization. At the same time my zeal to expose and abolish certain elements of social reality, according to Hacking (1999) would qualify only for the second (out of five) level, 'ironic' social constructionist (Hacking, 1999, p. 19). This would mean that while I accept that the issue is malleable to some degree, it may not be a good time or a good idea to reconstruct it. Since my research is data-based and largely phenomenological, I apply this 'ironic' balanced social-constructionist view to juxtapose the common claims and ways of talking about Buddhism in the West with the way my participants talk about it.

My aim in doing so, is to stir up these claims and assumptions. The main body of my dissertation will be organized according to these points of contradiction between common assumptions and my empirical observations, following a staged interrogation proposed by Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018). They preclude their seven principles (unfolded in the analysis section) by saying: "In many cases, what appears to be a phenomenon may in fact be seen as a fabrication" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, p. 384). The phenomenon I see as largely fabricated is the inevitable change of Buddhism as it adapts to Western culture, or rather the imagined degree of that change. In the spirit of social constructionism I challenge the inevitability of cultural adaption. With a critical discursive view of culture and religion as naturally-induced phenomena, sliced, shaped and served through power-laden discourses, I challenge an expectation of modern Western individuals to be determined by their being presumably 'modern' and 'Western'. And I also challenge the expectation of a cultural incompatibility between (Tibetan) Buddhism as an Eastern religion and its Western consumers, because it is not supported by the data, and is obsoletefrom a more sophisticated understanding of culture.

The lack of clarity behind how main concepts are approached and seen within the research can lead to implicit conclusions, which have no explicit evidence, and are often built on faulty reasoning. I hope to avoid the potential confusion by outlining the social constructionist approaches to the themes of this monograph and to justify my own take on these concepts in section 3.1.2. In order to further clarify the logic behind the analysis of my data, I will also touch upon the issue of realism versus relativism in section 3.1.3.

3.1.2 Culture and religion as real social constructs

The imagination of cultures and religions as rather stable homogeneous functioning entities has been a target for a lot of criticism (Baumann, 1996; Dervin, 2015; McCutcheon, 2012; Moon, 1996; Piller, 2017). Speaking of culture, proponents of such an idea often subscribe to it tacitly through their definitions, for instance Hofstede's (1991) famous "collective programming of the mind" (p. 5). Hofstede is, perhaps, the most irresistible target for criticism, since his work is not only bound by a direct (or naive) realist, naturalistic perspective of the abstract concept of culture (Baskerville, 2003), but is also far from impeccable methodologically even from this perspective (McSweeney, 2002a). However a great many theorists within intercultural communication have received broad acclaim, despite their clearly essentialist views (eg. Trompenaars&Hampden-Turner, 2011; Gudykunst, 1993). To some extent, it is understandable. The essentialist and positivist understanding of culture equipped with an arsenal of quantitative statistical methods can not only provide a glimpse into how cultural differences are manifested, but is presumably equipped to draw generalizable conclusions and make predictions. Quantitative inquiry and a clear operationalization of cultures in terms of nations creates a scientific and therefore convincing impression. This view is also in line with the sociological principles set by Durkheim, seeing societies (and cultures) as coherently functioning organisms (Holliday, 2011).

The critics of essentialism nevertheless revolt against this social-scientific approach by drawing attention to important factors such as the changeability of cultures, the absence of clear-cut boundaries, ambiguity of concepts, and the inadequacy of applying a naturalistic explanation-focused type of inquiry to something as complex, fluid, and unpredictable as human societies (Lock and Strong, 2010). The qualitative inquiry into culture, following Geertz's interpretation of Weber, aims at *understanding*, rather than *explaining* (Geertz, 1973). The idea of abstract concepts being presented as objectively real, despite not having a clear physical observable correlate is also called into question. On the other hand, coming back to Hacking's (1999) replacement of the vague and indefensible notion of essentialism with *inevitability* gives some credit to the social-scientific camp by serving as a reminder of some level of social reality which is not infinitely malleable. The modern scientific leaning towards a more innatist view of human tendencies is also supportive of that (Bergesen, 2012). The practical applicability (at least on the seeming level) of a quantitative study of culture adds more weight to the 'essentialist' camp by granting them the power to measure the current state of affairs and make educated predictions with numbers and trends.

However I decidedly choose an opposite view in this work, for a number of reasons. Despite its broad application within intercultural and cross-cultural research, this pragmatic attitude to essentialism does not excuse it from ontological and epistemological issues that have been outlined by its critics. The statistically valid conclusions may or may not apply when it comes to an actual intercultural encounter. They may fail to be replicated in a slightly different

context or over several decades. The concepts and maps, employed to draw these conclusions, are arbitrary and often value-laden. On top of that, a fixed understanding of culture can always be a guise for intolerance and perpetuating power inequality (Dervin, 2015; Piller, 2017).

At the opposite end of defining culture, Dervin (2015) has even gone as far as calling for the word *culture* to be forgotten altogether. He discusses how the notion imposes difference on people, rather than merely describes it (Dervin, 2011). In Dervin (2015, p. 13-14) he makes the following statement:

> Many scholars have argued that we need to keep the idea of culture (Ogay and Edelmann 2011) and to avoid 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'. In my own work I have decided to throw the baby out because it leads to so much confusion and misunderstanding between students, researchers, practitioners, and decision makers. My understanding of culture is not always the same as that of my interlocutors . I refuse to support a word that can rid the 'other' of his/her plurality and thus refrain from using this empty and problematic concept.

The alternative he suggests is to speak of all elements involved in the subject (language, children's rights, etc.) when they are relevant, without generalizing them into the abstract, ambiguous whole. Some other scholars (Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2011; Piller, 2017) have tried to instead turn the reader's attention to all other non-cultural factors, which define intercultural encounters: language, economics, politics, class and gender inequality, and prejudice. Not all critical scholars have been as harsh with the baby as Dervin. However, ontologically extracting the factors of language, economics etc. from the so-called 'cultural factors' for a critical scholar is problematic, because it is indicative of understanding culture as something ontologically external to these factors. Following Holliday's (2011; 2013) recommendation to see culture rather as a verb (what we do) than a noun, culture would manifest on the level of language use, attitudes and practices around children's rights, economic realities and behaviors originating from them (and partially creating them), and so on. *Doing* these things, according to Holliday (2013), would be culture. Besides, the argument of the critical scholars of renewed interculturality (such as Dervin, Piller) is itself based on a number of assumptions which in my view require more evidence. A suggestion to attribute a certain behavior to someone's language proficiency, rather than to socialization, can be equally unjustified as attributing behavior to socialization (culture). A tacit implication is also that individuals exist outside of their environment of socialization (culture). Indeed, we cannot know how common a certain behavior is in the place the individual grew up, but we cannot deny the impact of environment in shaping behaviors. Additionally, a choice to avoid acknowledging and talking about cultural differences, for example, by way of attribution, also contains implicit assumptions. It would either mean that a) there are no differences we can call cultural, or b) if there are any, we cannot talk about them. I think it would be fair to say, after several decades of intercultural and cross-cultural research (regardless of its issues), that point a) is not true. Point b) to me would be reminiscent of a strawman postmodernist attitude towards the

truth and truth-claims in science, which would rather see these claims discarded if they contradict the chosen emancipatory rhetoric (Hicks, 2004). Though often done in a noble emancipatory pursuit, this abolition can have a downside of ignoring an elephant in the room, which would not disappear through being ignored. By 'elephant' here I mean a certain level of inevitability, which, no matter how we alter our institutions and our everyday talk, would not disappear. For example, some radical feminist research may focus on an eradication of categories of 'men' and 'women' as an ideal goal for society, which strives towards equality (Haslanger (2012) expresses this view as well). While someone could cast aspersions over research proving gender differences, the assumption that there are no gender differences is not based on any empirical research. With respect to culture such a view would ignore existing practices of doing things, and the power of habit, developed in these practices.

Baumann's (1996) ethnography of multicultural life in Southhall, London, widely cited by many critical researchers (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011) is also not immune to this criticism. For example, Bader (2001) contested the constructivist logic behind Baumann's conclusions in this study. While praising the methodological and descriptive side of the work, Bader (2001, p. 255) pointed out: "Stating that only linguistic or cultural change is real, that traditions or continuities are purely abstract notions, easily leads to a complete neglect of the actual degrees of continuity and coherence." Speaking about the social construction of culture makes it easy to ignore the perpetual nature and reality of socially constructed phenomena. Excessive emphasis on culture manifesting in communication, and being used as a strategical tool, leaves aside the actual existing practices, which, despite their socially constructed nature, have some compelling effect on people's lives. Overestimating people's and societies' tendency for change and flexibility may effectively be just as unfounded and unjust, as overestimating cultural perpetualism (Bader, 2007).

Instead, I embrace an understanding of culture which is mindful not only of the socially constructed nature of human behavior but also of its ability for self-perpetuation (as well as for change) through human interaction, as well as a certain degree of natural predisposition within human behavior. Fluidity, internal diversity and contingency form an important part of this understanding, but only a part. In fact, these ideas are discussed by critical intercultural scholars as *re*newed (Dervin et al., 2012), because they are based on conceptualizations from anthropology and social-constructionist lines of thought which were influential, even if not mainstream for the study if intercultural encounters before the theoretization of the field of Intercultural Communication in 1980s (Moon, 1996). Instead of being a 'mere' social construction, culture is rather a product of human interaction, which through multiple mechanisms imposes and perpetuates various practices and attitudes that become established on levels of "common sense", "tradition", "the Higher Order", or simply habitual ways of doing things and tendencies of judgement, which are seldom questioned. While being created in communication, they may still receive a very lasting nature through being imbued with meaning and value. The socially constructed borders

of countries are documented in legally valid papers and have armed military personnel guarding them. The American constitution appeared as a result of social interaction in 1787, but it is used as a basis for one person to buy a firearm in a shop and another person to sentence that person to prison if they kill someone with that weapon. The rules of Vinaya, the Buddhist monastic code, were written down from memorized sermons of the Buddha given more than two thousand years ago, and they still define monastic attire in the 21st century South East Asia and beyond. In my research I am interested in a broader mechanism of social construction, rather than particular instances of interaction favoured by a constructivist view of culture (Baumann, 1996). And finally, I see socially constructed reality as bound by a certain level of inevitability, coming from our biology and common humanity.

My operational definition of culture would therefore be the ways, habits and norms, resulting from human interaction over time, imbued with meaning and associations, and perpetuated through drawing borders between, and labelling, various groups of people. While the group membership is open, it is constrained through in- and outgroup perception of its borders, as well as by the hierarchy within the group. Under this definition we can speak of a culture with respect to members of a certain Buddhist group, who are affiliated with a certain existing school of Buddhism, and, by virtue of that, share common meanings and a sense of connection. We can also speak of a culture on the level of grand divisions: for example, we can unite people, who would consider themselves 'modern westerners', through commonly shared meanings and assumptions, such as superiority of democracy over theocracy. Whatever cultural groups we draw, however, their borders are going to be flexible, and internal diversity would be higher than differences among groups. Many important meanings, commonly seen as shared within the group, are also considered contingent to a large extent, and under favorable circumstances can be redefined very rapidly. This way, my take on culture is largely within the interpretive paradigm, though the "webs of meaning" (Geertz, 1973) are seen as flexible, and open to de- and recontextualization. Each element or a whole part of a system can be replanted into another web of meaning and take a different role in it (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). The processes involving such change are best described through Welsch's (1999) transculturality, implying that cultures are amalgams of various elements, circulating through human interaction. My research investigates the process of this circulation on the example of a small culture, constructed via online affordances.

When it comes to religion as a socially-constructed phenomenon, it would be important to remember that one of the fathers of social constructionism, Peter Berger (Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1991; Berger, 2001) coincidentally was also a sociologist of religion, and a Protestant theologician. In their description of how reality is constructed socially, Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991) bring many vivid examples of constructing reality in relation to religion, for example, when they account for what they call "the systematic theoretical conceptualization of symbolic universes" as being brought by "heretic challenges to the 'official'

tradition" (p. 125). They provide the example of the novel development of "the theoretic conception of Trinity that was not only unnecessary, but actually inexistent in early Christian community" (p.125) in response to heretic voices.

The fact that religions perpetuate themselves through human interaction, cultural patterns and values, formal institutions and modes of sharing factual and common sense knowledge, is indeed rather transparent. However, what often remains on a tacit level, is what the word 'religion' corresponds to. Definitions of religion are numerous, starting from the basic: "worship of god or gods", which can be found in Merriam-Webster or Oxford dictionaries, to more sophisticated anthropological takes:

> a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, andlong-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the mood and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz, 1993, p. 90)

Some researchers, misled by dictionaries, exclude non-theistic religions (such as Buddhism) from the list, while others broaden the definition to include ideologies, such as communism, Nazism, and liberalism as religions (King & Hedges, 2014).

Considering its evasiveness in the face of definitions, we can look at the origins and the meaning of the word "religion". People started talking about religion in the Europe of the early modern age. In that truly fateful moment of human history, religious minorities of Protestant Christians, and Jews started to shape their distinct place in the society. Secularism, as a desired separation of church and state, was rooted into the idea of a civilized society. While the word comes from the Latin verb "re-ligare" (to bind, reconnect), in the emerging field of European values it not only bound, but also separated (Aden, 2012). Although contacts between people of different faiths had never been uncommon, the emerging concept of religion also presupposed a presence of the non-religious (Aden, 2012). In the modern world religion became something one can have, change, and leave. Religion came to be seen as one's personal matter and right. Religion came to define the part of identity, which has to do more with one's internal beliefs and one's connection to immediate community, rather than with how the world works and how society functions. Although the term denotes the social sphere present in virtually any society in human history, the term 'religion' is heavily charged with connotations of Christianity. In accord with the principle of West and the rest, religion refers to all religions, but on Christian grounds and through Christian lens. The early modern time was not colored by the spirit of intercultural harmony and respect towards world heritage. In terms of religions, early modern thinkers could say a lot about Christianity (mostly Protestant), a bit about Judaism, even less about "Mohammedanism", and virtually nothing about all other world religions, collectively referred to as "paganism" (Roth, 2008). In the intellectual milieu, where 'religion' became a term, the superiority of Christianity was not claimed, because it was simply tacit common knowledge.

This could not but affect the emerging academic knowledge of religions of that time.

Another factor, which makes religion a particularly slippery abstract term to use, the extent to which it is interconnected with everything else. Religion, values, legislation, cultural order, politics, attitudes and inequalities are all tightly interconnected, not only conceptually, but also through structures and institutions: church, state, school, family etc. Some beliefs or practices are so confusingly both religious and cultural, that it could make a researcher wonder whether the two should be separated at all. In fact, a rather prominent school of thought within religious studies have called to abolish the term (McCutcheon, 2012; Fitzerald, 1997). For them 'religion' is a social construct, which exists only in our imaginations. It defines the cultural "other" in distorting terms, imposes its internal logic and implications on contexts where they do not apply, and does not have direct translations in other languages, such as Arabic or Sanskrit (Schilbrack, 2012). Lynch (2017) proposes a milder technique for this crusade: gradual abolitionism. Referring to Haslanger's (2012) application of Hacking's (1999) levels of social construction, he identifies many religious phenomena (religious identity being one of them) as weak social constructions, i.e. those having real repercussions for real people (Lynch, 2017). As a intersectional feminist researcher, Haslanger (2012) uses social constructionism with a critical realist ontology, to approach issues of gender and race, both issues being physical and observable. In his application of this thinking, Lynch (2017) also focuses on the observable, such as a brown woman wearing the hijab. He makes a fair point connecting the observable religious identity markings with those of race: "While discussing the treatment of Muslims in terms of racism is controversial, it is clear that there are artificial observable markers, as well as some anatomical features, which are used to distinguish Muslims from other groups." (Lynch, 2017, p. 293) But it looks like a lot of religion is left outside of his analysis. Schilbrack (2017, p.304) adjusts this thinking to extend the range of phenomena, which are socially constructed, but also very real to people engaged in them:

> But I judge that that there were forms of life predicated on superhuman beings and powers including practices like making offerings, visiting shrines, and celebrating feast days; roles like oracles, renunciants, and jurists; and institutions to regulate and reproduce those practices and roles—all of which existed in history prior to and independent of the concept "religion." Those forms of life are not fictions and the modern concept of "religion" categorizes but does not invent them.

Being a social constructionist himself, he is also critical of Fitzerald's (1997; 2007) take on religion (Schilbrack, 2012). In his view, all non-Western societies, despite not having the word 'religion', have all that we associate with human religious activity; the term, although having no direct translation, has perfect analogies, and the difference in connotation demands explanation, rather than a refusal to use any terms; finally, concepts are the best-known ways of making sense of reality, and having a name for such specific sphere of human life is more practical, particularly, while even Fitzgerald (2007) and McCutcheon (2012), professors in

religious studies, use the term continuously in their critique of it (Schilbrack, 2012). I tend to agree with his arguments. My take on social constructionism in this dissertation (further outlined in the coming section) is concept friendly. However imperfect and ambiguous abstract concepts may be, we have to rely on them in order to make sense of the mess of phenomena around us.

I also see a level of inevitability when it comes to religion. Modern research in the neurobiology of religion demonstrates the unique place religious beliefs and activities occupy in our brain and brain activity (Aden, 2012). Archeological findings indicate the (proto-)religious behaviour of ancient homo sapiens (Harari, 2014). Though militant atheists may disagree, religious behavior does not seem to be a result of learned erroneous views, but rather a manifestation of natural predispositions of the human mind, and a universal human activity (Schilbrack, 2012). This is reflected in the dynamics of how religious beliefs are retained, despite the diminishing role of institutionalized religion (Bader, 2007). While a strong naturalist view would demand the avoidance of any metaphysical beliefs (apart from metaphysical naturalism, which is also a metaphysical view, Bishop (2009)), many post-Enlightenment and modern philosophers have pointed out that human existence, meaning-making, and moral judgement cannot be possible without metaphysical beliefs (Taylor, 2007). Despite their reliability, scientific tools, facts and knowledge *themselves* do not offer imperative guidance in terms of moral attitudes, ethics, justice, and other important pillars of society. Claiming a universal and exclusive scientific authority for such things has been seen as an erroneous view of scientism (Boudry & Pigliucci, 2018). Deriving socially relevant meaning out of scientific knowledge is reliant on a philosophical system with a set of values and guidelines, and religions have historically specialized in those. There is, of course, a cloud to the silver lining in the form of growing fundamentalism, general disregard or even hostility towards rational and scientific thought, and forced indoctrination in education and even at state level, which are all to be found across religions. However, that does not make religion less in line with the so-called human nature, only more so.

Saying that, it is important to clarify that religion in my view has no agency or essence of its own. It exists and functions solely through human interaction. Although we may speak of how it affects the physical world in terms of human actions (rituals), architecture (temples) and structures of the brain, it is nothing external to human activity. Therefore, being constructed, maintained and perpetuated through human activity, it may also be changed, redefined and represented through human activity. At the same time, in line with my take on social constructionism outlined above, I do accept a certain level of human predisposition to religious activities. The meanings created and re-created in communication, and attributed to religious concepts are flexible, but not infinitely so. The example of Buddhism for this matter is particularly vivid. Throughout more than 25 centuries, the religion has accumulated many ways of interpreting the texts that are claimed to be memorized discourses of the historical Buddha (Skilton, 2016). Different strands of Buddhism accept different range of texts. Some strands explicitly defy the authority of texts. Some

pervasively common texts exposed to thorough textual analysis may be seen as historical fabrications (Attwood, 2018). Nevertheless, every strand of Buddhism is going to rely on its discourses, and those usually travel across centuries, and their original messages can be recognized, even when they cross borders. For example, a thesis I referred to in the section on Buddhism in Finland showed how modern Soto Zen rhetoric in the West may seem very modern and Western, but it employs the original texts by Dogen for support (Cairns, 2011). Yes, as socially constructed entities, religions are malleable, but they are much more likely to be altered within and through their own resources and interpretations, rather than against them. Another issue I see in the idea of religions changing and adapting indefinitely is that the degree of change is usually severely overstated. Religions are probably the most static and resistant social constructions. Moreover, the claim that religions are fluid, may often be used, I think, as an overstated basic assumption, employed to promote one's own interpretations over the way things have been traditionally understood (Sharapan, under review). This does not mean that traditional understanding is by definition superior or even accurate, but amending traditional understanding or proposing alternatives cannot be undertaken based solely on religion's perceived flexibility.

3.1.3 Realism vs relativism?

Since my topic includes a large array of issues across religions, cultures and ages, it demands a broad but argumentative relativist take. Baghramian (2004) defines several dimensions of relativism (eg. ontological, epistemic, moral), and its several kinds in relation to truth, such as subjectivism, aleithic relativism (strong and restricted), and pluralism, which she herself subscribes to. She provides a very critical explanation of subjectivism, aleithic relativism, and Rortyan ethnocentrism, pinpointing the logical inconsistency and dangers of such slogans as: "everyone is right in their own right"(subjectivist view, which Smith (1988) called "sophomorean relativism"), "nothing is true", or "true for my group" (eg. Rorty, 1991). Finally, she describes pluralism through the metaphors of maps. A pluralist sees the human understanding of the world, including scientific theories and general ways of verbal sense-making, as maps of reality, which we create for different purposes. While maps can be accurate and useful, they are merely representations of the physical world. Nevertheless, they can be more or less detailed, accurate, and relevant. O'Grady (2014) criticizes popular takes on relativism on similar grounds, his views resonating with pro-realism philosophers (eg. Searle, 1995), just to defend the version of relativism (pluralism) which he sees as the most sensible. Although he deliberately prefers the term relativism instead of pluralism, his interpretation is very close to Baghramian's (2004). Instead of undermining logical and common sense principles, he argues, relativism was built upon them. It is not a mockery of truth, but a humble acknowledgement of its complexity in view of human limited human abilities (O'Grady, 2014). Despite some fierce critical voices (eg. Siegel, 2004), I find this epistemological framework indispensable for intercultural communication, and

any research into human reality. I find Feyerabend's (2010, p. xxi) observation relevant for researching a 25 centuries' old contemplative and religious tradition:

> People starting from different social backgrounds will approach the world in different ways and learn different things about it. People survived millenia before Western science arose; to do this they had to know their surroundings up to and including elements of astronomy. […]

> First-world science is one science among many; by claiming to be more it ceases to be an instrument of research and turns into a (political) pressure group.

Edwards, Ashmore and Potter (1995) have addressed most criticisms of relativism in their classic essay *Death and furniture: the rhetoric, politics and theology of bottom line arguments against relativism*. When it comes to human sciences, I do not find it useful to analyze notoriously irrational and illogical (Kahneman, 2011) human behavior, decisions and attitudes in terms of mathematically elegant abstract constructions of external reality. I also acknowledge scientific method as being the best known window into objective reality, but still imperfect in its application (Feyerabend, 2010) as well as often misleading in its authority. In general, guided by this epistemological position, social constructionism does not negate the functional reality of physical objects, including human organisms, DNAs and brains, laying the foundation for human behavior. While it acknowledges the arbitrary nature of these very concepts, it does not suggest their deconstruction, and is mindful of the inevitability these phenomena entail. The more complex levels of human activities, such as religious hierarchies, sacralized male domination, and face-keeping discursive strategies, are seen as operating largely through human convention, prevalent ideologies, as having been co-constructed through communication since time immemorial. This form of relativism does not recognize the monopoly of contemporary scientific knowledge and paradigms over truth, and in particular does not attempt to use it to explain away the phenomenological truth of participants' narratives. The call of critical researchers of religion, such as McCutcheon (2012), to interpret religious activities in terms of contemporary social, political and cultural factors instead of their phenomenology, is driven by a desire to align them with a realistic rather than a religious understanding of the world around us. However I fear this habit can lead to jumping into reductive conclusions, which provide a limited, potentially false understanding. Relativism allows one to explain the whole of the story, and even to express the researcher's personal view of it, without feeding the reader with a "correct" understanding, particularly when it makes a great many people look like fools or frauds. In this way the religious experiences, beliefs and values of the participants are seen as both, socially-constructed and real, at least in terms of their relevance and pragmatic benefit, but also in accordance with the worldviews the participants (and not the researcher or reviewers) subscribe to.

I find epistemic relativism to be the most compelling for the issue at hand. However, similarly to Hacking's (1999; Preface to Feyerabend, 2010) serious take

on scientific knowledge and facts, I do accept a strong degree of inevitability and ontological unambiguity. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018) point out that oftentimes constructivist and social constructionist qualitative researchers shy away from any realism, focusing solely on discourses and narratives, "thereby ducking many if not most important and interesting aspects of social reality" (p.2). In this dissertation I am not throwing out realism altogether. I do make assumptions on and causal inferences about how phenomena are connected, a point which brings my ontological position closer to that of critical realism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). However my interpretation is also restrained by relativism in view of various epistemological perspectives, and guided by those I explain in this dissertation.

One more important point in this discussion, which stands out apart from the previous points, is the social constructionist take on moral and ethical issues. Many topics in my research have to do with the changing attitudes towards what is considered virtuous, right, or moral, and it is reflected in my analysis of the participants' answers and of the phenomenon. Although ethical universalism may appeal to many, a universalist view of morality is difficult to pin down. Societies change and so do ethical social conventions. Even in the same society, the same action can be considered as ethical or unethical, depending on the context, motivation, agent's situation, and available alternatives. While moral relativism may sound appalling to some, Edwards et al (1995, p.36) claim it is virtually inevitable for a relevant sense of morality:

> The idea that letting go of realism entails that all these commitments must fall, is no more convincing than the idea that life without God is devoid of meaning and value. […] It is a foregrounding of meanings and values, to be argued, altered, defended and invented; including even the metavalue that some of these meanings and values may profitably be declared universal and even self-evident ('We hold these truths to be self-evident …').

Besides, a relativist take on ethics is not necessarily nihilist. For example, Bader (2007), instead of accepting a fully open take on moral issues, suggests moral minimalism as a basis for a civilized society and for liberal democracy. Despite aligning himself passionately with liberal ethical values, Bader's (2007) moral minimalism allows for a certain space of debate, for change and for internal variety within society, where not everyone has to be as liberal as himself. I find this argument to be stronger than the indefensible idea of some universal morals, which can be imposed on everyone regardless of context and situation, and more responsible than an exaggerated moral relativism. Therefore, while raising issues concerning changing Buddhist ethics, I rely on a hermeneutic, situational understanding of society, where the religion is practiced (Gombrich, 2009). It is also seen in view of available alternatives to one's actions and social conventions at large. For example, it could be expected that modern Buddhism, practiced by western converts, will express a different rhetoric over homosexuality than what was expressed by institutionalized pre-modern monastic Buddhism did. Ethical perception of homosexuality may differ greatly within one and the same strand

of Buddhism, and Scherer (2014) even demonstrates how much they fluctuate even within the rhetoric of the same public figure.

I this way, my data analysis and my conclusions in this monograph are based on an epistemic relativist take with a grounding in critical realist ontology, and guided axiologically by an understanding of ethics as socially and historically embedded, and my own ethical pursuit, guided by moral minimalism. I will be discussing the findings and opening up my analysis in each section of Discussion thematically, allowing the reader to construct their own understanding of each issue at the same time as they are offered mine. The practicalities of data collection and analysis are outlined in the sections below.

3.2 Choosing methodology

Many are stubborn in pursuit of the path they have chosen. Few in pursuit of the goal.
— Friedrich Nietzsche

Qualitative research can be compared to *craft* rather than science in a natural-scientific understanding of the word (Prasad, 2015). This metaphor represents the desired trajectory for qualitative inquiry, lying between the extremes of natural-scientific principles and completely unstructured qualitative inquiry. Prasad (2015, p.7) describes the rigor of qualitative inquiry like this:

> Working at a craft requires the development and perfection of skills and expertise that are usually handed down through several generations. Craftwork also involves the disciplined creativity that results in a tangible and well-made product – in this case, the piece of research.

She highlights the importance of intellectual *tradition*, alongside methods and theories. The methods, used in this dissertation, are dictated in part by the interpretive, social-constructionist intellectual tradition, driving this inquiry. The data collection and analysis rely on a number of principles characteristic of qualitative research. As a skillful craftsman, a qualitative researcher leans on an arsenal of methods; Tracy (2012) uses the postmodern term *bricolage* to characterize this approach. In my case these methods included thematic analysis of naturally-occurring data, interviews, participant observation and ethnographic (or *net*nographic). The important characteristic of data analysis was *hermeneutic* reflection, i.e. analyzing the materials and events in terms of their meaning within the larger context (Lock and Strong, 2010). This holistic way of interpreting phenomena can also be described through a Germanism *gestalt* (Tracy, 2012). Similarly, Alvesson & Sköldberg's (2018) reflexive methodology considers applicability of various approaches, their strengths and blind spots, for the researcher to engage in well thought-through transparent work. The use of a combination of different methods and attention to different participants (students and teachers) allows a more holistic picture of the issue in question to be drawn. At the same time, in my data collection I strived towards as much rigor and reflexivity as possible, in order to craft not only a versatile piece of research, but also a reliable one.

Although the results of the analysis are presented thematically, I am going to describe the methodology behind the three data-sets successively in the following sections. The last section will describe my personal position as a researcher in relation to the phenomenon and the participants to ensure transparency and accurate reflexivity (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).

3.2.1 The first data-set: naturally-occurring forum discussions

3.2.1.1 The research environment

In order to identify the broad range of issues involved in adopting Tibetan Buddhism, I started with a broad data-set. The focus of the first stage of my data collection was a major online platform, FPMT (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition), an organization offering courses in Tibetan Buddhism for non-heritage Buddhists, mainly Westerners. FPMT was founded in the 1970s by the now deceased teacher Lama Yeshe and his disciple Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who currently heads the organization. FPMT facilitates teaching and ritual activities in its 165 centers in 40 different countries, and offers a range of education programs, both onsite and online. Among the programs, the most popular is Discovering Buddhism, a comprehensive introduction into Buddhist thought and practice in the Gelug tradition. FPMT also employs many other teachers, resident and travelling in additionally to its head and main teacher, Lama Zopa Rinpoche. The teachers are either Tibetan geshes (analogous to a PhD in Buddhist philosophy), or converts, who have been education by FPMT or the affiliated tradition. Virtually all Tibetan teachers are monks, while Western ones can be both monastic and lay people, and can include women as well as men. The source for my data collection was the student forum, aligned with the online program. While the forum is used as a platform for open discussion among students, it is also used by six Elder who are FPMT teachers of Western origin. The Elders answer questions related to learning materials, teachings and practice. The administrator also occasionally appears on the forum, as well as the program directors and coordinators.

FPMT is one among several other major similar organizations, and it was chosen for the research for a number of reasons. The first was my personal familiarity with it, and its presence in Finland. Second, it represents the "mainstream", but traditional Tibetan Buddhism in the West, meaning that it adheres to the doctrinal and formal tenets of Tibetan Buddhism, has a broad outreach and a good reputation. Some other popular organizations of similar kind either teach a more "westernized" version of Buddhism, having less intercultural underpinnings for the research (Shambhala, Tergar), or are very local and small-sized, or have a questionable reputation (eg., NKT, see Kay, 1997; 2004). Importantly, FPMT is of interest for this research, because it relies not only on face-to-face teachings, but also showcases a list of online and home study programs, accompanied by the forum, which reflect the process of encountering, negotiating and adopting Tibetan Buddhism.

3.2.1.2 Data collection and analysis

Qualitative content analysis of naturally-occurring data from an emic perspective was a broad and inclusive way to map the field of issues related to the topic. Qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis are often used interchangeably in research, bringing a lot of confusion (Vaismorandi et al., 2013). The two methods indeed have a lot in common. It was decided that the first data-

set would benefit more from qualitative content analysis, because it has more emphasis on description and quantification as well as on the more manifest and broad meanings in the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The method also has a stronger potential for quantification, and it was important in this first stage to look not only at issues arising, but also at how prominent certain topics are in the discussions. I used inductive qualitative content analysis, in order to draw a broad map of issues that arise while discovering Buddhism. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) recommend using this method particularly for issues, which have not been studied in detail before. The broad nature of the phenomenon and its problematics also called for the use of naturally occurring data. Silverman (2006) positions it as the most accurate and reliable basis for qualitative inquiry, warning that its alternative, research-provoked data (interviews, focus groups etc.) has the potential disadvantage of creating an artificial situation and restraining the participants. He is mindful that *any* data used in research potentially could be corroborated to some degree by the eye of the researcher, and that no data can provide a purely natural insight into a phenomenon. However, he says (Silverman, 2006; p. 44):

> …one strength of qualitative research is that it can use naturally occurring data to find the sequences ('how') in which participants' meanings ('what') are deployed and thereby establish the character of some phenomenon.

In this monograph I used naturally-occurring data for the purposes of mapping the field, although for a closer look I also used researcher-provoked data later on, namely interviews. Internet forums, an example of naturally occurring data, were praised for providing a combination of authenticity and intimacy in the wake of internet research on Buddhism (Hayes, 1999). In this way, naturally-occurring forum discussions were a natural choice for the first stage.

I started approaching the field by contacting the administration of the forum and the learning center. I explained the idea of my research and the nature of my participation on the forum. I also made clear the standards of identity protection I was going to follow in future publications on the data. The staff were cooperative, but also mindful of the need to protect the students from unwarranted intrusion.

Having gained access, I started reading and saving the pages of the discussion forum and organizing the content of the threads into an MS Word table. The data collection process included going through approximately one thousand discussion topics, 1-20 posts long, accumulated over seven years, from 2009 (the launch of the forum) to 2016. The table included four columns: the name of the thread topic, content, quotations, and my comments/emerging categories. Arranged this way, the content of forum discussions stretched over 206 pages, but was still operational and pre-analyzed. Starting analysis on the level of data-collection is not uncommon, and is considered to support research reliability (Vaismorandi et al., 2013). Parallel to this, I also saved the html pages of the forum on my computer (and later on a safe memory stick), so that I could turn to them at any time for more detail and clarification during the analysis stage.

Based on a preliminary analysis of the data, I wrote an article (Sharapan, 2018), theoretically framed according to Tweed's translocal analysis (Tweed, 2011). The analysis of the data in this monograph, however, has a data-based focus and the format of the monograph allowed for greater methodological rigor.

For this dissertation, I went through the data once again, analyzing the MS Word file table in Atlas.ti 8 software. I was inclined to use the program for the forum discussions, so that I could accurately arrange the categories that were visible in the data. However, html format is among rare formats not supported by Atlas.ti, so I had to use the table as the basis for the analysis, constantly turning to the saved html pages to check the original context. While chronologically going through the posts arranged in the table, I was also referring to the previous posts and categories, following a recursive analysis recommended in Friese (2014) for less straightforward data. I formed a list of categories that were relevant for my focus, and these were issues concerning adopting cultural elements, evoking narratives of Tibetan Buddhism, shaping and maintaining policies around authority, etc. Altogether, the list was quite long. I analyzed the whole data-set, up to the most recent messages, even though the data saturation was reached before the end and the most prominent categories were recurring (Saunders et al., 2018). I filtered out categories, which were less relevant, such as personal stories of hardships, or clarifying questions concerning the operation of the courses. What remained could be shaped into more extended categories, which had laid foundation for the interview guide for the second data-set. When I went through the table file for the second time, the interviews had already been collected and provided an additional support for working with the data. The relevant categories were classified into five main clusters, which became the sections of the Findings & Discussion

3.2.1.3 Ethical considerations

The collection and storage of sizeable portions of participant messages requires consideration in terms of ethical impact (gdpr-info.eu). The forum discussions occur among the students of the program, and are closed to the public. Many users use their real name on the forum, often accompanied by their real picture. Often they share private and sensitive information. Therefore, the question of pseudonymization was a crucial one for me. Although the html-pages could not be anonymized, no names were used at the stage of analysis. All the names mentioned in the article (Sharapan, 2018) and in this monograph were coded names, which, were picked, however, to fit in with respondent's background. All secondary identifiers, such as location and occupation, were generalized into broader categories, for instance, "Eastern Europe" would stand instead of "Ukraine".

In the wake of internet research, the ethical issues of accessing and reporting internet data, especially public postings, was not considered problematic (Mann & Stewart, 2000). However, the regulations have become much tighter, due to the fact that posters on the internet may be sharing their opinions with other users, but might not be aware of the repercussions of their words being used in research

(AoIR, 2012). The timing of my monograph also coincided with the ratification of EU-requirements for data collection and storage. Initially the restrictions for research were unclear, especially for cases like mine, when the data collection was planned and performed prior to the ratification, and was essential for submitting a doctoral dissertation after the ratification. However, the situation resolved as the regulations became more specific. As prescribed for personal data processing such as that for scientific research in the public interest, the restrictions were observed whenever possible, unless they were "likely to render impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the specific purposes, and such derogations are necessary for the fulfilment of those purposes" (GDPR 89, gdpr-info.eu). In this way, no real names were used in the analysis, but the html files could not be pseudonymized. So instead, that data was kept no a separate data carrier. Moreover, potentially sensitive information, related to health conditions and biographical facts the participants were sharing on the forum had little relevance to the focus of this monograph, and therefore, was used very sparingly and with care, leaving as little scope for identification as possible.

3.2.2 The second data-set: interviews with students

3.2.2.1 The two groups

The second data-set consisted of sixteen interviews with members of two Tibetan Buddhist groups in Helsinki, Finland. In this study I wanted to test the assumptions made from the previous data-set, and reveal how the issues manifest offline. A preliminary analysis of the first data-set allowed a set of recurring topics to be drawn up. These topics formed a basis for selecting an interview guide with formal questions to be followed by a number of possible follow-up questions and remarks. In this way, the interviews were semi-structured (Mann, 2016). Mann (2016) outlines different types of interviews, and for the purposes of this monograph I conducted interviews which could be defined as in-depth and which "aim to elicit a full picture of the participant's perspective on the research focus" (p. 100). I chose to collect the data in two different groups in order to reach a more versatile understanding of Tibetan Buddhism in Finland, instead of focusing on just one organization, with its own specific policies and practices. The first group was an FPMT study group (Tara Liberation) established in 2007, and the second was Danakosha, a Niyngma group functioning since 1996 and headed by a Tibetan monk, Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche, who has been living in Finland on and off since 2005.

