

**Buddhism, Diversity and ‘Race’:
Multiculturalism and Western
convert Buddhist movements in
East London – a qualitative study**

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for degree
of PhD History

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work set out in this thesis for PhD History is entirely my own

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the development of convert Buddhism in multicultural environments. Its focus is on the encounters of people of colour (defined for the purposes of this study as people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent) with Western convert Buddhist movements, which tend to be predominantly white and middle-class.

The study uses an ethnographic case study approach informed by feminist epistemologies. The case-studies are of two of the largest Western convert Buddhist movements in the UK – the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) and Sōka Gakkai International-UK (SGI-UK) – and focus on their branches in the multicultural inner-city location of East London. The findings suggest that most Buddhists of colour in these movements come from the second generation of the diaspora. For the FWBO, there is an apparently hegemonic discourse of middle-class whiteness that people of colour and working class members of this movement have to negotiate as part of their involvement. In contrast, for SGI-UK, the ethos is one of a moral cosmopolitanism that encourages intercultural dialogue thus facilitating the involvement of a considerably more multicultural and international following. People of colour find that their practices of the techniques of the self provided by each movement enable them to feel more empowered in relation to their quotidian experience of racisms and racialisation, as well as encouraging them in a more anti-essentialist approach to identity that sees it as fluid and contingent.

To date, there has been little discussion of how Western Buddhism is developing in multiethnic and multicultural contexts, even though the West has long been a space of significant ethnic and cultural diversity arising largely from processes of colonialism and imperialism. This study therefore develops a new line of enquiry for consideration in studies seeking to illuminate the issue of how Buddhism is being translated in the West.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In any project of this kind, naturally many people are involved in the background. I would like to acknowledge their involvement here, of course with the key proviso that they are in no way responsible for any errors I have made. Firstly I would like to thank my main supervisor Professor Damien Keown who initially suggested the areas that this study covers might be a fruitful area for me to investigate. I would also like to thank him, as well as my second supervisor Dr. Rebekah Lee for their ongoing advice and support throughout the life of this project. Damien's expertise in the application of Buddhist ethics to contemporary problems and socially engaged Buddhism, as well as Rebekah's knowledge of ethnographic methods and issues around religious conversion, were invaluable.

I would like to thank the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), the British Sociological Association's (BSA's) Sociology of Religion study group, the UK Association of Buddhist Studies and the International Association of Buddhist Studies (IABS) for the opportunity to discuss work at conferences in a welcoming and supportive atmosphere, especially for postgraduates. BASR and the BSA's study group on religion were kind enough to provide financial support so that I could attend the meetings at which I presented work in progress. The History department also funded my attendance at the IABS conference where I presented some of my work.

I thank the Institute of Oriental Philosophy-UK for use of their library and their assistance with research on SGI-UK. I would particularly like to thank Dr. Anita Naoko Pilgrim for putting me on to the myriad possibilities of feminist qualitative and participatory research through the inspiring course she provided, her own PhD work and her incisive feedback on my project as it developed. Plus Duncan Branley for his advice on making and managing audio recordings and on using software for qualitative data analysis and bibliography management. I thank the Centre for Urban and Community Research for use of their transcription machine. The Inter-library loan service at Goldsmiths' was also particularly helpful. I also thank my research participants for taking part in the research and the feedback they provided. Dr. Brett St. Louis led a stimulating course on Race, Politics and Ethics that helped to clarify my thinking. Professor Chetan Bhatt provided extremely helpful comments at my

upgrade viva along with Rebekah Lee. I would also like to thank my PhD examiners Drs. Nirmal Puwar and Helen Waterhouse for their useful feedback and insights on this thesis.

I am especially grateful to my friends particularly Atula and my chapter of Order members, in particular Sāntva and Muditāśri for helping me to keep going. I would also like to thank members of my family for their feedback on the work as it progressed and for their ongoing encouragement – particularly my late father-in-law Dick Hensman, my sister-in-law Rohini Hensman, and my niece Shaku Banaji. Also the Coventry Hensmans, my sister Sonia Smith and my mother-in-law Pauline Hensman for moral support and encouragement. Last, but definitely by no means least, I would like to thank my life partner Savitri Hensman for all her love, belief in me, and support over the years – especially her keen eye as a commentator, proof reader and copy-editor. I also owe you a lot in brilliant meals and housework – more to my shame than I ever can repay!

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTS, CONCEPTS, METHODS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The growth of Buddhism in the West, a phenomenon dating largely from the mid-nineteenth century, is becoming an increasing source of academic interest. During the past ten to fifteen years a large body of work has been emerging from the academy about these developments. Some scholars give multinational overviews (see for example Prebish & Baumann, 2002). Others have prepared less global studies exploring how Buddhism is being translated in particular Western countries, for example the US (Prebish, 1999; Prebish & Tanaka, 1998) and Australia (Spuler, 2002, 2003). It is interesting to note that some studies in this area have included developments within what would be regarded as non-Western and Third World contexts, such as Brazil (Rocha, 2000; Usarski, 2002) and Africa (Clasquin, 2002; Clasquin & Kruger, 1999; Wratten, 2000). This suggests that 'Western Buddhism' is seen by some scholars as not solely about what would be considered in geographical terms as 'the Western world', but in terms of the development of Buddhism in modernity, and predominantly amongst those sectors of the population who are seen to be 'racially' white – a point that I return to throughout this thesis.

Closer to home, there is also an increasing interest in Buddhism in Britain, with some recent works (Bluck, 2006; Kay, 2004) giving case studies of major Buddhist movements in the UK. Others have preferred to develop more local studies of Buddhism in various parts of the UK (for example Waterhouse, 1997). The methodologies used are sometimes historical. However, increasingly recourse is being made to the methodologies of sociology of religion with investigators developing ethnographic case studies. As Buddhism develops in the West, scholars, in dialogue with Buddhist practitioners, are also reflecting on the applications of Buddhism to social and ethical issues such as 'human rights' (Keown, Prebish, & Husted, 1998) and social engagement. These areas, termed 'socially engaged Buddhism' are also giving rise to a considerable *corpus* of work (see for example Queen, 2000; Queen, Prebish, & Keown, 2003).

Clearly it is very much early days for the academic field of 'Western Buddhism' which is rapidly forming into a sub-discipline of Buddhist studies in its own right (Prebish, 2002). It is therefore of little surprise to observe that

there are many aspects within this area that merit further investigation. It is to these I now turn. In looking at this developing field, it is interesting to note how the academy is constructing discourses on the nature of Buddhism in the West (Foucault, 1978, 2002). Reflection on the current silences within these discourses can therefore yield interesting insights. For example, one area that one might consider worthy of sustained exploration are the linkages of this up and coming field with other areas that would seem highly relevant such as globalisation, transnationalism and postcolonial thought. This is especially so given that the most recent encounters between Buddhism and the West arose during the colonial era. It is therefore noteworthy that such linkages very rarely receive sustained treatment within the literature on 'Western Buddhism'.

Following on from this is the question of how issues of ethnicity and 'race' are treated within the academic study of 'Western Buddhism'. In the academy there has been lively debate around the issues of 'race', ethnicity, translation and diversity in the West. Arising out of these dialogues are the suggestions that more inquiry needs to be made into the nature of 'whiteness' as being unmarked (see for example Dyer, 1997 especially Chapter One). However, many studies of 'Western Buddhism' mark out those Buddhists in the West who come from Asian countries where Buddhism has a significant presence as distinct from 'Western Buddhists'. Those from traditionally Buddhist contexts are often referred to as 'ethnic Buddhists' and are seen to be distinct from 'convert Buddhists' (those who have converted to Buddhism rather than growing up in a community that practises Buddhism) who are largely seen to be white, and by implication as lacking ethnicity or 'race' in their own right. There seems, therefore, to be space for further academic exploration of the 'whiteness' of convert Buddhism, as well as the location of people of colour (defined in this study as people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent) within 'convert Buddhism' in the West.

Religion has proved to be a key force in questions of 'race' and racialisation, sometimes acting as a basis of more nationalistic movements (see for example Bhatt, 1997) and at other times as a more progressive force for mutuality and diversity (for an example in the case study area see Holtam & Mayo, 1995). The issue of religion's social engagement with questions of 'race' and ethnicity is proving a fruitful area of inquiry especially for religions such as

Islam and Christianity (see for example Leech, 2005; Modood, 2005). However, academic studies in socially engaged Buddhism in the West make little, if any, reference to these issues. There is therefore some potential in bringing the findings of academic research on 'Western Buddhism' into more direct dialogue with the considerable amount of work within religious studies and sociology that is being done on ethnicity, 'race' and multiculturalism.