My intention was not to conduct a comparative study, but rather to collect a heterogeneous sample, so I picked two very different organizations. FPMT teaches in the Gelug tradition, which is the most recent, rigorous and institutional branch of Tibetan Buddhism, and Danakosha represents Nyingma, the oldest and most diverse, liberal and lay-friendly. While the first group is affiliated with a large global network, is study-focused, small in size and relatively young, the other group is numerous and active, with a charismatic Tibetan teacher, and is relatively independent. Although Danakosh follows a clear   lineage

(Mindrolling), they are not part of any formal global organization. When I was starting my fieldwork and data-collection, Tara Liberation was going through difficult times: the regular weekly meetings, which used to be held in a rented Buddhist center on Mondays, became less frequent, with several old members dropping out and few new members joining, and there was a shortage of funds for inviting teachers.

According to FPMT regulations on their website, after two years of successful activity a study group can receive the status of a center and invite a resident teacher. At the time of my data collection, the group had been operating for about ten years, and many members shared a desire to have a permanent resident teacher available in their group. Due to the lack of financial and human resources, however, Tara Liberation was unable to provide a teacher.

The other group on the other hand, Danakosha, was broadening its horizons. When I was collecting the data the group was moving out of its own headquarters, an opulent Tibetan-style ground-floor apartment in a quiet central street of Helsinki, in order to move to a farm-turned-temple in Jokioinen near Hämeenlinna. I was fortunate to witness both: the former that opened in 2005, and the new place which in 2021 is still in the process of being made ready, although it is actively functioning as a Buddhist temple and a dharma center. The decision to abandon the excellent city location in favor of a farm in the country-side, located between Helsinki, Turku, Tampere and Hämeenlinna, was made by Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche.

Although it meant a lot of work, money and time for the members, and little security for the group, the decision was accepted. In fact, many Tibetan Buddhist organizations in other European countries have erected temples outside of cities (Obadia, 2001). However considering the young age of Tibetan Buddhism in Finland and the number of its followers, some apprehension about this move is easy to understand.

3.2.2.2   Data collection and analysis

Getting access to the participants was not so difficult for me, since I was perceived as an in-group. I had been visiting seminars, organized by both groups, and knew a few people from each of them. However, as Tracy (2012) points out, people seldom want any extra attention, or to be disturbed. So, even though potential respondents probably did not mind giving an interview, initially I received very few answers to my call. I contacted the former coordinator of Tara Liberation and the secretary of Danakosha asking their permission to conduct data-collection, and their cooperation in spreading the call among the members. The secretary of Danakosha answered positively after consulting the Rinpoche.

Since I was not permanently living in Helsinki, I could dedicate only limited time to fieldwork and conducting interviews. The first occasion was one week in September, when I could stay at my friend's apartment while she was on holiday. I arranged meetings with the three people, who had answered my call for participants, and marked dates, when I could visit the centers. During these visits I took part in the activities and observed the members of the groups in their ritual

activities, volunteer work and leisure. Tracy (2012) coined the term 'fieldplay' to characterize participant observation and data collection, performed in an enjoyable and interactive fashion. The play element was in participation, but also in active reflection over my own position as a researcher and a Buddhist in relation to what I saw and heard. My experience with both groups was enjoyable, I was accepted with friendliness and treated as a welcome guest by the members and the administration. The chairperson of Danakosha, Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche, was welcoming and eager to learn more about my research and my background, while engaging in his regular activities of entertaining foreign guests and renovation work. In fact, the first time I met him at the new temple in Jokioinen he was waving at me from under the ceiling in the former shed, the future main temple, in painting overalls. Visiting the centers allowed me to introduce myself in person and talk about my research, so I managed to fish a few more respondents for the same week, and returned home with several more contacts and many pages of notes in my diary. I interviewed another five people during my later short visits to Helsinki in October, November and December, and three more via Skype. The online interviews were conducted with those participants with whom I had already established some personal contact. During my visits, my goal was not only to collect interviews, but also to try being a part of the two groups. I was visiting teachings and lectures, as well as actively mingling with the members, talking about the events and Buddhist practice in general, considering their opinions and attitudes.

This way, I collected the total of 16 interviews, half from Tara Liberation, half from Danakosha. The respondents' demographic information is presented in the table below (Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017):

Table 1.   Interviewees from Danakosha Finland

Coded name (sex)	Age	Experience in Buddhism	Background
Marina (F)	Mid forties	More than 10 years	Half-Finnish (Eastern Europe)
Antonio (M)	Mid forties	2-3 years	Foreign (South Europe)
Petri (M)	Early thirties	Nearly 10 years	Finnish
Helmi (F)	Mid thirties	2-3 years	Finnish
Kirsi (F)	Late fifties	More than 10 years	Finnish
Risto (M)	Early thirties	Nearly 10 years	Finnish
Ilona (F)	Late fifties	About 20 years	Finnish
Jarkko (M)*	Mid thirties	More than 10 years	Finnish

Table 2.   Interviewees from Tara Liberation (FPMT)

Coded name (sex)	Age	Experience in Buddhism	Background
Agata (F)	Mid thirties	2-3 years	Foreign (Eastern Europe)
Bruno (M)	Mid fifties	4-6 years	Foreign (South Europe)
Alex (M)	Early forties	4-6 years	Foreign (Eastern Europe)
Eveliina (F)*	Early fifties	4-6 years	Finnish
Tomi (M)*	Mid thirties	Nearly 10 years	Finnish
Carita (F)	Early thirties	2-3 years	Finnish
Erik (M)	Early thirties	2-3 years	Finnish
Anna (F)	Late forties	Nearly 10 years	Finnish

Most interviews were conducted in Finnish, two were in English and one in Russian. They were transcribed and the one in Russian was translated into English. One article was published in co-authorship based on the interviews, tackling the issue of teacher-student relations in Tibetan Buddhist groups (Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017). A more comprehensive thematic analysis with Atlas.ti 8 was employed to analyze the interviews for this monograph. The interview guide was based on the observations of the previous study on the forum data, but the themes were identified throughout the answers. Following the steps, outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006), I analyzed the data by constantly going over the interviews and the relevant themes. As the authors justly point out, the themes do not just "emerge" out of the data by themselves, but are always, consciously or unconsciously, denoted by the researcher. In my case, the framework for the themes to "emerge" from the data was the previous study and my participant observation. Based on that, I read through the transcripts again, and arranged the prominent categories in a logical succession, comparing participant's reasoning behind their responses, trying to notice patterns in the data. The answers were considered in terms of what they mean in view of participants' narratives of their lives, their behavior and choices, and my identity as a researcher and an in-group also stepped in. Following the metaphor in Kvale (2007) of an interviewer as a miner (digging up the knowledge) or as a traveler (sharing a story of a personal journey), I was the latter. The themes formed quite clear conceptual clusters, corresponding to the relevant issues from the forum and the key assumptions from the literature on Buddhism in the West.

Vaismoradi et al. (2013, p. 404) point out that despite being commonly seen as the most basic methods with little interpretive depth, qualitative content and thematic analysis do not "necessarily produce simple and low-quality findings". Nevertheless, the authors confine the two methods to a more realist / factist perspective, warning that they do not stand well (and particularly, qualitative content analysis) to a social constructionist critique of seeing participants' reports as accurate mirrors of their actual predispositions and feelings. Being a social constructionist myself, I do see this as a limitation of the methods, and therefore, of this study. However my research questions would not have been answered

with strictly discourse analytic methods, which, in their turn, are also not immune to criticisms (Alveson & Sköldberg, 2018). Being aware of the factuality pitfall, I tried to apply a more reflexive, contextual and discourse-oriented perspective to both, the qualitative content analysis in the first study, and the thematic analysis in the second. I was also bearing in mind studies in conversation analysis, discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis applied to the context of interviews (Nikander, 2012; Wooffitt and Widdicombe, 2005), for example in the description of mystical experiences (Wooffitt, 1992). Most of the time, I treated the answers as reflections of participants' predispositions, often because I saw no sensible reason to doubt that the respondents meant what they said.

3.2.2.3 Ethical considerations

Ethics was an important factor for me to consider throughout this study, especially when it concerned real-time participants. Tracy (2012) mentions that providing full information and receiving confident consent is important not only from the ethical perspective, but actually provides for better data, since participants are not restrained by their mistrust. In addition to general ethical considerations, such as consent and transparency, there are many situational dilemmas, which I was pondering over throughout the study. When working with human subjects in qualitative research, the issues of identifiability become especially salient (Tracy, 2012; Frasso et al., 2018). In particular, collecting data in small groups of a specific nature (small organizations, religious groups, hobby clubs etc.), always carries the potential for the participants' identities to be revealed or guessed by a reader. While full anonymity is virtually impossible in such cases (Frasso et al., 2018), there are still a few steps a researcher can (and arguably, must) take to ensure that participants would not be identifiable to other participants, or to third parties.

Many of my respondents were quite eager to talk, even though they were aware that their unique position in the group brought the consequent risk of identification. For others, however, a guarantee of anonymity was a crucial condition for participating. To protect the participants' identities, I first excluded all primary identifiers. Real names were substituted with coded ones. Then, I organized secondary identifiers, such as age, experience in the group, and background, into larger categories. At the point of doing the transcribing, I changed precise information, for example, the country of origin (if different from Finland) or the function in the group, with broader descriptions, such as "Eastern Europe", "actively engaged in organization", etc. Nevertheless, the groups have only a small number of regular members, and combining several obscured secondary identifiers, together with personal stories and styles of talking, could still potentially lead to the participant being identified, at least by other members of the group. Although this cannot be completely avoided, I tried to minimize the risk by avoiding referring to such potential identifiers and/or potentially sensitive information, unless it was crucial for the research conclusions. In this

way, I had to balance accuracy and anonymity (Taylor et al, 2015), which I see as a potentially limiting the research in either direction.

Another important matter of an ethical nature, is my engaging in research as an in-group. Conducting research in Tibetan Buddhist groups, while being a Tibetan Buddhist, and being a usual guest at their events, may raise questions of impartiality. Taylor et al. (2015) recommend against engaging in personally relevant and familiar research environments or topics, assuming that the researcher will not be able to see things clearly and impartially. I disagree with that. I see doing qualitative research while being an in-group not as a drawback, but rather a position of advantage, and merely one of partiality (Mann, 2016). First, there are many good arguments in conducting research as a researcher-practitioner, such as possessing tacit knowledge and being accepted within to the field:

> …an effort has to be made, as far as is possible, to determine how the categories and terms of a culture relate to each other structurally and systemically, and so to place ourselves within the cultural contexts and intellectual horizons of the traditions we are studying, making use of their own intellectual and cultural categories and seeking as it were to "think along" with these traditions. This is much more than a matter of simply developing sympathy or empathy, for it is an intellectual, and scientific, undertaking. (Ruegg (1995) quoted in Scherer (2014, p. 156)

Second, I am skeptical of any claims of impartiality, particularly in qualitative research. Being an out-group does not presuppose being objective. Every researcher, whether in-group or out-group in relation to the group in question holds an array of conscious and implicit views and attitudes which will affect the analysis and even data collection (Silverman, 2006). Being reflective and observant in-group researcher ensures that the views and attitudes are induced by understanding and personal experience, while an out-group researcher though seemingly more objective may have a blind spot, that masks hidden bias. I therefore see the strength not in a supposed objectivity, but rather in mindful subjectivity and reflexivity.

3.2.3 The third data set: interviews with teachers

3.2.3.1 The participants

The final five interviews were conducted with teachers, trained in a traditional system of Tibetan Buddhism and now working mainly with non-hereditary Buddhists. The rationale for adding the perspective of the teachers was to show a multi-faceted picture of how Tibetan Buddhism is transformed and perpetuated in the new settings, as well as to bring out the voice of the bearers of the tradition. Another important impetus for including the teachers was my familiarity with how their impact shapes the way Tibetan Buddhist communities function, i.e. their soft power (Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017). My choice of respondents was primarily determined by the teachers available for an interview in Finland and their familiarity with the Finnish audience which my previous

data-set investigate. But unfortunately, since there were no Sakya centers in Finland, except one visit by Sakya Trinzin in 2016 (before this data collection), I could not interview any visiting Sakya lamas without leaving the country. I looked at several options available during the summer 2019, and Khenpo Ngawang Jorden was the most accessible and representative, being a head of a Sakya Buddhist academy for convert Buddhists. It was important for me to cover all traditions of Tibetan Buddhism with the choice of teachers: Geshe Gelek (Bön), Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche (Nyingma), Ringu Tulku Rinpoche (Kargyu), Khenpo Ngawang Jorden (Sakya), and Geshe Sherab (Gelug). Geshe Gelek was born and studied in Tibet and based in India, though he travelled considerably. Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche was also from Tibet and has resided in Finland at various times since 2005. Ringu Tulku Rinpoche was also born in Tibet, though he had lived most of his life in India, and he too has travelled a great deal, especially in Western countries, owing to his remarkable command of English. Khenpo Ngawang Jorden was born in Sikkim, India, studied in India and the USA, and was later invited to head the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu, Nepal, where he still resides today. Geshe Sherab was born and received his education in Nepal, and later moved to New Mexico, USA, to teach at an FPMT center.

All the respondents held some level of monastic ordination, and two of them (Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche and Ringu Tulku Rinpoche) had been recognized as reincarnated masters. Most teachers of that level are male, but I strived for some gender diversity, so I contacted Khandro Rinpoche, an impactful and articulate female teacher in the Mindrolling Nyingma tradition, who used to come annually to Finland. However, her last visit was in 2016, and her secretary said it would not be possible to catch her for an interview during her very busy European tour. It was unfortunate for me not just because of the resulting heavy gender disbalance in this part of the data, but also because I expected she would be able to offer some very critical and original viewpoints.

3.2.3.2 Data collection and analysis

Fortunately, I managed to interviews four of the teachers during their visit to Finland, and with Khenpo Ngawang Jorden I had to travel to Vienna, Austria, where he was speaking at a conference. The second half of Ringu Tulku Rinpoche's interview was performed via Skype, because we ran out of time during his visit to Finland. It was relatively easy to establish rapport with the subjects and reach them for a possible interview. Time constraints were considerable, however, because their teaching schedule is usually very tight, and after the lectures the teachers typically spent time with their students, rested, or had some sight-seeing program. On top of that, they have multiple hours of their personal practice commitments to fulfill some time during the day. We managed to go over all the questions with Geshe Sherab and Geshe Gelek during the lunch break at their teachings; with Ringu Tulku Rinpoche we had to start before his lecture, and then we continued two weeks later via Skype; Khenpo Ngawang Jorden allocated some time during the break and away from his conference visit

to talk to me, and with Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche I went to his dharma center in Jokioinen to talk to him, so we had plenty of time and I was treated as a welcome guest. I was fortunate that they all trusted me and the event organizers were enthusiastic for me to be able to interview the teachers and obtain their answers.

My interview guide was largely modelled on the interview for the students, with some structural changes to make it more cohesive. The wording of the questions was also adapted to be more transparent and unambiguous to them. Generally I followed a semi-structured interview approach, changing the structure and asking for more detail as we talked, so that the conversation was more spontaneous. The interviews lasted from 45 min to two hours, and ranged considerably according to the teacher's language abilities. I analysed the interviews in the same way as in the previous data-set (Braun & Clark, 2006).

3.2.3.3 Ethical considerations

An important consideration of this data-set which has not been discussed previously was the fact that these interviews were conducted preserving the identity of the subjects. The intention of this data-set was not to obtain information from the experts, but rather to treat the subjects of the third part as dialogue participants. I was eager to get to know how they really feel about the issues discussed, and what their personal attitudes are. The data-set could on the one hand be regarded as exploratory expert interviews, or at least elite interviews (Littig, 2009), but its main purpose was to interview the teachers as people. In this way, I was hesitating between my desire to give the interviewees a face and a name, considering the impact these teachers have, and my desire to obtain sincere and uncontrived answers. Collecting interviews without identity protection is a working option, especially when the interviewees are public persons (eg. Cushing, 2014).

In view of these factors, I decided the safest way would be to follow the principles of transparency and consent. I described the purpose of the interview to the teachers (or their attendants) in detail, specifying where and for what purposes the research was going to be published, and what topics are going to be in focus. I mentioned that in addition to this monograph there was a possibility of a book being published where their interviews would be given more space. I promised to contact them further in such an event, so that they would have a say in how their words would be quoted and interpreted. I inserted an additional line into the informed consent form, where I asked them to underline whether they would like their identity to be protected or made public. The premise was that the data-set should be consistent, so even one teacher, desiring to protect his identity would force the whole data-set to be anonymous (pseudonymized). No one chose to have their identity protected, and in fact the revealed identity did not seem to pose much of a concern to the participants. At the same time, considering their public roles and important positions they hold, I do find this to be a possible incentive for the respondents to hedge their opinions on some issues. This could be seen as a possible limitation.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

For the sake of clarity and cohesion the Findings section is merged with Discussion. The three data-sets present very rich material, and cover multiple relevant issues. Therefore, the results are organized thematically, instead of a linear reporting of the findings, followed by a discussion. The main themes that were relevant for this dissertation started to form already during the first data collection, based on the readings and the common topics, discussed on the forum. These themes also shaped interview guides for the students and teachers, giving a more precise focus. After several rounds of mind-mapping the themes were united into the following topics, which serve as sections in this chapter. They were:

a) Denomination stands for the participants shaping and embracing a Buddhist identity, their position in relation to other Buddhist centers, traditions and schools, and their teacher's role in this;

b) Democratization refers to the process of greater individualization of Buddhist practice, which is associated with a decreased emphasis on authority, and highlighted focus on the individual's engagement in spirituality.

c) Doctrinal and formal reduction is associated with detraditionalization. It is supposed to manifest in a decrease (or even elimination) of ritual and external physical marks of spirituality, de-emphasizing the sacred. Another important aspect is simplification or alteration of the Buddhist doctrine for the sake of accessibility and universalism. This process can also be conceptualized in terms of a secularization of worldview and the external presentation of the religion.

d) Inclusivity means an emphasis on equality of all humans regardless of gender, cast, income, physical ability, race or ethnicity, sexuality and all other factors in which people have experienced exclusion throughout history. It implies not just a theoretical equality, but also practical equity, or adjustment to the needs of individuals, however specific they may be.

e) The role of digital media is among the primary interests of this dissertation, though ironically its explicit presence in the data is very modest. Some assumptions about online or digital religion and the actual role of the digital media for the research participants is critically discussed in this section.

Each of these sections will be structured according to the key assumptions in the literature surrounding the issue, the findings from the forum, the findings from the two groups in Helsinki, and the findings from Tibetan teachers.

4.1 Denomination and group membership

I don't need to be a global citizen
'Cause I'm blessed by nationality.

"American Jesus", Bad Religion, Recipe for Hate, 1993

Alvesson & Sköldberg (2018, p. 385) recommend five stages for challenging assumptions in the field. First, identifying the domain of literature (whether classic or more recent), identifying assumptions underlying it, articulating them explicitly and then evaluating (in my case, in contrast with the data), and finally, developing an alternative ground of assumptions.

One common assumption underlying much of the research on Western Buddhists is that sectarian divisions, exclusive practice of one tradition, and even avowal of a Buddhist identity itself are weakened and gradually lost among Western Buddhists. In this analysis, I maintain that the scholarly interest towards the emergence of Buddhist groups in Western countries is to blame for creating a conceptual trap of a "Western" Buddhism. Alongside "Tibetan Buddhism", which sounds very much like a Buddhism associated with some specific nationality, scholars have applied the terms "American Buddhism", or the more general "Western Buddhism" (which, to make matters worse, are often assumed to be pretty much the same) to denote some specific type of Buddhism. However even if we look critically at the notion of Tibetan Buddhism, we quickly notice that its national belonging is an illusion. We see this kind of Buddhism being historically practiced in regions like Kalmykia, thousands of kilometres away from Tibet, which is also not a country. By saying "Tibetan Buddhism" we refer to a system of views, practices, discourses, shaping a subsect of Buddhism, which had been transplanted from India (Mahayana and Vajrayana were not the mainstream types of Buddhism in India) and had been mostly maturing on the Tibetan plateau, but going way beyond it, into the Himalayan region, Mongolia, China and Russia. However fluid and inaccurate, the term still refers to a *flow* with a long history and a strong momentum. If the term "Western Buddhism" is scrutinized it is seen not to have yet gained historical momentum as a coherent system of symbols (to use Geertz's language) but instead represents a set or an entanglement of various other flows. These flows are as different from each other as different "Asian" Buddhisms have been, internally heterogeneous, constantly reshaping and being maintained by internally diverse groups of people with loose boundaries, rather than by some communities defined by their ethnicity or belonging. In other words, "Western Buddhism" is a confusing misnomer.

None of the classifications separating Buddhism in the West into ethnicity-based categories have proven to be accurate. We do see some people bringing Buddhism with them as they immigrate into Western countries, and other people taking it up as a new religion or practice. But the division of "ethnic" and "white" (Prebish, 1993) fails just as much as the improved "traditionalist" and "modernist" dichotomy (Baumann, 2002a), simply due to the fact that racial or ethnic markers

are fluid across the categories, and "traditionalist" and "modernist" trends both originated in Asia (McMahan, 2008; Hickey, 2010, Quli, 2009), and can be seen both among Asians and Westerners. In spite of this, there is still a strong tendency to speak not only of two Buddhisms, but also of some kind of "emerging" new form of Buddhism, which is specifically "Western" or, even a narrower misnomer, "American". Classic works in the field, such as Prebish's (1979) *American Buddhism*, are full of anticipation of this emerging form, as well as of active adaption of Buddhism to its new home. In his recent interview for *Tricycle* Prebish admitted that with American Buddhism "we're not there yet" (Heumann, 2012b):

> First we need all the Buddhist traditions to come to America in their integrity — with their traditions and their lineages and their rituals and so forth. Then it will take time for them to become distinctly American, to factor into American culture, for Buddhists to communicate with other Buddhists. We need patience. Eventually, something that we could call "American Buddhism" will emerge. And that doesn't mean that there will be one vehicle. We will still have the same sects and so forth, but they will be much more interpenetrating, I think.

This hope is still alive not only in Prebish. Seager's *Buddhism in America* (2012) expresses a conviction "that in the future both Buddhists and historians of Buddhism will look back to the last half century and find the origins of unique American forms of Buddhism that will bear comparison to the great traditions of Asia" (p.xvii). He admits speaking of such forms as being "too early to announce" (xiii), so as yet remains unclear what value as forms of Buddhism they would have, or how they would be positioned in the global landscape. The book itself, meanwhile, is structured according to different originally Asian forms of Buddhism, represented on American soil, more different from one another than Catholicism and Baptism.

Another classic of the field, Coleman (2008) based on his impression of several groups he perceived as manifestations of such American Buddhism, drew common patterns of such formations. The patterns are typical features associated with modernity, and in his chapter they are juxtaposed with to the "Asian" Buddhisms. However Coleman's (2008) impression of these is based on how he imagines them rather than on data. Studies performed on contemporary Asian Buddhists demonstrate many similarities to Coleman's understanding of the new American Buddhism (Gayley, 2016; Han, 2017; Wallace, 2008). An additional problematic angle in such conceptualization is a typically orientalist revivalist attitude, which frames American Buddhism not just as a shaped Buddhist tradition of its own, but also as superior to the "Asian" Buddhisms in terms of its authenticity:

> One obvious similarity is that Siddhartha's followers were not born into the faith but had to make their own decision to join. Thus, the term "convert Buddhism" would seem to apply equally well to the original Buddhists as to the members of Buddhist groups in the West today. As converts, it is logical to assume that most of the early Buddhists must have had the same kind of spiritual hunger that draws

Westerners into Buddhism today, in contrast to most contemporary Asian Buddhists who are simply born into the faith. (Coleman, 2008; p.186)

A common assumption voiced by Prebish (Heumann, 2012b) in the interview regarding Buddhism's assimilation in America, is that Buddhism has adapted to the culture of each place: "When it moved from India to China, it took at least 500 years before it became sinicized". However, Chinese Buddhism and its derivatives, Zen and Son, is a very convenient example for this case. We do not observe this adaptive trait of Buddhism in the Theravada countries, or even in Tibet, where the practice, the institutional structure and even the imagery of the Sanskrit tradition have remained rigidly loyal to their Indian origins. Also, to assume inherent adaptability as a trait of Buddhism, based on the Chinese example, means to ignore the historical circumstances of Buddhism's sinicization and the contemporary circumstances of its modern spread.

The question of the openness and fluidity of Buddhist identity has bothered researchers to some extent as well. Tweed (2002) suggested differentiating committed Buddhists and the so-called "nightstand" Buddhists, or Buddhist sympathisers. Coleman (2012) in his essay *Who is a Buddhist?* made many important points on the difficulties of counting the Buddhist population with certainty. He observed "an interesting reluctance among many people to label themselves as Buddhists, even when they are deeply involved in Buddhist practice" (p. 33). He connects this elusiveness of Buddhist identity to Buddhism itself, with its emphasis on flux and fluidity, against reification of a solid self: "The path for many Buddhist practitioners lies in exactly the opposite direction: dropping one by one all identification, all beliefs, and all assumptions" (p. 35). However, this tendency Coleman (2012) mentions might not be a characteristic of Buddhism in general, but rather of the modern popularized form of Zen (McMahan, 2002).

Danilyuk (2003) in her ethnographic and interview-based study resonates with Coleman's (2012) view. She refers to several participants, members of Buddhist groups in Toronto, for example, the nun Kelsang Chenma from a Canadian NKT center to highlight a common hesitation to ascribe a Buddhist identity to themselves. Some of her interviewees, including Kelsang Chenma, even despite admitting being a Buddhist, shared their mixed feelings related to embracing the religious identity. Becoming a Tibetan Buddhist was by no means a simple, on / off decision, and they recognize how their perception of who they are shifts depending on the context. Kelsang Chenma, for instance, had difficulties saying she was a Buddhist during the times when her organization was actively involved in the clash with the rest of the Gelug tradition around a protector spirit.

The ambiguity and complexity of a Buddhist identity is also interpreted as being connected with general ecumenicalism within the religion in the West. Smith (2012) proves this point with numbers. His analysis of online Buddhist thickenings and their interlinks demonstrates that users connect from one organization to another, jumping across traditions and groups. He interprets this data to support the understanding of Western Buddhism as ecumenical and

homogenizing: "Due to the lack of an overarching denomination, each group must rely on similar resources as their co-religionists—both in terms of secular and religious virtual products" (Smith, 2012, p. 315).

Gleig (2013) even speaks of an origination of a specific Western form of tantric Buddhism. In her overview of the presentation of Buddhism in the Californian formation, Spirit Rock, she identifies the polemics of the group as gravitating towards tantra, rather than simply deviating from the traditional Theravada line. Spirit Rock was founded as an offshoot of Insight Meditation Society to shy away from the aspects of traditional Theravada, which its founders, mainly headed by Jack Kornfield, had found to be unhelpful. It represents a westernized psychologised form of Buddhist modernism, which has been criticised by many teachers and Buddhologists as being a commercialized Buddhist trend (Gleig, 2013; eg. Thanissaro, 2002). Gleig's (2013) analysis appears to be an attempt to rehabilitate Spirit Rock as authentically Buddhist by interpreting the adaption not as a compromise to the self-absorbed middle-class American audience, but as a development of a new essentially tantric form of American Buddhism. The connection she finds between Spirit Rock and tantra is "a tantric embrace of both immanent (samsara) and transcendent (nirvana) dimensions of awakening" (p.224). Effectively, she connects Spirit Rock's abandonment of intensive retreat practice and Buddhist soteriological goals in favour of improved interpersonal relations and greater enjoyment of life to the formation of American tantra. Although tantric practice is considered to be a secret or at least private matter in Tibetan Buddhism, the forum messages and the interviews do offer a glimpse of how tantra is seen, approached and practiced among the Western (or, perhaps, global?) Tibetan Buddhist practitioners.

My critical take on these assumptions would be that in actuality the scholarly interest towards "American" Buddhism is driven by the idea that Buddhism *should* become something else, something unprecedented and uniquely Western. This idea is in turn powered by the very notion of culture as an independent factor which critical intercultural communication defies, namely, that there are homogeneous solid nation-states, or at least clearly defined parts of the world (East and West), inhabited by people defined primarily by their nationality or "westerness", and sprinkled with people joining these societies, defined primarily by their different "ethnicity" or "easternness". Still in the twenty-first century, there seems to be an ongoing tendency to think of contemporary Buddhism in terms of boundaried categories, such as "America" or the "West", whereas most phenomena have long since taken on a global scope. This scholarly interest, rooted in inexistent categories, occasionally leads excellent studies towards conclusions there are potentially mislead and misleading.

4.1.1   Identifying with FPMT

I will ground this assertion in the data I collected. The three different data-sets allow for a big picture view, which is more longitudinal and stereo, than focusing on one specific case study. First of all, the assumptions I am challenging would

not conflict too much with the data collected from the FPMT Discovering Buddhism forum. Many respondents share their spiritual biographies, supporting the point that people browse through many sources and many different centers, both online and in the real world. These include not only different Buddhist organizations, as suggested by Smith (2012). The stories shared mention the Christian church, MBSR-courses, Law of Attraction seminars, yoga, Wicca, additionally to the expected local Zen groups and 10-day Goengka vipassana retreats. As one user introduces himself:

> I am a late starter but not new to spirituality. I have studied Agni Yoga and metaphysics with weekly group meditation for several years. (Lukas Park)

Specifically among Tibetan Buddhist groups, many users seem to be mindful of the boundaries of lineage and school. For example, Thomas Steilberg[8] expressed his wish to take a refuge with a Gelug teacher[9], where he feels more at home:

> I took refuge many years ago from a Tibetan teacher that gave a few teachings where I used to live. He was just passing through. I was fortunate enough to have him stay at my house, which was a truly amazing experience. This teacher is Nyingma, and I am Geluk...not that this matters all that much for taking refuge, but I mention it because I do not consider myself to be his student. I am very much dedicated to Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the other FPMT teachers.

For example, Bobby Irving has been receiving teachings from Nyingma lamas and is worried about "cheating" on Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

> I cant help but feel that some how "disloyal" to lama zopa. I have a deep respect for lama zopa and I feel that the fpmt played a major role in my finding the dharma. I would like to continue to learn from this fantastic online learning program but I want to make sure I am not " cheating " on lama zopa and the fpmt by continuing to attend dharma teachings and recieving empowerments from nyingma lineage.

Like multiple other forum users, he prefers to benefit from various resources within FPMT, or at least within Gelug, the lineage supported by the program. It is interesting that the Elders as well as more experienced students explicitly encourage a non-sectarian attitude, while at the same time gently steering the students towards more lineage-centered materials. For example in several threads students inquire about the popular Vipassana courses, and commonly are guided to a Vipassana teacher affiliated with FPMT:

> i also just wanted to let you know that there is a touring FPMT registered teacher called Ven Antonia Sattva who often does Vipassana type retreats (from the Mahayana perspective) (forum admin)

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[8] This one, as well as all other mentioned names of participants, are coded names
[9] Taking refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, dharma, sangha) is a ceremonial act of committing to the Buddhist main maxims. In Tibetan Buddhism it is performed with a qualified teacher (a lama, a Geshe, etc.)

The students do seem to come from all spiritual walks of life and are free to openly share and discuss the resources, lamas and religions they "cheat" on FPMT with, but the convergent (or centrifugal, Borup, 2020) forces of lineage-trained and lineage-loyal Elders and students navigate them away from the ecumenical spiritual supermarket towards Gelug. This convergent force is manifest in answers to questions which present a typical Gelug explanation as the Buddhist understanding, of materials shared by Gelug masters and Gelug-friendly authors, and in a constant mentioning of the main teachers of FPMT, who seem to haunt the forum with their implicit presence.

The only formation, which is not welcomed with the same non-sectarian friendliness is the FPMT's Gelug offshoot and competitor, the NKT. I described the history of this formation and its connection to FPMT in earlier chapters, so I will not go into detail here. But it is worth mentioning that the organization is problematic on many accounts. The testimonials of its "survivors" demonstrate strong neglect of Buddhist and common human ethics in favour of expanding and driving the agenda of a protector spirit, Dorje Shugden. While the common students' perception of the NKT varies from gratitude for the first touch of true dharma to open mockery and disdain, the Elders keep announcing warning signs whenever the NKT is mentioned.

An actual dilemma came up in one of the forum's conversation threads. Having seen an Elder's answer to another student's question on receiving initiations and teachings from different lineages, Elizabeth Lawrence asked for help with her own choices. After having been a student in her local NKT center she decided to receive a Kalachakra tantra initiation with HH the Dalai Lama. To her surprise, she discovered in his announcement that worshippers of the Dorje Shugden protector spirit, associated with the NKT were advised against taking part in the initiation. The NKT has a large center with many courses in New York, while the initiation was taking place just nearby in Washington DC, so Elizabeth was probably not the only visitor the NKT mindfulness courses who found herself in such an unwanted situation. Her messages made it clear that she was not deeply engaged in the tantric practices and was not even aware of the whole issue: "I looked for a center to study Dharma from a psychological/scientific point of view. I never approached it from a religious point of view. So naturally, I was never aware of "Dharma Protectors"". As the conversation proceeded, it became clear that Elizabeth is not alone with her NKT past on the forum. Joseph, for example, had developed a customer approach to the NKT, since where he lives there are few other Gelug centers available. He restricts his engagement to the level of the sutra teachings, avoiding any tantric initiations or other events, which could tie him to the Shugden practice:

> I've been very fortunate to have access to teachings and a very kind sangha for the past year. I think perhaps down at the grassroots level, people are not nearly as fanatical as the publicity makes it appear.

Other active FPMT students were not as non-judgemental about the NKT. One student, for instance, described her experience of witnessing an NKT

demonstration against the Dalai Lama and expressed her disapproval rather ardently. The argument made Elizabeth perform her own internet search on the issue, from both perspectives. There is a lot of information on the Shugden affair available on the internet by virtue of the NKT, and although not all of it is factual, it affected Elizabeth's opinion enough for her to share some charged wordings from the sources. A couple of other students erupted in response, either attempting to ignite more argument or to extinguish it, until the FPMT director came on stage and ended the discussion by reminding the participants of the scope of the forum and the FPMT's policy on Shugden. Elizabeth seemed to eventually side with other students: "I am excited because I feel confident in my options to break away from NKT. I hope that is not entirely meaningless to you".

This thread is remarkable in many ways. It shows the diversity of engagement among different students of Buddhism: while some identify strongly with a lineage and preach loyalty to it, others take what they like and leave the rest. Joseph took what he found useful and "safe" from his local NKT center, and Elizabeth was enjoying the FPMT courses, while regularly attending her local NKT center. The conversation also shows the power of policies and spreading information online by Tibetan Buddhist organizations. The webpages of FPMT and HH the Dalai Lama have plenty of information on the Dorje Shugden affair, and policies for dealing with the NKT students. While the more conscious Shugden practitioners are politely discouraged from receiving tantric initiations from the Dalai Lama, more lightly engaged ones are welcome, but still all of them are warned and informed about the sectarian nature of the protector spirit and the NKT's emphasis on it. Elizabeth's experience also demonstrates how such a crucial element (the Shugden worship) can totally escape the attention of an occasional visitor.

Another important insight we get from this thread is the appeal to modern humanist values on both sides of the issue. The FPMT-loyal students were condemning the anger and impertinence of the NKT protestors, as well as the sectarian overtones of the Shudgen practice, while the FPMT Elders were anxious to show an example of acceptance, forgiveness and spreading awareness about the issue in a non-judgemental way. The FPMT side was clearly framing the NKT side as the "aggressor". Judging by Elizabeth's presentation of the NKT side, and as we know from other research on the organization, eg. Kay, 2004, the rhetoric employed by the NKT includes "human rights" and "religious freedom", which are being infringed when HH the Dalai Lama discouraged Shugden practitioners from receiving initiations from him. In the example of Elizabeth, we see this sinking in very well, at least temporarily. The final important conclusion we can make from this exchange is the contingency of group affiliation. The identity of a Tibetan Buddhist is a project in the making. A person may be drawn to one organization with a "scientific / psychological" take on Buddhism and be inspired to receive an initiation in the Highest Yoga Tantra. Then that person may find out about a controversy involved with the organization, go deeper into the issue, decide that they are the victim, and then have a change of mind and change sides in the conflict. All of this took place within five days of forum discussion.

Another assumption that falls completely apart in the analysis is the perception of American Buddhism as being the essential Western Buddhism. Although FPMT's head office is located in Oregon, US, by far the biggest and the most influential center of their activity is the Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal. The map of FPMT centers includes many different cities all over the world, where their courses are accessible, and where freedom of information and religious expression is observed. One message on the forum caught my eye:

> Why all of the emphasis on the Tibetan language at all? I mean we are mostly all Americans, we all speak English, think in English and so on. So why isn't Tibetan Buddhism taught to us in this context, concepts, mantras, the works? Mumbling a mantra or prayer in Tibetan seems to be almost pointless to me sometimes. (Adam Jackson)

Interestingly, at a rough count, only under a third of active forum users are based in the US and about a half communicate in English as their second language. The six Elders come from or are based in six different cities. Nevertheless, Adam's assumption is immediately followed by a suggestion to change the practice to suit its consumers, "Americans". As another student patiently pointed out in response to this message, the concepts and works, as well as prayer texts have English translations, and in fact, HH the Dalai Lama recommends to stick to prayer texts in one's native language, but the mantras are done in their original form, which is not in fact Tibetan, but Sanskrit. Adam's reaction is one of amazement. He humbly admits: "I might occasionally allow cultural differences to scare me off the things I appreciate in Tibetan Buddhism, specifically, the teachings and the scriptures".

4.1.2 Identifying as (Finnish) Buddhists

Moving on to the participants from the two groups in Helsinki, the considerable difference with respect to avowed identity is that these people have ended their browsing across Buddhisms within their respective groups. Just like the forum users, some Buddhists reveal where they had been before, which may include a Zen group, Christian church or Muslim teachers. Antonio shares his own background:

> I've been looking for a lot of time for I've been raised as a Catholic. Serving mass, going to Church, very strong in the society and in the family. But it never actually made sense to me. I was always looking for something spiritual, so I went to the Jehova's witnesses and after I went to talk with a Muslim.

For others their respective group was the first contact with Buddhism or spirituality of some sort, and like Tomi they never bothered to explore other options:

> From the very beginning I have felt that this is the lineage for me. Some may like to take something from one lineage, and something else from another one, and for me, I think it's smart to practice one lineage. Though I have been now practicing here for a

bit more than six years and I'm still discovering something new, maybe someone else may want to discover more lineages, but I don't have so much time for this. (my translation[10])

A small number combine membership in more than one Tibetan Buddhist center, such as Anna:

My root guru is from the Kagyu lineage, but in a way I think of Lama Zopa Rinpoche as my root guru as well. Because I took refuge within FPMT and have been studying a lot with them. Yeah, basically Lama Zopa Rinpoche is also my root guru.

However, unlike the forum users, no one seemed to embrace any other religious or spiritual identity than (Tibetan) Buddhist or be ambivalent about it.

The spirit of non-sectarianism is preserved in the on site groups, just like in the forum, but it ranges from a basic tolerance of other traditions with appreciation of one's own to an open admiration of them. For example, this is what two different students from the same group say about Zen:

Marina: Well, I've visited a Zen group practice to check it out, but just because a friend of mine wanted to show me one handsome guy from there. (laughs) Otherwise I wouldn't have gone. I haven't been at all interested. After I met with Rinpoche, I just haven't.

Risto: Of course (you can learn from other Buddhist traditions). I really admire the Zen tradition personally. One of my favourite sutras the Avatamsaka sutra, which is one of Zen's most central sutras, it's so beautiful. If I weren't a Tibetan Buddhist, I would definitely go there. It's a really cool thing.

All but one student in some way mentioned preferring their own lineage over other available options, and being satisfied with the opportunity it offers. Helmi, who did not want to be limited by only one interpretation, rather saw it as part of her omnivorous spiritual path for the time being:

I: Can someone benefit from different lineages?

Helmi: I should probably say they cannot. This would be the correct, or the right answer, but unfortunately I cannot say so, due to my own experience. Because… I am the kind of person, who researches this sort of thing more broadly. I want to understand different things and reflect through my own experience of them, because that'ss how I digest things. This way can work.

When it comes to certain changes Tibetan Buddhism would be expected to undergo in the West, or certain cultural incompatibility between the students' western backgrounds and their religion of choice, there is no typical set of issues. There seemed to be a wide variety in how the respondents even understood "culture". Many respondents pointed out some cultural differences or clashes with Tibetan Buddhism but those did not seem to disturb them much. Two

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[10] Finnish quotes are provided in Appendix 3

people said they felt no cultural clashes at all. A commonly observed narrative was that one gets used to the differences and becomes more tolerant over time, as their Buddhist practice develops. A couple of people mentioned issues, associated with their friends and family not being able to understand or accept their lifestyles. For example, Petri said:

> I: Have you experienced any cultural clashes with Tibetan Buddhism?
>
> Petri: No, not personally, really. Everything feels right to me. But of course, those close to me, the people I live with, girlfriends and family, they could sometimes, if I don't live in a very western way in all things, then the close people could get a bit… Could get nervous about some things.

Although Petri mentions misunderstanding within his family, I do not see a reason to view such issues in terms of some East-West clash. Similar issues could be faced by someone who decided to be a minimalist, an animal rights activist, or a drag queen.

4.1.3 Setting boundaries as gatekeepers

The interviews with the Tibetan teachers show that their definition of a Buddhist is very similar to that of the students': being a Buddhist involves the traditional acceptance of the so-called Four Seals[11], and/or to having formally taken refuge in the Three Jewels. Khenpo Ngawang Jorden (Sakya) expresses his agreement with the common criteria:

> Usually, we say that it's the one who has taken a refuge vow. Then, officially this person is considered Buddhist. But I think that in order to be a Buddhist you need a little bit more than just taking refuge. Erm… In addition to taking refuge, or the refuge vow, you also need to know some principles of Buddhism, which we call the Four Seals of the Dharma. So, Four Seals of the Dharma is that all compound phenomena are impermanent, all defiled phenomena are suffering, erm… all phenomena have no intrinsic nature of self and then finally, Nirvana is peace. So when you have a pretty idea of these Four Seals additionally to taking the refuge vow, then I think you are considered Buddhist for my part.

Every student I asked about what defines a Buddhist referred to either or both these parameters. In addition to that, the later question on sharing some doctrinal aspects of Buddhism, such as karma and rebirth, revealed that all Helsinki students believed a Buddhist would be expected to embrace them. This is also a largely supported view among the teachers. Ringu Rulku Rinpoche (Kargyu), who showed the most liberal opinions, started by defining a Buddhist as a follower of the Buddha dharma, which he defined as "a set of guidelines, teachings on how to be a better human being". Then he narrowed it down to the

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[11] The Four Seals of Buddhism, or the Four Dharma Seals are the basic existential assumptions, shared by all three major Buddhist traditions: a) all compound phenomena are impermanent; b) all mental phenomena are unsatisfactory in nature; c) all phenomena are without substance; d) only nirvana is peace.

Four Seals, the last of which was "enlightenment is peace". When I asked whether somebody could be a Buddhist but not accept the ideas of karma and rebirth, Rinpoche made a clear distinction:

> I: And what if someone has a different understanding of nirvana? That it's just having a wise and good life.

> RTR: Nobody says that. Nobody says that. Nirvana is when you kind of cease to be under control of your negative emotions, then that's nirvana   is   peace.   There's nobody who says that some wellbeing is nirvana.

Interestingly, in defining a Buddhist the teachers did not follow the same logic as the students. While analysing the interviews with the lamas, I realized that my questions about Buddhist identity often carries implicit assumptions: who *can* call themselves Buddhists? The students often repeated the criteria they heard from their teachers and negotiated the boundaries between committed Buddhists and people interested in the dharma with their rights to consider themselves Buddhists or not. One of the students, Carita, asserted it was at one's own discretion: "Mulle ei ole väliä, tehköön niin kuin haluaa. / I don't care, let them do as they please. (my translation). The lamas, however, saw the issues in a more objectivist way. They discussed defining a Buddhist in terms of giving a label based on certain strict criteria, rather than on modalities of how one may or should call themselves. In other words, it was not a matter of self-identification or self-avowal. To quote Geshe Sherab:

> from their side there's nothing wrong in saying they are Buddhists. Whether they truly are Buddhists or not, it depends I guess... Or I don't know, even I cannot, real Buddhist is maybe not a right word. Maybe, full Buddhist, maybe.

With respect to combining the practice of one's chosen lineage with other Buddhist traditions, there was more flexibility among the teachers, than among the students. Despite strong differences, all teachers saw the similarities shared by all Buddhist traditions at the foundational level, coming from the same teacher:

> I: Okay, and what about other Buddhist traditions, if you also practice Zen, Vipassana.

> Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche: Oh, that is good. If Buddhist, all are same, supposed to be same.

At the same time Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche (Nyingma) did not reserve as much flexibility for combining Buddhism with other religions:

> I: And what about other religions. If someone is a Buddhist and also Christian.

> TDR: Then you have to think of the advice of the refuge. Some advice, you need to follow those things, too. That you can research, you can check, you research.

I: That you don't take refuge in other gods.

TDR: Yeah.

I: So it's difficult to combine with religions which have other gods.

TDR: You can respect others, but practicing is different.

All the other lamas also pointed out difficulties in committing to two conflicting frameworks, such as in combining Buddhist with Christianity, although they spoke about many shared points and the need for respect. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the lamas were open to using Theravada or Zen to enrich one's practice, but were more sceptical about combining different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Khenpo Ngawang Jorden specified emphatically that the Rhime movement, which propagates practicing multiple lineages, meant being rooted in one lineage and expanding from there. Only one of the five teachers, Ringu Tulku Rinpoche, claimed there is no real reason behind focusing on one lineage: "That's just being sectarian", he said. What I can make out of this paradox is that Tibetan Buddhist practice is often tantric in nature. Tantric commitments often presuppose commitments to a certain view and to a certain deity. Even in the case of the same deity yoga practice instructions may differ from one lineage to another, and this is likely to create confusion as to which ones to follow. This way, while Theravada, Zen and much of Tibetan Buddhist practice remains on the sutric level, it does not create problems. However, being also tantric masters, many lamas warn ahead of the issues connected with combining tantric practices from different lineages and schools.

4.1.4   How group identification works for the Buddhists

So contrary to the assumptions spread commonly in the literature, "Western" Buddhism does not represent some sort of an ecumenical conglomeration of all traditional schools, nor does it stand for some new and unique form of Buddhism, originating from the West. The example of the Tibetan Buddhist forum, the two groups and the Tibetan teachers gives more ground for conceptualizing the spread of Buddhism to the West in terms of *flows* (Tweed, 2011). Flows are not solid or rigid but flexible and fluid. Yet at the same time they may be quite defined and steadfast. They may gain momentum and strength. To continue the aquatic metaphor, liquid flows have potential to wreck ships and destroy villages, while still being shapeless and liquid. Originating from a many centuries old tradition, the discourses of Tibetan Buddhism do not just change hats on finding a new home. Instead they continue to flow, steering the converts to their side against all other influences. However, liquidity is not always change, most of the time it is perpetuating the same momentum, and it does not necessarily compromise nominal labelling. It could be assumed that an organization of FPMT's size should reflect some of the cultural dimensions, outlined by cross-cultural researchers (Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1993/2011) and create value conflicts. Instead, national identification is nearly

absent outside of logistical discussions, and differences between the broadly Western value-set and Eastern tradition surface only rarely. Instead of the identification with a local national or regional Buddhism, the data demonstrates identification with the specific Buddhist tradition and teachers. In this way, the perpetuation of connection to the specific lineage with its history and narratives seems to be a strong factor in forming a convert Tibetan Buddhist culture of the FPMT, while national or regional cultures do not.

Unlike Coleman (2001) and Danyluk (2004) I do not think that the Buddhist philosophy has the power to deconstruct the Buddhist identity. For sure, some sophistic discussion of a research participant may follow a basic question (Are you a Buddhist?) asked by the interviewer, but that does not necessarily reflect the actual sentiments of Buddhists in the West. In fact, in Danilyuk's (2003) ethnography only a small fraction of over 30 participants actually had the problem avowing a Buddhist identity. The Canadian woman in monastic robes, Kelsang Chenma, whom Danyluk (2004) devoted several pages of her article, may hesitate to avow a Buddhist identity not just because Buddhist philosophy is preventing her from labelling. Kelsang Chenma was also a member of a controversial organization (the NKT), which allows many controversial practices around monasticism (Kay, 2004). What is taken for deep philosophical pondering, can be just doubting whether one is in the right place. In my own interviews, none of the 16 participants had a moment's hesitation in saying they were a Buddhist.

When it comes to claims of Western form of tantric Buddhism (Gleig, 2013), there seems to be no evidence of anything like that in the interviews with either teachers or students, nor in the forum discussions. On the contrary, tantric practice seems to be steered towards its perceived original meaning and traditional way of presentation. Whenever things related to tantra are mentioned on the forum, the Elders seem to highlight the significance of secrecy, authenticity and precaution:

> For beginners tantra seems to have a big attraction. But remember that it is a highly sophisticated method that only works if you have trained yourself in the Lam Rim teachings. Tantra is not a magic quick fix that makes you happy here and now. Believe me, it is a very difficult method and very hard to practise. (an Elder)

The details of tantric practice of more advanced kinds remain rather backstage. But when it comes to the more basic forms of Vajrayana, these elements are quite apparent and, in most cases, well accepted.

The forum and the website seem to mix the Vajrayana elements so well into the fabric of Buddhism that the tantric practice looks almost like an inherent part of it, by default. Indeed over many centuries in Tibet mystical talks of mantras, deities and non-physical helpers have merged with foundational Buddhist doctrine (Powers, 2007). In its Indian Buddhist origins, however, Vajrayana techniques have been a marginal trend within a marginal Mahayana (Lopez, 2001). Among some non-heritage forum users, this distinction seems to be welcome, as for example, in this comment by Peter Newman: "The Buddhist

philosophy of mind and philosophy of ethics resonate with my own thinking. Deities, hell realms, rituals, offerings, etc. cause me some concern".

The tantric issues came up indirectly among the students in Helsinki as well. Some new followers mentioned the high prerequisites for tantric practice and their perceived ineptness to reach for that level, demonstrating their respect for tantra:

> But of course the tantric level is already too complicated for me. I feel not resistance, but it's just the level of practice which is too high for you. Maha Annutara Yoga tantra for example. I took some initiations, but reading this practice I realize that my level of awareness does not even correspond to the initial level. (Alex)

The more experienced ones, I reckon, were involved in this level of practice, but did not speak of it eagerly. Eddy (2019) provides a more detailed description of tantric practice among Australian FPMT students, based on her ethnographic research. She points out that many ideas about "Western Buddhism" stem from orientalist research, which highlighted the Pali Canon as the "true" and "original" Buddhism, which is also rational and therefore of interest to the Western intellectual interest. The Indo-Tibetan tradition with its tantric elements and deity practice was seen as a historical degradation of Buddhism, so its role remained marginalized. The external religious elements connected with Vajrayana, as well as its meanings and commitments seem to attract interest and appreciation of the Australian convert practitioners, despite their seeming exoticism (Eddy, 2019). Unlike Gleig's (2013) imagining of American tantra, traditional tantric practice in Tibet has involved hours-long daily texts to recite (sadhanas) with visualization, intention-setting and reciting Sanskrit mantras in hundreds of thousands, accompanied by tantric vows and commitments to the guru and fellow-students (samaya) (Eddy, 2019; Powers, 2007). Marina speaks about her daily practice: "We might look really cool with all the malas and such, sitting cross-legged, but it is actually quite hard work when you take it seriously". The teachers I have talked to did not speak of any transformation of tantra into a wellbeing and life-enjoyment practice either. In fact, they hardly even brought up tantra.

As for the "night-stand Buddhists and other creatures" (Tweed, 2001), none of those were spotted among my interviewees either, although some of the forum users could probably be rather called "Buddhist sympathisers", than "Buddhists". I find this feature of Buddhism in the modern world truly sympathetic. Following the Buddha's advice to the villages of Kalama, voiced in the modernists' favourite Kalama sutra, many people like to hear Buddhist teachings in some form or another, consider them critically, and take on board what they find speaks to them. I do not see the need to bring on the no-self doctrine of Buddhist philosophy to explain this phenomenon. In fact, one of my respondents, Antonio, summed it up from the student perspective in one simple phrase: "In Buddhism you can start at a lower level and you can be attracted to Buddhism, or get value from Buddhism, without becoming right away a full practitioner". This explains why a great many people say that Buddhism has

shaped their spiritual outlook (Coleman, 2001), and many people come to Buddhist groups, use forums and practice Buddhism with a full recognition that they are *not* Buddhists. To illustrate this with an analogy, if person A likes going to vegan restaurants and thinks that veganism is cool, they would still not call themselves "vegan" in all honesty, if they enjoy a juicy steak occasionally. In the same way, person B may be doing some Buddhist meditation and likes listening to some of the Dalai Lama's teachings on love and compassion, but if Buddhism's foundational claims do not resonate with her, she would hardly have any reason to call herself "Buddhist". Like veganism, Buddhism is rather inclusive as to who can practice and enjoy it. But both might be ardent, when it comes to stretching the membership inclusion criteria a little too far.

4.2   Democratization and power (im)balance

Don't question authority. They don't know either.

Popular meme

The issue of authority in contemporary Tibetan Buddhism in the West (and in the world) is hard to address in terms of false assumptions, due to the complexity of these assumptions in the literature and also the complexity of the issue. The predominance of Buddhist modernism in the public imagination of the religion (McMahan, 2008) and strong popular perceptions of Buddhism as "not a religion" (Faure, 2009) may create a feeling that strong authority is something inherently alien to Buddhism as a meaning-making system. However, a general knowledge of history of Buddhist societies will clearly prove the opposite (Faure, 2009). The impression of autonomy and individualism as part of Occidental values could reinforce a notion that now that Buddhism has reached individualistic modern societies, it can show its real egalitarian face. This belief is the main asset of the secular Buddhist movement, with Stephen Batchelor being its main ideologue. Higgins (2012) goes as far as to profess secular Buddhism as a polished version of Buddhist modernism and an inevitable development of Buddhism in the West. He uses examples of conservative behaviors among Theravada clergy standing in the way of people's practice to demonstrate the ill that secular Buddhism could avoid (Higgins, 2017). The questioning of clerical authority is also strong in Batchelor's works (Batchelor, 2015; Higgins, 2017; Sharapan, under review), and very often it is rooted in a presumption of inherent discord between Eastern practice and Western mentality (Sharapan, under review).

Emphasis on individual capacities to discriminate between what is true and useful and what is not, rejecting the teacher's authority, and position is also perfectly in line with Buddhist modernists' favorite Buddhist sutra: the Kalama sutra. In this discourse, the Buddha addresses residents of the Kalama village who were perplexed by occasionally conflicting recommendations given by various roaming spiritual teachers, of whom the Buddha was yet another. The Buddha answers famously:

> Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them.[12]

However, the issue of authority in Buddhism is not as straightforward, as the Kalama sutra may lead one to think (Gombrich, 1996). One reason why the

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[12] http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/kalama1.htm

Buddhist sutras give importance to the setting of the teachings is that the level of advice may differ depending on the level of the disciples. It is clear that the monks and nuns who were committed followers of the Buddha did not enjoy as much liberty in choosing which of the Buddha's recommendations to follow and which to leave out. Authority is hard not to notice in Buddhism in traditional Buddhist societies, starting from the rawest Theravada communities and, of course, up to Tibetan Buddhist religious culture, which had once earned the religion the derogatory name of "Lamaism" (Lopez, 1999).

Unlike the thoroughly modernized Theravada and Zen, authority in Tibetan Buddhism seems to be relatively immune to modernization. Traditional texts are unequivocal about the levels of teacher's authority that are hard to imagine nowadays (Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017). Modern examples of popular Buddhism literature do not leave much space for negotiation either (Khyentse, 2016; Zopa Rinpoche, 2009). The cases of teachers' abuse of power (Bell, 2002; Scherer, 2012; Sharapan and Swann, 2019) can be seen as a logical culmination of such an undemocratic state of affairs. In view of this there has been a lot of heated debate around the issue in various Buddhist resources. McMahan (2008, p. 247) brings up a quote from an interview with Penor Rinpoche in response to a self-guided democratic Buddhist path: "There is no benefit in following a democratic spiritual path. They are just wasting time".

The issue of authority is complex. It lies at the intersection of many issues: different Buddhist texts and their histories, the traditional circumstances of the Buddha's life and the spread of his teachings, and the strong pressures of modernity as well as the relativist flexibility of postmodernity. So one can expect to find as many assumptions as there are counter-assumptions, and just as many illustrations for both. In this section, I am therefore especially interested not in whether and to what extent authority manifests among forum users, students and teachers of Tibetan Buddhism, but rather how it is constructed. In a similar vein, research by Bush (2010) has shown how the presumably liberal virtual space of a pan-Buddhist online forum is constructed as a sacred space through Buddhist ethical precepts, shaping a traditional understanding of Buddhism and filtering out ideas that threaten it. Cheong et al. (2011) have pointed out the lack of discussion around a gradual development of online authority in digital Buddhist community and the role of clerics in it. In this chapter, in addition to the forum data, the interviews with committed practitioners from the two groups in Helsinki brings more understanding of how the perception of authority of Buddhist clergy, texts and teachers may develop in the students over time, and what the relations mean to them. Earlier research has focused mainly on negative examples, when the authority was misused (eg. Scherer, 2012). My analysis examines the mechanisms through which possible cases of violation may occur in this case. I take an emic approach to Buddhists' relationship with authority, seeing the issue in terms of its meaning within their spiritual practice and lifestyle, rather than in terms of social or psychological correlates (eg. Capper, 2004). The negotiation of authority between teachers and students is also seen from the angle of traditional Buddhist teachers interviewed for this project.

4.2.1　Mediated construction of authority

When I started going through the forum for the first time, what struck me as counter-intuitive was the stable pattern, common among both students and Elders, to lower the importance of their own understanding in favor of that of teachers and students that are more senior. Many posts on the forum were asking for some sort of clarification of the material, which in itself was unsurprising for a learning forum, but the tone of nearly all of these posts was deliberately, almost artificially humble. Here is an example of typical preludes to clarifying questions and answers: "I haven't been studying very long and I don't have any profound insights but I will offer my thoughts in the hopes that we all benefit." (Gabriela Santoz).

 This intellectual humility became more understandable when I went through the study materials for the first Module. The Discovering Buddhism program (which most students in the forum are taking) starts with a topic that is not exactly elementary: the mind and its potential. The Buddhist model of the mind is a complex issue even for seasoned Buddhists, and also varies in detail across different schools of thought. It is also distinctly at odds with the neurophysiological understanding of the mind popular among many scientifically minded people, for it posits that the mind (subjective experience) continues over multiple lifetimes, and relies on the physical brain, rather than being created by it. The PDF transcript[13] of the Module 1 recordings attempts to determine the attitude of the students as early as page five, immediately after introductory words and logistics. Almost one page is dedicated to asking the students to have an "open mind", and awareness of the assumptions they were socialized into:

> Be prepared to be challenged. Allow your doubts to surface; own them, reflect on them and discuss them with other students and your teachers. Doubt can be a great tool for learning, opening doors and leading us into further exploration. But, sometimes our skeptical mindset can be a hindrance, closing doors and leading you away from learning and growth. (p. 6)

The teacher (one of the Elders) also refers to the fable about a Zen master who welcomed a new student and served him tea, pouring it into the cup without stopping, so that the tea spilled over on the table and on the floor. The master is said to compare the mind of the new student to a cup, which is full, and tell him to return after he "made space" for the teachings. This instructive reference serves to set a tone of intellectual humility and receptivity to the teachings the Modules provide.

 The forum discussion style clearly proves this device is efficient. The students show the lower reliance on their personal understanding, looking up to the "official" version of Buddhist teachings, especially in the lineage (as discussed in the section above). In case of discord between what they see as logical or sensible and the stance presented to them, the choice is made (at least

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[13] available to students among study materials

rhetorically) in favor of the senior source. For example, Monica Lewis when asking for clarification to practice instructions added: "There must be some misunderstanding on my part, because His Holiness cannot be inconsistent".

This way, the high status within the authoritative lineage is held in priority over personal intuition for most students. Official certification of authority also plays a part here: all the sources seem to be officially affiliated and certified by some Gelug institutions, or FPMT specifically. On top of what Cheong et al. (2011) refer to as clerical epistemic authority *de facto* in the context of online dissemination of Buddhism, the organizational affiliation provides what they call epistemic authority *de jure*. The certification standards are typically very high in Gelug (with approximately 20 years of education required for a Geshe degree), and they are maintained so on the program. Discovering Buddhism is not a beginner course (those are Meditation 101 and Buddhism in a Nutshell), and it is designed for regular part-time study over three to four years. After this introductory course, there is a four-year Basic Program ("Bachelor" level) with several years of the Master's Program (Cozort, 2003). On top of that, being chosen to work for the organization, given another layer of authority (*de jure*) is meant to strengthen the students' trust, not just towards the Elders, but towards all teachers and lamas, engaged in FPMT. The Elders of the forum, through being graduates of the Master's Program with its high standards of certification, still maintain considerable humility. For example, one of the Elders, after clarifying a point, added: "Hope this brief flash of ignorance may be helpful". The attitude of the Elders towards the students reflected in their answers, could be characterized as respectful and humble, but firm, when it comes to teachings, recommendations and practices.

The forum users differ a great deal among themselves in terms of commitment. While all Elders and some of the senior students are clearly affiliated with their teachers, in particular through tantric connection, most visitors are new to Buddhism. Many of those low-commitment participants keep a very respectful tone, matching the general forum atmosphere. The few cases of dissent are, however, quite interesting in terms of how authority is re-claimed. In a thread dealing with school bullying and how to help a child to counteract it, a woman came up with a comment about the "spiritual bullying" she faced from an FPMT senior sangha member. She did not go into detail, but the comment triggered a wave of discussion over the difference between bullying and harsh lessons, given out of compassion, and the FPMT's mechanisms for dealing with the former. The students and Elders involved differed in their experiences and stands, but the discussion developed in constructive and respectful ways, clarifying the ways to deal with abusers within the system[14]. A few threads later, the same person appeared in a discussion over practice requirements. In response to an Elder pointing out that the student who asked the question had already asked a similar one and received a detailed answer, the student, who had claimed to have faced "spiritual bullying", called the Elders, "bullies" and told the

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[14] FPMT has since then issued a policy statement for dealing with abuse and training staff accordingly

student not to pay attention to them. The inflammatory comment was almost immediately followed by a page-long address signed by the Director of Education and the Admin. The text reminded the participants of the purposes of the forum and to remain constructive and respectful, and it took a stand to protect the Elders in their responsibilities and rights, and to invite students, who experienced undue treatment to contact the administration directly. It seems that the authority of Elders, despite their long training and expertise, remains inferior to that of native Tibetan teachers. As Gross (2010) noticed in her firsthand experience, Western teachers are not regarded with the same awe and can be challenged more easily than Tibetan clerics.

These discussions show a pathway for accountability of teachers and clerics within the organization, while at the same time maintaining an atmosphere of respect for authority in the forum. As in the study of the E-Sangha Buddhist forum (Busch, 2010), the way of reclaiming authority was a reference to the ethical guidelines about using the forum as a 'sacralized' space for learning. It must be noted, however, that over the seven years, there seemed to be no actual censorship as to what could be asked and discussed. For example, a few discussion threads looked as if they had been started solely for trolling purposes. One such involved a student asking how much nettles one should eat in order to turn one's skin green, like Milarepa[15]. The thread remained on the forum, but received zero answers. In this way, creating and maintaining authority seems to be instilling a flair of intellectual humility towards institutionally certified authority and keeping the atmosphere respectful and courteous. However, a lack of active moderation leaves space to question authority.

Respect towards teachers and the guru figure (whoever this might be for different students) is the most prominent and controversial element of authority on the forum, in this research, and probably in Tibetan Buddhism in general. In general, the atmosphere of the forum and the courses invites strong feelings towards teachers. In response to the emphasized importance of "the guru(s)", the forum students show different responses. Jamie Pane expressed his admiration for Lama Zopa Rinpoche and other FPMT teachers: "I just feel such a strong admiration for Lama Zopa Rinpoche, whenever I see him or watch the live webcast of the Light of the Path retreat my mind is filled with joy." Amanda Cornely said she was taking things easy with respect to commitment:

> I've been on the lookout for my teacher for thirteen years. I haven't found him or her, yet. I just do what I can do with what is available to me. One day, I'll have enough good karma to meet my teacher.

While some students seem to become emotional, others become intrigued, but I did not see people reacting to teachers' authority with skepticism or criticism. The strong power disbalance between students and teachers is

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[15] Milarepa is a Tibetan saint, who according to a legend, sustained himself in retreat by picking and boiling nettles. Due to this diet his skin is said to have turned green, and he is often depicted in thangkhas with a greenish skin-tone, wearing just one white sheet for clothing

discussed in Module 4 of the program and in the readings for the course, and it does not seem to sound like much of a risk factor to the students, even though some people mention controversial stories from other organizations. While some other big dharma networks, like Rigpa or Shambala had had big scandals around teachers' power abuse, at the time of my data collection FPMT had a clear record. It was only in spring 2019, when the organization actually had to face the consequences of power disbalance, in the case of Dagri Rinpoche, that is covered below.

I will not go into much detail in my analysis, since this goes beyond the focus of this study and it happened after my research into the forum and into FPMT Helsinki community. I will give a brief overview, inclusive of the reactions from the FPMT authorities, to illustrate the paradox, created by the Vajrayana narrative, which is embraced by FPMT teachers and students alike. If interested, the readers will be able to find more about the incident by searching. In short, a monk, one of the few high-ranking reincarnated lamas, serving for the FPMT, Dagri Rinpoche, was publicly accused of sexual harassment on a plane in India, triggering another coming-out from a former FPMT nun, sharing in a YouTube video the details of his harassment of her ten years before, and a call for his other victims to come out as well. The official information sources do not disclose other cases apart from these two, but there are reasons to presume there have been many. Dagri Rinpoche, who rejects all accusations, was suspended from teaching for the duration of an independent investigation into the matter by the Indian police. The FPMT website openly refers to the situation[16] and the head of the organization, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, gave his advice to the students of Dagri Rinpoche. However his advice was considered "unsatisfactory" by many FPMT students, leading him to issue one more letter, which did not, however, make things better. The letters called Dagri Rinpoche "holy being" and dismissed the allegations, insisting that the students should see their guru with "pure vision". Lama Zopa Rinpoche's advice should be of no surprise, since this is the general recommendation in Vajrayana, and perfectly in line with his book on student and teacher relations *Heart of the Path* (Zopa, 2009, p.214): "Saying that we actually see particular faults in our gurus is not logical proof that the faults exist in reality and that the gurus are not buddhas. What appears to us depends on the state of our mind." The matter is discussed on the forum as well, though there are only six posts about it, despite the serious nature of the issue. In this way the FPMT is trying to adhere to its standards while keeping the delicate matter as transparent as reasonably possible, but in the process making itself vulnerable to criticisms over not addressing the matter much earlier and in due fashion. This incident demonstrates that in a situation where a powerful clerical figure is caught in blatant wrongdoing the organization is bound to follow its religious narrative ahead of standard secular policies for protecting students and followers. Considering the amount of trust students put in the organization (Sharapan, 2018), this can be seen as off-putting for potential students.

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[16] https://fpmt.org/fpmt/announcements/updates-regarding-dagri-rinpoche/

4.2.2 The guru factor in the two Buddhist groups

The issue around commitment to a teacher (or a lineage, or an organization for that matter), involving the responsibility of personal free choice is discussed in more detail through the interviews with the students. Most participants I talked to were engaged in some sort of tantric practice, which means their relationship with their teachers was already on a deeper level of commitment. Even those who were not seemed to be perceiving the relationship very much in the same vein. In my co-authored article (Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017) we discussed the gravity of commitment to one's guru as it is depicted in traditional texts, and its dynamics in the students' deepening practice. The issue of teachers' abuse of power came up in the interviews, and all respondents recognized sexual, financial and physical abuse as wrong and shameful. However there was no such decisiveness over actually accusing the wrongdoers. This ambiguity was further aggravated by the fact that the choice of teacher was very often intuitive, following the "heart" or a "gut-feeling", and in about half of the cases there was some sort of spiritual or transcendental experience with a teacher (or a desire for such). The unreliable psychological nature of such a method for forming one of one's most important relationships could easily lead seekers into situations where they might become victims of what they may consider to be negative behavior, but which they nevertheless do not blame the perpetrator for.

When it comes to manifesting one's respect, cultural factors may play a role. These are especially prominent in the Danakosha group, where students are gathered around a rather traditional reincarnated Tibetan lama. Many traditional ways of paying respect, such as presenting a white scarf (khadak), bowing, doing prostrations and subserviently following requests and advice could seem controversial to members, who mostly socialized in democratic societies. During my participant observation, I could see only the opposite of that. The director of Danakosha, Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche, is the kind of teacher who prefers to emphasize the importance of authenticity and the purity of traditional ways. Having been trained as a ritual master, he is also quite adamant about elements, which may be seen as secondary: rituals, altar, dress code, formal reverence of lamas. The period of my data collection corresponded with the organization moving from Museokatu to Jokioinen. The former place in the city center had a small, but extensively decorated prayer hall with large statues and antique Tibetan furniture. The new place in the country-side was in the process of being constructed during the time of my data collection. There was just a small altar with seven water bowls in the living room. I had a chance to visit the newly decorated prayer hall later, and it looked like a true Tibetan Buddhist temple with all the internal and external décor. It is hard to say whether the majority of newcomers to Danakosha are put off by the traditional décor, with only those staying who can tolerate the high position of the lama. It could also be that the lama's high position is considered positively as status-quo. One of the students who has been closely engaged with the organization for about ten years, explained:

Kirsi: …Many have a contradiction, that when we live in this kind of democracy, and if they feel that being a Vajrayana student means the teacher is in a way omniscient, so someone could feel he's a bit like a dictator, and wonder how it could be so. Is it really so, and so on. I don't know why, but I've never had this problem myself.

I: But you've known people who have?

Kirsi: Yes. And then these people don't end up in a dharma group, because they feel there is too much power.

I: Are there many people like that?

Kirsi: I think, that most people are turned away by some sangha members, with whom they have contradictions. I haven't noticed though. Many people would rather say something like, I'd like to remain your student, but there are people in the sangha whom I dislike, with whom I don't enjoy being.

In fact, the interviews with many of Danakosha's students revealed finding a teacher (lama / guru) as the biggest factor in joining Danakosha. Risto also noted that formal expressions of respect, such as bowing, can be difficult regardless of culture:

It is difficult for everyone because everyone has ego. We all have our egos, that's why it's strange to everyone. And this is the idea here. So it doesn't depend on whether I'm a Westerner or wherever else I'm from.

Relationship to authority was more complicated among the members of the other group (FPMT), since their relationships with teachers were more diverse. Only a few interviewees seemed to be engaged in some sort of tantric practice. And since mostly it was on the more basic levels (kriya tantra), which do not normally entail as much commitment, their relationship to authority was not as binding. Nevertheless, references to authority were present in the interviews, and the conflict between religious authority and personal autonomy was not strongly pronounced. The interview answers made it seem as if the students' spiritual needs are largely shaped by the meanings they receive from teachers in the tradition they follow.

A strong impression crystalized through interviews with the students and participant observation, as well as while working on the article on teacher-student relations. On the one hand, the initial presumption that the values of autonomy, democracy and egalitarianism would form a clash with the guru-centered culture, which places an individual below the consensus understanding of the lineage, does not seem to find confirmation. The spiritual seekers I encountered were interested in handing over their practice to an authoritative guru-figure and appreciate the possibility to follow and serve, especially while it is limited mainly to their spiritual life (as much as it can be divided form the rest of their life). On the other hand, the lack of tacit knowledge of the tradition, coupled with a romanticized view of the role of a spiritual teacher, as well as a of the spiritual path, has the potential to commit the seeker to something they

would later grow disillusioned in. The general discourse around the matter of finding "the right" authority and committing to it for life and beyond is presented based on an assumption that individuals are responsible for their own rational choice. The choice is, however, very often driven by a momentary psychological need, a romantic idea, inspired by the media, and amplified by Tibetan Buddhist narratives of great masters and their relations with their masters, which relativize "right and wrong", following a tantric view (Lopez, 2018). The way participants reported choosing a teacher was often dependent on circumstances, informed by their intuition, often of a mystical kind, so the results of their choice would depend on their luck. In my view a much broader education in terms of Buddhist traditions, practices and goals is needed before one can commit to a certain path, through a certain lineage; and also for a much more informed, sober and rational attitude to teachers before one commits to them.

The common traditional advice, to quote Risto from the Danakosha group, is for the student and the teacher to observe each other for half a year before the teacher can accept someone as their student. In some cases, following the story of Serlingpa[17], students are recommended to observe their teacher for up to twelve years before they become a follower. When traditional Buddhism enters a new realm, the understanding of what it means to observe a teacher and a lineage, and to consider what it means to commit to them, should also be revisited. The nature of students' commitment depends on the depth of practice and the teacher's personal engagement and responsibility for guiding the student through the path. It is rather unfortunate when a high level of commitment is required on somewhat obscure grounds and criteria ahead of a real need for any serious commitment. There is real risk here when that is coupled with the potentially unreliable intuitive way of picking a teacher discussed above.

4.2.3   The teachers' view of their authority

The interviews with the teachers also brought up this phenomenon. There is a difference in how much emphasis each teacher placed on lineage authority, and how the role of the teacher was conceptualized. But to some extent each of them attested that their western students often misunderstand the issue. For example, when I asked Geshe Sherab (Gelug) whether westerners undestood the relationship right, he said thoughtfully: "I don't think so." In fact, each teacher I talked to answered in either exactly the same wording or very similarly. Khenpo Ngawang Jorden (Sakya) suggested that the misunderstanding could be explained by the form of relationships people have nowadays with their gurus compared with those in the context of Indian tantric Buddhism (where the emphasis on the guru originates from), as we know it from texts:

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[17] Serlingpa is a Tibetan name for Suvarnadvipa Dharmakirti (Skt), a 10th century Sumatran master, the teacher of Lama Atisha. The story goes that Atisha had spent twelve years receiving teachings from Serlingpa, which was how much it took him to accept Serlingpa as his guru

In India the teacher only accepts one or two students, exclusively. And they maintain relationship, kind of very-very closely. Of course when you have so many students, unless you are a very enlightened teacher, it's difficult to maintain a relationship on a pure level of guru-disciple. And for that reason, in Tibet, this has also happened that a teacher gives a Vajrayana teaching or empowerment to a big crowd. However, we don't have that much of a problem, because there is distance with the teacher on the basis of faith, on the basis of respect. Not everybody has access to the teacher anytime you want to go, it's not like that. But in the West it's different.

Another problem is "taking it to either extreme", which is either hesitating to follow a teacher, or following blindly, leading oneself into trouble. These comments from Geshe Sherab shed some light on the common misconception:

I: Aren't they supposed in this tantric context, aren't they supposed to see the teacher as the buddha himself?