This study takes some initial steps towards exploring these linkages and silences through its focus on the multicultural appropriation of Western convert Buddhism by people of colour (who in the UK tend to be people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent). The remainder of this introductory chapter firstly gives more details of the background to my personal interest in this research, moving on to the main research questions that arose as the study developed. I go on to set out the methodology of this research project. Starting with a critique of the most common model used to analyse Buddhism in the West and questions of ethnicity, I move on to problematise the notion of the West as commonly used within scholarship on Western Buddhism and suggest an alternative that better addresses processes of racialisation and minoritisation within convert Buddhist movements. There follows a description of the feminist epistemological approach to this project that draws strongly on what has been referred to as 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1991). I also define key terms and theoretical approaches to concepts such as 'race' and racialisation and set out the perspectives on gender and on class used for this thesis. I propose an approach to religious conversion that is more appropriate to newer Buddhist movements than those usually proposed, and then discuss my experience of the various methods used in this project, the analytical approach taken to data and the ethical considerations that arose during fieldwork. At the end of this chapter I evaluate the methodology developed for this study and give an overview of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THESIS

My decision to pursue research into the development of Western convert Buddhist movements in multiethnic and multicultural societies initially arose out of my experience as a Black-British Buddhist practitioner in one such movement over several years. Finding myself as part of a minority within this movement and having to engage with issues of racialisation and racism within the context

of the movement and more widely, I found myself wanting to explore questions of what the 'Buddhist approach' might be to questions of 'race', ethnic identity, diversity and multiculturalism with a view to writing a book on such issues, as there seemed to be a gap in this area. My initial intention was to explore how the notion of 'culture' could itself be seen as an entity that, in accord with Buddhist principles, arose in dependence on a variety of conditions. As such, 'culture' did not have a fixed, separate, essential nature, making the idea of an essentialist personal identification with any specific ethnic or cultural identity inherently problematic.

In applying to be a research student, it was suggested to me by the person who was to become my main supervisor, Damien Keown, that it would be generally accepted within Western convert Buddhism that 'culture' was conditioned and so lacked a fixed, essential nature and so could not be considered as forming an 'essence of self' or a 'soul'. He suggested to me that I might find it more fruitful to investigate the multicultural appropriation of Western Buddhism by people of colour (who in the UK tend to be people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent) within movements such as the one I was involved in, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO)¹, as people of colour, and (as I was to find out through my work on this project) working class people, tended to be a minority within such movements. There had been some observation made of this, but it appeared that little if any investigative work had been done in this area, especially in the UK.

This appealed to me as I would be able to explore how other Western convert Buddhist movements outside the FWBO were approaching the questions in which I was interested. It could also further develop the perspectives stemming from: my personal practice of Buddhism; being part of the emerging dialogue within the FWBO around these issues; being a member of a team of people engaged with outreach to communities of people of colour in order to encourage their greater participation in the movement; and my experience of working as a community worker and equal opportunities officer within the multiethnic and multicultural contexts of inner London. By developing a sociological perspective on these questions rather than a merely missiological and religious studies one, wider social issues for Western convert Buddhism

¹ As will be observed throughout this thesis, many of these organisations are often known by their initials. A full list of abbreviations is given in Appendix 3.

that was itself developing a more socially engaged approach, particularly in more multiethnic and multicultural areas, might be further explored. I had also heard that the Western convert Buddhist movement Sōka Gakkai International (SGI) was the exception in being considerably more ethnically diverse and I was very interested in finding out why this might be the case. Working on such a project therefore seemed an opportunity for me to considerably deepen my understanding of the issues involved through exploring these questions more widely – specifically within a Buddhist rather than the more secular contexts with which I was acquainted. Hopefully through my work I would be able to identify the ways in which Buddhist contexts resembled and differed from other religions where these issues had been raised, for example Christianity, as well as the more secular contexts where I had more experience of exploring issues of diversity within organisations and communities. I also had some experience as a former Christian of liberation and contextual theologising that sought to relate faith to social and political issues. I came to feel that the research findings could have wider implications for Western convert Buddhist movements generally as they often find themselves based in increasingly diverse communities which face both the promises of both what Paul Gilroy (2004a) refers to as ‘multiculture’ and the challenges from forces of racism and social exclusion. I also came to consider that the research could be seen in relationship to the broader and lively scholarship on multiculturalism and ethnic diversity within the West, which often where it engages with religion focuses on theistic traditions such as Christianity and Islam (for example Leech, 2005; Modood, 2005), rather than non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism. In defining my interest, I found myself needing to provide more focus for this study and I discuss this process in the next section.

1.3 AIMS OF THESIS

Having established my principal aim for this investigation as the exploration of issues around the multicultural appropriation of Buddhism in the West, specifically the UK, I found myself needing to identify more specific research questions for the project. I felt that a qualitative approach to this study was to be preferred to a quantitative one firstly because the relative numbers of people of colour involved in these movements seemed too small to develop a valid quantitative project. This was confirmed by the findings of the 2001 census that found that the total number of Buddhists in the UK was about 0.3%

of the population. Furthermore, a broadly qualitative and ethnographic approach could tease out issues of organisational culture of Western convert Buddhist movements and the diverse experiences of their participants and how these might impact on communities of people of colour/working class people from their self-reported perspective. In my initial work for this project when I was reviewing the literature, I found that Buddhists of colour seemed to have relatively little visibility and voice, so there seemed to be potential in following this avenue of inquiry. Given that what became my research area was one in which little, if any investigative work had been done, particularly in the UK, it seemed important to seek to identify what issues might arise. Because of the qualitative approach to this study, the questions developed over time through the investigation (Silverman, 2005, pp. 77-94).

I started with a broad approach to this inquiry that suggested first looking at various demographic features of participants of colour involved in the Buddhist movements I was interested in. Examples of the demographic factors that seemed to be possibly promising areas of enquiry apart from participants' self-defined ethnicity were: gender, age, religious upbringing, perspectives on religion and spirituality, generation of diaspora, social class, disability, sexuality and responses of family and friends to participants' interest in Buddhism. As my analysis of participants' interviews and movements' texts progressed, my focus narrowed to considering what discourses of 'race' and class within Western convert Buddhism might arise, and how people of colour and working class people engaged with these movements were negotiating these. A second aim that developed around this time was to explore how people of colour/working class people's engagement with the techniques of the self offered by these movements affected their own processes of identification, particularly in terms of 'race' and class, and their quotidian experiences of 'race' and racism. In developing the study and seeking to achieve these aims, several theoretical concepts and terms needed clarification, and it is to this process I now turn.

1.4 CONCEPTS

In outlining the concepts that have been used for this study, I start by critiquing the most common model for describing Buddhism in the West and issues of 'race' and ethnicity in relation to it – that of 'two Buddhisms'. I go on to suggest that studies on 'race'/ethnicity in Western Buddhism in general are

considerably enriched and nuanced by drawing more fully on wider theoretical work on 'race', ethnicity, diasporicity and postcolonialism as well as explorations of the methodological issues involved (in particular debates around feminist epistemologies and critical/(post)'race' theories). I move on from this to develop working definitions of 'race', ethnicity and racialisation for this thesis. As 'race' is modulated by other axes of difference, I then consider how questions of class and gender/sexuality were felt to be best approached for this project. The section ends with a consideration of what religious conversion might mean in the context of Western convert Buddhist movements in post/late modernity.

1.4.1 The 'two Buddhisms' model – a critique and alternative focus

In this model, Buddhists in the West are typified as being either: 'ethnic Buddhists' who are Asian immigrants; or indigenous Buddhist converts, referred to as Western Buddhists, European Buddhists, or even 'white Buddhists' (Bluck, 2006; Fields, 1994, 1998; Tanaka, 1998). Paul Numrich, has recently argued that the model continues to have analytical purchase (2003) In his article, Numrich (2003, p. 55) says that he recognises the impact of debates on the terms race and ethnicity and asserts that he rejects a primordial, essentialist approach to these axes of difference. However, in his essay he combines several ethnic groups and their descendants under one umbrella term 'ethnic Asians' solely on the basis of what he regards as their shared heritage of Buddhism. However, 'Asian Buddhists' are members of a wide range of ethnic groups in their own right, for example Sri Lankans, Vietnamese, Japanese, Thai as well as several others and practise in a wide range of Buddhist traditions. This diversity is not insignificant, as recent work² and the findings of this thesis suggest that people make considered choices as to how they describe their ethnic identity for themselves as opposed to others' categorisation of them. Numrich therefore not only seems to make assumptions about his respondents' ethnic identities, he unwittingly creates a binary in which a global 'Asian-ness' is implicitly asked to define itself in relation to being Western and European.