GS: In tantra we're trained to see not only the guru, but everyone as thebuddha. The whole environment as mandala, everyone that lives in it, every sentient being as a deity. Does that mean we don't question other sentient beings?

I: But guru is especially important.

GS: Of course, especially important, doesn't mean that he is not especially important, but doesn't mean you don't question. I mean we are, as we talked today, we talk about Buddha's teaching, definitive and interpretive. Buddha Shakyamuni himself, the founder of that, can be analysed whether his speech can be taken literally or not literally, why don't we ask the same to the guru?

As all teachers attest, seeing "the guru as a Buddha" does not mean literally following everything they say, or let alone allowing abuse. Ringu Tulku Rinpoche (Kargyu) was adamant about this:

So therefore, this is very wrong, this is wrong, all these abuse stories come from wrong attitude, how to relate to your teacher. And it is possible that some teachers also take advantage of that, possible, but it's because of that. There's no reason why you need to be allowed to be abused at all. There's nothing like that required for the understanding of the dharma.

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche went as far as to equate Buddhist teachers (including the tantric level) to teachers in any sphere, only with the added consideration that it is not mere skills which are in question, but the person and their mind. Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche (Nyingma) pointed out that external behavior of a tantric master towards their students cannot be measured in terms of mundane moral norms: "Of course, if you read of Tilopa, Naropa, Milarepa, Marpa and also many others, like... They are kind of... I think if they were here today, maybe they'd have to go to jail. (Laughing)" In his explanation, the actions of the teacher have to be seen in terms of the student's engagement and the motivation of the teacher. He illustrated this by mentioning that sometimes a well-behaved and sweet teacher can be using the trust of their students to meet personal ends, while rough

behavior on the side of the master could be a means to advance spiritual progress and realization in the student.

All other teachers I interviewed were rather unambiguous about whether abuse is abuse. Geshe Gelek (Bön) made it clear: "The big teacher would never force you, never. The name big teacher doesn't mean you are a big teacher. The simplest guru can be the biggest guru. It's not a name. The inner achievement." He also made it clear that the authority of the teacher or guru comes from their belonging to a lineage and being certified within it. Teachers and students alike brought this up directly or indirectly. The pitfall here is that based on many cases of abuse or misbehavior on the side of the teacher, we can see that the lineage leaders and other prominent teachers not only fail to address the behavioral issues of their colleagues, but also endorse them, therefore tacitly condoning their behavior to the students. The hierarchy of Tibetan Buddhism is quite strict, but at the same time, loose in terms of the actual *de jure* authority of lineage heads and prominent figures. Ringu Tulku Rinpoche explains the up- and downsides of this:

> Even His Holiness the Dalai Lama, if he feels I did something totally wrong, and he is informed about that, he can say he is very sad and he is very sorry, he's not my friend anymore, or he's not my student anymore, something like that he can say. But he cannot write a letter to me or somebody else and say he's not allowed to be a lama anymore, or he's not allowed to travel anymore, or he's not allowed to teach anymore. There's nothing like that. This has positive thing and a negative thing. The negative thing is that nobody has any control about anybody, nobody controls, everybody is on their own. The good thing is because there's nobody controlling, there's no controller, yeah. I think that's a very good thing. Because if those people who control, they become corrupt, then it all becomes corrupt, which has happened in many institutions.

Placing the responsibility on individual followers generally seems to be a pattern among the teachers I interviewed. Geshe Gelek, for example, suggests that some of the accounts by abused students can be coming from jealousy or some other human misunderstanding: "Of course, female practitioners they want something, to get it. Human beings fall jealous. You know. Jealous for useless things. It doesn't matter for you, but still they can be jealous. Through jealous, the same bad things". Each teacher mentioned something similar to that. At the same time, all the teachers agreed that if a student faced an abusive or controversial teacher, they can follow HH the Dalai Lama's advice: "I think the Dalai Lama says very nicely that when you have taken, received initiations or something, after you find out they do something, he says you should leave quietly, without saying bad things. I saw in the YouTube".

Overall, the analysis illustrates how Buddhist teachers, Geshes, lamas, gurus and so on, are still held in great respect as representatives of their lineages, of the dharma and of the Buddha. Their role in the process of becoming a Buddhist is immense, regardless of the degree of commitment. Some students happen to have a tight personal relationship with their gurus on a tantric level, others see their lamas only occasionally, and many people have not personally

met them, or hesitate to consider their mentors as "gurus". Nevertheless, their authority is recognized both explicitly and implicitly. The explicit embrace of teachers' authority manifests in following their advice, holding them in high regard and placing their image on the altar. Implicit reverence can be traced through citing the words of the teachers as their own thoughts and attributing common Buddhist statements to them. In this way, the data does not show the evidence of authority yielding to the modern ideal of equality and the democratization of the spiritual path, despite occasional voices of dissent among those who are starting their journey into Buddhism. The abuse of power that has stemmed from the hierarchy seems to be in most students' perception a factor as alarming as it is opaque. The teachers, though, are much clearer about abuse, but ultimately place the responsibility on the students, rather than on their colleagues. Overall, they explain the role of the teacher as much more mundane and pragmatic, as well as being graded according to the level of practice and commitment of the student. While responsibility over one's spiritual destiny is in the hands of gurus, the teachers I interviewed, also allot the students with some rights. First, there is the right to question the actions of teachers and even report them to higher authorities if necessary, and second, there is the right to quit the guru's community, keeping gratitude for the things one learned from them, but not the commitment to continue following them.

4.2.4 The place for authority in modern Tibetan Buddhism

While one could expect that the western followers would demonstrate the modern ideals of individual thinking, autonomy, value for democracy and equality, and it would be fair to say that the hierarchy in the historical Buddha's community was relatively low (Gombrich, 1996), the complex hierarchical structures of Tibetan Buddhism do find a new home in the online space, as well as among committed practitioners. Instead of showing a natural transition of the hierarchical Vajrayana into the egalitarian rules of the 'enlightened West', the analysis rather showed a pronounced emphasis on authority among the Western followers of Eastern clerics. While some pushback on authority in Tibetan Buddhist communities in the West happens when power crosses the boundary, the same is true for those in Tibet (Gailey, 2016). Gailey's (2016) research on Tibetan bloggers shows them resisting policies of prominent lamas and pushing for a greater divide between the secular and the religious realms in the Tibetan social environment. Keeping this in mind, there seems to be little reason for convert Tibetan Buddhists to accept rigid rules of authority without negotiation. Since spirituality in the modern world is said to take a commercial and transactional turn (Carrette and King, 2005), it is important that student-consumers are aware of their responsibilities when it comes to spiritual authority, but also of their rights.

4.3 Doctrinal and formal reduction

Music, feelings of happiness, mythology, faces worn by time, certain twilights and certain places,
want to tell us something, or they told us something that we should not have missed, or they are
about to tell us something; this imminence of a revelation that is not produced is, perhaps, 'the
aesthetic event'.

— Jorge Luis Borges, Other Inquisitions, 1952

Changes in modern Buddhist practice that refer to the simplification and re-invention of its main concepts and practices are perhaps the most heated and the most foundational issues in the Buddhist discussion space. These issues lie at the core of what constitutes Buddhist practice and worldview, and therefore, serve as the criteria for defining who can be a Buddhist and what teachings or phenomena can be categorized under "Buddhism". In the analysis of the forum data, as well as the interviews, this issue came up from a variety of viewpoints. What I intend to do here, is to outline the assumptions behind a perceived change or need for change around Buddhism's main doctrinal postulates, including its transempirical concepts and their status, as well as around its formal, ritualistic and physical dimension. One might argue that these are two separate clusters of problematics, and in my analysis they indeed were. My rationale for uniting them within one section is the emphasis on *reductive change*, as Buddhism (here, its Tibetan form), crosses its historical geographical boundaries, allowing for a complete re-envisioning of Buddhism's core meanings and practices. It is important in terms of the actual face and nature of Buddhist practice and teaching, and has deep implication for practitioners. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, I see this reductive change as being caused by the project of Buddhist modernism, as well as rooted in essentialized mental categories of "East" and "West". Another reason to unite doctrinal and formal reduction is that the formal (ritualistic or physical) aspects are often rooted in and intertwined with the doctrinal side and with beliefs, so it makes sense to discuss them together.

I think that these issues have not received due attention in academia, despite the strong implications for the future of Buddhism. The possible reasons for the neglect may be found in the nature of Buddhist scholarship, which is academic, mostly induced by methodological atheism or agnosticism, and bound by the ideals of descriptive impartiality and objectivity, all of which could serve to downplay the concerns around the changing face of Buddhism. Also, because the transempirical concepts of Buddhism (which are the main stumbling block in its doctrinal composition) are not a matter of debate in Buddhist Studies. There are many slippery issues for Buddhist scholar to debate, such as the actual origins of Mahayana sutras and so on (Skilton, 2016), but the fact that the Buddha had taught karma and rebirth over multiple lifetimes, is not one of those (Gombrich, 2009). The debates happen around Buddhist teachers and practitioners, who have often been brought to practice through Buddhist modernist rhetoric to meet often non-Buddhist ends, psychological or social, and they find themselves resonating

with some Buddhist maxims and practices, yet reacting to many core Buddhist views in different ways (Payne, 2018).

The roots of the assumptions about Buddhism's inevitable reductive change after reaching the West lie deep within another assumption, this time a sophisticated academic one. The idea of the constant change and flux of all phenomena and the absence of any unchanging essence in them. This idea is reflected in modern post-positivist, occasionally postmodern, views, as well as in the Buddhist key concept of non-self (anatta / anatma). There is some academic thought invested in connecting Buddhist philosophy with the postmodern thought (Hyman, 1998; Park, 2010; Taylor, 2007). Tweed (2011) suggested employing the main postulates of Buddhism in the study of Buddhism itself, as well as in the study of other religions. He discusses an academic approach to religions through the concepts of impermanence and no-self:

> There is no pure substratum, no static and independent core called 'Buddhism'—in the founder's day or in later generations. What we have come to call 'Buddhism' was always becoming, being made and remade over and over again in contact and exchange, as it was carried along in the flow of things. (p. 23).

While I agree with his argument to a large extent, it does have weaknesses. One of them is creating a superficially broad and loose category of "Buddhism", so that it subverts its descriptive purpose. Another weakness is legitimizing the narrative of change ahead of the narrative of perpetuation, as a result of which we may fail to see the problematics of some powerful flows shaping the amalgam of "Buddhism" nowadays, and specifically the neoliberal trend and post-colonial bias (Borup, 2020).

In the wake of research on Buddhism in the West, some authors occasionally mentioned the transempirical concepts in view of possible difficulties for Westerners in their becoming Buddhists. Classic voices in the field still express these beliefs. Prebish and Keown (2010) for example, dedicate almost all of the section "Western perspectives" under "Foundations" to the ongoing discussion of rebirth:

> In particular many Western Buddhists tend to reject the more 'medieval' elements of the traditional scheme and replace them with notions more congenial to the modern age, perhaps interpreting the six realms as referring to other dimensions of existence, levels of reality, parallel worlds, or simply states of mind. (22)

In this way, they expect Western Buddhists to be more easily convinced by the idea of parallel worlds than by the idea that a mind can continue existence beyond one physical body. The tendencies of belief or disbelief that are assumed about Easterners and Westerners in their experience with Buddhism, are very often conceptualized in static binary terms. Just like in the previous example, much of the classical literature in the field seems to suffer from such generalization. Coleman (2001), discussing contemporary Buddhist practice in the US, explains:

> A common objective of many religious rituals, Eastern and Western, is to gain some supernatural benefit such as the absolution of sin or merit for a better rebirth. It must be noted, however, that while such magical notions are not entirely absent in Western Buddhism, they are far less influential. (97)

The fallacy in this argument starts with the generalized and, as we have discussed above, conceptually fabricated notion of Western Buddhism, which can be juxtaposed with some other Buddhisms and with "magical notions", another category, which unites actual magical notions with foundational doctrinal tenets of Buddhism. Logically, this follows and perpetuates the psychologization thesis of Buddhist modernism, which is not supported by the data, nor by Coleman's (2001) own ethnographic descriptions.

This assumption is also tacitly present in many other pieces of research. For example Smith (1996) provides a philosophical reformulation of the Buddhist idea of multiple lifetimes through its pragmatic component of developing intimate empathy to other people and forms of life one could have been reborn as, into a version that he would consider more acceptable for Western followers. Although he never explicitly says that, the fact that he see the pragmatic purpose of the belief is seen as being in need of reformulation in some other terms than literal understanding of rebirth demonstrates that Smith (1996) expects "Westerners" to reject a postulate which on the other hand he expects "Easterners" to take for granted. Both expectations work only for two separate and very essentialized geographically divided groups.

In fact the Pew Survey (2009) revealed that 25% of American Christians believe in reincarnation (which most Christian denominations would see as heresy). Patridge (2004) described the growing belief in reincarnation among Western respondents under a general process he called "Easternization". He noted however, that the conceptualization of reincarnation among its Western believers, falls more in line with esoteric and theosophical thought originating in the West, than with the scriptural views of Buddhism or Hinduism. Instead of believing in the mind taking on rebirth according to karmic imprints, respondents seem to mostly embrace a view of some sort of evolution of the soul through reincarnations (Patridge, 2004). It could be argued, however, that general lay public seldom carry a fixed and rigorous worldview, so even minor openness to the idea of reincarnation, even if conceptualized differently, already signifies potential openness to a more classic and Eastern conceptualization of the term. In this way secularization does not strip people of religious beliefs, but transforms them and makes them more fluid. While it is common to associate the West with secularism, atheism, and scientific materialism, since these views are believed to have originated in Western philosophy, common polls asking ordinary people about their beliefs show that globally only a fraction of people subscribe to pure materialistic atheism, while the vast majority adhere to some form of religious or spiritual beliefs (Pew, 2017).

Still, a desire to mask Eastern religions as inherently naturalism-friendly is common among Western scholars and intellectuals (Faure, 2009). For example, Roth (2008) argues against what he calls cognitive imperialism, a bias in studying

religious behavior, coming from an ethnocentric, Christianity-focused perspective, but in doing so tries to naturalize transempirical concepts of Eastern religions:

> The Daoist Dao (Way) is very much a force inherent in the universe; it is certainly not supernatural. The Theravada concept of no-self (anatta) is not even a force: it is a mode of cognition. It can be argued that the foundational Confucian tradition, too, contains no super-natural powers: its concept of tian (usually translated as "heaven"), is, like the Daoist Dao, clearly subject to natural laws. (4)

Of course, the fact that Dao or *tian*, or the Buddhist notions of karma or bodhisattvas acting in non-material form, are seen as subject to natural laws by Taoists and Buddhists, does not necessarily make them naturalistic in modern scientific perception. Modern physics would hardly be interested in the Dao, and the laws it is believed to be subject to[18]. Why would Roth (2008) feel the need to strip Buddhism and Taoism of their essential non-materialistic elements? Quli (2009, p. 18) critically discusses the idea of "Buddhist modernism" being coupled with Western influence in the discussion of Buddhism and claims: "A highly static identity is posited, such that Asian American Buddhists are described variously as traditional, patriarchal, or more interested in the "cultural" (Asian) aspects of Buddhism (…)." Although her argument concerns Asian American Buddhists, the same assumption is problematic when aimed at the "Western" converts, as it still relies on the same dichotomy. In her research on *jhana* practice among convert Theravada teachers and practitioners (Quli, 2008), she showed differences in stances among various teachers, many of whom (eg. a former British theoretical physicist Ajahn Brahmavamso) accepted rigorously traditional, meta-physical, if not supernatural, conceptualizations of this Buddhist practice.

The universalizing, modernizing tones of the Vipassana movement (Gleig, 2013) and contemporary Zen (McMahan, 2002), do nourish a sentiment towards a reductive change. Coupled with the secular atmosphere of Western societies, they also bring to the surface secular or psychological elements, while potentially sensitive transempirical or devotional ones remain left at the bottom (Payne, 2018). The idea of rebirth is central to the goal of Buddhism (Gombrich, 2009), but in being decontextualized, it becomes an unessential, unimportant element, open to debate and reformulation. The pioneer of reformulation in the Buddhist space was Stephen Batchelor with his work *Buddhism without Beliefs* (1997), and his idea of agnostic Buddhism. A few years later the agnostic became convinced atheist with his Confession of a Buddhist Atheist (2011), and other works, where he reformulated the Buddhist doctrine in line with a materialistic understanding of consciousness. I see Stephen Batchelor rather as a symptomatic phenomenon, than a trend-setter. Higgins (2012) explains that Buddhist modernism, "out of which secular Buddhism is gradually crystallizing" (p. 111) "melded this ancestral mosaic with core but discordant themes of Western modernity, and it was this modernist hybrid that came to stand for Buddhism tout court from its

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[18] Unless we are talking about Capra (1975), Tao of Physics. The position of such works within mainstream science is, however, debatable.

arrival in the West." (p. 112) I agree with Higgins' idea, though I do not see the logic of claiming Buddhist atheism, a crystalized offshoot of the construct of Buddhism modernism, as the actual and original *dharma*. In its further reduction, this product would only go farther away from its origins, at the same time as enhancing its potency to displace the original Buddhist narrative in the modern Buddhist space.

The trend of problematizing Buddhist core transempirical concepts is very common in contemporary popular Buddhist / self-help literature. The examples would include, apart from Batchelor, best-sellers like Sam Harris (2014), Owen Flanagan (2011), and Robert Wright (2017). The argument usually follows two key principles. First, all Buddhist transempirical beliefs (from Hindu Gods speaking to people, to the notion of karma) are merged into one category, which one can either wholly accept or wholly reject, once and for all. The other principle their argument relies on would be to instill an assumption that as modern progressive Westerners (the target audience of the literature) we cannot accept any Buddhist beliefs without compelling scientific evidence, while we can (and should) do so in the case of scientific assumptions (Sharapan, under review). The basic problematic area here would be the incompatibility of the Buddhist understanding of the mind as continuing over multiple lifetimes, according to one's karma, with the common scientific view of mind as being a function of the brain. In my data analysis I was looking for instances of how such clashes are encountered and resolved, only to find that Buddhist transempirical concepts were simply not a problematic area. In this section, I discuss several reasons I see for this, as well as how these positions are negotiated and developed over time. The development of belief has been unfairly considered unimportant in the recent scholarship of religion, and is not commonly discussed in research. A quick glance at the Contents of some recent edited volumes reveals close to no discussion of religious belief as a topic (eg. Campbell, 2012). There is, however, some ethnographic research into the meaning systems of Buddhists (Eddy, 2013) which sheds light on what the landscape may be like in groups, similar to FPMT. However the seven years of forum discussions and conversations with beginning as well as more experienced students of Buddhism, and their teachers, can show the longitudinal development of their conceptual frameworks and their spiritual journey.

When it comes to formal reduction, this assumption has been treated in a similar way in academic and popular literature, and similarly, it contrasts the data. The iconoclastic tone of Buddhist modernism largely affects how convert Buddhism is conceptualized, in spite of visible examples to the contrary. Baumann (2002a) draws a clear distinction between "modern" convert Buddhism, which is focused on the psychological side of the practice, and the traditional Buddhism of Buddhist immigrants in Europe, who seem to emphasize the ritualistic and devotional elements, with a lot of physical paraphernalia. This distinction still affects academic research in a stereotyping and essentializing way (Quli, 2009). The translation of the common Tibetan word used to denote "a Buddhist", *nangpa*, conveys the meaning of someone looking inwards for

happiness. It may create a sharp contrast to the lush ritualistic and artistic religious expression prevalent in Tibetan Buddhism. Needless to say, the relationship between the external and the internal is extremely diverse *within* Tibetan Buddhism and over its history and its different strands of thought, if one looks beyond the essentializing description (Powers, 2007).

Taking a more longitudinal approach reveals how the physical, ritualistic and symbolic elements, found in abundance in Tibetan Buddhism, are in fact not a separate category from its doctrinal and religious tenets, but rather physical extensions of those. Looking at phenomena often called "Western Buddhism", such as Insight movement, can give an impression that some strands of Buddhism have coped better with inevitable Westernization. However a more precise historical look at how different strands made it to the West (about Insight, see f.e. Braun, 2016) makes it clear that the tendencies start in the East, as natural processes, brought about by circumstances and rooted in Buddhist rationale. In this way, phenomena like the Insight movement or Buddhist Geeks (Gleig, 2014) are not specific forms of some new "Western" Buddhism, but should rather be seen as continuations of religious trends, in the movements' homelands, in the same way as FPMT would be a continuation of Gelugpa Tibetan Buddhism, while some less doctrinal and institutionalized forms of popular Dzogchen (eg., Sarsina, 2012) would be continuations of the same narrative strands back in Tibet, albeit in a different packaging.

The presence of external and ritualistic elements in Tibetan Buddhist communities brings up the question of cultural appropriation. Despite its prominence in the public domain, this issue is not discussed as rigorously in the academic domain, and I see many reasons for that. First, the idea of cultural elements belonging to someone, so that they could be appropriated, lacks weight due to the broad and natural spread of various elements across the geographical and historical terrain. Second, it presupposes culture to be a solid fixed category, which is an outdated view. Third, it is derived from activist emancipatory rhetoric, while in many cases, the infringement of rights is unproven. In some cases, despite the awkwardness of the term, it may refer to an unethical power imbalance. Rogers (2006) suggests four types of the processes, that some people could define as "cultural appropriation", which are: exchange, dominance, exploitation and transculturation. While cultural exchange and the spreading of cultural elements is natural, all-pervasive and inevitable (Welsch, 1999), in certain contexts, Rogers (2006) admits cultural exchange can have ethical repercussions. The notion of transculturation is rooted in a flexible and fluid understanding of "culture", which sees the spread of cultural elements as oftentimes enriching, rather than exploitative. In the case of adopting an Eastern spiritual practice, cultural appropriation becomes inevitable to some extent, but it does not evoke ethical challenges by default, if we consider the change happening in societies across the board (Antony, 2014). York (2001, p. 368) highlights another problematic pillar supporting the cultural appropriation argument:

The erosion of ethnic dignity and identity might be an inevitable aspect of historical and cultural change, on the one hand, or a catastrophic diminishment of human legacy, on the other hand. In many cases, it is a complicit or even active disseminatory role of the original bearers themselves which has encouraged religio-cultural exportation. The Tibetans have consciously marketed Vajrayana Buddhism to the West and have recognized tulku-incarnation among Euro-Americans.

Apart from the supposed victims being complicit in the appropriation of their culture, the ethnicity-based rhetoric comes in as another pillar of the cultural appropriation. Who is a member of culture? I agree with Young (2005, p. 136), pointing out "A given ethnicity might seem to be a necessary condition of membership in certain cultures, but ethnicities are frequently as confused as cultures. (I am, incidentally, doubtful about the claim that ethnicity is a necessary condition of membership in any culture.)"

The ethical questioning of adoption practices and physical elements coming from Tibetan Buddhist culture under the label of "cultural appropriation" falls apart when the process is considered through the phenomenological lens of the assumed "perpetrators" and their "victims". It rests on the idea of fixed "authentic" owners of culture, and "inauthentic" impostors, which ignores the hybridity, flexibility and change on both "sides" (Rogers, 2006; Quli, 2009). Based on her fieldwork in Tibetan markets, Brox (2019) describes how the value of religious paraphernalia is constructed as authentic by buyers and sellers, despite difficulties with ensuring the "ideal" production requirements for authenticity. She concludes: "We can say that shopkeepers, ritual specialists, and customers negotiate the integrity, efficacy, and the spiritual biographies of Buddhist objects as ways to equip the commodities with values other than "exhibition value" (Benjamin, 1969) and exchange value." (p. 123) This shows that usage of religious physical elements is a matter of construction and negotiation in native communities, just as it is in convert ones, and their ownership is not culturally innate in some way, but instead, rooted in the meanings attached to them.

To sum up, there seems to be a generalizing assumption that Buddhism in the West is undergoing reductive change in terms of its doctrinal aspects and its physical manifestation. Western converts are commonly deemed rationalistic, secular, attracted to Buddhism's psychological sides, and resisting its devotional, doctrinal and ritualistic sides. The separation between modernist Westerners and traditionalist "natives" is rooted in a fixed essentialized understanding of culture as a factor in this change. Deemed inevitable force, it marks reductive change of Buddhisms into a unified authentically Western form as a matter of time. In the following paragraphs I will show, how the idea that Western converts are transforming Tibetan Buddhism to their assumed liking does not find much confirmation in the data. For better or for worse, it seems to be a process of constructing identity in accordance with constantly-changing individual inclinations and with the small narrative of a specific school and lineage.

4.3.1 Gradual belief formation among online and offline students

The paragraphs below are based on the analysis of the forum discussions and the interviews with students and teachers, and are presented in a logical, rather than chronological manner. To start, I would like to bring up a remark by Geshe Gelek, emphasizing that convert Tibetan Buddhists made a conscious decision to start the practice, and should therefore be conscious and tolerant of its idiosyncrasies: "Yeah, if you are being a Buddhist, nobody caused you to be, nobody manipulated you to be, it's your choice 100%, and we say, of course, it's your karma, your karma leads, a connection, and for that [reason]." Indeed, the physical religious expression, as well as the doctrinal tenets of Buddhism jump at newcomers rather immediately. Module 1 of Discovering Buddhism starts with the Buddhist theory of the mind as being endless, i.e. continuing over multiple lifetimes, the website and materials are full of symbolic drawings and images, most course teachers and Elders wear monastic robes. Tantric meditations, involving mantras and visualizations are first mentioned in Module 2, which is the only module free of charge and therefore become the first and possibly the only one for many newcomers. Vows and precepts, and behaving according to Buddhist ethics rooted in the Buddhist view of sentience, are discussed in many threads on the forum. The practice materials are English translations of Tibetan prayers, containing names of bodhisattvas and deities, mantras and symbolic images. It is, indeed, hard to misinterpret FPMT as a secular mindfulness group. We can make an assumption that students who are less tolerant of external religious symbolism, literal discussion of Buddhist doctrinal tenets, including magic and mysticism, and of life-changing ethical precepts, would simply look for another program. Students, who stay, are people with a higher tolerance for such elements, and, as their messages show, and are often appreciative of them.

The interviews with the students from Helsinki show a rather similar picture. Everyone I talked with seemed to engage in regular practice, which included elements such as prayer, mantra recitation and visualization of some sort. Marina from the Danakosha group remembers how she was attracted to Tibetan Buddhism precisely by such elements:

> Actually, I think that Buddhism's charm was in, like, as a cliché, with Tibet being a really cool place and all were so cool, with these malas and it looked so awesome, it was probably a totally superficial, external attraction.

Not all cases are like hers, for many people it was a way to deal with suffering in their life, or part of personal development, but to all students these elements seemed to be an important part of their practice and their lives.

Beyond the time on their cushions, both the Helsinki students and the forum users seem to make serious adjustments to their lifestyles. Specifically, the principle of non-violence becomes prominent following the Buddhist formal vows and a literal understanding of karma. Various pests, attacking houses and gardens of some forum users, are dealt with in new, occasionally magical, ways,

rather than by the usual use of poison. One forum user, Frederick Levy, shares how he dealt with disturbing insects during a retreat:

> I had sand flies in my apartment and I would keep getting bites. While trying to keep an altruistic intention in mind I told them they could stay and I would not harm them if they would stop biting me. I stopped getting bites and some time later they moved out!

Among the students in Helsinki, shifting priorities may create discord in their families, and some lay Buddhist vows (f.e. refraining from alcohol) create new social difficulties. Nevertheless, following these practices is seen as a mark of a "good" or "full" Buddhist, and a desirable goal. Eric shares his experience:

> Eric: (…) Then I refresh my lay vows.
>
> I: And you have all the five?
>
> Eric: Yeah. I took two years ago four, not including the alcohol, I wasn't ready at that time, but I took last year in the fall from the Dalai Lama I took also the fifth one. Yeah, I have had, I used to like to drink alcohol, but at the teachings with Robina [an FPMT affiliated teacher] I wasn't ready to take that vow, but after Robina I didn't drink maybe a couple of times, and I didn't want to take the vow I wasn't sure 100% I could keep.

Such lifestyle sacrifices, as well as a practice involving sutra recitation, prostrations, and scaring away mice with mantras, requires a solid motivational and ideological basis, which is different from the modern secular narrative. But there did not seem to be a problem with this. Based on the forum discussions and the accounts of the interviewees, people come to Tibetan Buddhism from various origins, ranging from a strict Christian denomination to atheism. Their current views were also diverse: from strong mysticism to pragmatic rationalism, but problems accepting the basic Buddhist transempirical concepts (enlightenment, rebirth and karma) were extremely rare on the forum and absent or overcome among the Helsinki students. Among forum users, doubts were commonly framed as asking for clarification with a hope to deepen their understanding, and whenever the understanding was still not reached, the doubter would be recommended to take it slowly and give it time. I talk more elsewhere about the development of belief among the forum students, and the rhetorical strategies supporting it (Sharapan, 2016; 2018). My interviews with the students reveal that the strategy seems to work. While most respondents had no issue with the literal understanding of karma and rebirth, in a few cases when they started their practice, accepting them required some work. A practitioner with about twenty years of experience, Ilona, said:

> I: Tell me about your approach to Buddhist philosophical concepts, such as karma, rebirth, and the possibility of enlightenment.

Ilona: I grew into them, I can say, over these many years. Even if there was something difficult, I have come to accept them all. There was a question, whether something was difficult, so in the beginning it was really difficult to accept rebirth, because I hadn't had any prior idea about it. I think for very many people, it's the other way round, they had thought about it from the beginning, that it's possible to be born again, but my attitude was like, no, no way. But yeah. Within a few years it started to feel quite natural.

The only person, who said he could not wrap his mind around the concept of rebirth, was Risto from the same group. He learnt to deal with his doubt, however, and to accept the narrative provisionally:

Risto: I take them as some kind of a teaching, so to say, but yes, I find it difficult. I could explain to myself that something like that could be, but I'm not convincing myself.

I: Okay. What's your attitude to these tenets?

Risto: I treat them openly. I know a lot of things exist, which I cannot perceive so easily. And there are things which I don't know about. This way, I have an open mind, maybe it is like that.

Despite that difficulty, he still accepted the notions of karma and enlightenment (which, it could be argued, are knit together in Buddhism). Another observation was that some students show a flexibility with their beliefs, which may seem like an internal contradiction. In my conversation with Alex, a former Christian, who has been practicing Buddhism for quite a few years, he mentioned that his belief in the Buddhist concepts is strengthened when he sees similarities with other spiritual traditions:

Alex: It [rebirth] is not at all in opposition with the Christian belief in the next world. Because it is also a rebirth, you are passing to another reality, we can call it Bardo in Tibetan, or in terms of Theravada, you are going quicker without any transitional stops, into the next life, but this tenet does not alter the Christian understanding: you transited. They just think that it is permanent, though, one tradition says that there is first purgatory, another that there are ordeals. Maybe you've heard of the Ordeals of the blessed Theodora? In fact it is Bardo, there are the same descriptions of hells, as in the Tibetan book of the dead, the same scary knives, pikes, knife-shaped leaves, various temperature changes, cold and hot hells. They are similar in all cultures.

I: And do you personally believe in those worlds? Literally? Or metaphorically? How do you understand that?

Alex: Naturally, probably, that some kinds of knives exist… definitely I don't believe in it, I find it hard to believe, but on the other side, the meaning of hell for me is mainly the understanding of deep remorse, that I have never experienced, a kind of a negation of everything, where a person does not have any developments for improving their nature.

It may seem contradictory, that Alex provides an argument in support of "hells" and "bardo" from a Christian mystic text, but he then explains that his understanding of hells is rather psychological. However, the attitude demonstrated by him, and some other respondents who mentioned having had difficulties accepting some aspects of the Buddhist doctrine or narrative, is quite close to the one recommended in the Buddhist texts. A Theravada monk Ashin Cintita[19] in his essay *Take seriously, but hold loosely*, suggests that acceptance of the core Buddhist teachings is as vital for one's being a Buddhist, as it is provisional and flexible. Cintita criticizes popular secular Buddhism for unsubstantiated claims about the origins of these core teachings, and for reifying the two extremes, namely the option of accepting the description of rebirth in the texts at face value as a dogma, or rejecting it based on a reified belief in a materialistic nature of consciousness, again taken as a dogma. Indeed with issues like rebirth, which are so central to Buddhism, so complex and hard to prove or disprove with certainty through objective scientific means, taking seriously but holding loosely sounds like a plausible middle way, and proves to be helpful for the participants as well.

It is also important to note, that while the Buddhist tenets are exposed to doubt through Western concepts, it also works the other way around. A few people on the forum claimed to have been materialists before their encounter with Buddhism, but over the posts you could see the development of their views towards the Buddhist understanding, as they became motivated to investigate the logic behind it. Geert Anstoot described his way out of a materialistic understanding of the mind over several posts. Here is the gist of what he said: "Now, my former view on reality, which was completely nihilistic, seems so improbable and lacking several explanations, while the ideas of no-self, and an ongoing but ever changing consciousness grow more and more real in my mind". The same can be seen with some students in Helsinki. Erik put the differences between a Buddhist and scientific worldview this way:

> It's in a sense comprehending a totally new worldview, which is quite radical thing to do. So of course there's some clashes, but not clashes in a sense like they are conflicting and causing friction in me, but it's kind of more like pointing, like look at this thing. Do you know that this is a fact? Is it a fact or is it just a belief? Basically, in that way I feel that it is very constructive, it kind of makes you look at things that you previously thought were solid and true. So you kind of like start to question and critically think at the world, I don't think these are clashes, these are just different ways to look at wisdom and knowledge.

Buddhism is often compared to science, both on the forum and in the interviews. In part, due to the Buddhist modernist marketing campaign (Lopez, 2008), and in part, because science is a common interest and an authoritative knowledge system among many educated Westerners and Easterners alike. Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche summarizes the situation this way: "We are just basically,

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[19] https://www.academia.edu/34809520/Take_Seriously_but_Hold_Loosely_perspectives_on_Secular_Buddhism

one mold. The mold, do you know? When you make tsa-tsa[20], we have one mold and from that you can make many tsa-tsa. So in the West the mold is education." The juxtaposition, however, most of the time is not that of contradiction. A few of the Helsinki students had an education in natural sciences and even worked as scientists. This did not seem to threaten their Buddhist beliefs, nevertheless. Jarkko explained how he had relativized the two different knowledge systems: ("[…] when you understand this Buddhist worldview better, then rebirth and karma are not strange. They are not at all in contradiction with the Buddhist view of how the world works".)

One factor in the students' acceptance of these tenets, even when they disagree with their initial views, seems to be a perceived complexity and vastness of the Buddhist (specifically Mahayana and Vajrayana) doctrine. Teachers who had spent decades studying it enjoy credibility when they speak of transempirical or even magical things using Buddhist jargon and complicated systems. Doubts and contradictions are easily resolved by reference to the complexity of the teachings and the time needed to appreciate them. As one forum Elder puts it: "Some of these vexing questions and doubts will probably be answered. I still have some hanging around from many years ago. But, mostly, as I try to continue to listen, reflect and meditate, they seem to resolve without much effort." On the level of practice, the exercises beyond reach are seen as not yet accessible, rather than unimportant or marginal. The secrecy of tantric practice seems to be observed most of the time, with the students speaking of it in often euphemistic terms, calling it "practice involving visualizations", "recitation practice" and so on. I remember a conversation in the yard of Danakosha Ling, having conducted an interview with one student, and inviting another one to do the same. The second student wanted to know what kind of things I wanted to discuss, and the one who had been interviewed, chuckled and repeated one of my questions: Mistä sinun harjoituksesi koostuu? (What does your practice consist of?). They looked at each other with irony and smiled. That was a sign that some of their common grounds are private. As I have discussed in the first section, there seems to be no sign of the rigorous traditional Vajrayana practices being substituted by something that could be called "American (or Western, or Finnish) tantra" (Gleig, 2013). The meanings and practices at the tantric level are, perhaps, among the most stable translocal elements of Tibetan Buddhism, as seen through the forum and among the teachers and students I talked with.

The tolerance of these unusual practices, elements and beliefs could be created in part by what Moberg and Granholm (2014) have discussed as being a postmodern exposure to global symbols and meanings through media and travelling. Several students mentioned that the experience of visiting or living in a Buddhist country must have brought them to Buddhist practice later in life, when they felt a spiritual need. Some students mention some of their interests, such as mysticism, or habits, such as keeping an altar. Risto shares his experience:

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[20] Traditional Tibetan small Buddha statues made of clay and painted by hand as a ritual activity

I had an altar before I was a Buddhist, or practiced any religion. I had it, because I had collected a certain space on my book shelf with important things. There were things that reminded me of things I wanted to remember. There was a mirror at the base, which signified that things are kind of… it was about space and reflection, and then there was a little candle. It reminded me of the light within, which endures, this waswhat I had thought myself before. An altar was not a strange thing to me. I had an altar because I respect things I hold important. That's why I now have a Buddhist altar.

Risto also connected his inspiration to learn about Buddhism with the book by Robert Pirsig (*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*) he had read several times. In a similar fashion, being drawn to Buddhism through literature, art and other cultural exposures is rather common in the interviews and on the forum.

After the initial spark of interest, the gradual deepening of commitment is also evident. In the case of more experienced practitioners, it is clear that their practice is mainly dictated by the expectations of their teacher and lineage. Those who just started their path in Danakosha, as well as most students from the other group, tend to be more practical about the amount of daily practice, but still refer mostly to their teachers and the organization for advice about it, and keeping a pragmatic attitude to their regular commitments. For example, Agata from the FPMT group said:

I: Onko sinulla joku säännöllinen harjoitus? Joku harjoitus mitä sä teet päivittäin?

Agata: Se vaihtelee. Mulla on semmonen ainakin jos ei mitään muuta, mulla on semmonen, istun 20 minuuttia hiljaisuudessa, ainakin se on se. Sitten voi olla eri harjoituksia, voi olla love-meditation, tai 37 Buddhaa, tai Varjasattva, tai miten on aikaa. Erilaisia juttua mitä myöskin tuntuu että nyt tarvitaan, tai kiitollisuus tai pientä. Se voi olla viis minuuttia.

I: Do you have some regular practice? Something you do every day?

Agata: It changes. At least, if there is nothing else, I sit for 20 minutes in silence, at least this. Then there could be different exercises, meditation on love, or 37 Buddhas, Vajrasattva, depending on the time I have. Different things I feel I need right now, or just gratitude, something small. It can be five minutes.

The forum offers similar recommendations to the Discovering Buddhism students. While it is up to them how to organize their practice, the general requirements are rather high, and students often share being overwhelmed. One's progress into more "esoteric" levels of practice, more complicated theories and more potent exercises is determined by prior commitment and success, and the rules are dictated by teachers as lineage-representing authorities.

4.3.2   Teachers setting the agenda for religious beliefs and rituals

Buddhist transempirical concepts are among the requirements dictated by teachers, because all of the teachers I talked with agreed that they would not consider somebody a Buddhist, who did not accept a literal understanding of

enlightenment, rebirth and karma. Interestingly, they started to define "a Buddhist" in almost always very broad and universalist terms, and then made it very specific, when asked about these concepts directly. In my interview with the most liberal of all the five lamas, Ringu Tulku Rinpoche, he first defined a Buddhist as "somebody who tries to study and live life according to buddha dharma", which is "a set of guidelines, teachings, on how to be a better human being". However, a reformulation of foundational Buddhist concepts was not an option in his view:

> I: And what if someone has a different understanding of nirvana? That it's just having a wise and good life.

> RTR: Nobody says that. Nobody says that. Nirvana is when you kind of cease to be under control of your negative emotions, then that's, nirvana is peace. There's nobody who says that some wellbeing is nirvana.

A common modernist argument in favour of doctrinal and formal reduction as a natural process and/or worthwhile endeavor is a distinction between the religious elements and actual benefits, relevant to daily life. The forum data and the interviews demonstrate that this distinction might be artificial. In fact, pragmatic effects of religious beliefs, moral restrictions, practices and rituals are constantly brought up on the forum. Chandler Nash for example describes his experience with prostrations like this: "Prostrations make me feel more respectful, calm and focused. They mark body, speech, and mind. They are also great for cracking the nut of self-cherishing. What it's not about is submission or worship." It is quite common to ask for mantras and practices when faced with difficulties, illness and the death of loved ones. Students share positive changes in their every-day life and meditation practice, that come from what they learn on the courses. Pragmatic benefits of belief and practice are also seen in the interviews. Alex explains how Buddhist philosophy helped him deal with the chaos in the world:

> And yet I understand that by becoming a Buddhist, accepting it, I accept that everything in the world is interdependent, and therefore I understand that I cannot change many things in my life. It affects me a lot, for example, the events in my homeland I understand that in many ways it is a karmic result. Karma of the whole region, people, and by and large I understand that I can help, but my hatred that I could have, and maybe had at some point, is of little use in helping this conflict.

This way, for many people on the forum and in the two groups, the everyday psychological benefits of the practice go beyond the effects of meditation. In fact, they seem to be primarily derived from the Buddhist philosophical and transempirical tenets, such as karma and rebirth, and the idea of potential for enlightenment, and also enforced through devotional and religious practices. Even the cases, when a practice or ritual is conceptualized as "cultural", and does not pertain to the original Buddha's message, students are pragmatic in being able to see its effects, with respect to the teaching. For example, when Jarkko mentioned that some beliefs of Tibetan teachers might be cultural, and are

certainly not shared by him, I asked what he would do if the lama was inviting the group to feed nagas (water dragons):

> Jarkko: Well, if my lama is encouraging to go and feed water dragons, I consider that there is some Buddhist intention on the background.
>
> I: What could it be?
>
> Jarkko: It could be, for example, either that my lama knows better than I, whether water dragons exist. Or even if they don't, it could be useful for me in a situation when I feel proud about my own views, that I'm always right. The lama could possibly think that it would be useful for me to go and do something that would loosen up such attitudes.

In the view of the lamas, drawing a line between Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan culture, does not support the charged arguments surrounding cultural appropriation. As Geshe Gelek explains, traditionally in Tibet "the culture and tradition are mostly linked to the spiritual. Whatever singing, whatever we do, even dancing, you see, the mask dance, every small things, even public performance, you call it, dancing or whatever, it's designed and related to the spiritual", and that makes these cultural symbols meaningful elements when it comes to adopting the religion. And he adds that globally people become interested in practices which sank into oblivion in modernity: "Now I think people want to recall, to re-introduce these same old things." Over the centuries, the every-day matters and mundane affairs have been infused with Buddhist meanings and rationale, in the same way, Buddhist doctrine became dressed in Tibetan historical terms, texts and events. Khenpo Ngawang Jorden, insists that teachers nowadays should focus on teaching the dharma, rather than Tibetan culture:

> I: Are there any elements in Tibetan Buddhism, which are actually cultural elements, which do not come from the religion, but from the culture.
>
> KNJ: Absolutely. There are many-many elements of culture. And culture assimilated into Buddhist culture, in the Buddhist practice and Buddhist understanding sometimes. And then, there are so many Tibetan Buddhist teachers, emphasizing on culture, rather than the teaching itself. When they introduce Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism in the West, so many centers where, you can find, they are so much into learning the culture as part of their practice. in Tibetan Buddhist centers many center members like to learn how to make sweet rice that kind of things, on special occasion. These are not important. And also how to… offer the scarves. And then… These are really unnecessary. So… But you can't help it. I think, when you're teaching Buddhism, you have to teach Buddhism, not the culture. You have to differentiate. Also, the Western Buddhist students also, they are not in it for learning culture. They are in it for learning Buddhism. And of course it is a version of the Tibetan Buddhism, so of course sometimes you cannot really separate the pure Buddhism from the Tibetan culture. This one I understood, because when Buddhism went to different places it assimilated with the local culture.

Another teacher, Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche seems to be just the kind of lama Khenpo Ngawang Jorden mentions. The old and the new headquarters of Danakosha have been decorated with the most traditional rigor, all rituals and practices are held to the strictest standard of authenticity, and on top of that, one finds an abundance of merely cultural paraphernalia in the group. My first interviewee, Marina, described the tacit rules about dressing up for events and initiations into traditional Tibetan attire (chupa) or an ankle-length skirt for women and smart, formal clothing for men. Cultural ways are also observed on all levels, beyond the dharma, she says:

> We have this big close-knit group of students, we've been actually trained for years now in maybe more traditional ways. For example, we are very good at hosting Tibetan lamas, because we can behave according to certain traditions. And it comes from our teacher, or he tells us about these ways. It's a funny situation, because most of us are older than him, and he had to take us by the hand and show how to carry tea cups, how to serve some high-ranking lama. And these are pretty small things, but now we know how to do them to keep up. This kind of tradition. Also, he does not alter texts and teachings to please western disciples. He follows his lineage strictly. He is a very authentic teacher in this sense, that things are not simplified for us, just because we're lazy westerners.

On a day to day level, such traditional Tibetan views can cause bewilderment among some students. Antonio remembers one case:

> Here in Finland for example you know, you can go to sauna together, it's not a problem if they see me in shorts, or naked. But the lama is like… it's cultural, you know. For example the other time we were at sauna time, women and men, and after, one of the guys just walked out with a towel around like this, and the lama was horrified, he was in the presence of women. "What you do! You have no respect! There are women here. Please, go get dressed".

But it is remarkable, that these seeming cultural idiosyncrasies do not seem to become a problem at all. They are rationalized through Buddhist values, and generally seem to bring a more elevated state of mind to the practitioners, most of whom have been dedicating several hours a day over many years to the practice. Most of the elements, which at first could be marked as "cultural" are actually imbued with religious significance, and therefore strengthen commitment and practice. One example of this at Danakosha, was the story Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche shared at the opening ceremony, when presenting two new tall golden statues in the prayer hall. The statue of Buddha Shakyamuni was custom made for the Danakosha center at the Mindrolling Monastery in India, in accordance with the lineage tradition. At about the same time, a Chinese follower, who had pledged to sponsor Buddhist statues for dharma centers, had promised to send a Guru Rinpoche statue to Danakosha Ling. The kind offer was accepted, but the details were not discussed. The remarkable coincidence Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche pointed out to his students was that the donated statue came in exactly the same size, colour and style, as the Buddha statue, which the Chinese

benefactor could not have seen. In this way, the reconstruction of Shangri-la brings a special feel to the practice, the teacher, and the community.

4.3.3 Small narratives of tradition versus the meta-narrative of regional culture

Therefore, the assumption ground, rooted in essentialized ideas of "Eastern" and "Western" followers of Buddhism, needs to be replaced with a more realistic and grounded ones. Instead of fixed geographical categories, we need to appreciate individual tendencies and experiences of socialization. The modern exposure to media allows for significant contact with traditionally "Eastern" symbols and ideas, while globalization provides hereditary Buddhists with various views of the world and values, which are not Buddhist. The Buddhist doctrine, the way it is taught in FPMT and in Danakosha, does not create a sharp cultural "clash", but rather acts as a complex and internally diverse resource for the public to benefit from. As with any novel worldview system, it requires time to adjust, which the respondents were eager to invest, and which seemed to be an important factor in the process of accepting transempirical concepts. The extra-worldly, beyond-this-life ideas, such as karma and rebirth, Buddha nature and enlightenment, as well as non-physical beings, and helping people in their life and practice, are largely a pre-requisite for being a Buddhist in the eyes of the Buddhist teachers, and are an important part of the Buddhist worldview for most participants as well as seeming to have a strong pragmatic value to them. Ritual and physical representations of religion are also highly accepted and enjoyed, even though most people acknowledge that Buddhism would have a broader public appeal without them. Physical aspects such as art, chanting, architecture and pilgrimage sites, ritual activities and artefacts, and so on, are conceptualized through the Buddhist rationale, and also carry a pragmatic value, as well as being aesthetically stimulating to most participants.

The process of accepting these elements does not seem to be organic, though. Developing beliefs and engaging in practices seems to be largely shaped by traditional teachers bound by their lineages. This includes native Tibetan teachers, like Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche, but it also includes Elders on the FPMT forum, who despite being mostly of Western origin, are quite strict and traditional in their explanations. In this way, if we are looking for predicting power of our assumptions about "Western Buddhism", it makes sense to look at the flows of meaning-construction which rush along organizations and their policies, with their specific authority figures, saints and lineage texts, i.e. follow these *small narratives* within their historical perspective.

4.4 Inclusivity

One important difference between modern and pre-modern values is the importance of each individual's human dignity. All world religions originated in times when individual wellbeing and possibilities were easily neglected in favor of the predominant ideology, order or perceived common good. Modern humanist values, which stand in contrast to pre-modern discourses of Tibetan Buddhist religion among the forum participants and among the Helsinki students, could be grouped as follows: gender equality, freedom of sexuality, as well as adjustments to health obstacles and disability.

When it comes to Buddhist discourses around these issues, there has been a considerable amount of academic speculation and research, at least on the first two clusters above (eg, Gross, 1993; Leyland, 1998). In view of the 21st century civil rights movement and contemporary activism, it is easy to see the negotiation of women's position in the dharma, liberal attitudes towards homosexuality, as well as empowering people with disability, as western influences. Occasionally these issues also become assets in the negotiation of modern Western Buddhism, as opposed to its perceived pre-modern Oriental effigy. Some proponents of Buddhist modernism unite the perceived inflexibility of traditional Buddhism towards these issues together with its important doctrinal, devotional or structural parts, to use as an argument against all of the Buddhist tradition (Bubna-Litic and Higgins, 2010).

The idea that accepting important doctrinal tenets of Buddhism presupposes condoning some pre-modern discriminatory tendencies is based on a perception of a homogenized Other, which one can either fully embrace or fully alter or reject (Sharapan, under review). With respect to liberalizing sexual ethics in Buddhism, Corless (2000) demonstrates the difference between the Buddha's discourses found in Sutta Nikaya and later medieval Buddhist texts to claim the origination of homophobic sentiments in Asian Buddhist institutions, a phenomenon which he hands over to Western Buddhists to confront and resolve from their enlightened perspective. Looking at a broader range of examples, including phenomena from the colonial era and more modern diasporic groups, Vermeulen (2017) shows that on many occasions throughout history, it was Buddhists who experienced homophobic sentiments from a western influence. He gives many examples of Buddhist organizations not only showing tolerance, but providing support for LGBTQI individuals in the face of western intolerance, be it in the form of Christian missionary pressure, Marxist terror or conservative nationalists:

It thus falsifies the popular theory that activism for same-sex marriage (and by extension for non-discrimination of sexual orientation and gender identity) is a recent, atheist and Western demand that is alien to, and imposed upon, religious and/or non-Western cultures. (40)

It has been shown that, counter-intuitively to a popular assumption about "western influences" enhancing issues of sexuality, Buddhist study and practice tends to de-emphasize a LGBTQI identity, instead of making it more prominent (Gleig, 2012). The sheer diversity of attitudes regarding this topic, and importantly, the prominence they hold for the Buddhist practice undermines the intuitive East versus West generalizations. Attention should rather be drawn to specific discourses in specific circumstances, which may vary not just from one school or teacher to another, but even within the same person, as Scherer's (2014) research on neo-orthodox rhetoric by Lama Ole Nydahl of the Diamond Way shows. The relevance of sexuality for Buddhism, acceptance of LGBTQI, and activities related to embracing sexual diversity are all constructed in specific situations by different actors, or stake-holders. A negative example in contrast to Vermeulen (2017) could be the history of sexual abuse performed by queer members of FWBO (Triratna), described by Crook (1998). In that case, several LGBTQI individuals, who were attracted to the sangha for its emphatically homo-positive narrative in the 60s and 70s, used their hierarchical positions to seduce straight newcomers, using the Buddhist rhetoric of *anatta* an absence of a fixed and unchanging self, against the victims' perceived straightness. In this way the use of rhetoric, positive or negative, should consider power not only in terms of dominant meta-narratives and social forces, but also circumstantial hierarchy.

Another important cluster concerns the representation and position of women in the dharma. Previous studies have looked at scriptural, historical and structural aspects of the issue (Anālayo, 2008; Gross, 2004; Tsomo, 1988). Similarly to the previous topic, there is a tendency to seek to uncover the "real" or "actual" intention of the Buddha, or the spirit of Buddhism to guide the liberated and equality-driven "Westerners" with respect to women's position, against perceived Asian shackles of patriarchy. Goodwin (2012) on the other hand discusses the importance of role models in empowering women on the Buddhist spiritual path, and on the other the self-perpetuating power of discrimination. Swanepoel (2014) attributes the driving force in unraveling these discriminatory structures and discourses to Western women, specifically convert nuns. I largely agree with celebrating and empowering the role of Western scholarship and activism in bringing more equality to traditional Buddhist institutions. However I want to emphasize that these changes can and need to be made outside of the fixed categories of "equal West" and "patriarchal East". As the data analysis will demonstrate, tendencies both to perpetuate discrimination and to unravel it under the pressure of compassion and equanimity, exist on both sides of this conceptual divide, within the same organization, and even within the same person during one interview. The "West" has not overcome its patriarchy and stereotypical gendering habits, just like the "East" does not

remain stuck in its imagined conservativism. To place Western converts in the role of savior would be to neglect the endeavors, in traditional Buddhist cultures to liberate women (Härkönen, 2016; Quli, 2009). Categories marked by homogeneity and inherence act as blockers of change, rather than triggers for it.

The amount of research on the third cluster, disability, is only a fraction of the research on the previous two topics. That is understandable, in view of the proportion of disabled people in society, (compared to, say, women). However, I would argue, based on the data analysis, especially of the forum messages, that this area requires more attention, not only from researchers but also by Buddhist organizations. It would be a generalization, though a fair one, to say that in developed countries it is typical for people with disabilities to be included in society, to receive help from social services and to claim and receive their rights to representation and equal treatment. It would also be fair to link this expensive and unprecedented phenomenon of human history to humanistic modern values, which underlie many structures in Western democratic countries. However I see no reason, based on the data, to try to tie the absence of such attention and adjustments to the Eastern religion or structures of traditional Buddhism. Miles (2013) discusses how disability has been approached in the literature on Buddhism, specifically pointing to the incongruence of the modern western perception as he understands it with the Buddhist notion of karma: "Recently Jim Deitrick, at the Journal of Buddhist Ethics site, assembled data suggesting that {North} American Buddhists hardly take 'karma and rebirth' seriously - it's not a 'live option' for modern western thinkers"(168). However, the original source (Deitrick, 2011) is a conference paper that is a philosophical essay, rather than an empirical study. The author simply bases his argument on the intuitive claims of scholars of Western Buddhism, examined here in the previous section, and points out both the crucial role of the literal notion of karma for Buddhism, as well as its empirical improvability. On a very different note from Miles' (2013) understanding, Deitrick (2011, p.9) concludes in the following way:

> …a scientific concept of karma, such as that proposed by Dale Wright, is unlikely to satisfy people's religious aspirations, and so dramatically limits Buddhism's appeal for religious seekers. It also transforms the tradition to such an extent that many will have a hard time recognizing it as genuinely Buddhist.

The implication of Miles' (2013) logic would be that Buddhism should discard some of its most foundational elements if it wants to withstand its encounter with humanistic western values. As my data analysis will demonstrate, this view is rooted in both a misunderstanding of karma and an ethnocentric bias. By contrast, Scheulka (2015) shows how differently (in form) and yet similarly (in essence) disability can be discussed within the modern example of Bhutan a country, infused with Tibetan Buddhist culture and religion. Western influence on the social landscape of Bhutan is undeniable and should be seen as triggering similar humanistic discourses from within the narratives and values of its own religion and culture, rather than as a foreign imposition. Instead of drawing a geographical divide, I would connect the presence or absence of adjustments for

disability to material and structural factors. In my analysis, I will include healthy conditions requiring adjustment, including psychological health, under the same cluster of disability. Although these things are not the same, analyzing them follows the same logic: they are about adjustments, which are made or not made in Tibetan Buddhist organizations and groups towards those who require them.

In addition, in connection with the attitudes of the Buddhist students and teachers towards these three broad themes, I will discuss how both students and teachers bring up the Buddhist notion of karma. This is an essential question, since a literal understanding of karma is often put forward as an obstacle to embracing humanistic values among Buddhists (Miles, 2013; Wright, 2005). At the same time, a literal understanding of karma seems to be not just the only one logically compatible with the rest of Buddhist doctrine and goals, but also the only logically coherent one (Deitrick, 2011; Faure, 2017; Gombrich, 2009; Lin & Yen, 2015).

Despite being clearly present on the forum, the issues related to inclusivity were rather sporadic compared to the actual doctrinal and practical elements of Tibetan Buddhism. When going through the forum posts to find indicators of doctrinal and formal reduction (or the opposite), I found categories and relevant quotes in virtually every post. Overall, including the interviews with teachers and students, I had 31 categories, some with up to 106 quotes to them. When I was doing the analysis for this section, I had to go over long chains of posts which mentioned absolutely nothing related to these issues. Altogether, I had 14 categories with 2 to 63 relevant quotes to them.

4.4.1 Position of women as reflected among students and teachers

Looking at the forum messages from a gender point of view, there were no apperent conflicts between modern ideals of gender equality and the Tibetan Buddhism taught in the programs. After all, three out of five Elders on the forum are female, and so are many students, including senior ones. While both founders of FPMT (Lama Thupten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche) were / are male, their first prominent Western student and benefactor was the first ordained nun, Zina Rachevsky, and one of FPMT's highest ranking teachers is a lay woman, Khando la. However, since the students are educated by a classic Tibetan Buddhist curriculum based on traditional texts, an old-fashioned view of the position of women in the dharma does surface every now and then, catching the attention of the students.

One conversation thread specifically tackled the issue of the position of women in the dharma. One student (female) noticed a passage in the *Liberation in the palm of your hand* by Pabongka Rinpoche that refers to a fortunate human rebirth free from imperfections, such as a missing limb or the female gender. With respectful recognition that this topic must have been discussed plenty of times, she inquired whether she misunderstood something (in typical display of intellectual humility, as discussed earlier in Democratization). The first answer was by a male Elder, recommending her to skip unhelpful passages, since the aim of such claims is pragmatic: to increase a sense of urgency in one's practice out of awareness of rare goof fortune of one's condition (such as a male body free

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from disabilities). Some other women, Elders and students, give their interpretations, blaming the claim on the times, when the text was written, and emphasizing that the level of gender equality in the modern world is still a very new phenomenon, and not a global phenomenon. One female Elder referred to Lama Yeshe quoting Guru Padmasambhava saying that women have a greater potential to achieve enlightenment than men. The initial comment of the male Elder, however, gets some attention. A female student, Anna Mullen, said the comment actually perpetuated the same pre-modern mentality:

> I find it against the Buddhist ideas of equanimity and compassion. Simply recommending to "skip" what you cannot accept does not address this important topic duly; I would expect a large organization like FPM to have a better stance with respect to this crucial question. (paraphrased)

This topic did spring up in other threads every now and then, but not as often as one might expect. It also did not seem to cause that much of a stir, with many students remaining non-judgmental about such elements until they get clarified. One student in a thread on faith brought up praying to always be born male as one of the "tenets" that she "kept on a high shelf" in her mind, tolerating if not accepting it. The issue of gender equality was also discussed with respect to monastic ordination. The students and Elders seem to be putting the issue of the full ordination of nuns into a historical and hermeneutic perspective, paying attention to the practical side, such as receiving refuge vows from a nun (which is common in FPMT).

Gender equality came up more often in the interview with the Helsinki practitioners, since they were asked directly: "Are there differences between male and female practitioners?" The most common answer to this question is either "no", or some pondering on general differences between the sexes, without reference to their abilities in dharma practice. It is important to mention that for many practitioners I interviewed, the most important teachers have been female ones, especially nuns. Antonio, for example, accords a special place his female teachers, even though he mainly studies with a male one: "If you are in the room with the teacher, you can feel the presence. With Ven. Robina and Khandro Rinpoche I can even feel it through the web. But when I was there it was amazing". When talking of their female teachers, the students did not specifically mention their gender, a fact which may indicate that gender is not a significant factor in following the teachers, and that their own perception reflects gender-neutrality. Among those who answered the question with some sort of a theory on how men and women are different in general, I still did not think that the issue was a big obstacle in their adoption of Buddhism. Their characterization would reflect not some things they might have read in Buddhist texts, but rather common, pop-cultural stereotypes about men and women. Petri, for example, referred to stand-up comedy:

> I: Are there differences between male and female practitioners?

Petri: I recall a funny western comedy show, or some stand-up piece we watched the other night. It was about, like, how women think in a totally different way than men.

When asked how the comedian's observations could be a reflection of the path for men and women, Petri mentioned the stereotypical interconnection of thoughts and emotions in women. In general, among the students and the teachers alike, the perceived emotionality of women was sometimes mentioned, albeit in different ways. No one perceived it to be an obstacle, however, making women pray for a male rebirth. Rather, it sounded like an innocent observation about different peculiarities and approaches.

The same reference to common stereotypes occurred in some interviews with the lamas. Geshe Gelek drew no distinction from the perspective of Buddha nature: "Both have the mind, mind has potential to achieve enlightenment. The potential in the Bön tradition, there are a lot of female practitioners who achieved rainbow body in one life-time, also male practitioners." Khenpo Ngawang Yorden and Ringu Tulku Rinpoche pointed out that there are differences between men and women, but in terms of practice they should be seen as equal. Geshe Sherab pointed out that men and women have differences in terms of some emotional reactions, and Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche humorously pointed out: "They're doing everything differently, why only Buddhism?" Although when it comes to the "power of practice" in Mahayana, men and women are treated equally.

However, even though most students and all teachers agreed that men and women have equal potential for practice, many students mentioned that family life and taking care of children become a greater obstacle for women. Marina, an experienced member of Danakosha and a mother herself, explains:

If we look at the core practice, I don't think there is [a difference]. Mind is the same. "Mind" [air quotes]. But there is [a difference], on the practical side. If a woman has children, then in terms of time, she cannot do it as much. And if both people in a family are practitioners, then the man's practice is prioritized over the woman's in many homes. So that the woman is with the kids anyway, and the man is practicing.

Several female students did not mention this problem explicitly, but they referred to situations, when their children interfered with practice. Agata mentioned this with respect to keeping a formal altar at home: "I don't have an altar for practical reasons, because my son would take things away, I couldn't leave anything there. Because of that." She also mentioned, that she did not hear or receive much from the recent visit by Sakya Trinzin Rinpoche, because she "was after" her son all the time. Agata was the only interviewee who also pointed out that women are regarded in an inferior position to men in all cultures, including Finland, and that the differences are just a matter of degree. At the same time, though, a male student of FPMT, Tomi, also mentioned that his (and his partner's) practice lessened considerably when they had their first child.

In both these groups female teachers (such as Khandro Rinpoche and Ven. Robina Courtin) have been very prominent, and some students mentioned other

popular female teachers in their responses. However it is also true that globally most teachers, Geshes, lamas etc. are male. It has not been long since the official title of Geshema was introduced, giving nuns the possibility to receive a degree in Buddhist philosophy. Full monastic ordination is still an unresolved issue, which despite vocal support from many prominent Tibetan Buddhist agents (such as the Dalai-Lama and Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje), has been delayed due to what Swanepoel (2014; 592) calls "procrastination tactics". The way Tibetan nuns and lay practitioners are treated in Tibet, Bhutan and Tibetan diasporas (Goodwin, 2012; Härkönen, 2016; Wangmo, Edo & Fadzil, 2018) still leaves a lot of room for improvement, making the idea of "equal potential" sound like bitter irony. When I asked Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche about why there are so few prominent female teachers, he answered that "amount is not important; […] lion is much smaller amount than insect." Indeed, Khandro Rinpoche, who has been mentioned by many respondents, and highly revered by many Buddhists in Finland, including myself, has been a regular and honorable guest at Danakosha. At the same time it is important to note that Khandro Rinpoche is not only a brilliant teacher in her own right, but also a daughter of the late Minling Trichen Rinpoche, Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche's main guru, and a former head of the Nyingma school. The presence of such prominent female teachers fulfills a need for strong role-models for nuns and lay female practitioners alike. However it does not compensate for the lack of structures supporting girls and women in their ordination, education and practice that is especially blatant in traditional hierarchies in Asia but also present in Western societies presumed to enjoy gender equality. In my view, the presence of "lions" like Khandro Rinpoche should make one wonder how many more potentially brilliant teachers are held back by impenetrable patriarchal structures simply, because they were not born into a more suitable gender or family.

4.4.2 Sexuality in forum messages, and interviews with students and teachers

When it comes to the second cluster of issues, related to acceptance of LGBTQI and the flexibility of sexual ethics, there was even less discussion on the forum during the period of my data collection. Within over about a thousand threads there were only two which mentioned sexual ethics in relation to homosexuality in the contexts of a Buddhist lay vow and the karma of 'sexual misbehavior'. One thread where the issue was brought up was initiated by a married gay man who wanted to clarify whether homosexuality is considered negative karma in Buddhism. As students and Elder shared their ideas, it became clear that students understood sexual ethics contextually, rather than taken literally from medieval texts. For example, Silvia Hampshire expressed her opinion as a practitioner:

> Fortunately, I don't believe homosexuality is considered sexual misconduct any more than heterosexual sex presuming no one is inflicting any harm. I interpret 'harm' as emotional or physical, so two consenting adults not harming each other or anyone else would be okay.

Another student also referred to an article by Alexander Berzin[21], explaining Tibetan Buddhist sexual ethics through the cultural contexts of the different mores of Tibet and monastic structures. An Elder's response, which followed, was interesting. He recommended the inquirer to rely on the wording of the vow and the conceptualization, provided specifically by his teacher. This position reflects a constructed nature of sexual ethics with respect to LGBQI, but also its compelling force once it is constructed and accepted, such as in the form of a vow received in a certain wording from one's teacher. Such view should invite closer attention to how the mores are being constructed, discussed and voiced, because once a vow is received in a certain way it is believed to be binding for the rest of one's life, and breaching the vow is seen as not only engaging in the prohibited negative karmic action, but also in a negative act of breaching a vow itself, which harms one's relations both to the teacher and to the Three Jewels.

In view of this, I will take the liberty of analyzing a thread which appeared after the end of my data collection, in 2020. In that conversation a gay student inserted a quote from Pabongka's Liberation, prohibiting sex using "all orifices except the vagina", and asked whether his homosexuality would be considered negative karma by default. The thread is too long to render, but what struck me when reading it was that some Elders and some students expressed opinions in line with the text. In more or less polite terms, some people would instruct the inquirer not to take a vow against sexual misconduct (nowadays commonly seen as adultery and sexual coercion), or assured him that it is not being gay which is negative, but it is gay sex. One Elder mentioned that heterosexual sex is considered accepted, because it produces new people, and then remembered that even this end can nowadays be met without sex. One student posed the question of whether one is seriously committed to the Buddhist path to enlightenment, because if one were, in her understanding, one would avoid anything seen as "sexual misconduct". There were some reassuring voices as well, of course. Some shared links to videos with teachers such as Jeffrey Hopkins and Dzogsar Khyentse Rinpoche, where they clearly addressed the issue of homosexuality as not an obstacle in any way. Jeffrey Hopkins, for one, has written a book instructing gay Buddhists in tantric sexual practices. The remarkable thing was the reaction to the posts, which behind polite and courteous phrasing demonstrated clearly exclusivist homo-negative unsubstantiated beliefs. Two gay students participating in the discussion answered the posts with respect and patience, trying to deliver the message that they did not choose to be gay, and their intimate relationships with their partners were just as important for them, as these are typically for straight people. They also shared their feelings of being excluded and unwelcome, especially due to the history of rejection in the culture and faith they were born into. The Elders did not address the homo-negative beliefs of some students and clearly infringed some students.

In this way, considering the ongoing construction of the perception of sexual ethics and homosexuality, the data illustrates that there was no clear

[21] https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/lam-rim/karma-advanced/buddhist-sexual-ethics-an-historical-perspective

policy or direction which FPMT as an organization was taking in this construction. The organization's representatives, Elders and students, showed tolerance towards homosexuality, but also towards homo-negative, poorly substantiated beliefs perpetuated by some students and teachers in Tibetan Buddhism.

The analysis of the interview data produced a more extended picture. When asked, whether a gay or lesbian person would be welcome in their group, all students answer positively. A few of them mentioned some people who are openly gay in their group, and even hold important positions. Two participants mentioned that becoming a Buddhist actually made them more open-minded and tolerant. For example Alex, who grew up in a conservative Orthodox culture, said:

> Alex: Well, not every one even in this country talks openly about it. I don't know, I'm okay with that, because… why not, if a person get pleasure by giving pleasure to someone else, why not? Being Orthodox, I was against it, yes. (laughs). Indeed.
>
> I: Is it because of Buddhism or because of living in this country?
>
> Alex: I think both factors. I came to see that there is no evil behind it absolutely, unlike how I saw it when I was 20. Now I even see that if the animal world confirms it, if some animals feel attracted to those of their own sex, it is just a manifestation of life, for instance, it wants pleasure in such away. Again, this pleasure is not connected with procreation, maybe it takes one away from practice, shifts accents to some more bodily aspects of being human. I am myself very dependent on it, although I understand what I deal with, but at this moment I also cannot live without it. And this is part of my life, naturally.
>
> I: You mean that they live with the same feelings, but towards people of the same sex?
>
> Alex: Yes, exactly. I cannot blame anyone, I don't have a moral right to do it. And I have no hostile feelings towards them.

Petri also pointed out that the atmosphere is set by different voices, and like everywhere, occasional individual homo-negative views, even as jokes, can be spotted:

> It's difficult to say who is [homophobic], since people easily throw around all kinds of jokes, that… people joke about things, so it's hard, if it's not like… at work at least, I can notice, that easily spot something like that, or maybe it's just harsh male humor. In such example people can easily get the label of a being racist or homophobic.

And then he added that being in a Buddhist group is more likely to dilute such voices, than add to them:

> But maybe in Buddhism it's difficult to spot, if everyone is compassionate and such, maybe it doesn't come to the surface even when somebody might be slightly homophobic.

It is interesting, however, that for most respondents the acceptance of LGBTQI in their groups and in Buddhism is seen as a matter of multiple opinions among their teachers, debate, and hermeneutic interpretation. At the same time, the issue of sexual ethics remains separate, because it is not the main point of the practice. Ilona observes this explicitly: "since we're not about having sex here (laughing), this sexual orientation thing stays separate". I also realized it happened implicitly. When some students started mentioning the instructions, which Sakya Trinzin Rinpoche left during his visit right before my interviews, which Marina vividly described: "He was the first lama I have heard, who said into a microphone to a huge audience: "no oral, no anal"". Marina wondered how homosexuals, who were present at the teachings must have felt. Many other students, who have been practicing for more than ten years, like Marina, were also surprised by this incident, which made me wonder whether their teacher, Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche, ever mentioned these passages in texts at all. In the other group, few people seemed to have given it a thought either. Erik spoke on the basis of his experience with FPMT:

> But I can't [say] for very certain, but I feel that I don't yet very well know of the community, if I talk to maybe a couple of hundred people of FPMT people, maybe in five years I will give more clear answer.

Tomi, also from the FPMT group, recalled the issue of sexual ethics being discussed on a retreat he had attended in Nepal:

> I haven't read any sutras myself or anything where it would be written this way, but I understood, I don't know, was it so that someone asked about it or… Probably, it was when I was in Nepal at a one-month course in the monastery, people asked different things, and yeah, I understood, that there is something wrong in it [anal sex].

The issue of homosexuality is easily left undiscussed, as something irrelevant to the practice. The array of opinions in Tibetan Buddhist groups in the West remains diverse, and Buddhist texts have a strong emphasis on universal compassion and acceptance, as well as referring to instances of "sexual misconduct", which may mark gay couples out as inherent sinners. From the answers, it is clear, that there is a lot of space for debate around this unjustly marginalized issue. Even though, as some respondents point out, these same restrictions concern heterosexual couples in the same way, they do reflect on LGBTQI individuals much more strongly, affecting their sense of feeling at home and belonging to the religion.

Since many students refer not only to the texts, but rather to common sense, the opinions of their teachers and the stances of their organizations, it is useful to look at what the teachers have to say about the matter. Geshe Gelek mentioned that homosexuality does not receive much attention in Tibetan culture, either positive or negative, and when Buddhism comes to the West, it should not matter either:

> GG: I think I see in the West many gay or lesbian, following, so. So they can also come.

I: Do you think these things can affect practice? These factors, like gender, sexual orientation?

GG: No.

Geshe Sherab, who is a resident teacher in New Mexico FPMT, is emphatic about Tibetan Buddhism's need for inclusivity: "Absolutely. This should be. And no two minds in that, should be, in my perspective." He also mentioned that homo-negative views occur among Tibetans and Americans alike. Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche ironically made a point that Buddhist compassion should be universal: "I think, if they are sentient beings, we should welcome. Buddha says all sentient beings, should be treated equally, even animals, all kinds of things, and I think gays and lesbians must be included in all sentient beings." In view of same-sex marriages being a current issue in modern Christian communities and the fact that some Buddhist groups had started blessing same-sex couples long before it became legal (Vermeulen, 2017), I asked Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche whether he had any experience of that. Since he holds official proxies to conduct a marriage ceremony (as a priest) and in Finland same-sex marriage is legal. He said he would have no problem doing that, although he has never had a chance to. His view was that one should always follow the local ways and mores. Ringu Tulku Rinpoche went even further with relativizing sexual ethics according to contemporary and local ways and norms by relativizing the Vinaya:

RTR: Indian society, maybe gay is not regarded very good. If you look into the Vinaya, maybe you will find that that's not good, that's not allowed and things like that. That may be treated as sexual misconduct in some cases, things like that. In Tibetan society… But these are about the society, nothing to do with Buddhism. Buddhism it's all the same.

I: So even though it's written in the Vinaya, you will see it as a reflection of the social norms of the time?

RTR: Yeah, it is. It is.

I: Not the dharma.

RTR: Vinaya is very much based on the society.

Khenpo Ngawang Yorden also assured people of any sexuality are welcome, adding that "in my tradition nothing is important, except the mind". Then he talked about different tendencies of the mind that people might have, such as being attracted to people of the opposite sex with attachment, or people of the same sex, and also about different circumstances, where one's sexuality could matter. Then he made an interesting assumption:

I: That would matter for example, if this gay man, someone wants to become a monk, and will have to live in a monastery.

KNJ: Then you have to be careful. You shouldn't be alone with him, otherwise you may get raped, who knows. You have to be… you have to be vigilant, you know. Look around your surroundings.

One might easily see his apprehension as an expression of homophobia. However, I believe that the explicit messages of the teachers should be focused on more than their potential hidden biases, fears and other baggage they might carry from their upbringing. It is important to keep in mind that exclusivist attitudes can be diminished only through open discussion. It is therefore important for those taking a homo-positive stance to bring up the issue and defend equal treatment whenever possible, but also for Buddhist organizations to think through, to voice and to publish their official inclusive stance, which can later be referred to in case of incidents, and which would explicitly welcome people who otherwise may hesitate, wondering, whether their sexuality can prevent them from practicing on equal basis as Buddhists.