Vron Ware (2002, p. 206) has suggested that the term 'European' is often seen as a tacit synonym for whiteness and challenges this. The implications of her questioning are that the 'West' and 'Europe' are actually themselves multicultural, multiethnic and especially postcolonial locations. Unfortunately, Numrich (2003) does not appear to provide sufficient

² See (Song, 2003) for examples of this in both the UK and US context.

appreciation of this in his advocacy of what he sees as two distinct Buddhist constituencies. The result is that in his essay and related scholarship based on the 'two Buddhisms' model, being European or Western becomes synonymous with whiteness. The overall effect for Numrich is as Rajinder Dudrah suggests (2004, p. 5.6): while 'whiteness' is unquestioned, Asian-ness (in Dudrah's article 'blackness') is 'problematized and positioned as its binary opposite'.

We thus find ourselves with the 'two Buddhisms' model facing the problem that Edward Said (1995) raised of Orientalism. The model also has difficulty accounting for developments within so-called Asian Buddhism that indicate its hybridity³ with the West, for example the development of 'Protestant Buddhism' in Sri Lanka (Gombrich, 1988). Also, how would this typology describe those Indians in the Ambedkarite movement who, following their conversion to Buddhism, form a sizeable portion⁴ (around 23%) of the membership of the Western Buddhist Order (WBO) that is a central part of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, an international Buddhist movement originating in the West? If Numrich's model is employed to examine this, the conversion experiences of Indian Order members have to be sidelined, while the fact that many were born into Buddhist families (themselves usually the result of conversion as a result of the work of Ambedkar) becomes the focal point of accounting for their Buddhist identity.

We therefore need to ask how we can move towards approaches that may yield us with greater insights by taking account of the diversity within 'Asian Buddhism', the West and Europe. The 'two Buddhisms' model as Numrich himself has observed has led scholars to seek alternatives.⁵ Martin Baumann (2001) has suggested that the development of Buddhism throughout the globe falls into three main phases: the first being *Traditionalist Buddhism*; the second *Modernist Buddhism* and the current one post-modern or what he prefers to refer to as *Global Buddhism*. His model represents a positive alternative to the

³ I am aware in using the term 'hybridity' that it is one that is strongly contested because of its antecedents, especially in racist pseudoscience (see for example Coombes & Brah, 2000) and because at times it is over-rated in terms of its potentially transgressive power (Kalra, Kaur, & Hutnyk, 2005; Werbner & Modood, 1997). However, I would contend that while acknowledging the potential for the term to be used in hegemonising projects, it continues to have positive counterhegemonic potential (Anzaldúa, 1999; Bhabha, 1994; Pieterse, 2001; Said, 1994), hence my use of it in this thesis..

⁴ As of June 2008 there were 1517 members of the Western Buddhist Order on the Order's register of whom 344 hold Indian nationality.

⁵ See Charles Prebish (1999, pp. 57-63) and Wakoh Shannon Hickey (2004) for outlines of the debates around this model.

'two Buddhisms' model as it recognises the hybridity of Buddhism in Asia with developments arising out of modernism. However, when discussing Buddhism in the West, he suggests that Asian Buddhists (his term) practise in terms of developing 'a home away from home' in order to preserve their cultural traditions in a hostile environment. This implies spaces that are not transformed by location, generation and time and contrasts with the findings of other scholars of diaspora communities, e.g. Douglas Padgett (2002) in his study of a US diasporic Buddhist community. Baumann unfortunately fails to recognise the ways in which such Buddhists, like all diasporic subjects, are multilocational, having links between the places from where they have migrated and the places in the West/Europe in which they are based. This oversight by Baumann illustrates what Matthew Wood (2006, p. 237) suggests is a general tendency of American and European models of religion to apply to white majorities. Where these models address factors of 'ethnicity' and 'race', they essentialise and marginalise non-white groups thus normalising and hegemonising white religion and white religious involvement.

One typology that I initially felt⁶ has more ability to explain why black people and people of colour form a small minority of Western Buddhist convert movements, has been proposed by Jan Nattier (1998). She suggests that religions, in particular Buddhism, spread to new locations in one of three ways. They may be *imported* as a result of individuals actively seeking the new tradition through travel abroad, reading and visits from indigenous teachers. The form of Buddhism introduced by these means she describes as *Elite Buddhism*, 'a Buddhism of the privileged, attracting those who have the time, the inclination, and the economic opportunity to devote themselves to strenuous (and sometimes expensive) meditation training'. She sees *Vipassanā*, Tibetan and Zen Buddhisms as most corresponding to this model. Religions may be *exported* through missionary activity, and Buddhist groups in this category are described as *Evangelical*, for example Sōka Gakkai International. Finally religions may be *baggage*. Here groups of immigrants start to practise religious tradition in a new location and outsiders may come to be part of these communities for instance, via intermarriage. Buddhisms in this group are described as *Ethnic* (the term I consider to be more appropriate is *Diasporic*). On further consideration however, I was to find that some of what is described

⁶ See S. Smith (2003) for more details of this argument based on the Nattier model.

as *Evangelical Buddhism* can arise out of what Nattier would call *import* traditions (for example the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order) or out of what was initially *Diasporic Buddhism* (for example the Sōka Gakkai International).

I therefore found myself needing to develop another typology that would not define Buddhist adherents by their ethnicity, and infer the nature of their involvement in Buddhism from that. It also needed to take account of the temporal dimension, by not assuming that Buddhist movements remained static. The alternative I sought would be based on how individuals who defined themselves as Buddhist considered themselves to be part of a ***sangha***⁷ or Buddhist movement, and the degree to which that movement is socially engaged and missionary-oriented. Some *sanghas*/Buddhist movements are highly missionary-oriented, for example the Sōka Gakkai International. Others are missionary-oriented to a lesser extent, for example the Order of Interbeing. Some Buddhists will not engage in any proselytising activity at all, preferring to operate as practitioners in a much more limited individual (for example what Thomas Tweed (1999) calls ‘night-stand Buddhists’) or family-oriented context. Obviously there is not a strict binary dividing line between *sanghas*/Buddhist movements; rather we have a spectrum of missionary-orientation and social engagement that can change over time.

I felt that the construction of such a spectrum could change the nature of questions about ‘race’ and ethnicity in Buddhism and lead to possibly a more fruitful direction of inquiry that asked, rather than tacitly assumed, how individuals see their involvement in and practice of Buddhism and how they understand their Buddhist identity developing in relation to their own self-defined ethnicity. From there, in researching *sanghas*/Buddhist movements one could ask who tends to be involved in this *sangha*, how are they involved in it and who is the focus of that Buddhist movement’s missionary activity and social involvement? Researchers may also want to consider the ways in which particular Buddhist practitioners might come to be minoritised within particular *sanghas*/Buddhist movements and how these practices of minoritisation may

⁷ A full definition of *Sangha* is given in the glossary in Appendix 4 along with definitions of other unusual terms. When a word that is defined in the glossary first appears in the text of this thesis it will be marked in bold. In this thesis I am drawing on the definition of *Sangha* as the ‘fourfold *sangha*’ of both ordained and lay Buddhists and using it to mean a Buddhist movement.

relate to practitioners' ethnicities.⁸ This might enable better tracking of processes of exclusion and inclusion in various *sanghas*, and might where relevant make discourses of whiteness within Western Buddhism more visible than they usually are in scholarship⁹ around this area. These issues increasingly became the focus of this project and to examine how these questions might be addressed, I found myself further exploring how wider theoretical work on researching 'race,' ethnicity and diasporas might be of help in this task.

1.4.2 'Race', Ethnicity, Racialisation, Racisms and Western Buddhisms

It has been generally accepted that the term 'race' is not a scientific category (Kuper, 1975; Montagu, 1997) and that differences attributed to 'race' within a population are as great as that between racially defined populations. This has led to the suggestion by Stuart Hall (1990) along with others that 'race' is a political and social construct. He goes on to suggest (cited in Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 4) that 'race' is the discursive organising principle behind a system of hierarchized differentiation, rather than a statement of social, never mind biological fact, although science may be invoked as a rationale for such systems (for example the debate around 'race' and IQ).