4.4.3 Adjustments to physical and mental disability

The third cluster of problematics was related to dealing with health obstacles and disability. In the analysis, I also included serious health restrictions, psychological trauma and psychopathology. These issues were exceptionally prominent from the very beginning, throughout the seven years of forum discussions. At first many users ask questions related to their health conditions, which require adjustments to the practice. Second, some students stumble upon the criteria for a "precious human rebirth", set forth in many texts for practitioners to appreciate the freedoms and opportunities they possess for practicing Buddhism. One of the first threads was the one where a user (Silvia Perkins) asked for clarification about a passage on precious human rebirth in Lama Zopa Rinpoche's book, which states that the reader should rejoice in not being deaf (among a number of other obstacles), because otherwise they would not be able to hear teachings, communicate with people and become a monk or a nun. An Elder explained how to relate to the passage by admitting that people with restricted physical ability or deaf people nowadays can receive help, but the quotation is still relevant to some degree, because there are health restrictions, which form practical obstacles. She continued:

Our human life, with the eighteen qualities, offers us the opportunity to attain enlightenment in this lifetime. If any of those qualities are missing, while it may be possible to engage in some level of practice, it might be impossible for us to attain enlightenment in this lifetime.

While the Elder's comment was in line with traditional interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism, the practical value of such logic for the forum and offline communities is debatable. In fact, the number of people with serious health restrictions among the forum users seems very considerable and quite disproportionate. In part it can be connected with the phenomenon discussed in the fifth section, namely, the audience of online dharma. In view of this, the

response of Tibetan Buddhist organizations to the challenges experienced by their followers in terms of adjustment to physical and psychological restrictions, becomes especially important.

Based on the threads where disability is discussed, it appears that studying Buddhism online and engaging in practice is not only adjusted to different physical restrictions, but is reported to have a beneficial effect on fading abilities. Some students also bring up passages from the same books and text, which set criteria for optimal human rebirth, sharing stories when people were able to overcome the restrictions and make the most of their practice. Many students are able to place the teachings in their cultural and temporal context, for example, Amanda Cornely:

> This teaching is 2500 years old. The technology to overcome the obstacles to studying and practicing the dharma has only become widely available in the past ten to thirty years. We're in a time of great change and eventually that teaching will need to be revised by one of the masters to include the richness of access to technology.

This understanding among students seemed to be quite common. Due to practical adjustments, such as hearing aid, and many examples of people with health restrictions being ordained and becoming dedicated practitioners within FPMT, some users also raised questions of why there is a need to present such exclusivist viewpoints.

An obstacle for discussing health restrictions for some students on the forum is conceptualizing them through the idea of karmic cause and effect. Several respondents on the forum brought this up, for example:

> With this logic, karma sounds like a punishment. I can't understand why some people who did no wrong, it appears, have to suffer so much, not depending on their actions in past lives. When a child is murdered in a war, it's impossible for me to know for sure that they died because they did something in one of their past lives. (paraphrased)

Elders and senior students address this difficulty immediately, by admitting the seeming injustice and explaining the misunderstanding, and where it might come from. On the face of it, these remarks support the ideas voiced by some Buddhist intellectuals, about an inherent difficulty in accepting the idea of karma for Westerners, such as Wright (2005, 78): "It is important for us to do so because Buddhist (and Hindu) teachings on karma and a moral life have now entered contemporary currents of Western thought and culture, and deserve to be scrutinized for their potential value and weaknesses". However on closer look, the majority of newcomers to the forum have no problem with this conceptualization, and some students actually express finding the karmic explanation more insightful. For example, Adam MacCain shares his experience:

> I spent a long time thinking of what I did in my previous lives, that lead to this situation. Today I suddenly realized, that it's unimportant. To begin with, this question can only be resolved by a Buddha, because one has to be a Buddha to see all karmic elements. Then, the fact that I have to face all this suffering is actually positive, because

it exhausts my karma. And lastly, having this disability allowed me to learn multiple skills, which are not available to many other people.

Interviews with the members of FPMT Helsinki and Danakosha, do not reflect either difficulty accepting karmic causes for disability or any value conflict around the criteria for a precious human rebirth, as much as the forum messages do. As discussed in the previous section, all interviewees accepted the notion of karma in a literal sense. With respect to negative things happening to good people, there was only one student who mentioned that he was uncomfortable with the idea, Antonio, from Danakosha:

> It was difficult in the beginning to accept that someone especially if something bad happened to children or people that are innocent. That even if of course it's not right in this life whatever happened to them, but whatever happened to them is kind of their fault, and related to their past karma, and it's, that's quite difficult to accept. And the fact that you should be more compassionate not to the one that suffers but the person who causes suffering to this, especially innocent, of course we feel more compassion towards people who are innocent, that's… Karma makes sense to me, so this should make sense to me, too, rationally, but emotionally it's very difficult to accept.

His explanation shows, that his own difficulty to accept karmic causes for, disability, for example, comes not from a rational objection, but from an emotional barrier. One forum participant provided an explanation for why there could be difficulty for many people to accept the idea, and he explained that in his culture it is typical to consider people who have trespassed against some moral norms or law, as deserving suffering, an idea that would be in conflict with a Buddhist view. Therefore, I can make a bold assumption here that the difficulty could stem from an understanding of the concept of *justice*, where people who are not innocent are guilty and therefore *deserve* to suffer. Also, the emotional difficulty accepting karmic cause and effect with respect to the suffering of innocent people does not entail disbelief in karma or core Buddhist philosophy, like Wright (2005) assumes. Antonio actually confessed that he always believed something along these lines:

> And I certainly kind of believe in that, what goes around comes around eventually. Even if I didn't name it as karma, I always believed that eventually if you do something wrong to another, it will come back to you. So giving it a name and explanation to that, it makes sense.

Just as the unfortunate correlation between smoking and lung cancer or bacon and bowel cancer should not undermine health science, the belief in the karmic cause and effect, if taken seriously, should not be undermined just because people may have emotional difficulties accepting it.

An interview with an FPMT member, Alex, was particularly interesting for this topic, since his profession presupposed constant contact with people with restricted physical and mental ability, something he considered part of his Buddhist practice. He explained:

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I: Can a mentally or physically challenged person engage in Buddhist path? Or a blind or deaf person, or someone with a Down syndrome?

Alex: I think yes. I work with such people, and I think yes. I was told by Robina Courtin to chant mantras with them, om mani padme hum, or medicine Buddha mantra. And I do so. I chant them and some react negatively, say, stop this, but often I prefer to do it to myself. But the main thing at this moment is wishing the person well, wishing them to get rid of this terrible suffering, when he cannot subdue his anger or his madness, or practically cannot. And… I really hope it is a really passing karma, than in their next life, this being due to maybe these wishes of mine, prayers, my touch, care, well-wishing, maybe he will get some better luck, because many of them experienced terrible suffering in their "healthy life", because every one of them, practically, had the potential for schizophrenia, or some other disease. As for practice… some of them can do it, one of them practices meditation. He just sits, I don't know how, what this person experiences at this moment. He can really sit in a lotus posture for hours.

Most of the people he takes care of function poorly, but some of even those people are apparently capable of practicing meditation on a serious level. Alex has no problem believing in karmic cause and effect, and he sees "hell" as a state of mind, giving an example of a patient he has had, who lost his mind after a bad car accident. He also speaks of Buddhist practice as requiring "a certain karmic element". So, in fact, according to this logic, a disabled Buddhist practitioner, suffering from the results of karmic can still be considered lucky, due to having a karmic connection to Buddhist practice.

Many other students from both groups mention that of course one's Buddhist practice and lifestyle could be restricted by a physical or mental obstacle, but at the same time they confirm that their centers are visited by people with serious restrictions, and they receive the help they need. It must be noted that I did not have a person with physical or mental restrictions among my interviewees to confirm that the facilities and assistance were indeed sufficient.

According to Danakosha members, some people with physical and mental restrictions do attend their teachings and events. Their lama, Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche, expressed the opinion that learning, committing and practicing are definitely possible, and the restrictions around ordination concern more a person's perceived ability to make responsible decisions. He also said that a person whose hearing and/or speech are challenged can learn "very well", "if you have a high intellect". However, he did not challenge the existing list of eight freedoms and ten faculties which provoked discord on the forum. Other teachers, generally agreed that physical or even mental restrictions are not obstacles to study and practice. Geshe Gelek pointed out that such practitioners exist in Tibet, where he grew up, and they can understand and put teachings to practice, even though sometimes in society they do face discrimination:

Your mind is clear, but there is no talk. Also can be. The real essence, the knowledge of Buddhism is not in the words, it comes in the heart, experience. So that way, they have sharp mind, but they cannot talk. Normally we judge they cannot think, but they can think. Whatever feelings we have, they can be rejected in the society, disabled persons.

Khenpo Nagwang Jorden mentions the same point, with respect to monastic ordination. In his understanding while any amount of practice could be done, according to personal capacities, ordination is a serious decision which should be made with a stable mind and also with due consideration of one's circumstances: "Because to become a monk you have to sign like this. So they don't know what they are signing. They have to get also permission from your teachers, from your governor, your city mayor, like that." Geshe Sherab mentioned that disabilities can be of varying severity, and in some cases there is no obstacle to practice at all. Buddhist commitments entail a strong responsibility, however, so stable decision-making is important when taking them on:

> The thing is if you take those initiations, you have to be, to have the capacity to really understand and get it and to be able to keep whatever requirements, precepts and commitments to that, and whether they have the capacity to do those, these are the things they have to think about. Not only with disability, but also without disability, you know. This is something you have to think of.

He makes an important point that some levels of practice are difficult even without disability. Ringu Tulku Rinpoche was categorical about with restrictions to practice, but then he admitted that obstacles are relative, and brought a useful example:

> I: So it would be impossible for someone who has some kind of mental disorder, or maybe physical...
>
> RTR: It depends on what kind of disorder. What kind of. If you have physical disorders, yes, you can do it, you can practice. But with mental disorders, it depends on how bad, if you can't understand anything, you cannot, you know... the question of practice does not arise.
>
> I: But I mean those kind of cases of maybe, schizophrenia, or something like that.
>
> RTR: These kind of things, I think they can practice.
>
> I: Have you ever had students with severe disabilities like that?
>
> RTR: Yes, yes, there're lots of people, who have schizophrenia, all different kinds of, different levels of problems. And they, yeah, some of them can do very well also. But it's also, you know. It's also different from one person to another.
>
> I: And physically, for example, if someone is in a wheelchair, do you think it would be realistic for them to become a Buddhist practitioner?
>
> RTR: That's absolutely no problem.
>
> I: Or like, deaf or blind.
>
> RTR: No problem at all. I have a monk, actually, who has been blind from birth. He's my French translator. And he's so good... (Laughs) Everybody gets completely astonished when he translates.

Rinpoche's example with the blind translator can be a great inspiration for people with serious restrictions. In general, based on the forum messages and the interviews, it becomes clear that the way physical and mental restrictions are conceptualized, discussed and treated, is constructed in the push-and-pull process between dharma texts, teachers and followers. Many forum users and interviewees make it clear they are aware of the logic behind these traditional ways, and see the social, cultural, and perhaps, economic factors behind them. Also, the role of more experienced students, Elders, and, of course, teachers, becomes very prominent, since they are the ones who explain these points, in ways, which can be either discouraging and exclusivist, or empowering and inspiring.

4.4.4 Practical conclusions

As I mentioned above, accommodating of and adjusting to physical and mental challenges that some followers might experience is very important. The forum data shows that many people who experience such challenges are attracted to the religion (especially, online), they often have more drive to practice, as well as leisure. It is also a manifestation of the key value of Tibetan Buddhism, compassion, to be inclusive and adaptive in taking such practitioners seriously. Since adjustment requires extra effort and money, it is important to keep in mind that *equal* treatment will not be enough. Instead, it is important for centers to strive for more *equity* and to accommodate various physical and mental restrictions.

The same concerns the two previous themes, sexual minorities and women. Due to the history of subjugation in both the East and the West, empowering discourses (Goodwin, 2012), highlighting role-models (Tsomo, 2009), and giving broader practical possibilities, are all important for proving that minds are indeed equal regardless of gender. When it comes to sexuality, a reformulation of rules and mores, which arose from certain cultural and (especially) institutional circumstances, is crucial. The view that the communities will be free from sexism and homophobia now that Tibetan Buddhism has rooted in the West, is based on essentialized categories, and simply untrue. Unfortunately these phenomena have a global presence, and may be manifested by the side of Western practitioners, Elders and teachers, even if only tacitly. When they are combined with stable sacralized religious constructions, dredged up from pre-modern times, these carry the potential for discrimination, discouragement, and exclusivism. Because of the history of discrimination around the globe, manifesting as distrust in some traditional Buddhist societies and taking much more gruesome forms in the West, simply allowing LGBTQI individuals in is not sufficient. The fact that a gay identity of a practitioner is irrelevant to their group and their teachers, does not mean it is as irrelevant to them. Some examples on the forum and in the interviews, discussed above, demonstrate that there is a need to address the matter more openly and explicitly.

4.5 Online religion

Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them; that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.

Lao Tzu

The intersection of Tibetan Buddhism in the West and internet research offers an abundant terrain of questions to explore. Campbell (2013) observed that subjects related to religion on the internet tend to reflect the overall array of topics within internet research. She addresses some common concerns, predictions and assumptions made about the Internet by researchers in 1990s, and demonstrates how most of them did not stand up to a reality check. For example a common concern that researchers in religion expressed with respect to the influence of the Internet, was that religious followers would be losing a sense of congregation, and the new virtual reality would hinder their socialization. What is in fact observed through data-based research and the development of research problematics is rather a blurring of online and offline boundaries, and "facilitating fluid performances of religious identities and contributing to shifting conceptions of authority" (Campbell, 2013; 689). In other words, the online religious activities and manifestations became so intertwined with the offline structures and entities, that it does not make sense to differentiate between them as two separate planes of reality. As a consequence of this interrelatedness, transformations are both mirrored and affected by each other.

A major shift that is happening due to the new mediatized reality is a shift from local to translocal levels in the negotiation of Tibetan Buddhism. Bringing up the national categories so favored by many researchers focusing on Buddhism in the West (or anywhere, today, for that matter), I will quote a preface to a recent edited volume *Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States* (Mitchell and Quli, 2015). Quli and Mitchell (2015) discuss the factors contributing to the translocal spread of different schools of Buddhism in recent years, including online affordances, and ask the following question: "Given this connectivity, one might ask whether the category of the US Buddhism is even still relevant" (ix) Their answer is emphatically *yes*, because:

> While we cannot study US Buddhism without being attentive to transnational cultural flows, we must also be aware of how such transnational cultural flows express themselves within a particular local context of the United States, *within* borders. (ix)

I cannot help but see a contradiction in looking at the spread of Buddhism in terms of translocal flows (Tweed, 2011), and seeing the US Buddhism as a separate category. Based on my own data analysis, my argument is that the impact of a specific narrative, stirred by certain people or organizations is much greater and more tangible (even on the level of language use and thematic categories) than any local cultural or national context. I do believe researchers can fruitfully research 'American Buddhists' in order to better understand the

part of the US populace, who see themselves or are seen as Buddhists in their social contexts to better understand national religious or cultural dynamics. Also, studying Buddhism in the US makes a lot of sense when we are investigating how the various specific trends have manifested themselves and taken root on the soil of the specific country with all its local peculiarities. However I see issues with identifying a concrete 'American Buddhism' (or any other national Buddhisms for that matter) among other contemporary Buddhisms. The trends and flows within 'American Buddhism' are many and various, and their affiliation should be traced in conjunction with other global trends, rather than merely related to their specific location and supposed national belonging. Based on my own analysis and other available studies, I admit that a relocation in a specific country (US, Finland or Russia) can be a good and practical angle to approach these global flows. But I would be wary of making a conceptual step towards projecting a new (American, Finnish or Russian) form of Buddhism in each case, assuming that the local context has a causal efficacy of its own. The differences among global trends and flows would be much stronger than those among, say, branches of the same organization in the US, Israel, Denmark or Russia, whenever their religious belief and practice are concerned.

Nevertheless, the facility and intuitive appeal of 'American Buddhism' may provide some research insights which could apply to other national, as well as global contexts. For example a survey-based study (Ostrowski, 2006) on internet usage among American Buddhists reveals many interesting cues, resonating and explaining my observations on the forum, as well as those by my interviewees. Among them are the types of groups which tend to flock together online, common categories of people, who keep most of their religious study and practice online. The category of online American Buddhism is also in line with and partly originates from the early research in online Buddhism. Prebish (2004) claims that early users of Buddhist online resources were predominantly American. He also describes the landscape of online Buddhist formations, demonstrating their ecumenical nature. Even though in his own depiction many of those formations, such as the Buddhist Resource File or still operating BuddhaNet, were (co-)founded by Asian teachers or universities. In this way, while "American Buddhism online" could have been a phenomenon of research back in the early days of the mass spread of the internet, nowadays the online landscape is so mixed, that the idea of online space within national borders becomes even more difficult to defend.

I believe that in the contemporary circumstances looking at religion in national terms can lead to potential fallacies. As an example, Smith (2012) characterizes "American Buddhism" as "a small foreign religion" (301), and, based on the analysis of the mutual interconnection of links on a number of Buddhism-related websites, as internally intertwined and therefore homogenous. While the conclusion regarding homogeneity seems to be guided by the assumptions rather than derived directly from the data, they also stand in contradiction to what I observed on the forum, in the interviews and fieldwork. On top of that, a tendency to regard the websites available to all internet users

around the globe as a mirror of "American Buddhism" is another reason why the assumptions of national Buddhisms need to be addressed critically.

In fact, existing research into (Tibetan) Buddhism online clearly shows, that the digital affordances play down the impact of national or regional factors on the formation of (Tibetan) Buddhist narratives and meaning systems among its followers. Instead, religious organizations and teachers assert and negotiate their authority on the internet (Cheong, Huang & Poon, 2011), and virtual platforms display a sacralization of rules and regulations they deem appropriate and "truly Buddhist" (Busch, 2010). The research by Busch (2010) on the E-Sangha forum investigated how power is constructed and maintained in order to negotiate meaning towards what the virtual "authorities" deem traditional and true. A similar, although seemingly looser negotiation and navigation of meaning can be traced among organizations, which can be seen as representatives of Buddhist postmodernism, with a novel and millennial style of egalitarian structure and a conscious distancing from the narratives of Buddhist modernism (Gleig, 2014). Both E-Sangha (Busch, 2010) and Buddhist Geeks (Gleig, 2014) were *glocal* formations, i.e. incorporating universalizing forces with regional differences, with a truly transnational and transcultural impact. As Prebish (2004) pointed out, the Buddhist online landscape serves as an illustration of the Buddhist principle of impermanence. However on top of that in my view the collapse of both of these ecumenical formations could signify that the current differences among translocal flows are too irredeemable to be brought under the same umbrella. It might be difficult to maintain a physically embodied organization with staff, a bank account, a legal body, property and a head office, when there are serious discrepancies among its agents as to what a Buddhist *is*. And again, as Prebish (2004, 145) pointed out years ago:

> Nevertheless, there seems to be fewer rather than more communities with existence in cyberspace only and with no existence in real geographic space. Presumably, this reflects a renewed acknowledgement of the necessity for face-to-face encounter between teacher and a student and between sangha members in general.

The heterogeneity *among* and the internal consistency *within* such flows is largely supported by the data. It serves only to demonstrate how much more meanings are shaped by specific organizations and their agenda than by the local offline contexts in which they are often measured. In his exploration of online followers of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Yonnetti (2017, p.18) comes to a resonating conclusion:

> […] scholars should be mindful that as life online and offline become ever more entangled, understanding religious life and practice will require serious engagement with both physical and virtual spaces.

The impression of homogeneity may come from a surface level of discussion with online formations. While there may be some interconnection (Smith, 2012) on the level of mutual links and explicit mutual validation among Buddhist groups in specific regions (American or Finnish), a deeper look into

how Buddhism is understood and practiced within these groups shatters the illusion of national or regional Buddhisms. One of the factors contributing to interconnection on a superficial level could be the media presentation of Buddhism, which creates a positively charged but extremely simplified image of the religion (Moore, 2008). Researching a deeper level of study and practice reveals first, a strong versatility, and second, a top-down negotiation of meaning. What I mean by top-down is that the meanings of religious authorities are prioritized over opinions and interpretations of the followers, and not as much through the efforts of the authorities or teachers themselves (which tend to be rather gentle), but more so by the students and followers.

4.5.1   Construction of Buddhism on the forum

The FPMT forum discussions have to be regarded as an extension not of global online Buddhism, but rather of students following the programs in Tibetan Buddhism offered by the FPMT. So I analyzed the answers not just in order to understand Buddhists, but rather as a process of how Buddhists are shaped by the programs and the forum. The external religious elements, as well as elements of authority, and of tradition, i.e. elements not characteristic of Buddhist modernism, are sprinkled all over the website. A prospective student would be guided from the front page to the Online Learning Center, which offers a range of programs providing for different levels of prior knowledge and commitment. Discovering Buddhism, the most popular program, comes in fourteen modules, the second of which is offered at no charge. To access other modules, a customer will see a list of products, such as online modules and physical CDs. At the moment of writing this section, the prices for every online module are discounted from $45 to $30. Purchase happens through PayPal after adding the desired product into a cart.

This type of presentation is in line with the conceptualization of postmodern religion (Lyon, 2000), and the spirit of commercialized pick-and-choose capitalist spirituality (Carrette and King, 2005). But the impression changes based on the forum discussions. There seems to be little pick and choose on the level of meanings and practices involved in Discovering Buddhism. The primary function of the forum is to explain the Modules, to help students reach a *correct* understanding of Buddhism (Busch, 2010), i.e. the one in line with the specific views of the lineage of FPMT. The Elders serve as guides to this "correct understanding" (Busch, 2010), while the atmosphere on the forum, marked by intellectual humility and respect for the lineage and its representatives, serves as a channel for the specific Buddhist flows. The tacit strategy of the forum structure can be characterized as a *convergent force*. While newcomer users seem to expose various views, often in the spirit of a pick-and-choose spirituality, or views discordant with Buddhist philosophy, the answers of the Elders commonly reflect attempts to gently steer their understanding in the preferred direction.

This is done in several ways. First, through rhetorically challenging the perceived existing view and promoting the FPMT view. For example, one user asked about a method of achieving higher mental states and boosting intuition

through listening to tapes with sounds stimulating various brain waves. Another experienced user, Amanda Cornely, tried to bring him back on the Buddhist track:

> Through Buddhist meditation, you will develop supernatural powers such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, etc. And you can do it without purchasing expensive meditation tapes with sound stimulation. However, that is not the point of buddhist meditation. The point is to see emptiness and attain enlightenment.

Second, forum Elders and senior students use a "slow and steady" strategy (Sharapan, 2016). The postulates of Buddhism are presented in their full complexity, and despite very rigorous explanation, would remain obscure to most members of a lay audience, beginners in Buddhist philosophy. Whenever students struggle with a lack of understanding or with a contradiction, they are recommended to "take one step at a time". These assurances keep them on the forum and interested, with the hope that the doubts will be dispelled some day. Third, the students are being constantly directed towards Gelug-oriented or Gelug-friendly sources (except the NKT), be it offline or online. This is especially important, following the analysis by Smith (2012) that demonstrated the interlinking and sharing of the same resources among different American Buddhist groups. The FPMT forum constantly shows *mentionings* of other teachers and organizations, Tibetan or even from other Buddhist traditions, and also of the NKT, but the nature of these mentionings is either superficial or negative. Whenever a Zen or vipassana teacher is mentioned or a prominent Tibetan Buddhist figure in another lineage, the context would be friendly and validating, but staying on a general and basic level, where few contradictions would surface. Whenever the discussion goes deeper into philosophy and tantric practices, it is almost always steered towards Gelug and FPMT, and not just by the Elders, but by the students as well:

> You will find Kendall Magnussen's lovely chanting of the Vajrasattva mantra. I quickly learned the mantra by listening to her chanting and reading out loud along with the audio file.

Whenever the NKT is mentioned, it almost always comes with warnings and polite discouragements. The final steering strategy is returning to the FPMT offline resources. The online presentation of Buddhism in Discovering Buddhism is fused with the longing for a material connection to holy places and symbols, to events, a group, or a teacher (lama). Whenever a student is directed to something in the offline realm, it is almost always going to be Gelug and/or the FPMT. At the same time, it must be noted that from the side of the students, the FPMT resources are not always sufficient or accessible to satisfy their need for the religion offline, and that creates a slight discord, discussed further in the text.

The relations around authority on the forum has already been discussed in Section 4.2 in more detail. To some extent, the forum confirms an observation that offline structures of authority are relocated online as part of a survival strategy in the digitalized world (Cheong, 2017). There seems to be not much difficulty for most students accepting a hierarchical structure of epistemic power.

The agents placed on top of the structure are the founders of FPMT and prominent Gelug authorities, dead and alive, for example, HH the Dalai Lama or Pabongka Rinpoche (however strong the differences between the two may be). It manifests in constant mentionings of and references to these teachers in different topics, as described in Section 4.2. The middle tier is the Elders, whose online authority is supported by their offline education and merits. Some more experienced students also offer their own informative comments and opinions openly, but they usually precede them with displays of intellectual humility.

The online facilities do not simply provide information, but also host other religious activities, which have previously been strongly associated with the offline realm. Specifically, many forum goers inquire about the online availability of transmissions and vows, which are traditionally expected to be bestowed in person by a teacher. Over the years of forum discussion I could see how some procedures (such as bodhisattva vows) used to be framed as requiring a personal in-flesh presence, and how after many requests began to be offered online via Skype, or even through a video recording. The same trend for digitalization can be seen in the treatment of texts, teachings and religious artefacts. As Tibetan Buddhist elements are brought into digital format, new questions arise about how to treat texts and artefacts which in their physical form have required special reverence.

But the paradoxical side of online authority is that it alone does not seem to satisfy its users. Since the importance of finding a qualified guru is highlighted from the onset, students may get an impression that this connection is required for their progress on the forum. Several forum users over the course of my data collection actually managed to "find a lama" outside of FPMT and Gelug, or had already done so earlier, making their study of the modules and forum attendance complementary to their main practice. One forum user, for instance, told their story of having met a Nyingma lama long ago, and of still being connected to him and his community, but lacking contact and teachings:

> After my teacher had left my home town I only managed to see him once. I do keep in touch with his students though. I also continue my study of Buddhism, which has led me to this FPMT forum.

Based on many explanatory comments, it may seem that the online community of the forum provides for the students' needs. Some students also mention the global spread of the programs and their availability:

> Through the online learning center, the FPMT website, and the Lama Yeshe Wisdom archive online, Rinpoche and everyone who has helped with these projects have made the Buddha's teachings available to almost everyone on the planet (Amanda Cornely)

In addition to discussing the online modules and clarifying their understanding of the dharma, the students also share many sensitive details from their histories and from their current life situations, relying on the support and advice of their fellow practitioners. The paced written communication ensures

that conversations on most important topics can be really detailed, thorough and substantiated with relevant links and materials. This factor of online communication can potentially work towards forming a deeper connection and understanding, than offline communication, which does not allow for the same level of detail. However, based on the profiles of the users and what they say about their engagement with Buddhism, it looks as if most of those who are active users on the forum are not engaged in any offline community for reasons beyond their control. A number of students have mentioned living too far away from any center, or having a serious condition, restricting their mobility or group participation, or even things like social anxiety. As one of such students put it: "I am so happy I found this forum and course because finally I have an opportunity to talk about the dharma with other people". This is in line with previous findings on online Buddhist communities, f.e. Grieve (2016). The study demonstrated that most inhabitants of the Zen temple in Second Life stayed as long as they had no access to an offline community.

The global reach of the forum and therefore the impact on translocal flows on the formation of Buddhists, is manifested in the geographical composition of its users and Elders. Among Elders, at the time of this study, two were based in Australia, one in the Netherlands, one in Britain, and one in Japan. For some it is impossible to identify their country of origin, and most have lived and studied abroad. Students also come from different areas of the globe, and many report having mixed and fluid backgrounds. I will quote my other publication describing the national composition of forum users (Sharapan, 2018; p. 88):

> The forum unites people of various nationalities, cultural backgrounds and creeds. A Russian living in Germany, a German living in Sri Lanka, an Indian former Catholic and an American former atheist can all find common premises in FPMT forums. Still, I have noticed none of the estimated 130,000 exiled Tibetans, let alone of over 6 million Tibetans in Tibet among forum users.

It is easy to rejoice with some voices on the forum praising the availability of the teachings provided by the organization. However if one looked at the globe and looked at the forum, one could not help but notice that many countries, in fact whole regions and continents, are not represented at all. I have written about the effect of transculturality on religion and the global interconnection via online means (Sharapan, 2018), and the conclusion has remained the same: the transcultural online flows we call "global" actually benefit areas where socio-political factors allow for the glocal religion to be planted and to sprout. Areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East (with the exception of Israel), the PRC (including, ironically, Tibet), and some others, cannot accommodate cultural and religious flows. In this way, as scholars increasingly abandon geographical divides in favour of online unity, it is important to be mindful of the divides at the levels of freedom of information and freedom of conscience which are prerequisites for a truly globalized world.

4.5.2   Use of online Buddhism among the students from the two groups

In the context of the two Tibetan Buddhism groups in Helsinki, these conclusions are further supported. The students I talked to are not complete beginners at Buddhism, all of them had some sort of daily practice commitment and were members of their respective organizations. The use of the internet as a source and as a place for religious practice was minimal. When I asked about whether the respondents benefit from digital sources and online forums and groups, nearly everybody expressed skepticism about the validity of information received this way, and expressed no need for general online sources, since they had access to teachers in their tradition. One of my questions was whether they believed there could be an "online guru", "online dharma", and "online sangha" and a common answer was that one's teacher could be available online, but if it is some teaching or some teacher they had no prior connection to, they would be skeptical of the efficacy of the teaching. Overall, interviewees expressed very concerned about the reliability of information available online:

> I: And what about sangha? If you had some forum where you could talk with people about things?
>
> Eveliina: Well, there are plenty of forums available. But I just don't have time for that. I would rather use this time to get information through studying or from my teacher. There are so many opinions on forums, so when you [follow] other people's opinions, it's just a waste of time, I think.

At the same time, many students admitted using online resources of their respective organization. For example, most of my respondents from Danakosha followed the five-year educational program with the Rinpoche, keeping most materials in the Cloud. Kirsi also mentioned a couple of teachers in the same lineage whom she had been following on YouTube and through webcasts in addition to her lama. When she mentioned following weekly webcasts with one of them, it was clear from her words, that she felt connected to that lama, and was not regarding him as a source of information on Buddhism:

> Kirsi: He always gave very practical advice, which felt like it helped in the moment.
>
> I: Is the communication both ways or is it just the teachings?
>
> Kirsi: It was just teachings, but somehow it seemed as if he always knew what was on people's minds. He gave such tips like… Maybe we just all have similar problems sometimes.

Two practitioners from the FPMT group were also actively present on the forum, but both of them lived outside Helsinki and could not attend group meetings very often. They were also among the few students I interviewed, who were most eclectic in their practice, following teachers from different lineages.
As for using the broader sources of information on the World Wide Web, some respondents mentioned how they could be helpful in finding out

information about a certain teacher, especially when it concerns cases of abuse. Petri, for example, admitted that he would not have heard about such cases unless he had seen them on Facebook. At the same time, the surprise of many students when I brought up cases of abuse in Tibetan Buddhism indicates they had not used the internet to look for relevant information on Tibetan Buddhist teachers.

Being mostly invested in their locally represented groups and teachers (represented for Danakosha, and visiting for FPMT), the students are nevertheless not tied to a national context and unconnected to the global one. First, the representation of their groups and teacher on Finnish soil is part of a global presence of a respective lineage (Mindrolling Nyingma for Danakosha) or organization (FPMT for Tara Liberation). The kind of dharma being taught is solely in line with the lineage, and not impacted by any Finnish national or cultural context. Second, the local membership also involves some global participation, both through teachers being invited to the dharma center and the students travelling to other connected dharma centers abroad. Danakosha has been visited many times by such teachers, including Khandro Rinpoche, who in fact had been visiting for nine years in a row at the time of the interviews. Even the visit by the head of Sakya lineage, Sakya Trinzin Rinpoche, in August 2016, was largely connected to the Danakosha group and was well attended. Petri said he was interested in hearing some teachings in the Sakya lineage, and surprised that the practices were the same as in his own tradition:

> Petri: Maybe he thought that our school is well represented. But of course, in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism our teachings are represented and spread. Ours is just an old school.

Marina, Bruno and a few other respondents said they really enjoyed visiting other centers of their organization abroad. Alex was using his command of Russian to access the array of Gelug teachings offered across the border, as well as participate in trips to attend Gelug Buddhist teachings in India with other Russian speaking students:

> Alex: I for one do not equate myself with an FPMT practitioner. For example, I don't narrow it down so much I also go to India with Kalmyks.
>
> I: But it is Gelug as well.
>
> Alex: So I'm trying to show you, here's FPMT, and they have a group of teachers. They require certain certification, saying that they are FPMT teachers, and the Gelug teachers are wider, they can actually, maybe you know, they have different textbooks in Sera and Drepung. And they all have their own teachers and peculiarities. So I wouldn't narrow it down like that.

In this way, the global interconnection through the internet for the interviewees did not mean either connecting to Buddhism online as a general phenomenon or keeping their practice within regional or national borders.

Instead, the global interconnectedness coupled with convergent discourse by each organization, means being drawn deeper into specific *translocal* flows of Buddhism, where national boundaries, let alone cultural ones, become largely arbitrary at most. Although being often orchestrated via online means, the convergence brings the students back to the real world, creating a tacit interconnection between the "online" and "offline".

As for having an online community as a regular congregation, most respondents are also skeptical. Its value is seen only by those people, who are unable to be part of an offline community: "Of course, it's always better than nothing. But would it really be of use, would there some real benefit, I don't know" (Bruno). However one of the FPMT students, Erik, who had also been using the Discovering Buddhism modules online, observed:

> It's kind of like a channel when it's needed. Some questions are good for online forums, others would be better to ask in a group meeting session, like today, and some are good to be asked personally through email, or personally in a meeting.

With respect to online vows and initiations, and prayers and practices, students differed in their opinions, admitting that some teachers offer these things online and others do not. In any case, all of my respondents did in fact have a possibility to receive them offline, and it was not much of an issue for them. Some students mentioned mobile applications they used, as another aspect of digitalization. In line with the previous observations, the applications were not the source for their practice and learning, but rather additions and digital adaptations of their religious life. The kinds of applications were, for example, the Tibetan calendar of auspicious days in digital form, and Mindfulness Bell (timed reminder to be mindful), as well as an application showing statistically how many days one has left to live. Most students who mentioned these applications made it clear that what is offered largely surpasses their actual demand:

> Marina: I use a Tibetan calendar as an application. It's very useful, because I used to have a paper one, but now it's with me all the time. Nothing else really. But once I made a search in an apps store, and there were many funny things. Such as a virtual prayer drum (laughs), and then all kinds of calculators to count mantras you accumulate, and you can follow your progress through an app.

In this way, the use of internet by my responders for dharma practice shows the same *convergent* power within their organizations. While many sources are definitely available to them, the vast majority prefer to keep things as close to the same teachers and lineage as possible, with the exceptions of when several teachers and/or two lineages are followed at once, making online or remote practice complementary to their main practice. The reasons for that are the value people placed on a real community (returning to being offline), the authenticity and coherence of teachings, and time restraints. All these factors work against the ecumenical trend, let alone some homogenization of Buddhism within

national boundaries, and they enhance the *glocal* flows of specific dharma organizations and teachers.

4.5.3   Teachers evaluating online dharma

Among the teachers I interviewed, impressions of the usefulness of technology for the practice of Buddhism were mixed. Some teachers (and some students also) mentioned that the modern-day world creates a lot of distractions. Geshe Sherab pointed out that even the fact that there is a lot of information available online on Buddhism can be problematic:

> GS: Also, the positive side it's like that, with the technology and everything people have more access to the dharma, easily. Yeah, and so... They have much more, maybe some time too much access, and easily access, so they might get confused. Hear-hear-hear and sometimes there's a contradiction, there's no one to explain, and they're confused, lost.

In the same vein, Geshe Gelek emphasized that amidst the spiritual supermarket it is important to be looking for authoritative and lineage-consistent teachings:

> GG: In the modern world people are more open and they mostly share the knowledge, you know, kind of, most sectary...

> I: Sectarian? So the modern world is less sectarian?

> GG: Yeah, it's most shared, for example you can see in big events, the Buddhists, Christian, Muslim and everybody is here, suddenly you can see them. Where the Dalai Lama goes, there's many people, following, not following, but gathering, sharing information, that's modern thinking. And the challenge is very important and masters also following a pure tradition, okay. And people really get the pure instruction. No creation, or in...

> I: Invention?

> GG: Invention, not like that. Really important. You don't do that, you lose the essence of a tradition, of the religion.

And he was also skeptical of the potency of online-transmitted initiations and rituals:

> GG: Yeah, also, I know that people give transmission through the internet. It happened. Of course, we have the technology. I don't criticize, but I don't know if it's good or bad.

> I: But you wouldn't give a transmission on the internet?

> GG: No, not. So far, I would not.

Khenpo Ngawang Jorden expressed a similar opinion:

KNJ: My feeling is that maybe there is some benefit, but it's not going to be the same as interacting with real people. This online… is really like erm… you don't really… the online relationships, maybe some kind of this loving kindness, is different from real fellow human beings' touch. Mother's touch is so valuable to children, but you cannot just send mother's love through online to children, it's difficult, it's different kind of aspect. It's going to be different kind of feeling.

I: So it cannot fully substitute.

KNJ: Yes. It cannot fully substitute. That's right.

Unlike them, Ringu Tulku Rinpoche and Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche were less categorical. Half of my interview with Ringu Tulku Rinpoche was conducted online, via WhatsApp, when he was in Kathmandu, Nepal and I was at home. We started at 6 am Finnish time, because it was the only slot in his schedule, where he could have a chat with me while he used a café wifi. The first part of our interview (conducted during his visit in Helsinki, in the changing room of the venue) was interrupted on the question of the challenges and opportunities the modern world provides for Buddhist practice, and he mentioned "the miracle of technology". Very tellingly, we would not have been able to continue our conversation without its help.