In her review of debates of the concept of ethnicity and how it should be defined, Miri Song (2003, pp. 6-11) points out that recent analyses are moving away from primordial understandings of ethnicity which suggest it exists naturally, towards approaches that see ethnicity as socially constructed. Primordial views of ethnicity are criticised for having a culturally essentialist approach, which sees the characteristics and cultures of ethnic groups as being static and unchanging. The dynamic nature of ethnic categories was illustrated to me during the course of this research when I observed how within the Buddhist movements that formed the case studies of this research, the definition of the category 'black' altered over time, e.g. from a coalitional/pan-ethnic to a more restricted one, reflecting changes within the wider society around these definitions (Aspinall, 2002). I found therefore that a historical

⁸ This is not to say that ethnicity is the sole basis on which members of *sanghas* might be minoritised. Gender, class and sexuality are other significant aspects of identity in this regard. Also as I contend throughout this thesis, ethnicity, like any aspect of identity, is modulated by gender, class and other axes of difference.

⁹ Scholars in the wider field of 'race' and ethnicity have long advocated the need to make whiteness as a discourse more visible. See for just a few examples from a wide literature (Frankenburg, 1993, 2004; Ware & Back, 2002).

approach to questions of ethnic categorisation was required for my work. I also found it useful, as Cole (2003) suggests, while questioning the notion of 'race', to retain the concept of ethnicity on the basis of participant self-classification, rather than trying to define participants on the basis of prior categories that I had developed myself from, for example, those used in the UK census. This approach proved to be fruitful in drawing out what Stuart Hall (1992a) describes as 'new ethnicities' as well as at times yielding results that were different from what I had initially anticipated.

Given the lively debates referred to above, the question of how to work with categories of 'race' and ethnicity without lapsing into essentialism therefore remains, and is by no means a simple one to address. (This perhaps explains why it can appear so simple to initially posit the notion of 'two Buddhisms' rather than explore what others have suggested is a more complex picture). By mentioning 'race' one is suggesting that it is real. However, at the same time differentiation by 'race' is racist and unjustifiable on scientific, theoretical, moral and political grounds. This places one in a classic Nietzschean double bind. The history of 'race' is one of an untruth that at the same time is our collective history. We are therefore challenged to generate from this a future where 'race' can be put to rest forever (Radhakrishnan cited in Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 31). Some have argued on this basis that the term should be jettisoned, and adopt what has been referred to as a 'post-race' position (Gilroy, 2004b; Nayak, 2006). However, I would suggest that although 'race' is a fiction, it has lived effects that we all have to wrestle with, even though I would acknowledge that some of my participants have decided to take a 'post-race' approach in their personal lives. It is for these reasons that, throughout this thesis, I place the term 'race' within quotation marks.

The issue of how to navigate this 'treacherous bind' in the research process has become the subject of widespread debate.¹⁰ I found the three methodological points that Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003) suggests crucial in addressing this issue. The first is the need for reflexivity that can enable researchers to be accountable for their findings (Haraway, 1991), in particular their theoretical concerns, their ways of doing research and their social locations along various axes of difference e.g. ethnicity, gender and class. This

¹⁰ See for UK examples of this literature: Martin Bulmer & John Solomos (2004); Caroline Knowles (2003) and special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (Writing Race: Ethnography and Difference) edited and introduced by Claire Alexander (2006).

is often ignored by those examining 'race' and ethnicity in Western Buddhism. The second is to recognise that although 'race' and ethnicity are fictions; we need to appreciate those for whom 'essentialist categories of 'race' and ethnicity do have some level of resonance with lived experiences' (*ibid.* p. 33). I would argue under this heading that there are those for whom such categories have proved a focal point for political mobilisation against racism. In other words we need to recognise the affective dimensions of 'race' and ethnicity. I would especially suggest, in the light of some of my findings, that the affective dimensions for those participants who reject or question systems of racial and ethnic categorisations can yield valuable insights. Thirdly and finally, we need to resist the urge to 'freeze' 'race' and ethnicity into stable categories. This can be done through a two-pronged approach that looks at the processes by which the categories of 'race' and ethnicity are produced, encouraged and put to work in research. This suggests the need for reflexivity in the process of analysis and reporting one's conclusions. Researchers need to recognise and be concerned about lived experiences of 'race' and ethnicity, and, at the same time, resist and challenge the impulse towards essentialism in research (*ibid.* p. 34).

This third point suggested to me that in researching 'race', we need therefore to be primarily concerned with processes of racialisation, a term that I describe as the process by which individuals come to be seen as/organised into members of different 'races', and how these 'races' are discursively positioned within a hierarchy. In tracking processes of racialisation in Western Buddhist movements for this thesis, I therefore found myself asking for each respective case study:

- a) How are questions of subjectivity and 'difference' addressed?
- b) How is 'social change' approached?
- c) How are questions of aesthetics understood?
- d) What are the definitions of 'race' and racisms in this movement?
- e) How do practitioners' relate their engagement with Buddhist practices to their quotidian experience of racialisation?
- f) How do participants from different ethnicities engage with the spaces generated by each Buddhist movement?
- g) What are the approaches to 'class' and 'gender' by each movement and how do these interact with 'race'?

h) How does each movement's approach to 'race' and racisms interact with broader social trends such as political context, media discourses and wider social treatments of these issues?

These questions formed part of the analytical framework I took towards the data I collected (as can be seen from the reports of the case studies that form Chapters 3-6 of this thesis).

In investigating 'race' and racisms within white-dominated institutions, such as most Western convert Buddhist movements, the issue of how discourses of whiteness operate inevitably arises. Studies such as those of Richard Dyer (1997), Ruth Frankenburg (1993) and Peggy McIntosh (1997) among others, have commented that the position of whiteness is often seen as ordinary, unmarked and synonymous with standing for humanity in general, a disinterested and transcendent position that is outside 'race', unlike the position of other ethnic groups, which is seen as being more partial and relative. In other words, whiteness is commonly regarded as not being the outcome of racialisation but is a discourse that points to notions of the 'universal subject' (Brah, 1996b, p. 119; Puwar, 2001, p. 653, 2004). I found that questioning the data for narratives of subjectivity and 'race' also served to elucidate ways in which whiteness was (de)-centred in each case study.

Having clarified my conception of whiteness for the purposes of this thesis, I turned to the related question of how the term 'racisms' was to be best defined. From my argument above, it can be considered as the processes by which 'races' and ethnicities are designated and positioned through discourse and narrative within various hierarchies. In terms of the Western context with which this thesis is concerned, I was drawn to the model that Alana Lentin (2004) developed following David Goldberg. She suggests that racisms within the West must be seen as arising out of the development of the nation-state and as a product of modernity. She argues that contemporary racisms operate through a denial of racism as a serious social problem even though it is institutionalised and integral to the functioning of the nation-state. She suggests that where it is acknowledged, it tends to be seen as arising from individuals' ignorance and prejudice. Contemporary racisms now function through the adoption of a stance of 'racelessness', a purported position of transcendence which proves to be a discourse of unmarked whiteness that all who find themselves within the nation-state must assimilate to if they are to become

'insiders'. This is a position that puts those designated as 'outsiders' (particularly people of colour) by the nation-state in a difficult position as they cannot easily become 'raceless'. Although Lentin is critical of Pierre Taguieff (2001), I did find his typology of racisms as being either: racisms of assimilation (he terms such as *heterophobic*); or differentialist/mixophobic racisms without 'race' that emphasise the incommensurability of cultures (these he describes as *heterophilic*) of utility in describing the different forms that racisms can take. I thus came to look at the narratives of racism emerging from each case study in terms of the extent to which racisms were seen in terms of individual agency in comparison to social structure; whether narratives of 'race' and racisms were *heterophobic* or *heterophilic*. I also sought to identify the representations of discourses of universality and 'transcendence' of 'race' and how these were racialised so as to clarify the ways in which whiteness was or was not marked in each movement.

One of the ways in which whiteness can become more marked is through the operation of class. For example, white middle and upper-class people are rarely considered to be racist, racism being associated more with the working-classes. In a study such as mine that considers the workings of 'race' and racisms within largely white middle-class institutions; the operations of class are a key concern. I therefore now turn to consider how class was approached in this research.

1.4.3 Social Class and Western Buddhism

Although some have questioned the salience of class in Western societies (for example Giddens, 1991b) in late/post modernity, class does continue to have an impact on individuals' lives and this is being increasingly recognised within academia with a resurgent interest in this axis of difference (Kirk, 2006). Social class is seen as not only relating to income and occupation, but also to subjectivity in terms of how one perceives oneself, others and one's environments. Class affects access to resources and opportunities as well as mobility and how one is received in social spaces (for example Puwar, 2004). It interacts with 'race' (Back, 1996), gender (Skeggs, 1997), sexuality, disability and other axes of difference, modulating their nature (hence the debate as to whether there is a 'black middle class' in the UK) as well as giving rise to possibilities for multiple levels of disadvantage in particular subjects.

It has been generally observed that most converts to Buddhism in the West tend to be middle class as well as white and majority ethnic. It is therefore of interest to identify the factors that ‘classify’ people with an interest in Buddhism and impact upon their ability to affiliate with and identify with Buddhist movements and their religious practices. In order to understand this, I needed a model of class that did not focus exclusively on participants’ access to economic resources (even though income is a significant factor in considering access to the resources Buddhist movements provide, e.g. the cost of retreats and courses in meditation/Buddhism¹¹). For instance, in one of the Buddhist movements studied, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, many people have left relatively high-paying and professional positions to work for centres and other businesses run by the movement at a much lower wage, yet they continue to have considerable privilege and access to resources through, for example, education, family upbringing, access to savings, and in a very small minority of cases family assets.

I therefore turned to Pierre Bourdieu, a theorist who developed an understanding of class and capital that identifies their workings without an exclusive reference to income or access to the means of production. Many participants came from middle-class backgrounds and/or were well educated. However, a significant proportion of them (especially those well-established in the FWBO) held low-status occupations, earned around the minimum wage resided in shared accommodation and/or lived lives of voluntary simplicity. Bourdieu’s (1986) conception of the different types of capital as well as *economic*, i.e. *cultural*, *social* (in terms of access to social networks) and *symbolic* (in terms of status and esteem within communities), enabled me to identify resources in individuals’ lives that were not just economic but impacted on participants’ access to resources, spaces and their associated symbolic capitals. Bourdieu (1986 p. 243) describes cultural capital as having the possibility of existing in three main forms: ‘in the *embodied* state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.); and in the *institutionalized* state’ (italics in original). He gives educational qualifications as an example of cultural capital in its institutionalized

¹¹ Of course, there is also the factor of having a livelihood or other significant means of income that gives one sufficient time to be available to go on residential retreats/Buddhist courses.

state. All these forms of cultural capital are inter-related but the first two forms are more likely to be hereditary and the third acquired by the subject. Hence I asked interviewees for the level of their highest educational qualification and what they considered the social class of their parents to be, as well as their own social class. This enabled to have a sense of the sort of cultural capital interviewees had acquired through parents and by themselves and the extent to which this had proved relevant to their entry into particular Western convert Buddhist movements and the symbolic capitals they had to offer.

I also examined publicity used to promote Buddhist movements' activities and outlets where this was distributed as this was one pointer in terms of the social class of persons particular Buddhist movements were aiming at. Other pointers were the approach to the study of Buddhism and to aesthetics and Buddhism within Buddhist movements and what they seemed to require in terms of participants' access to *cultural capital*, especially in terms of their understanding of fine arts and high culture. Participants' accounts of their experience of ethical requirements (e.g. dietary requirements for membership) and of communicating themselves in retreats and discussion forums gave some insight into the 'moral economy' (Skeggs, 2004, 2005), which formed part of the symbolic economy at work in that movement. This was of interest, for as Beverley Skeggs (2004) suggests (I would argue in the UK context), it is usually within the symbolic order rather than economic order that conflict between classes can be most readily observed. The impact of Buddhist practices upon participants' ongoing process of class identification was also considered mainly through interviews and the process of their analysis. I now turn to consider questions of gender and sexuality in relation to Western Buddhism.

1.4.4 Gender and Sexuality in Western Buddhism

Even though there has been much exploration of the issue of gender and Buddhism (for example Gross, 1993) and to a lesser extent sexuality and Buddhism (e.g. Corless, 1998), there has been less consideration in the study of Western Buddhism of the ways in which gender and sexuality can be racialised and the impact this has on these axes of difference. However, there has been much work done outside Western Buddhism (see for example Alexander, 2000; Brah, 1996a) on these issues that is of utility. Gross (1993), whose account is often regarded as a classic, tends to put forward a binary of 'traditional ethnic' cf. 'modern Western' Buddhism, with Western (presumably

white) feminist Buddhist practitioners acting as the vanguard for reform . This is unfortunate as it ignores the wide range of longstanding feminist projects that have existed within both the ‘West’ and ‘East’, or perhaps more to the point in the global South as well as the more privileged Northern hemisphere. It was therefore important for this research not to reproduce this binary in its consideration of the approaches taken by different Buddhist movements to questions of gender and sexuality and their implications for gender regimes of people of colour and their feminist projects.

Feminisms have become fraught with questioning how differences (of ‘race’, class, nation, etc.) among women are to be best understood, and positions such as the one taken by Gross (1993) that I described above are increasingly seen as being untenable. In identifying which gender regimes in particular Buddhist movements were hegemonic, I found the work of Judith Butler (1993; 1999b) helpful. Through her theorisations of the performativity of gender, I could consider the fluidity and multiplicity of gender identities and sexualities as well as their potential complicity with heteronormativity so as to explore the scope for diversity within each movement. As well as observing the roles played by different genders as part of my ethnographic work, I asked interviewees for their views on gender regimes and sexualities within particular movements, how they saw these as being racialised and how they saw each movement’s appeal to people of colour in relation to gender/sexuality. The findings from this enabled me to see the potential appeal of each movement to different gender groupings of communities of colour, and thus their potential for conversion to Buddhism within each of the movements that form the case studies for this thesis. Of course, this needed to be located within the larger theoretical debate about models for religious conversion, in particular to Buddhism, and I discuss this in the next section.

1.4.5 Conversion Theories and Buddhist Conversion

Much of the literature on religious conversion tends to see religion as *sui generis* and therefore in effect standing outside culture, making it difficult from this perspective to understand the ways in which religion can be influenced by issues of politics and culture. This work also tends to focus on Christianity and other theistic religions – for example Lewis Rambo (1993) tends to describe religious conversion as the result of the exercise of a transcendent agency. This is highly problematic for non-theistic religions such as Buddhism. Also,

although conversion is increasingly understood as a process, because of its description in Christian terms the models generated, e.g. by Lewis Rambo (1993) suggest that people alter their religious identities as the result of a crisis and/or conviction of sin. This model did not generally fit with the accounts given me by participants. Though some did eventually develop a Buddhist identity following a personal crisis and/or sense of dissatisfaction with their lives, their initial reason for engaging in Buddhist practice was often one of curiosity or a willingness to experiment with techniques of the self.

Some have suggested that within a context of secularisation, the adoption of new religious identities should be seen within the context of 'rational-choice theory' where individuals choose religion based on what they see as a competitive market between different religions (Young, 1997). I found this assumption of religiosity arising out of 'economic man's' striving to maximise their utility unable to account for what appeared to be the social factors of 'race,' gender and class. At least some of these social factors seemed to work quite subtly yet powerfully in individuals' negotiations with Buddhist movements.¹² This is because the theory's methodological individualism fails to recognise that the individual subject and his/her preferences are themselves socially and culturally constructed, so that sociological investigations have to address this rather than the individual's preference in isolation from these wider contexts (Beckford, 2003, p. 168).

Also, given the heterogeneity of the Western Buddhist scene, it is important to realise that different *sanghas*/Buddhist movements understand Buddhist conversion and the facilities they impart to Buddhist converts in different ways, as we will see in Chapters Three and Five. It is not just a case of a customer 'demanding' and claiming an identity, as what 'rational-choice theory' describes as 'supply-side' mechanisms can be highly significant. Christopher Lamb (1999) gives an account of how conversion is understood in the Buddhist tradition that I found quite helpful, but unfortunately it is largely limited to convert and meditation groups so does not reflect the diversity within global and Western Buddhism. For instance, in some groups full conversion requires a commitment to monasticism. In SGI-UK, one's application for membership also has to be attested to by one's sponsor, chapter leader and

¹²See also Bourdieu's critique of rational choice theory in Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992, pp. 124-126).

eventually the national headquarters. In other cases, the *Dalai Lama* has been known to grant initiations which some regard as highly advanced to mass gatherings, some of whom would not define themselves as Buddhists at all (Lamb, 1999) and are not intending to make any commitment to Buddhism.

For this reason I would suggest that we need to understand conversion and its impact on subjectivity differently for the purposes of this project. James Beckford (2003, p. 105) argues that ‘...by definition, religion is *self-reflexive*’ (emphasis in original) which is particularly relevant for religions such as Buddhism whose practices have a strong element of introspection and personal reflection. Anthony Giddens has suggested (1991b) that unlike traditional societies, within the context of late modernity, the construction of the self becomes a reflexive project in which individuals have to work out their roles for themselves and develop an integrated narrative of their lives. It is in this context that self-help books and various therapies proliferate and themselves reflexively constitute the issues they explore, and many Buddhist movements introduce themselves to the public in terms of the practices they can offer to individuals seeking to manage their lives more effectively.