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche mentioned many instances when digitalization has made his own life and dharma practice easier, such as not having to carry a lot of books anymore:

Not necessarily only online, but also recordings, you have books on the, you know, online books, you can buy for instance, these days I don't have to carry any books, before I always had to carry a box, and it was a big problem with luggage on the airplane. But now don't have to bring any books, I bring, not even, now I only bring my iPad, I have everything there.

Since my analysis of the forum data and interviews showed that there is usually a strong need for physical embodiment, I asked Rinpoche whether in his opinion the "online dharma" and "online guru" can be enough:

RTR: There's online dharma, there's online sangha, you can have a group, a sangha, you can sometimes discuss together.

I: But can it be enough? If a person doesn't have anything in realtime, they only have some person online and a community online.

RTR: Well, I... Enough or not enough is another thing. There's nothing called enough, there's nothing called not enough. It's how you use it. Yeah. And I think it's completely real, everything is temporary, changing, impermanent, you know. So there's advantages and disadvantages of the online, it's also, but you know, the main thing about the relationship between the teacher and the student is teaching. And you can receive teachings from online as much as in any kind of way.

Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche, who keeps a strong personal bond with his disciples, not just in Finland, but also from visiting other Danakosha centers in Europe, was also flexible on the new trend of online religion:

> As I mentioned, many technology is also not bad, you can record things and then you can listen many times. You can carry everywhere. Like that. But I think everything if you are in control of your mind, can be very useful. But as soon as we cannot control our minds, everything can be, even little cave can be also a big obstacle to your practice.

It can be predicted that despite open skepticism from many teachers with respect to online transmissions, initiations and rituals, when gradually well-known teachers like HH the Dalai Lama or the late Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche start showing more and more examples of online transmissions, the format becomes more tolerated. As Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche notes, it is not so much the physical presence itself that makes an initiation or transmission work, but the state of mind of the disciple:

> I: This has been started many years ago, big masters they started, so must be like that. Like, His Holiness giving initiations and whatever happenings are online, isn't it?
>
> TDR: But can it be enough?
>
> I: That depends on your devotion and confidence. You know, even you see your teacher in the dream and instruction you hear in the dream, some people get realization. This is more life, so I think if we have enough confidence, enough devotion, it could be even more than enough. But if you don't have those things, even if you are in front of the master, even if you are next to the master, nothing happens.

At the same time, each teacher is a user of the WWW at least to some degree. Geshe Gelek said he used email and WhatsApp. Tulku Dakpa Rinpoche conducts a five-year educational program, with most materials available for the group in the Cloud, so every participant is an active FB user, either directly or through an assistant. The advertising of events and the teachers' itinerary would be unimaginable without social networks and mailing lists, and their teachings can also easily be found on YouTube. In this way, digital and online communication have truly become a background factor, which is so essential and pervasive that it is barely noticeable.

The discussion around tantric initiations which have previously demanded a physical presence moving into an online format is still ongoing, with varying opinions. The pandemic of 2020-21 also showed the need for approving such a format, both in terms of the public demand for religious support in the time of turmoil, and also in terms of the online being the only possible and safe option during this time. The recent tantric transmission of Avalokiteshvara practice was performed by HH the Dalai Lama in May 2020, and attracted more than a million devotees[22]. Such scope could never be achieved in person, and the popularity of

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[22] https://www.tibetanjournal.com/more-than-a-million-attend-dalai-lamas-online-teachings/

this event demonstrated its public appeal and the possibilities of global Buddhism online. It can be forecast that in the future the ability of teachers, lineages and traditions of Buddhism to market themselves online, adjusting to the demand for digitalization and online availability and making use of the latest technological know-how, will be among determining factors of their success, if not of the survival of their teachings.

4.5.4 The online construction of the real world Vajrayana

The analysis of forum discussions and interviews with students and teachers in Tibetan Buddhism demonstrate a complex relationship with information and communication technologies and their role in the formation of Tibetan Buddhists. On the one hand most research participants would have no access to Tibetan Buddhism without the online learning platforms and the information spread via social media and email. Gradual familiarization with Buddhist doctrine allows students to develop a Buddhist identity and adopt regular Buddhist practice (Sharapan, 2016). The organization's formal regulations and its tacit rules allow for a level of cohesion necessary to creating a distinct narrative (Cheong, 2017), which can be called a small narrative (Lyotard, 1984). On the other hand, it quickly becomes clear from the forum posts, that most members have little or no access to real time dharma centers and communities, either due to their geographic location or to limited mobility. The opinions of the offline students support the idea that "online dharma" can be only second best to face-to-face contact and realtime communication and practice. Teachers confirm this idea, even though they do hold the "marvel of technology" in high regard and of use for the practice and study of Buddhism.

The data suggests no evidence of formation of a universal or unified global Buddhism, let alone a Western or American one. In fact, the digital affordances provide possibilities for the diversification rather than the unification of (Tibetan) Buddhist narratives. While the Discovering Buddhism forum offers links and connections to other Buddhist resources, the tendency of its Elders and more advanced students is always to steer newcomers towards the same haven. In this way the qualitative content analysis of messages reveals an opposite trend from what Smith (2012) observed to be a tendency for unification quantitatively. Even though the students and teachers of the two groups in Helsinki preferred offline to online, the importance of the information and communication technologies should not be underestimated. In the case of the forum, the data would not exist without them. Most active forum goers would be unlikely to develop a Buddhist identity and practice without the program or similar programs. The students of the two groups mentioned using the internet for searching, as well as the respective facebook groups and email lists, as well as using various applications. But most importantly, they received Buddhist teachings via channels affiliated with their respective organization or lineage, either privately (in the Cloud) or publicly available (on YouTube). As some more experienced students mentioned, the attempt to create a common Finnish-language forum space for free discussion of Buddhism-related topics ended in disagreements and 'flaming', because of

irreconcilable differences among "Finnish Buddhists". This supports the idea that the geographical categories classifying "Buddhists" are less helpful than global organizations with their specific translocal narratives. Having said that, I found it noteworthy that the students seemed to be more ardent and sectarian than their teachers. The five monks I interviewed did not see much difference on the level of sutra, not just among Tibetan Buddhist organizations, but also including other Buddhist traditions, namely the popular Zen or Insight (Theravada Vipassana). They did set boundaries with respect to tantric teachings and initiations, however.

All of my data collection took place before the 2020-2021 Covid-19 pandemic. Needless to say, physical restrictions and safety regulations prevented many offline gatherings, so many groups had to make use of ICT. Did this change strengthen – albeit and hopefully only temporarily - the global online Buddhism? Perhaps, not. But I would assume it could strengthen each specific small narrative, bringing practitioners from different geographic locations together for common practice under the same tradition (Yonnetti, 2017). It also urged teachers to look for alternative ways of engaging with their students and followers when their usual travelling schedule was compromised. These new channels include YouTube, Patreon, Soundcloud and TikTok, to help spread Tibetan Buddhism and change its demographic landscape, as well as opening up new possibilities for research. However, there is also a chance that Tibetan Buddhist practice, which relies so powerfully on ritual, group practice, and the embodied presence and connection to teachers and to the community, could be compromised in view of the growing popularity of meditation apps (Sugino, 2020), which offer flexibility, variety and a low participation threshold.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In this section I will try to sum up the main points of my analysis in this research, and shape them into a more or less coherent whole. Although the phenomenon of mediatized Tibetan Buddhism in the West is as multifaceted and complex as it is idiosyncratic and peculiar, this research with its three tiers of data collection strived to draw a realistic and insightful portrait of this phenomenon, at the same time elucidating some theoretical inputs, proposed in the field of Intercultural Communication. My Discussion section was structured according to five different thematic clusters, within which unsupported assumptions are often made, and my purpose was to suggest alternative ground of assumptions, based on a more up-to-date understanding of society and on a broader analysis of the interconnected data-sets. I will propose the main take-aways of this dissertation in three sections, followed by an assessment of the limitations of this research and suggested directions for the future, along with some practical insights and some observations of value to global mediatized Tibetan Buddhist organizations.

5.1 Shaping small narratives and bringing them to life

My initial research focus was online religion and the role of digital affordances in the adoption of Tibetan Buddhism among Westerners. One somewhat unsurprising revelation enhanced by my subsequent reading on the topic and especially by my own data-collection and analysis was the fascinating complexity of the religion's adoption, as well as the compromised use of binary categorizations, such as "online" and "offline", as well as "Westerners" and "Eastern religion". Intuitive as these categories may be, the creation of social reality seems to follow a different set of rules. These rules may be too sporadic and complicated, so that when trying to pinpoint with any certainty, what exactly they are, researchers are likely to come to a grinding halt, or worse, tacitly impose their *imaginations* of these "laws" on phenomena they study, producing questionable results and conclusions. However I believe we can obtain some

relevant viewpoints by pointing out what the studied phenomena are *not*. In this way researchers may step out of the assumptions imposed by their intuition or even by an educated theoretical toolbox of their respective fields, and therefore better accommodate the complexity of the topic at hand. In the case of this research, I see a need for a drastic change in how Buddhism (or any translocal religion or coherent philosophy) is studied, marked by a transition from geographical categories (*horizontal* plane) to mediatized narratives of specific organizations or lineages (*vertical* plane). Vertical construction connects narratives and elements linked by coherence and compatibility, rather than physical proximity, and interconnected historically with themselves, rather than with geographically related narratives and elements. And even though the geographical proximity does play a role, due to its sheer compelling impact of being "there", and because the two are in constantly interconnected, I would wish to see more emphasis given to the vertical construction of translocally mediated and historically rooted interrelated sets of narratives and elements. Besides, as I examined earlier the theoretical and empirical foundations behind seeing nation-cultural and regional distinctions as important factors in play still leave a lot to be desired. Cross-cultural research, pioneered by Hofstede (2001), Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1993/2011) and their followers is generally not applicable to specific multi-factorial situations, Buddhism in the West is made of. The empirical reliability of their claims is also not convincing enough to be taken for granted in other scholarly fields and popular discourse. The impact of perceived regional, national and cultural factors would need to be much better argued and more compelling for these perceptions to shape research on Buddhism in the West. While the research on country differences in organizations and businesses has a controversial positions within Intercultural Communication, I do not see much need to fortify ideas of country differences with respect to Buddhist organizations and communities.

The understanding of social reality as being constructed by its participants in communication is already a mainstream understanding in Humanities and Social Sciences, but the way this understanding is developing in view of the growing force of information and communication technologies invites a fresh take on the phenomena we study (Campbell, 2013; Chen, 2012; Hepp, 2009; Hjavard, 2008; Yonnetti, 2017). One such elaboration, The Mediated Construction of Reality (Couldry and Hepp, 2017), proposes a detailed description of how social worlds are constructed in the age of ICT, in the spirit of the classic by Berger and Luckmann (1967/1991). Couldry and Hepp (2017) see the social world "as fundamentally interwoven with media" (p.16), offering a translocal connectivity in, but also outside of, the immediate moment. In my forum data, the lack of attention research participants allocate to ICT is striking. But this should not mislead the researcher (or the reader) into diminishing the role of ICT for the participants. The situation is quite the opposite, since modern individuals are so embedded in mediatization that they do not pay much attention to how it affects their environment. Like the proverbial fish in the water might not bother much about what water means to them, what it is, and whether it *is* at all. Couldry and

Hepp's (2017) mediatized social world is composed of numerous social domains, big and small, affecting each other and while being constantly in flux, also striving to re-establish themselves and their respective world order. The role of national impact, let alone any "national culture", becomes very limited, if it is even applicable at all to these small narratives. At the same time these small narratives are neither left off grid, nor on the margins of society. Instead of causing a fragmentation of society, this pluralism causes an internal fragmentation within one's individual identity, anticipated by Gergen (1991). In these interconnected social domains, like the FPMT or Danakosha, or global Tibetan Buddhism, people share meanings not due to physical or "cultural" proximity, but *translocally*. They also align themselves with narratives, elements and persons spread across time: two and a half thousand years back, when necessary, and as far as needed into the future. In general, this transtemporal aspect is inherent to any religious construction, but in the mediated world the immediacy and facility of transtemporal interconnection are exponentially enhanced (Couldry and Hepp, 2017).

The mechanics of digital affordances and ICT in this process of shaping and maintaining social domains and their agents is reflected in Martin & Nakayama's (2010) description of "technological imperative" for intercultural communication. The unprecedented interconnectedness via the internet brings an exposure to people and ways of living radically different from our own, at the same time offering affordances for translocal communities of like-minded people (small narratives); this process shapes multifaceted identities and ways of life, translating into the physical realm as long as these possibilities are indeed available with implications for local and economic freedoms and restrictions with their implications (Martin and Nakayama, 2010; p. 21-28). My analysis of the FPMT forum discussions (Sharapan, 2018) elucidates this process in a similar way. First, the mediatized world creates a tacit exposure to difference, including foreign concepts (eg. karma, guru) and symbols (eg. Buddha statues, prayer flags), raising general tolerance towards them (Moberg and Granholm, 2014). Second, digital affordances provide spaces for small narratives to perpetuate themselves and be absorbed. And third, this process constructs new identities that are manifested in the physical world. The issue of disproportionate representation and access to these channels and affordances was also evident in the forum data: transcultural and translocal flows rely on the local freedoms and possibilities dictated by economic and political conditions in different regions. Discourses of intellectual humility, patience and appreciation of the complexity of the Buddha's teachings, which it is promised will become clearer over time, are the factors retaining newcomers on the forum even in cases of initial dissonance (Sharapan, 2016). However before the students can be retained, they need to be attracted to the materials. Educational online affordances, like the FPMT programs, require material resources for the development and maintenance of an up-to-date visual presentation. Vigorous fund-raising and proselytizing, as well as disguising traditional elements, are atypical for Tibetan Buddhist organizations, apart from the NKT (Emory-Moore, 2020), so the

resources for professional PR, content creation and presentation are often scarce, and in the mediatized world this may bring a "competitive disadvantage" regardless of many organization's virtues and merits. While the data clearly shows that among Tibetan Buddhists the physical embodied presence is valued way above online interconnectedness, all participants, students and teachers alike, do rely on ICT. Considering that the online and offline in the modern world can no longer be seen as two separate interacting realms (Cheong, 2017), but instead a new mediatized social reality, the repercussions of a lacking or inadequate online presence extend to the prospective vitality of the organization in general.

5.2 Concept of culture and defining phenomena in terms of regional, cultural, and geographical belonging

The shift from the modern to postmodern perception is characterized by a transition from coherent "cultures" framed by a meta-narrative of a specific time and space to a possibility of following small narratives instead, i.e. cultural frameworks of spatially and temporally unlimited origins. In part this could be connected with the growing variety and spread of information technology of the time. The dominance of the postmodern cultural narrative is typically identified by researchers as occurring in the last decades of the 20th century (1960s-1990s) (Ward, 2009; McHale, 2015). Indeed, these times in American culture are known as an era of rapid social change, new free-thinking movements, and for opening doors of perception, as well as for the presence of both futuristic and nostalgic sentiments (McHale, 2015; Partridge, 2004). The same trends could be observed in other first-world countries, including Finland (Tolvanen, 2019). These happened to be the times when Tibetan Buddhism came to establish itself outside of its traditional domain and set the rules for its adoption among Westerners. On a general level, the flourishing of ICTs in the 21st century and the global transition into digitalization and interconnectedness does not necessarily follow the postmodern trajectory. User exposure to online sources and discourses available virtually on a large scale is affected by the algorithms of social media and search engines (Mittelstadt et al., 2016). We also see a strong political trend for entrenching in fixed boundaries of cultural identities and memberships, rather than a homogenizing "global village". But beneath the surface digital affordances remain available in their variety, translocal reach and identity-shaping force. The possibility for the construction of Tibetan Buddhist identities remains with these digital affordances, channels and communities, offering a cozy niche, but also interconnected with the rest of mediatized social reality (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). In this way one of the main take-aways of this research is a conclusion, which was counter-intuitive to me at the beginning of this work: that studying national "Buddhisms" is largely futile, and research should rather focus on specific traditions, organizations and lineages in their translocal mediated

manifestations, i.e. it should look at the vertical construction instead of the horizontal plane of imposed cultural boundaries. With such an approach the specific national location would act as just one manifestation of these traditions, organizations and lineages (or of Buddhism at large) that are being re-established in a new physical, social and legal environment. But I would not be expecting to see it as a compelling force, powerful enough to create a new form of Buddhism. So while it makes sense to study Buddhism in the context of Finland, I would be doubtful about studying Finnish Buddhism as a separate discrete entity.

The same could apply to many research topics in Intercultural Communication. National tokens remain a default terminology for conceptualizing cultures in ICC (Sommier, 2014; Moon, 2010). Nationality and national borders are, indeed, very compelling factors, and the Covid-19 situation has demonstrated that clearly. When we discuss national boundaries and national identity as constructed, it is important to keep in mind that the level of this construction is binding and consequential, considering historically embedded and legally authorized institutions and the laws and regulations they follow and create. The state and government authority are characterized by the so-called monopoly on violence, which means that disobeying laws and regulations may entail irrevocable repercussions for an individual, and in rare cases lethal ones. Social constructions can be roughly categorized as strong and weak, with some uncertainty as to where the line is drawn (Haslanger, 2012; Lynch, 2017; Lock and Strong, 2014). The legal proxies of nation-states could be seen as strong constructions, even though they too are contingent and malleable. But arguably in the modern digitalized world one's *individual* cultural framework and background follows weak constructions. The place of national identity in how people see themselves (Holliday, 2011) and how they communicate with others is rather modest, unless they find themselves in a formal situation, such as applying for a visa. The bigger part of one's Umwelt is shaped through various discourses, frameworks and epistemic traditions one encounters and follows (Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Gergen, 1991, 2016). And they are extremely diverse not only among each other, but even on the level of the same individual at different stages of life and different interactions. With such complex and multi-factorial issues as adopting a new spiritual framework, and its re-establishment in a new location, it makes sense to focus on such weak constructions (symbols and meanings), while considering the implications of the strong ones (such as legal codes). The causal efficacy of generalized factor of local culture would be likely to have many counter-examples.

The participants of this research are all bound by the same "culture", even though they are geographically, socially, economically, and generationally distant. While the frameworks they follow are weak constructions in terms of actual binding, they rely on foundational operational frameworks which the participants create for themselves in their adoption of Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism with its key frameworks and an imagination and physical re-enactment of Tibet become a type of mediated third culture (Shuter, 2012). As long as these new frameworks remain pertinent for the participants, so are the

tacit rules and regulations are too. These are the "webs of meanings" (Geertz, 1973), which motivate their words and actions, as well as explaining certain behaviours and opinions they voice. The habitual "cultural" boundaries of national borders do spring up occasionally as shared meanings and connections, but do not carry a similar explanatory power, merely due to the internal diversity of these regional cultures in modern times, and the fact that they hold little relevance for the actual adoption and practice of Tibetan Buddhism. This makes the expectation of some new American or Western form of Buddhism to emerge, yielding to the pressure of the new cultural domain, completely groundless. The only manifestation of such cultural pressure could be the drive for inclusivity and equality within the religion, but this drive also relies on the possibility of connecting and grounding inclusivity in Buddhism's own concepts and sentiments.

The implications of this change for the field of Intercultural Communication in general are, indeed, hard to estimate. We need some way of identifying and naming distinct cultures in order to be able to study communication across them, and national labels remain the most conservative way at the moment. Some solutions I see here would be a) seeing beyond the superficially ascribed cultural memberships, b) looking at the dynamics of identification and construction of identity and culture in specific interaction and historically over time, c) specifying the cultural boundaries in more relevant ways, such as taking other influences into consideration (lifestyle, religion, socio-economic position, gender, etc.), d) and generally shifting our focus beyond our labelling to include also the participants' own identification and avowed identity. I believe these principles are helpful in yielding some novel insights and a more up-to-date understanding of culture and identity in our mediatized world.

5.3   The future of postmodern religion

There is a popular quote on Buddhism, usually misattributed to Albert Einstein, or at least to Dukas and Hoffman's *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, but upon inspection is not found even there (Lopez, 2008). It runs:

> The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.

More important than the misattribution of the quote is the very fact that "something compelled someone to concoct this statement and attribute it to Einstein"[23], and it was a success in many ways. But despite the vigorous PR-

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[23] Lopez's description of his Buddha and Science (2008), retrieved from: https://press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/493121.html

campaign and the modern popularization of Buddhism, including Tibetan Buddhism (Emory-Moore, 2020; Moore, 2008), has it become the religion of the future? This is definitely nowhere to be seen in the data I analyzed, or any other inquiries into the global religious landscape. That Einstein biography, which is wrongly cited as the source of the quotation, was published in 1954, the decade before the era of "postmodernism" is usually considered to have started (McHale, 2015; Sim, 2011). In a way, this concoction can be seen as a premonition that the global religious landscape was at a turning point. There was a disillusionment with tradition in intellectual circles, a sense of abandonment of the "meta-narrative" of Christianity in the Western world, as well as a longing for a spirituality, that could withstand the pressure of another meta-narrative, science. Picking Buddhism for that mission ahead of any of the new emerging spiritual movements and teachings of the 20th century, which were in abundance, could mean some openness to a religion with Eastern roots and 2500 years of tradition. This represents not a modern desire to forge something new and universal, but rather a postmodern appreciation of something old and foreign, which could nevertheless be re-forged and redefined at will.

Indeed, the FPMT forum discussions and the interviews with teachers and students have many marks of postmodern religion, as discussed in 2.1.2. There is a clear preference towards a small narrative instead of the meta-narrative; nostalgia for an imagined tradition, one had lost real connection to; cultural openness and Easternization; a yearning for something primordial and pristine outside of modernity; bricolage and complex identities; commercialization and neo-liberal mechanisms; magical realism and a spiritualization of the mundane; and mixing elements of high and low culture (Andersson, 2011; Bauman, 1998a; Lyon, 2000). While we can locate postmodern culture in a certain time period (roughly 1960s-1990s), we can still observe some of these elements in Tibetan Buddhism, the most important being the flexibility of shifting to a small-narrative which is new, foreign and historically rooted in a detached time and place, and adopting *it* as one's primary frame of reference as much as possible.

The construction of this new culture is going to be a weak construction, meaning that unlike laws of nature and of nation-states, this framework is not inevitable. Breaking the rules of this framework will not lead to a prison sentence or physical harm, but will simply (if this can be called simple!) cause conflict with one's values, worldview, ethics, beliefs about afterlife, and one's social engagements with the related community. The small narrative can maintain community despite occasional challenges by the force of its internal coherence and the pragmatic value of its beliefs and practices, but unlike nation-states it has no monopoly on violence, and therefore is rather limited with respect to repercussions for the disruption of its order. However in the case of Tibetan Buddhism there have been more than just occasional challenges of maintaining a different lifestyle against pressures of conflicting values and motivations in the society at large, which some of my respondents have mentioned. Some researchers have criticized contemporary trends in Eastern spirituality targeted at Western consumers for their frivolousness, subjectivism, cherry-picking and

neo-liberal transactionalism (Carrette and King, 2005; Mullen, 2001; Sugino, 2020). Instead, the forum messages and interviews with students demonstrate a tendency for commitment, depth, piety, and scrupulous dedication to being a good Buddhist. Such a lifestyle often demands considerable effort and discipline and may even cause misunderstandings in the practitioners' immediate environments. But the worst stumbling block is the cases of abuse by prominent Tibetan lamas and the communities' reactions to them. In Sharapan & Härkönen (2017) we have described how the longing to find a "guru" is often a strong if not the strongest motivator behind joining a Tibetan Buddhist group, and the choice of the teacher is very often intuitive, relying on personal "chemistry", and in a large proportion of cases, on some mystical inkling or experience with them. The students are sometimes familiar with cases of power abuse, but not always, and they unanimously agree that financial and sexual coercions are wrong and harmful. However, the small narrative they follow presupposes a full and complete surrender to one's lama, once the student has made the commitment, and repercussions for students who see faults in their lamas. This offers fertile ground for serious disillusionment and crises, fueled further by organizations where abuse happens failing to address the abuse in accordance with the laws and mores of society at large, because that would breach the rules and norms of their small narrative. While there are many traditional prominent Tibetan clerics, who voice an open disapproval of abuse cases (a very bold thing to do in their position!), there is still a sense of ambivalence as to what line should be followed, because the tantric Buddhist view here is at odds with important modern values, and sometimes even with law. So, with all these contradictions is the postmodern Tibetan Buddhism the "religion of the future"?

There are few ways of seeing into the future, which are accepted in an academic work, so let us turn to one of them: socio-demographic analysis. Heelas et al. (2005) made an attempt to quantify all religious and spiritual formations, including group and one-to-one, in one British town (Kendal), categorizing them into two trends: 'life-as' religion versus 'subjective life' spirituality. The quantification was performed based on a carefully counted number of participants and engagements in activities like yoga, new religious movements, mindfulness, hypnosis, reiki, etc., and participation in traditional Christian congregations over the same period of time. The categorization was done based on the analysis of participants' own expressed motivations for taking part in these activities, the meanings they attached to them, and the impact on their lives. 'Life-as' referred to narratives of duty, fulfilling one's role as a good Christian, a virtuous wife etc., which were reinforced by the religion, while 'subjective life' referred to personal spiritual search, as well as comfort, wellbeing and health, with the freedom to pick and choose beliefs and practices. The demographic analysis of the population engaging in both these spiritual and religious activities and its trend over time (10 years), showed that the 'life-as' spirituality was shrinking and aging, while new members and young people were attracted increasingly to the 'subjective life' type. The authors also brought in some global statistics to claim that "the massive subjective turn is integral to the world in

which we currently live" (Heelas et al., 2005), and based on the natural dynamics of population aging the prediction can be made that the congregational domain ('life-as') will gradually subside and either level-off, occupying a marginal position in society, or die out altogether. As for the holistic milieu ('subjective life') the prospects are much better, even though they would be hard to define, due to the contingency and internal diversity of the phenomenon. My own data analysis suggests that the change is fueled not just by the massive subjective turn, but also by the possibility of maintaining small narratives, which can be as individualistic or hierarchical. Kaufman (2017) has shown that the relationship between the domain and the milieu is more complex than a binary juxtaposition. The "traditional" church is not fixed in time either, and in some cases the 'subjective life' activities may bring followers back to the congregation, rather than out of it. Indeed, the binary separation might be an oversimplification when applied to specific groups or activities, and is to some extent applicable to specific discourses within them. The most recent study on the NKT demonstrates how typical modern and 'subjective life' discourses are used to bring in newcomers, who are later exposed to very traditional 'life as' sentiments (Emory-Moore, 2020). In my own study, though made without the rigor necessary for any firm generalization, I have shown how the 'subjective life' and 'life as' discourses may co-exist at the level of one organization.

Having said that, the general demographic trend toward more subjective, wellbeing-oriented, universal narratives with low threshold and commitment is undeniable. This trend is also enhanced by a general decline in religious identification (Inglehart, 2020). This makes some of the elements of postmodern religion mentioned above work as catalysts for survival, and others work as obstacles. The deep study and committed practice of Tibetan Buddhism are important for keeping it intact, but these are also fading trends in society. Tibetan Buddhists in my study, both on the forum and offline, had time-consuming practice commitments. The mediatized society suffers also from a perceived lack of time, caused not by business so much as, by the blurring boundaries between the personal, the professional and the social, as well as an expectation of constant availability (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). Subjective cherry-picking spirituality will certainly remain more attractive due to its accessibility, but this tendency will do little good for traditional lineage-focused Tibetan Buddhist groups.

The narrative glue, which has kept global Tibetan Buddhism intact in the playing a role of a mediatized third culture (Shuter, 2012), is the imagined version of Tibet (a Shangri-la) (Sharapan, 2018; Summala, 2019). However the role of the actual Tibetan Buddhist countries as well as diasporas which host Tibetan communities and religious social structures, is more than just symbolic for Tibetan Buddhist followers in Western countries. The global mediatized Tibetan Buddhist organizations legitimize and root themselves in Asian institutions, authorities, sacred places and pilgrimage sites, with and a supply of traditionally trained teachers, reincarnated lamas, Geshes, Khenpos, monks and nuns. These countries and regions are themselves yielding to the pressures of modernization, social, economic and ecological factors, Western cultural influences, and other

challenges to the demographic survival of religion. In this way, looking into the future, we do not necessarily see Tibetan Buddhism as a religion of the future, but instead we may become concerned whether the religion has a future at all. This truly brings home the idea that the flourishing survival in the 21st century of the global mediatized Tibetan Buddhism depends on the carefully considered strategies and collaborated actions of its stake holders.

5.4   Limitations of the study and directions for further research

Like any academic research, this study has a number of limitations. One important aspect of my authorship of this work is my own identity as a convert Tibetan Buddhist, familiar not just with the religion, but also with the organizations I study. As pointed out in earlier chapters, I see this mostly as a strength. First of all, being familiar with Tibetan Buddhist jargon, meanings and rules made it easier for me to approach the participants and understand what they were referring to, as well as making it easier for them to speak about their Buddhist identity and life, since they could rely on me knowing the words they were using. Second, having background knowledge of the religion, as well as the Tibetan Buddhist global "scene", allowed me to make better sense of some situations and seeming paradoxes. I was aware of course of my own possible biases when planning the study and working with the data, but I tried my best to maintain a reflexive position in separating my own judgements and wishes as a practitioner and my analysis and conclusions as a scholar. I also became aware of the differences between how my participants see Tibetan Buddhist practice in general and how I see it in my own case, so I make sure my analysis looks at their opinions and experiences and not my own. In general, I do see benefit in adding some emic, phenomenological insight into the formation of identity and framework among non-hereditary followers of Eastern religions and spiritual practices, for two main reasons. First, it could decrease the number of groundless assumptions made with respect to what "western Buddhism" is or is supposed to be, in favour of a more in-depth first-person understanding of how it is actually *lived*. The same would apply to the study of any religion, practice or philosophy, labelled as foreign, such as yoga. And second, within the field of Intercultural Communication such research could offer more clarity of how "culture" is *constructed* rather than *had*. It shows the contingency and versatility of labels of cultural identity, which are still often used as some definitive characteristics within the field.

Another limitation of this research is the limited data itself. In some way, approaching intermediate level Buddhists, such as registered students of the online program and group members, makes the observations somewhat circular. Since these are the people, who came and stayed, we could assume that adoption of the foreign elements was not a problem. But this does not tell us much about those students, who despite initial interest, come and go, or register for a program, but decide it is not for them. To my knowledge, the research into people

who fail to develop interest in Buddhism or quit it after a while has not been performed, although it could potentially offer many interesting insights. This could be especially useful for the sake of developing strategies for making Tibetan Buddhism more viable for those wanting to benefit from it. The data I used also has limited generalizability, since this is only one organization with its rules and discourses, and it might differ greatly from similar global mediated Tibetan Buddhist organizations[24]. The data-set looking at Tibetan Buddhists in Finland is based on 16 people from two groups. Originally I intended to collect at least 20 interviews, but it was much more difficult to find respondents, than I had thought. I admit that those, who did agree to be interviewed did so because they had some special characteristics: they were outgoing enough, had some time to spare, wanted to be helpful or showed interest in the study and have seen or met me before. This might have led to many potentially interesting answers of busier or shier participants remaining a mystery. I suppose that some well-designed anonymous surveys with some open-ended questions could potentially yield some interesting research discoveries which interviews will not.

In a similar vein, I find quantitative inquiry quite useful in mapping some common opinions, tendencies and of, course, the basic demographic picture as well as the activity of Tibetan Buddhists. Such studies should be grounded, however, in insights derived from qualitative studies into the subject, rather than theoretical or personal presumptions that can turn out to be misleading. There is some considerable potential for triangulation and mixed-method studies, similar in style to Heelas et al. (2005), in order to identify where the postmodern trend for Eastern religions is heading.

As for my third data-set, it was very regrettable that I could not find a single female nor a single lay teacher. As novel and interesting the analysis of the five interviews is, it is still based on a demographically disproportionate sample of five monks. But I hope this research will set a good example for studying not only Tibetan Buddhist converts, but also for asking the opinions of their teachers as active agents of the adoption and construction of the mediated global Tibetan Buddhism. Although many of them have plenty of materials available as books, videos and courses, their personal opinions as stake-holders can be refreshing and thought-provoking, and are not necessarily always reflected in their teachings, or even asked about directly.

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[24] International Dzogchen Community, Tergar, Ligmincha, Khyentse Foundaiton would be some candidates, all with very different style and history

5.5 Practical recommendations for Tibetan Buddhist organizations

5.5.1 The medium is the future

One of the goals of this research was to identify possible strategies of Tibetan Buddhism's development in the future, which would help related organizations keep it alive. Therefore, based on my research I would like to offer a number of such strategies and recommendations. The first one concerns the exposure of Tibetan Buddhist content via the trend for mediatization and digitalization. An intuitive glance at the generational patterns of Tibetan Buddhist followers, reflected on the forum and in the groups, as well as in my personal observation, shows that the Tibetan Buddhists public in the West are not getting younger. Following the classic "the medium is the message" logic by Marshall McLuhan (1964), we can assume that the types of presentation styles and technological affordances offered by many organizations fail to attract young audiences. This does not seem to be the case with other Buddhist traditions, such as Insight or Zen. Indeed the online affordances I looked at in my analysis have not changed their form and content in more than a decade, and unlike Buddhism's timeless message the message of the employed media can look behind the times to many more tech-savvy internet users. While the idea of a forum for registered program students, supported by Elders makes sense from the perspective of constructing and maintaining a small narrative, the type of educational affordances, interface style, and quality of audio-visual content could be an obstacle. Considering the amount of affordances and platforms available and their accessibility, the solution would be a simple (albeit time-consuming) update, which could send a powerful message to spiritual seekers of the twenty-first century. In the same vein, broader audiences could be reached by open-access materials offered via low-threshold online courses on popular platforms, such as SkillShare, as well as via popular materials available in popular social media, such as TikTok.

McMahan (2008) writes of a formation of an adapted universalized form of Buddhism, which he calls tellingly, *global folk Buddhism* (p. 261). Unlike some other authors, he is not complacent about this phenomenon, pointing out than in traditionally Buddhist countries most Buddhists are not clerics, monastics or full-time practitioners, and their practice is "similarly soothing, offering comfort and accommodation to cultural norms, rather than radical transformative challenge"(p. 261). Looking at Finnish practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism (Härkönen and Sharapan, in press), the level of practice and devotion followers commit to corresponds rather to that of monastics and full-time practitioners in traditional Buddhist countries, rather than to laity. Similarly to Buddhism in its natural habitat, global folk Buddhism will yield to the common mediatized culture and environment of our interconnected world. The organizations which make use of this trend in order to gain access to spiritual seekers, rather than look

down on this trend will have better chances for reproducing their narrative, including its most elitist and sophisticated elements.

In terms of content, attracting new audiences also means listening their needs. Popular psychology, self-help and resilience strategies are a sphere, in which Tibetan Buddhism can offer something that is always in demand. Ethics, conscious living and identity politics is another sphere which is growing in relevance and could concern potential Buddhists (Borup, 2020). Trends for minimalism, zero-waste, and cottagecore, could all be coupled with Buddhist and Tibetan Buddhist meanings and physical elements. The physical elements in general, despite the controversies around cultural appropriation, remain a relatable link between wide audiences and Buddhist meanings. Traditional Tibetan food, incense in various forms, tsa-tsas, prayer flags, little rituals for connection with nature, animals and insects, could all be beneficial group activities and personal routines, maintaining a Tibetan Buddhist identity or a sympathy for it. These are of course grassroot activities which large organizations cannot orchestrate, but they could use their authority to endorse and guide them.

A specific characteristic of the modern mediatized social world is its perceived shortage of time (Couldry and Hepp, 2017), a phenomenon that stakeholders of Tibetan Buddhism also take advantage of. One aspect of hurried schedules is that people value brevity. Teachers could think of ways of adjusting practice to the necessary minimum and prioritizing its potency rather than length, instead of layering practice commitments so characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism. Many forum users and interviewees complained about feeling inadequate due to being unable to dedicate the necessary time to practice. Making use of available mobile applications for specifically Tibetan Buddhist practice could as well be welcome. The market of applications, courses and guided mediations is booming, and with respect to Buddhism, this is not always seen as positive (Sugino, 2020). However it is inevitable. The presumption of Buddhist modernism is that the Buddhist doctrine should be distilled to core tenets, negotiated to be compatible with science, and Buddhist practice can be reduced to core meditation practices, fitting a universalist agenda. Against this presumption, I would argue that many less modern elements could enjoy popularity as well. Both the forum and the interviews show that meaningful visualizations, devotional practices, mantra recitations and, mystical realizations are often enjoyed despite being categorized as unusual. All these elements could be creatively put into formats of guided meditations, mobile applications, meditation challenges, and popular audiovisual content.

The opposite aspect of this time urge is the desire for "information detox", offline time, quiet and solitude. Tibetan Buddhism has something to offer here, and the pressure of constant interconnectedness is a fertile context for promoting the peace and quite of retreat facilities, silent group retreats, practice days and other offline activities. This could be incorporated as another way of bringing in some new visitors, a small number of whom could become committed practitioners.

5.5.2   Leave no one behind

Another important recommendation, based on the research, is to focus on inclusivity. There seems to be little to no conflict around this matter at the foundational level, and at the same time this is an issue of broad public concern. In this dissertation, the focus on inclusivity encompassed issues of gender equality, freedom of sexuality and adjustments to disability. Despite some pre-modern narratives found in traditional texts, there seems to be a hermeneutic understanding of these tenets as being outdated, both among students at large and among teachers. Certain individuals may hold and voice some discriminatory stances, but they do seem to be just individual stances. The flexible attitudes shown by the teacher interviewees concerning the matter were encouraging implying that these issues can move beyond mere tolerance, to more proactive stances, policies and statements. Tolerance of intolerance should also be reduced, with the administration having the right to interfere with disruptive discriminatory rhetoric, especially when it is being presented through some sort of a religious rationale. Some more decisive actions with respect to nuns' ordination, full education and support would be very welcomed on a local and global level (Swanepoel, 2014). Discussions over sexuality and personal sexual preferences are often out of the comfort zone of many teachers, who are usually monks. This should not be an obstacle in demonstrating an inclusive and LGBTI-friendly tone, emphasizing aspects of sexual ethics, which are arguably more relevant than concern for particular orifices involved. Since sexual mores have changed considerably in the 21st century due to medical and social progress, Tibetan Buddhists should be able to renegotiate sexual ethics in terms, which actually apply to modern individuals, such as consent and respect for personal feelings.