But how do individuals go about this in practice in late modernity? An answer to this question is suggested by the later work of Michel Foucault in which he started to consider the question of subjectivity – the self’s relationship to self, and the self’s constitution as a subject *per se* (O’Leary, 2002, p. 9). Foucault saw this as an aesthetic project and of ethics he said, ‘But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?’ (1997b, p. 261). Foucault (1997a) within his schema of technologies of the self and work on ethics saw opportunities for the development of agency and went on to hazard a definition of spirituality that is quite useful for our purposes here, suggesting that it be defined as:

the subject’s attainment of a certain mode of being and the transformations that the subject must carry out on itself to attain this mode of being (p.294).

Techniques or technologies of the self have been described as the practical methods individuals use to constitute themselves as subjects within and through systems of power (Foucault, 1984, pp. 25-30). Obviously these methods might occur under the auspices of religious, spiritual and other more secular regimes. The adoption of such regimes is not necessarily so far removed from conversion. M. Darroll Bryant and Christopher Lamb (1999) describe how, for

some, coming out as gay or realising that they are feminist – experiences that would normally be seen as secular – is not unlike a conversion experience in which one finds oneself having a sense of ‘coming home’.

Giddens has been criticised for privileging agency over structure in a way that he sees the mobility of the white male middle-class subject as normative (Skeggs, 2004). Drawing on Foucault’s theorisations around discourse, ethics and techniques of the self allows us to see how power works to discipline the subject (J. Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1977). We can also draw on work around racialisation, Bourdieu’s work on class, and critical gender theories to examine the ways in which individuals’ reflexivity, choices and mobility between identities is constrained as well as facilitated.

In recognising how ethnicity and migration affects one’s willingness to engage with different religions and eventually assume a different religious identity, especially a minority tradition like Buddhism, it needs to be appreciated that many minority ethnic people are brought up strongly in a religious tradition. Religion can form a powerful basis of mobilisation around ethnic identity. Perhaps one can see two tendencies at work within cultural groupings (Gilroy, 1997; Woodward, 1997): an essentialist appeal to a mythic past in which religion may be invoked and mobilised contrasted with a more anti-essentialist fluid engagement with the present in which hybrid cultural forms and practices can emerge (this can be seen perhaps most readily in the arts, especially music). The decision to choose a new religious identity is perhaps more likely where a member of the diaspora is creating their life mainly with techniques of the self that enable the development of hybrid cultural forms and practices. The generation of diaspora is possibly an important factor in this, as well as other matters that might affect one’s mobility between identities such as class (particularly level of educational attainment), gender and sexuality – hence interviewees were asked questions about these aspects as well as their experiences of racialisation.

In his review of different theoretical approaches to conversion, Lewis Rambo (1999) suggests a *narrative* theoretical orientation in which individuals make sense of their lives through constructing or adopting narratives. In his description of this he states:

In some religions, the reconstruction of one’s biography is a central element in the converting process. Biographical reconstruction and the resulting narrative give new meaning to a person’s definition of

self, identity, relationships, and God (or some other comprehensive understanding of the world and life). Adopting a new story involves resonating with a story (for whatever reason the new story is relevant to the person), finding or building connections between “my” story and “the” story, and retelling or incorporating of the story into one’s own life narrative

In fact for both case studies, biographical narrative plays a key role. Within the FWBO, the telling and sharing of life stories is often used as a means of developing *sangha* or what is referred to as *kalyāṇa mitratā*, otherwise known as ‘spiritual friendship’. In SGI, people are often encouraged to give ‘experiences’ – accounts of the ways in which practice has improved their lives. Through close reading of participants’ rich accounts in their interview transcripts, and observation of their testimonies, I could gain some insight into how they engaged with techniques of the self and the identities they were developing through the influence of each particular Buddhist movement and axes of difference such as ‘race’. I will now turn to the fourth section of this chapter, which discusses the methodological approach taken for this thesis.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 Methodological Approach and Questions of Positionality

As I have said above, when reviewing the research on Western Buddhism I found that it very often reproduced an ‘East/West’ binary that presupposed two internally homogeneous groups that were totally Other to each other (see discussion of the ‘two Buddhisms’ model for an example of this). This did not reflect the hybrid identities that are all too common in the multicultural West – and East¹³ - and especially those of my research participants. I found, as we shall see in my literature review in Chapter Two, that the term ‘Western’ was often seen as synonymous with an unmarked and normative whiteness. Although I found some literature (which is now developing to a significant level though was small in volume when I first started this project) from practitioners in the United States, it was rare for consideration to be made within the academy to the interface between issues of Western Buddhism and ethnic diversity. Too often I saw a tendency within the academy

¹³ ‘Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more ‘foreign’ elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude. Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities? ... [such questions] have important social and political consequences.’ (Said, 1994, p. 15).

to essentialise Western Buddhism as an established entity that was spreading from the 'traditional East' to the 'modern West', rather than seeing it as an ongoing mutually transformative process of translation in a globalised world. I therefore found myself asking as part of my inquiries: 'Who is doing the exercise of translation that constitutes the process of Western Buddhism? What are these translators (largely white middle-class men) picking up on within the Buddhist tradition? Who do they think is the audience for their translated work?' I found some truth in the late Rick Fields's (1994, p. 55) statement that:

in the ongoing discussion about the meaning of an emergent "American Buddhism," it is mainly white Buddhists who are busy doing the defining. Nor is it surprising that they're defining it in their own image.

Given this I found the insights of feminist epistemologists (Olesen, 2000; Tanesini, 1999) and the debates occurring amongst others as to how 'difference' is to be addressed, invaluable. Becoming aware that all too often research in the natural and social sciences focuses on white, middle class, majority ethnic, able-bodied men and that its findings were often presumed to be universally applicable, feminist epistemologists have been at the forefront of showing how notions of knowledge, knowers and known are socially constructed. The false universalisation that feminists had observed and the strategies to combat this that have been developed through different feminist approaches in the sciences seemed to be highly relevant for my work. The question of bringing into the foreground the perspectives and concerns of those who, due to their social positioning outside the 'centre', were generally not taken into account by researchers seemed to be key for me. Beverley Skeggs' (2001, p. 426) observation that: 'Feminist politics, of whatever variant, is always concerned with power: how it works, how to challenge it' therefore seemed quite pertinent, even though the main focus of this study is not gender but religion, ethnicity and 'race'.

It has been suggested (Harding, 1986; Tanesini, 1999) that there are three broad schools of feminist epistemology – feminist empiricisms; feminist standpoint theories; and postmodern feminisms. Feminist empiricisms urge the inclusion of women in scientific investigation. However, standpoint theorists have argued that although it is a useful first step to include women in empirical research, the political nature of science requires further challenge. They suggest that women's 'double consciousness' as a result of their subjugation,

means that richer studies can emerge that take women's experiences, particularly as knowers and known, into account. Unfortunately, especially in the early days of development, feminist epistemologists all too often ignored differences other than gender. This has led to an ongoing lively series of challenges from women of colour, Third World women, working class women, lesbians, disabled women, and other groups of women who experience multiple discrimination and disadvantage, as to how differences apart from gender, must be addressed if the potential of feminist epistemologies is to be fully realised. Feminist epistemologists have therefore had to reassess their position, and postmodern feminisms have emerged that seek to move away from essentialist and unitary definitions of 'woman', and further clarify differences between different groups of women. Even though this study focuses on people of colour, I found this useful, for as we shall see below, Buddhists of colour are not a homogeneous group, differing not only in their denominations but also in their approaches to Buddhism, racialisation and 'race'.

On reflection, I came to consider that the attempt to theorise intersectionality of various axes of difference has received the most response from those adopting variations of feminist standpoint theory (for example Harding, 2004) and postmodern feminisms (Hekman, 1990; Nicholson, 1990). As 'difference' is a key theme for this study it was to these that I turned. Also, the issues raised by feminist critiques of traditional epistemology have led to a range of other debates between feminist epistemologists that impinge very much on this work. For example, what should be the place of experience? What becomes of notions of bias and objectivity if an Archimedean point is impossible to achieve? What foundations should exist for feminist knowledge claims?

Within the framework of my project I felt that what was important was highlighting the narratives of experiences of black people/people of colour engaged in Buddhist practices, relative to those of their fellows in Western convert Buddhist movements. However, it felt important to approach this in a way that did not fix or essentialise identities - rather to see these experiences as a way of understanding the processes by which participants came to adopt particular subject positions at different times. This was especially important as due to the ongoing development of the debate around diversity and racism in the FWBO and London Buddhist Centre (LBC) as well as its current

restructuring, things within this *sangha* are constantly changing. Also identity positions are by no means fixed through time – this being borne out by my data and the study's focus on religious conversion, as well as being a central tenet of Buddhism. As postmodernist feminist Joan Scott (1992, pp. 25-26) suggests: 'It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience'.

I now agree with Scott's view that the 'emergence of a new identity' should be 'treated as a discursive event' (*ibid*: 34). This was especially shown to me over time by interviewees' conversion narratives and the various accounts I heard and read of what SGI participants would call the 'actual proof' of their Buddhist practice by which its efficacy was demonstrated to them. I consider her perspective of experience is not dissimilar to Buddhist teachings of conditionality that assert everything is interdependent and nothing has fixed essential existence. These teachings suggest that all phenomena, human subjects included, are constantly forming and re-forming on the basis of moment to moment experience and the conditions within which they operate. This is not without significance for this thesis, as the term 'racialisation' that emphasises processes of identification is to be preferred to the term 'race' which has a relative fixity.

I also found Beverley Skeggs' (1997, pp. 24-28) theorisations on the treatment of experience within feminist research useful and consistent with this Buddhist perspective. She argues that experience is to be recognised, yet not to be treated as a foundation for knowledge. One need not have a particular experience in order to take up a standpoint. She suggests a place for experience in feminist theory which sees it as central to the construction of subjectivity and theory. Experience ceases to be foundational and becomes instead productive of a knowing subject, whose identities are continually in production rather than occupied as fixed. Experience is not necessarily productive of knowledge, whether this happens depends on the context and the experience. The take-up of a standpoint becomes possible for anyone, rather than being an ontological given. Skeggs concludes by arguing that the emphasis becomes 'on the access to instances of take-up, movement, recognition and occupation of the positions available and it is assumed that these are neither fixed nor fixing. This recognizes that knowledge is situated ...

located in a nexus of power relations. Also, that there is a relationship between the ontological and epistemological but that this is not determined' (*ibid.* p.28).

Feminist reflections on the impossibility of a researcher finding an Archimedean observation point (described by Sandra Harding (1986) as the 'god-trick' that pretends to a neutral all-seeing perspective – which is impossible) and the resulting contributions to the insider/outsider debate were also useful (Naples, 1996; Narayan, 1997; Ong, 1995; Zavella, 1996). These made clear the fluidity of one's position as an insider and an outsider within a single research setting. For instance in the FWBO case study while I was generally an insider, at times I would be positioned as a relative outsider. This would happen, for example, when participants recognised me as a more experienced Buddhist practitioner when I was a participant/observer at mixed newcomers' classes. As a result I would be sometimes excluded from conversations amongst newcomers at the class, which made it harder for me to get a sense of black newcomers' perspectives of FWBO mixed events using this method. Also as part of my fieldwork with SGI-UK, although I identified myself as a Buddhist, I was often seen as an outsider and at times distrusted as someone who might be seeking to use research to reproduce controversial stereotypes¹⁴ of that movement.

This fluidity of inside/outside positioning stressed to me the consequent need to be constantly mindful of both the positioning of myself as a researcher, my project participants and the *sangha* I was studying. It pointed to, in other words, the need for reflexivity (Wright & Nelson, 1995, p. 48), as also suggested by Haraway (1991) and Gunaratnam (2003). I found all these contributions very useful for me in developing each case study as I am a black woman of African/Caribbean heritage who in 2003, while fieldwork was still taking place, became a member of the WBO after over eleven years of training within the ordination process of the FWBO. I have also participated and supported LBC events for black people and people of colour for many years while being involved in the ongoing dialogue within the FWBO and LBC around issues of diversity and multiculturalism. I am therefore mainly an insider in several LBC/FWBO and more recently WBO contexts and quite a few of my FWBO participants are close personal friends. In fact, I am doing what Brian Edwards

¹⁴ These stereotypes suggest that SGI members are involved in chanting predominantly for personal gain and that SGI seeks to increase its membership by coercive means and limits the individuality of its members.

(2002) calls from his own experience 'deep insider research' because I have been involved in the organisation under study for more than five years. Edwards suggests that being a 'deep insider' offers potential insights arising out of knowing a particular organisational culture quite well but presents potential problems from being so familiar with the organisation under study that the researcher may miss the obvious. These problems were another reason why I felt the use of triangulation (see below) could be of considerable assistance for each study.

I had to further interrogate my position as a researcher in terms of the issue of 'bias' and the impact of my research on the situation that I am studying. This seemed to me to be a matter of ethics for my research project (I discuss the ethical implications of my research in more detail below). While I had developed some insight into my research questions on account of having been strongly involved in the FWBO and its internal debates around diversity for almost ten years at the time I started my fieldwork, I became aware that my perspective as a practitioner of colour was distinct from the academic and scientific understanding I was striving to develop in the course of my study – hence the importance of my fieldwork, especially my interviews with participants and seeking to develop a more distanced analytical approach. I was, however, and remain, committed to communicating any hegemonic practices that my research uncovers as part of an anti-racist positioning. Furthermore I found that my work itself became part of the dialogue within the FWBO about diversity issues. For example, some participants have told me that just asking the questions I raised during interviews has encouraged them to give more thought to these issues than they had done previously. And as we shall see, especially in chapter 5, the circulation of my initial findings amongst participants further developed the debate and hopefully will contribute towards greater understanding and awareness of these issues over time.

But the fact that total objectivity is impossible to achieve does not mean for me a total dismissal of the idea. Donna Haraway (1991) suggests using the metaphor of vision, making clear the lenses through which one is observing whether in natural or social science and to make clear what one's observation point is. To her mind: 'Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges' (*ibid*: 188). In this way she suggests knowledge remains accountable and avoids the problem of relativism that I consider can arise from

extreme postmodernist positions. I felt a strong need to avoid a relativist approach as all too often, participants of colour reported that their account of their experiences was described by white majority ethnic people as ‘just their opinion.’ To me this reinforced the notion of a transcendent discourse of whiteness that was implicitly seen as objective.

However, unlike more simplistic versions of standpoint theory, Haraway (*ibid.*) argues that while subjugated standpoints may well yield richer results, it is not simply a matter of allocating epistemic privilege to those who are subjugated. Bat-Ami Bar On (1993) for instance has argued against such privileging on the grounds that while it authorises some, it can lead to further silencing and marginalisation, and that it gives voice to the subjugated primarily on the premises of those who oppress them. By refusing to simply privilege the voice of the subjugated, one avoids the Kantian problem of epistemology being equivalent to ontology. This suggests, as I have argued earlier around the theme of experience, that mere membership of a socially subjugated group does not of itself render the knower or the known with an inherently superior moral or, more to the point, superior epistemological position. It still remains important to ensure that one’s pursuit of scientific inquiry is rigorous and accords with the requirements of good practice so that one’s ‘instruments of vision’ give rise to reliable and valid data, whatever one’s positioning. For these reasons, I now go on to describe how questions of reliability and validity were approached for this project.

1.5.2 Reliability and Validity: Questions of Plausibility

As David Silverman (2005, p. 209) puts it, ‘Having good intentions, or the correct political attitude, is unfortunately never the point.’ Although I draw on postmodern thought in developing my methodological approach, a concept of validity remains important to any research that draws on empirical data, as does mine.¹⁵ In reviewing the literature on reliability and validity in qualitative research, Alan Bryman (2004, pp. 272-278) suggests three different stances that have been taken by qualitative researchers to these notions. The approach I have taken is related to a midway point between the first two positions of a completely realist approach in contrast to regarding qualitative researchers’ work as one of many potentially credible representations.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Anita Naoko Pilgrim for this insight.