Adjustments to health obstacles and disability could be more difficult, because they require actual financial investment. But prior to allocation of resources, there is a need for support and encouragement from the side of teachers, administration and followers, who could offer their help as volunteers or professionals. An incorporation of psychiatric and psychological expertise into teaching and mentoring students could be of great use, and many experienced students, as well as Buddhist teachers have such a combination of competences. Strategies for medical assistance adjusted for the needs of Buddhists, and end of life advice, hospice care and other needs seem to be of a great relevance to followers as well. It is important too to adjust the teaching content to accommodate reading disability, blindness and other challenges.

In addition to these three clusters, there were other difficulties, the most prominent one being financial. Organizations like FPMT require funds and profit in order to maintain their activities and pay salaries to their staff, so the educational content cannot be free. But it is also true that there many people who cannot afford this additional expenditure, and also some registered users expressed their financial concerns. Live teachings and retreats can also be costly to attend. Offering some content online for free, or perhaps crowdfunded, for example through Patreon, could be a potential solution. Scholarship programs

are also broadly used in Tibetan Buddhist organizations and could offer an opportunity for a dedicated practitioner.

5.5.3 Abuse management

All efforts to preserve Tibetan Buddhism for future practitioners could be in vain, due to damage to its reputation as a result of recurring cases of abuse by its teachers. During the years of my working on this dissertation there have been several scandals around prominent Tibetan Buddhist lamas in the West which have been published in the Buddhist magazines and in public news media. Mediatized society makes it impossible to keep such information hidden from public attention (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). As mentioned earlier, Tibetan Buddhist practice among converts often involves a high level of commitment, which includes a tantric commitment to a teacher (a guru, a lama). Maintaining such commitment in practice when the teacher demonstrates unethical or illegal behavior, can be difficult and cause a lot of confusion to the followers. Becoming a victim of such behavior can be traumatic. The tantric narrative of the guru-disciple relationships carries the potential for abuse which is taken seriously by followers (Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017). The followers, however, are also members of modern society at large, and the interviews demonstrate clearly that they see abusive behavior by teachers as negative, dangerous, unacceptable, and in some cases calling for appropriate legal action, even though the followers are reluctant to admit such behavior with certainty. The assumption expressed both by teachers and students is that "real" teachers do not engage in abusive behavior, but the exact criteria of "real" are hazy. As recently as the last few years we have seen scandals around teachers, who had been recognized as reincarnate lamas, who had been endorsed by others as very advanced teachers and practitioners. Based on the forum discussions, the requirement to examine the teacher before committing to one is often framed as the student's responsibility. However in cases when teachers are endorsed by other prominent teachers or organizations, this may send a (sometimes false) message that the teacher is indeed reputable. As long as other prominent lamas hesitate to voice a clear stance over sexual, financial and (in some cases even) physical abuse by their colleagues, the scandals around these teachers will remain scandals around Tibetan Buddhism itself.

In order to maintain a good reputation for Tibetan Buddhism, its stakeholder organization should work out strategies for dealing with in-house cases of abuse, showing transparency, integrity and care for its followers. The instructions over different levels of teachers and commitment to them should be given early on, so that the examples of teacher-student relationships from the legends of lives of medieval Buddhist saints do not become the most prominent role models for the students. Regulations concerning healthy boundaries between teachers and students should also be explicitly developed. From the Vajrayana perspective these issues are complex, and there is bound to be some debate and adjustment. Some passages from Buddhist texts describe the gruesome karmic consequences for "breaking the guru devotion", including

afterlife in hell realms (Sharapan and Härkönen, 2017). The texts also tend to emphasize guru devotion at all levels, including in the very beginning of one's practice. It is important, however, to address such statements hermeneutically, i.e. from the perspective of the times and culture they were written in. The tacit knowledge of the Buddhist tradition, social norms and what was expected of followers in traditional Tibet were different, and few people in the modern world have much familiarity with Tibetan Buddhism at the beginning of their practice. The origins of the claims about the consequences of breaking the guru devotion also seem to lie with later Buddhist texts, specifically the requirements of Vajrayana. This means that modern-day convert students cannot be expected to develop and show unconditional guru devotion from the early days of their practice. Even with respect to tantric practice, the actual gurus I interviewed assert that Tibetan Buddhist teachers should be treated and respected as *teachers*, and the advanced tantric level of personal relationships in a small community is generally not typical in modern Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, it is important to openly discuss the levels of commitments, including with teachers themselves, and take the consequences into consideration. The consequences of abuse cases should also include clear instructions for students who have witnessed abuse in their community or became victims of it. It is worth mentioning again that all the five lamas I interviewed admitted that abusive communities can safely be abandoned and none of them mentioned any hell realms.

5.5.4   Unification

One of the prominent take-aways of this dissertation is that Buddhism in the West does not represent new national Buddhist formations (American Buddhism, Finnish Buddhism etc.), but instead is composed of smaller narratives, bound by the meanings of their own respective tradition or lineage. The differences between these traditions and organizations are vast, both in terms of how Buddhism is practiced and presented and how its basic tenets and concepts are understood. These differences are so irreconcilable, that distinctions of national or regional Buddhisms do not apply. With respect to Tibetan Buddhism, this trend is especially aggravated by the focus on specific teachers and lineages. This adds even further to the division within Buddhism in West. Within Tibetan Buddhism there can be different organizations with their own name, structure, head office, bank account and centers, which follow exactly the same lineage and a similar set of teachers. For example, the list of organizations registered in Finland includes quite a few groups, which follow the Karma Kaguy tradition. Some of these groups are irreconcilable due to serious schisms around the "correct" reincarnation of Karmapa XVI. Others are simply centered around different teachers. Since Tibetan Buddhism does not have many followers in Finland in general, this leads to organizations having scarce resources, few events, and a weak influence in the society. In some cases, it may also turn away newcomers.

The teachers I interviewed were mostly hesitant about combining different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. While they all agreed that other lineages should

be respected, and positive about their students attending teachings by lamas from other traditions, it was clear that they saw being rooted in one's own tradition as imperative. Despite that, they were all positive about combining Tibetan Buddhism with practices and resources from other Buddhist traditions, such as Insight or Zen. As described earlier, I see the explanation of this seeming contradiction in the difference between practice on the level of sutra and the level of tantra. The teachings involving basic meditations for development of concentration and compassion are rather similar, and various traditions can offer insights into these qualities of the mind. Tibetan Buddhist practice often includes mantras, tantric visualizations and ritual practices, however, which often tend to be specific to each lineage. A lot of public Buddhist teachings offered by Tibetan Buddhist lamas are at the sutric level and concern issues and narratives, to which all Tibetan Buddhists and even Bön practitioners can relate. I believe keeping Tibetan Buddhism viable means joining resources when it comes to teachings, which are applicable universally and/or to all Tibetan Buddhist followers. More advanced tantric teachings, entailing commitments, could be marked separately and have admission criteria, as is commonly practiced in some Tibetan Buddhist organizations. Recognizing the differences is important for identifying the similarities, present among various Tibetan Buddhist schools. Jointly organized teachings and other events at the sutric or just common Buddhist level could help enhance the resources and be more effective at making these events visible to potential participants. With the inevitable advancement of online affordances brought by the Covid-19 situation of 2020-21, important unifying activities could take place translocally as online events.

This last recommendation might seem to go against the actual conclusions of this dissertation. My analysis of the FPMT forum and the two groups in Helsinki showed that the formation of Tibetan Buddhist identity and practice among converts follows the trajectory set by each organization, tradition and lineage. Although each such a small narrative is intertwined with other ones and with the society at large through mediated interconnectedness and shared meanings, the stake-holders tend to steer the followers towards their own narrative. This happens through information and communication technology, which is translocal, so the *local* Buddhisms remain too heterogenous to be defined as separate entities. While I have been critical of misnomers like "American Vajrayana" or "Finnish Buddhism", I must admit that unity and territorial proximity do offer benefits. The aim of my dissertation was to *describe* the process of constructing and enacting a new "culture" and "identity", and this construction seems to have a tendency for division. But considering the numbers of active participants in each group, the demographic shrinking of Tibetan Buddhism and the challenges to its vitality, the preservation of the Vajrayana small narratives may depend on overcoming this tendency. Beneath the many foundational differences and idiosyncrasies, Tibetan Buddhist groups do share plenty of similarities compared to other Buddhist traditions in the West, let alone with other social domains. Sharing the similarities through common events and information channels, while being mindful and respectful of differences, could

be one important factor for the continuation of Tibetan Buddhism in the 21st century. However the default tendency seems to be towards division rather than unification, so to make use of the benefits unification offers, the stakeholders will have to be proactive.

SUMMARY IN FINNISH

Tämä tutkimus käsittelee tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden translokaalia rakentumista kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän näkökulmasta. Tutkimus ottaa kantaa myös uskonnon muuttuviin muotoihin ja tarkoituksiin eri aikoina sekä tieto- ja viestintätekniikan rooliin kääntymisprosessissa. Kirjallisuuskatsaus kartoittaa nykymaailman uskonnollista maisemaa ja hengellisyyden kehittymistä. Katsaus keskittyy erityisesti tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden asemaan ja historiallisin kehityskulkuihin. Tutkimuksen varsinaisena keskipisteenä ovat sellaiset tiibetinbuddhalaiset järjestöt ja yhteisöt, jotka pääsääntöisesti suuntaavat toimintaansa uusille käännynnäisille. Itämaisen hengellisyyden, meditaation ja Dalai Laman suosion takia tiibetinbuddhalaisuus on viehättänyt länsimaalaistaustaisia harjoittajia huomattavan paljon, ja se onkin nykyään muuttunut globaaliksi ilmiöksi. Samalla tiibetinbuddhalaisuus sisältää paljon elementtejä, jotka voivat olla modernille ihmiselle vieraita. Väitöskirjan tarkoitus oli tarkastella translokaalin tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden muodostamista ja jälleenrakentamista uusissa ympäristöissä. Kulttuurisia merkitysneuvotteluita ja nykyaikaisen tieto- ja viestintäteknologian roolia tässä prosessissa tarkasteltiin kolmetahoisen aineiston avulla.

Ensimmäinen aineisto koostuu FPMT:n (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition) tiibetinbuddhalaisen opetusohjelman keskustelupalstoilla käydyistä keskusteluista. FPMT on vuonna 1975 perustettu järjestö, joka tarjoaa tiibetinbuddhalaista opetusta kaikille uskonnosta kiinnostuneille ympäri maailmaa. Analyysiin käytettiin seitsemän vuoden foorumikeskusteluja opetusohjelmaan liittyen. Toinen aineiston osa koostuu kuudestatoista haastattelusta kahden tiibetinbuddhalaisen ryhmän jäsenten kanssa (Tara Liberation FPMT ja Danakosha). Molemmat ryhmät toimivat Helsingissä ja väitöskirjatyön alussa tämä oli ensimmäinen tutkimus tiibetinbuddhalaisuudesta Suomessa. Kolmas aineisto koostuu viidestä haastattelusta perinteisesti koulutettujen tiibetinbuddhalaisten munkkien kanssa, jotka asuvat eri puolilla maailmaa ja opettavat pääsääntöisesti länsimaalaisille seuraajille. Opettajahaastattelut tarjoavat tärkeän lisäyksen harjoittajien ja opettajien vuorovaikutukseen translokaalin tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden muodustamisessa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset on järjestetty viiteen osaan niiden keskeisten teemojen mukaan. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että uskonnon elementit ja merkitykset rakentuvat konkreettisten järjestöjen ja perimyslinjojen vaikutuksessa ennemmin kuin alueellisten ja kulttuuristen tekijöiden pakottamana. Uskonnon muodollisuus, tärkeimmät opinkappaleet ja auktoriteetin tärkeys pääsääntöisesti säilyvät, vaikka näyttävätkin aiheuttavan joillekin käännynnäisille haasteita. Tutkimuksessa korostetaan teknologiavälitteisen viestinnän merkitystä translokaalien ja "glokaalien" kulttuurin ilmentymien mahdollistamisessa. Viestintä- ja tietotekniikan erikoisroolin erottaminen käy yhä vaikeammaksi, koska erilaisten verkkokanavien päällekkäinen ja limittäinen käyttö on tutkimuksen osallistujille niin luontevaa ja kaikenkattavaa. Tutkimus esittää, että tieto- ja viestintätekniikan kyllästämässä maailmassa maantieteellisten ja kansallisten vaikutusten merkitys uuden uskonnon omaksumisessa on loppujen lopuksi huomattavan pieni.

Tämä tarkoittaa, että buddhalaisuuden nimeäminen "länsimaalaiseksi", "amerikkalaiseksi" tai "suomalaiseksi" ei useimmiten ole perusteltua. Alusellisia ja kansallisia merkityksiä painottavan näkökulman purkaminen on ajankohtaista, koska buddhalaisuuden ilmentymät nykymaailmassa muodostuvat kansainvälisen ja paikallisen tason risteymissä, buddhalaisuutta harjoittavien järjestöjen konkreettisessa toiminnassa. Tutkimuksessa käsitellään myös sellaisia ajankohtaisia nykymaailman tekijöitä, jotka vaikuttavat tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden jatkumiseen translokaalien muodostumisten kautta, ja esitetään ennusteita mahdollisista tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden tulevista kehityssuunnista sekä suosituksia siitä välittäville osapuolille.

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APPENDIX 1: THE LIST OF TIBETAN BUDDHIST GROUPS REGISTERED IN FINLAND AS OF 2017

Tibetan Buddhist groups, registered as religious communities: Danakosha Finland, Lochen Jangchub Tsemo Buddhist Religious Association, Palpung Yeshe Gatshal Finland and Diamond Way;

Groups, registered as an association: Ligmincha Finland, (former Garuda Bön Finland), Palpung Changchub Dargye Ling Finland, Songtsen (former Tulku Pema Wangyal Study Group), Dzogchen Association of Finland, Tara Liberation Study Group, Tarab Institute Association Finland and Nagarjuna Datsan;

Informal but established meditation or study groups in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition: Aro Gar Finland, Bodhicharya Study Group Finland, Dzogchen Shri Singha Finland, Dzogchen Tashi Palbar Ling, Helsingin Shambhala Meditation Group, Kagyu Samye Dzong (former Rokpa Finland), and Sumatikirti Buddhist Center.

APPENDIX 2.1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Suostumus osallistumisesta haastattelututkimukseen
Projektin nimi: "Dynamics of Tibetan Buddhism: adoption or adaption?"

Tutkimus tarkastelee kulttuurisesti vieraan harjoitusperinteen, tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden, omaksumisprosessia. Tutkimus myös selvittää niitä hyötyjä ja haasteita, joita prosessista seuraa sekä sitä, miten hyödyt ja haasteet kohdataan. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on auttaa kehittämään tapoja välittää perinteistä tietoa moderneille länsimaalaisille ihmisille. Kaikki vastaajat pysyvät anonyymeinä, ja yksilönsuojan takaamiseksi haastattelunauhoitteet tuhotaan haastattelujen puhtaaksikirjoituksen jälkeen.

1. Olen saanut riittävästi tietoa tutkimusprojektista. Osallistumiseni tutkimushaastatteluun on selitetty minulle ja on selvä.

2. Osallistumiseni tutkimuksen haastatteluun on vapaaehtoinen. Suoraa tai epäsuoraa pakkoa osallistua ei ole käytetty.

3. Sallin haastattelijan tehdä kirjallisia muistiinpanoja haastattelun ajan sekä haastattelun tallentamisen. Saatan myös sallia haastattelun nauhoittamisen (audio- tai videotallennuksen). Minulle on selvää, että mikäli en halua että haastattelu tallennetaan, olen milloin tahansa oikeutettu perumaan osallistumiseni.

4. Minulla on oikeus jättää vastaamatta mihin tahansa kysymykseen. Jos tunnen oloni epämiellyttäväksi missä haastattelun kohtaa tahansa, minulla on oikeus vetäytyä haastattelusta.

5. Minulle on suoraan taattu, että mikäli niin haluan, tutkija ei identifioi minua nimeltä tai tehtävältä missään raportissa, jossa käytetään haastattelusta saatua informaatiota ja että luottamuksellisuuteni osallistujana tässä tutkimuksessa pysyy salassa.

6. Kaikkiin kysymyksiini on vastattu tyydyttävästi ja minulle on annettu myös haastattelijan allekirjoittama kopio tästä suostumuksesta.

Suostun osallistumaan tutkimusprojektiin, jonka tekee MA Maria Sharapan PhD Marko Siitosen ohjauksessa Jyväskylän yliopistossa.

Allekirjoitus   Pvm.

Osallistuja_____   _____
Tutkija_____

APPENDIX 2.2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

Interview guide

i. **Tell me about yourself as a Buddhist. (...) Are you somehow different from traditionally Buddhist followers?** Do you see yourself as a Buddhist? Who is a Buddhist as you understand it? Do you feel any cultural clashes between you and Tibetan Buddhism?

ii. **What drew you to Buddhism? What makes up your regular practice? Are there any aspects of Buddhism that you find hard to relate to?** Do you have an altar? Do you value formal, ritual aspects of religion?

Iii. **Tell me about your attitude to Buddhist concepts like karma, rebirth, enlightment?** Do you have a firm conviction in rebirth? Karma? Possibility of enlightenment? Buddhas and boddhisattvas helping you in your practice? Is there anything in Buddhism that you find difficult to develop conviction in? Do you feel you need to develop conviction in these things? Do you try to, how? Do you find these things well-explained? **Has your worldview changed, how?** Are there any concepts that you were first opposed to, but then managed to internalize? **Can one be a Buddhist without believing in such things, let's say a "secular Buddhist"?**

iv. **Are there any criteria one should follow when choosing what teachings to listen to and to put to practice?**

v. **Is there anything in Buddhism, which can be actually cultural?** What is your attitude towards "cultural" practices or beliefs? Can Mindfulness be called the "essense" of Buddhism? Can it be benefitial to many people?

vi. **What is the role of a lama on the Buddhist path and for you personally? Who can be a teacher?** Is a teacher necessary? How far can the authority of a teacher stretch? What is a proper attitude and behaviour towards the teacher? Any teacher? What do you think of the notorious cases of abuse, around sex and money? How should one act if they encountered something like this? **If you have a guru, how did you commit to him/her? Has it been a smooth path after that?**

Vii. **Is there any differences between male and female practitioners? Can a physically or mentally challenged person engage in the Buddhist path? Would a gay or a lesbian feel welcome in a Buddhist group?** What does the tradition say on such issues?

Viii. **Can you follow more than one Tibetan Buddhist lineage? What about other Buddhist traditions, such as zen or vipassana? Other religions?**

ix. **What does modern-world Buddhist practice look like compared to Tibet?** What opportunities does this world offer? What challenges does it imply? **Do you take advantage of any modern means of communication, technology, apps, etc. in your spiritual life?** Would you wish to use them (more)? **Do you believe there can be an online guru? Online dharma? Online sangha?** Why? What are advantages and disadvantages of offline and online?

APPENDIX 2.3: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

Consent for participation in a research interview

Project name: "Dynamics of Tibetan Buddhism: adoption or adaption?"

The research investigates the process of adopting Tibetan Buddhism among people of non-Tibetan background. The goal of the project is to help develop ways of transmitting traditional knowledge to the people of modern West. The project relies on data collected from a Buddhist forum, interviews with Tibetan Buddhist students in Finland and Tibetan Buddhist teachers of Tibetan origin, who have experience of working with Western audiences. Tibetan teachers can choose to keep their identity protected or revealed, whichever option they find to be of more benefit.

1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project. The purpose of my participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to me and is clear.

2. My participation as an interviewee in this project is voluntary. There is no explicit or implicit coercion whatsoever to participate.

3. I allow the researcher(s) to take written notes and recording during the interview. I also allow the audio recording of the interview. It is clear to me that in case I do not want the interview to be taped I am at any point of time fully entitled to withdraw from participation.

4. I have the right not to answer any of the questions. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to withdraw from the interview.

5. I have been given the explicit guarantees that, if I wish so, the researcher will not identify me by name or function in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

6. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I have been given a copy of this consent form co-signed by the interviewer.

7. I would like my identity to be A) revealed; B) protected. (underline)

I agree to participate in a research project of Researcher, Maria Sharapan, MA, under the supervision of Marko Siitonen, PhD, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Signature   Date

Participant _____   _____

Researcher _____

APPENDIX 2.4: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Interview guide

1. **How will you define a Buddhist?** (Specific practices? behavior? world outlook?) (If someone does not believe in i.e. karma, rebirth, enlightenment, can they still present themselves as a Buddhist?)

2. You know a lot of traditional Tibetan practitioners, right? And Western practitioners? **Can you think of any differences between them?** Is Buddhism perceived/practiced by them differently? (Especially, due to cultural differences. Examples, opinion of it)

3. **Are there any elements in Tibetan Buddhism that could be cultural?** What is its essence? (ex. altar, rituals, artifacts, Sanskrit/Tibetan language) (Can the cultural part be discarded?)

4. **The question of guru is very important in Buddhism. Do you feel Westerners get it right?** Have you encountered any problems with it? (We have different power relations in the West traditionally) (What if someone decides to leave or change the teacher, f.e. in case of abuse?) (**What is your opinion of the cases of abuse**, and what can be done about them?)

5. **What are the challenges and opportunities of the modern world we live in**? (Compared to traditional environments)

6. **Do you think technology can be useful for Buddhists?** (Do you use any technological means?) (Would you like to see it developed further, examples?) (Can Buddhism be transmitted online? **Online guru, dharma and sangha?**)

7. **Should a practitioner stick to one lineage and one tradition?** (What would you say if someone wants to combine your practice with another lineage, or with Zen or Theravada?) (Can someone be Buddhist and practice other religions, f.e. if they have a strong Christian background?)

8. **Is there difference between male and female practitioners? Can a physically or mentally disabled person commit to Buddhist practice? Would a gay/lesbian person be welcome in a Buddhist group?** (What does the tradition say about all these cases? Your personal opinion? Can factors like gender, disability or sexual orientation affect people's practice?)

9. **How would you like to see Tibetan Buddhism developing in the future, 50 years from now? What are you afraid of happening to it? How would you NOT like it to develop?** (What do you feel to be more likely from your experience, examples?)

APPENDIX 3: ORIGINAL VERSIONS OF TRANSCRIBED QUOTATIONS CITED IN THE TEXT IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

4.1. Denomination and group membership

Tomi (p.112): Mikä voisi olla että jos, että se, että alun perin musta tuntui että, ehkä se on se linja. Että tykkäät ottaa yhden toisesta koulusta ja toinen toisesta koulusta, ja sitten musta se on fiksua jos harjoittelee yhden, jos mä olen jo kuusi vuotta harjoittanut, tai reilu, mun mielestä vielä mä tutustun, jos joku voi tutustua enemmän, ei mulla ole aikaa niin paljon.

Anna (p.112): Mun juurilama on Kagyu linjasta, mutta tavallaan mä ajattelen Lama Zopa Rinpoche aidallaisena juuriguruna myös. Koska mä olen turvautunut FPMT linjan sisäällä, ja paljon opiskellut. Kyllä Lama Zopa Rinpoche on varsinasella tasolla mun juuriguru.

Marina (p. 112): Marina: No mä oon käynyt kerran katsomassa zen-harjoitusta, mutta se johtuu siitä, että mun yksi tyttöystävä halusi näyttää mulle yhden komean miehen siellä. (nauraa) Muuten en olisi mennyt. Mulla ei oo oikeastaan ollut mielenkiintoa ollenkaan. Sen jälkeen kun mä tapasin Rinpochen silloin 11 vuotta sitten, niin ei.

Risto (p.112): Totta kai (voi oppia eri buddhalaisuuden traditioista). Mä itse ihailen tosi paljon zen perinnettä. Yksi mun lemppärisutrita on Avatamsaka sutra, joka on zen perinnen yksi tärkeistä sutrista, se on niin kaunis. Jos mä en olisi Tiibetin buddhalainen, mä menisin ehdottomasti siihen. Tosi hieno juttu.

I (p.112-113): Voiko henkilö hyötyä monesta harjoituslinjasta?

Helmi: Mun pitäis varmaan sanoa että ei. Se olisi varman korrekti tai oikea vastaus, mutta valitettavasti mä en voi sanoa silleen, oman kokemuksen kautta. Koska siis… mä olen itse sellainen, että mä tutkin asioita tällei niin kuin laajemmin. Ja mä haluan niin kuin ymmärtää eri asioita ja tavallaan sitten peilata sitä omaan kokemukseen aina, koska se on silleen, miten mä ymmärrän asioita. Sen kautta niin kuin, voi.

I (p.113): Koetko tai oletko kokenut kulttuurisia yhteentörmäyksiä tiibetinbuddhalaisuuden kanssa?

Petri: En oikeastaan henkilökohtaisesti silleensä, että jos kaikki kuitenkin tuntuu omasta mielestä niin kuin itselle oikealta. Mutta toki sitten kanssaihmiset, joitten kanssa elää, meinaan niin kuin tyttöystävät ja perhe, niin joskus ne olla silleensä, jos itse ei toimi enää silleensä kauhean länsimaisesti kaikissa asioissa niin sitten just läheiset ihmiset saattaa vetää siitä…Hermostua joistain asioista.

Marina (p.117): Me ehkä näytetään hirveän coolille just kun on kaikki malat sun muut ja sitten istutaan jalat ristissä ja muuta, mutta kyllä se on aika työlästä kuitenkin, jos silleen niin kuin tosissaan ottaa.

4.2. Democratization and power (im)balance

Kirsi (p.126): …monellahan on ristiriita siitä esimerkiksi, jos kun me eletään tämmöisessä demokratiassa, niin jos tuntuu, että sä oot vajryana-opilas, niin opettaja on niin kuin se, joka on tavallaan semmoinen kaikkitietävä et joku vois ajatella, että se on semmoinen diktaattori tai että miten se voi olla. Että onko se varmasti ja niin tuota. Mä en tiiedä miks mulla ei ole sitä ongelmaa yhtään ollut.

I: Mutta sä tunnet ihmisiä, joilla on?

Kirsi: Kyllä. Ja sit ne ihmiset ei yleensä sitten tule dharma-ryhmään. Koska jos ne kokee, että siellä nyt on liikaa valtaa.

I: Onko tuommoisia ihmisiä paljon?

Kirsi: Mä luulen, että eniten kuitenkin ihmisiä karkottaa se, jos siellä on sellaista sanghan jäsenten kesken sellaisia ristiriitoja, että en oo oikeestaan sit huomannut kuitenkaan, et kun moni saattaa sanoa näin, että haluan olla sinun oppilaasi opettaja edelleenkin, mutta täällä sanghassa on joitain sellaisia ihmisiä, joista mä en tykkää, joitten kanssa mä en viihdy.

Risto (p.126): Se on kaikille outoa sen takia että kaikilla on egot. Meillä on kaikialla oma ego, sen takia se on kaikille outoa. Ja se on se idea tässä. Eli se ei ole riipuvainen siitä olenko mä länsimaalainen vai olenko mä minkämaalainen.

4.3. Doctrinal and formal reduction

Marina (p.138): Itse asiassa mä luulen että buddhalaisuus kiehtoi just sellai niin kuin kliseisellä, Tiibet oli tosi cool paikka ja sitten nää kaikki oli niin cool oloiset kun niillä oli nää malat ja näytti niin makealta, se oli varmaan semmonen täysin turhamainen, niin kuin ulkoinen viehätys.

I (p.140): Kerro omasta lähestymisentavastasi buddhalaisuuten filosofisiin näkemyksiin kuten karmaan, jäällensyntymään ja valaistumisen mahdollisuuten.

Ilona: Niihin mä olen kasvanut, näin voin sanoa, näin monen vuoden aikana. Jos siellä oli jotain hankalaa, olen kuitenkin omaksunut ne kaikki. Toi oli kysymys, oliko jotakin vaikea, alussa oli hirveän vaikea omaksua tä jäällensyntymä, koska mulla ei ollut siitä minkäänlaista ennäkköajatusta. Mä luulen että tosi monet ihmiset, niillä on ihan päinvastoin tällainen ajatus, ensiksi ajatteli että on mahdollista syntyä uudelleen, mutta mulla oli semmonen että ei, ei missän

tapauksessa. Mutta tuota. Sitten muutaman vuoden sisällä rupesi tuntemaan ihan luonnolliselta.

Risto (p.140): Mä otan ne jonkinlaisena opetuksena, niin sanotusti, mutta joo, mulle on vähän hankala. Kyllä mä osaan jotenkin itselleni perustella että jotain voisi olla, mutta en mä kuitenkaan vakuuta itseäni.

I: Okei? Mutta miten sä suhtaudut niihin puoleihin?

Risto: Siihen avoimesti. Että mä tiedän paljon asioita jota on olemassa, mitkä mä en voi havaita niin helposti. Ja on tommosia asioita jotka mä en tiedä. Siinä mielessä avoimia ajatuksia, ehkä se on näin.

Jarkko (p.142): "[…] kun ymmärtää tätä buddhalaista maailmankuvaa paremmin, niin silloin ymmärtää myöskin, että tai siitä näkökulmasta, niin jälleensyntymä ja karma, niin ne eivät ole niin kummallisia. Ne eivät ole ollenkaan ristiriidassa sen ajatuksen kanssa, mitä buddhalaisuudessa nähdään, että miten maailma toimii."

Risto (p. 143): Mulla oli alttari ennen kun mä olin buddhalainen. Mulla oli alttari enne kun mä olin mikään uskonnon harjoittaja. Mulla oli alttari sen takia että mä keräsin selläisen, mulla oli tiety alue kirjahyllyssä, missä oli semmosia asioita jotka oli tärkeitä. Mulla oli siellä semmosia asioita jotka muistutti mua asioista mitkä mä haluan muista. Alttarilla siellä oli iso peili, se peili oli siellä pohjana. Se peili osoitti mulle siitä että asiat on jotenkin… liityi jotenkin avaruuteen ja heijastukseen, sitten mulla oli keskellä sitä peilillä oli kyntilä. Kyntilä muistutti mua siitä valosta joka on sisäällä, joka ei häviä, mä ajattelin tälläin aikasemmin itse. (…) Mulle alttari ei ollut outo juttu. Mulla alttari on ollut sen takia, koska mä kunnioitan sitä mä itse arvostan. Sen takia mulla on nykyään buddhalainen alttari.

Jarkko (p.145): No jos mun lama kehottaa menemään ruokkimaan lohikäärmeitä, niin silloin mä ajattelen, että tässä on niin kuin buddhalainen tarkoitus taustalla.

I: Mikä se voi olla?

Jarkko: Se vois esimerkiks olla semmoinen, että joko että mun lama tietää paremmin kuin minä, että niitä lohikäärmeitä on olemassa. Tai vaikka niitä ei olis olemassa, niin ehkä se voisi olla mulle hyödyllistä esimerkiksi jos mulla on tilanne, mulla on kovin ylpeä asenne mun omia uskomuksia kohtaan. Että minä olen aina oikeassa. Niin lama voi ehkä ajatella, että nyt se on mulle hyödyllistä mennä tekemään jotain tämmöistä mikä vähän löysyttäis näitä asenteita.

Marina (p.146): Tuota meillä on iso semmonen lähioppilasporukka, meitä on oikeastaan jo vuosia käyty läpi semmosia niin kuin, nää on taas ehkä enemmän

perinteeseen nojautuvia. Mutta esimerkiksi me ollaan todella hyviä kestittämään tiibetiläisiä lamoja, koska me osataan käyttäytyä tiettyjen perinteiden mukaisesti. Ja se tulee ihan niin kuin meidän opettajalta, tai että hän niin kuin kertoo. Se on hassu asetelma, koska me suurin osa kuitenkin ollaan, tai siis ei suurin osa, mutta osa meistä on häntä vanhempia, hän on joutunut meillekin näyttämään kädestä pitäen miten teekuppeja kannetaan, kun palvellaan jotain korkeanarvosta lamaa. Ja ihan semmosia pieniä asioita, mutta nyt me osataan ne. Se tämmönen niin kuin tän tyyppinen perinteisyys. Myöskin hän ei muuta tekstejä ja perinteisiä, siis opetuksia miellyttääkseen länsimaisia oppilaita. Että se hänen perimysinja noudattaa tismalleen sitä perimyslinjaa. Hän on siinä mielessä tosi autenttinen opettaja, koska sitä ei tehdä meille yhtään helpommaksi, koska me ollaan laiskoja länsimaalaisia.

4.4. Inclusivity

I (p.153): Onko mies- ja naisharjoittajien välillä mielestäsi eroja?

Petri: Mulle tuli vaan mieleen tommonen hauska länsimainen komedia, tai standup-pätkä mitkä katottiin tossa toissailtana. Ja se oli niin kuin että naiset ajattelee ihan eri tavalla kuin miehet.

Marina (p.154): Jos katotaan ihan ydintä harjoittamista, niin en usko että on [ero]. Että mielihän on sama. Mieli lainausmerkeissä. Käytännön puolella on. Jos naisella on lapsia, niin se ajallinen, ajallisesti hän ei pysty sitä niin paljon tekemään. Ja jos parisuhteessa kummatkin on harjoittajia, niin silloin se miehen harjoitus menee naisen harjoituksen edelle tosi monissa kodissa. Että nainen on sen lasten kanssa kuitenkin ja isä tekee harjoituksia.

Agata (p.154): "Minulla ei ole nyt käytännöllisistä syistä alttaria, koska poika vie kaikki pois sieltä, ei se voi sinne jättää. Siitä syystä."

Petri (p.157): Se on vaikea kyllä niin kuin sanoa kuka on, kun siis helpostihan kaikesta heitetään vitsiä ja tolleensa, että… asioista vitsaillaan niin se on taas niin kuin vaikea, jos se ei oo semmosta… Töissä ainakin huomaa, että siellä niin kuin helposti on, tai pystyis erottamaan tai sitten se vaan on rajumpaa, tai semmoista miesten välistä huumorin heittoa. Siinä voi sitten helposti leimauta rasistiksi tai joksikin homofoobikoksi.

Petri (p.158): Mutta ehkä buddhalaisuudessa sitä on vaikeampi huomata, jos kaikki on kuiteskin myötätuntoisia ja tuollaisia, niin ehkä se ei sitten tuu sitten ilmi ehkä vaikka saattais vähän ollakin.

Ilona (p.158): "koska me emme harjoitetaan seksiä (naurraa), se pysyy vähän syrjessä tämä seksualinen suntautuminen"

Marina (p.158): "Hän oli nyt sitten oikeasti ensimmäinen lama, jonka mä kuulin, että suuryleisön edessä mikrofonin sanonut että: "ei oraalia, eikä anaalia"

Tomi (p.158): En ole itse lukenut mitään sutria tai selläisiä missä se on sanottu, mutta olen ymmärtänyt, en tiedä onko joku kysynyt vai… varmaan on, kun mä olin sitten joskus Nepalissa siellä luostarissa, joillakin kuukauden kurssilla, kaikkia kyseltiin, sitä tuotta, olen ymmärtänyt että siellä [anaaliseksissä] on jotain tälläistä väärää.

4.5. Online religion

I (p.173): Entä sangha, vaikka jos sulla olis joku keskustelupalsta missä sä voisit keskustella ihmisten kanssa asioista?

Eveliina: Siis keskustelupalstojahan nyt on jo hirveen paljon tarjolla. Mutta siis mulla ei ole niin kuin aikaa siis semmoiseen. Mä mieluummin sitte käytän sen ajan, että mä hankin sen informaation joko opiskelemalla tai kysymällä mun opettajalta. Keskustelupalstoilla on niin paljon kaikkien mielipiteitä eli se että sä (?) jonkun mielipiteitä, niin siinä menee hukkaan aikaa mun mielestä.

Kirsi (p.173): Hän antoi usein hyvin käytännön neuvoja siellä, että tuntuu, että se aina auttoi siinä hetkisessä tilanteessa.

I: Onko siinä niin kuin kaksisuuntaisesti vai oliko se vain niin kuin opetusta?

Kirsi: Se oli vaan opetusta, mutta jotenkin tuntui, että se aina tiesi välillä mitä on ihmisten mielissä menossa. Se antoi sellaisia vinkkejä sitten, että… Ehkä meillä on kaikilla vähän samoja ongelmia sitten välillä.

Petri (p.174): Ehkä hän jotenkin ajatteli, että tää meidän koulukunta on edustettuna hyvin, niin. Mutta toki kaikissa koulukunnissa on mun mielestä hyvin paljon niin kuin on meidän koulukunnan opetuksia. Kaikissa koulukunnissa luetaan niitä paljon. Se vaan on niin vanha koulukunta.

Bruno (p.175): "Totta kai siis, aina parempi kuin ei mitään. Mutta sen että tulisiko käytettyä, olisiko siitä semmosta todellista hyötyä, en osa sanoa."

Marina (p.175): Mä käytän sovelluksena muun muassa tiibetiläistä kalenteria. Se helpottaa tosi paljon, koska mulla oli aikaisemmin paperinen, mutta nyt tää kulkee niin kuin koko ajan tässä. En oikeastaan muuta. Mä joskus etsin siinä Appsi-kaupasta, niin sieltä löytyy kyllä tosi paljon tosi hassua. Kuten virtuaalinen rukousmylly (naurua), ja tuota, sitten eri harjoitusten laskurit, eli jos sä akkumuloit mantroja, niin sä voit sitten sen appsin kautta tallentaa ja seurata sun edistystä.