Like most others in this camp, I acknowledge the existence of social phenomena that are part of an external reality but disavow any suggestion that it is possible to reproduce that reality for the audiences of social scientific endeavour. I see my account as one of a number of possible representations rather than a definitive version of social reality. However, as in my approach to feminist epistemology, I have not totally adopted a postmodernist approach, but have sought to strengthen my account through thick descriptions, (particularly using narrative), respondent validation exercises, and triangulation (Seale, 1999, pp. 53-61, 72). It is mainly through using these strategies that I have assessed the plausibility of my research conclusions. This is not to say, like Beverley Skeggs (1997, p. 30) in her ethnography of working-class women, that in using respondent validation, I necessarily accepted all the feedback I received. For instance, some participants in the FWBO disagreed with my analysis of the place of racism in determining the involvement of people of colour in that movement. Some in SGI-UK disagreed with some of my conclusions about the treatment of gender and sexuality in that movement. I therefore treated the feedback I received as research data, and like my interpretations sought to understand it as coming from particular standpoints that I needed to engage with and appreciate through a process of dialogue and consultation (Seale, 1999, pp. 61-72). As the author and researcher, I had the ultimate power of production and responsibility and was not developing a collaborative account. While the process of dialogue with participants led to reassessment of my speculations and theoretical frameworks, it sometimes led me to modify, abandon and at times reassert these. Having outlined the methodological approach to this thesis, I will now to move on to the fifth section on the methods used, and the approaches taken to analysing data and to research ethics.

1.6 METHODS, ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH ETHICS

This section looks at the methods and sampling procedures used for this study. These qualitative methods come together to form an ethnographic case study approach that seeks to draw out the ways in which 'race' and racialised class, gender and sexuality are lived out in newer Western Buddhist movements. I then turn to the process used to analyse data from my fieldwork. The section ends with a consideration of the approach taken to research ethics.

1.6.1 Case Study Approach and Sampling Procedures

The variations in traditions amongst UK Buddhist organisations (non-denominational, *Theravāda*¹⁶, Zen, Tibetan, Nichirenist, Diasporic, to name just a few of the varieties) means that it is not a simple matter to select an organisation that is representative of the entire UK Buddhist scene. For this study it was therefore felt useful to focus on larger Buddhist organisations in which the majority were converts, based in a geographical area with a relatively higher number of Buddhists. It was felt important that the area was highly multicultural and had a relatively high population of people who were from low-income groups/working class. According to the 2001 census, London is home to a large proportion of Buddhists in the UK (36% of an estimated 149000 in the UK as a whole¹⁷). The area of East London (defined for this study as consisting of the inner London boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets) has been a longstanding area of settlement for migrants to the UK and is generally agreed to be one of the most deprived areas of London, as well as England as a whole¹⁸. It was therefore thought that a study based in this area would make the workings of 'race' and class in Buddhist organisations more visible than might be the case elsewhere.

Currently, the three largest Buddhist movements in the UK are the Nichirenist Sōka Gakkai International – UK (SGI-UK), the non-denominational Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) and the Tibetan New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) (Bluck, 2006; Waterhouse, 1999). At the time when fieldwork was conducted (2000 – early 2005), the NKT did not have a presence in the case study area, although since fieldwork ended in mid-2005 it has been running some meditation classes there. It was therefore decided to focus on SGI-UK which, as well as being the largest is also widely regarded as the most multicultural and cosmopolitan of Western convert Buddhist movements. The FWBO has a long-established centre (of which I am a member) in the case study area which has also organised a longstanding outreach programme to black people/people of colour (through which at its outset I made my first

¹⁶ See glossary in Appendix 4 for definition.

¹⁷ This statistic comes from the UK Government's (Office for National Statistics, 2001a) study of the 2001 census data on the geographic distribution of religions in the UK.

¹⁸ In the UK Government's (Communities and Local Government) index of deprivation for England (Noble et al., 2008), the rankings of the local authorities of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets left them in the top ten of most deprived areas. These rankings were 2, 6 and 3 respectively with Hackney coming second after Liverpool in terms of its levels of deprivation.

acquaintance with the FWBO in 1988), which was also included in the study (also in part because of the relative ease of negotiating access).

It was decided to develop ethnographic case studies for this study through: participant-observation of activities; examination of Buddhist movements' literature/websites/publicity/videos; use of photographs and in-depth interviews. I found that it was necessary to draw on a range of data sources to place what I was observing in Buddhist movements' activities and hearing in interviews into better context. I therefore used triangulation¹⁹ of these methods to access various sources of data as well as to provide another means of validating the data I obtained (Seale, 1999, pp. 53-61, 72). Triangulation also allowed the emergence of 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1993) of the processes by which 'race,' class and 'diversity' are constructed in each movement on an ongoing basis.

In terms of sampling of interviewees, for the FWBO, where I had greater access, I interviewed key members of the LBC **Council**,²⁰ senior Order members linked to the LBC involved in the ordination process, **Friends**²¹ who were **newcomers** and **regulars**,²² **Mitras**²³ and **Order members**²⁴ and some people who had formerly been involved in the FWBO - particularly people of colour from these groups. For SGI-UK I interviewed seventeen people involved in the case study district (Malcott²⁵) from each of the four main divisions (Men's, Women's, Young Men's and Young Women's), all of whom were members in good standing. Snowball sampling techniques were used but efforts were made to develop a representative cross-section of interviewees from different categories/ethnic groups.

¹⁹ See Phil Henry (2006) for details of how a multi-method approach can be of utility in a study of Western Buddhism in the UK.

²⁰ The Council is the Board of Trustees of the charity that is the LBC. All of its members are Order members with specific responsibilities. Its members include the Centre President, Centre Chairman, Centre Manager, Treasurer, outreach worker and the men and women's *Mitra* convenors as well as representatives of the FWBO community businesses based around the LBC.

²¹ A Friend is anyone who attends FWBO activities to whatever extent. They have not made a formal commitment to the Movement.

²² Regulars are Friends who are more experienced than beginners or newcomers and attend FWBO activities on a regular basis.

²³ A Mitra (Skt. for friend) is someone who wants to practise Buddhism seriously according to the FWBO's approach and intends to do so for the foreseeable future. They have also made a formal commitment to this effect through their participation in a simple ceremony.

²⁴ Order members have been ordained into the Western Buddhist Order (WBO). Male Order members are called **Dharmacharis** and female Order members **Dharmacharinis**. The terms **Dharmachari(ni)** means 'Dharma-farer' or 'one who practices the Dharma'.

²⁵ Malcott is the pseudonym for the district that was studied in the SGI-UK case study area of East London.

1.6.2 Ethnography: Observation and Texts, Offline and Online

For the FWBO case study I was involved in participant observation of the following activities:

- The then weekly newcomers' drop-in class at the LBC during September-November 2000 (as a guest);
- Events for people of colour from September 2000 to July 2004 including a one-week retreat in May 2001 and another one in July 2002 (as an organising team member) organised under the auspices of the London Buddhist Centre (LBC);
- Meetings of the organising group for LBC people of colour's events from September 2000 to July 2004;
- A newcomers' course in Buddhism at the LBC between September-November 2000 (as a team member)
- The LBC initiative on diversity from November 2004 to the present (firstly as a participant and from April 2005 as an organising team member).

For the SGI-UK case study the participant-observation I undertook took place through attending the following:

- meetings of Malcott district, its associated women's division and chapter from October 2003 to September 2005.
- meetings of Abibbimma, the group for SGI members of African heritage, in October 2000 and its relaunch meeting when it became the African-Caribbean Heritage Group (ACHG) in September 2003 as well as one meeting of the Absolute Freedom group (which co-ordinates outreach to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities) in September 2003.
- the SGI-UK General meeting that took place in May 2005.

Through close reading, I examined publicity materials for events as well as various documents about each case study organisation and its activities through its periodicals, websites, videos/DVDs and other publications. I also took some photographs of the LBC and the case study area for illustrative purposes. I found that the use of such documents alone, even where they were produced by the movements I was studying, could give a misleading impression, particularly where they had been produced early in a movement's life and were now outdated. For instance, SGI-UK had previously been affiliated with the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood and had separated from it in the early 1990s. Another problem with available publications was that they did not

necessarily reflect the whole spectrum of opinion within a movement. For example, the British Library public catalogue of publications about the FWBO only lists the senior Order member Subhuti's (1995) book *Women, Men and Angels*, thus potentially giving the impression that this is the agreed view of gender within the FWBO. In fact the book has been and continues to be hotly debated within this movement and has been withdrawn by its author as we shall see in Chapter Three. I therefore felt a need to interpret organisational literature carefully for the *sanghas* under study, especially where a Buddhist movement was undergoing fundamental reassessment of its structures and principles. This, for example, is the case for the FWBO at the present time. A historical and contextualising approach to literature was therefore needed. I also used official websites for both case study organisations. Both of the movements used in my case studies have proved controversial and there are other websites²⁶ available on the Internet reflecting this. The websites often tend to be of a view that the case study organisations are not legitimate, or describe them in the way that many new religious movements are described – i.e. as 'cults'. I felt that such material, although worthy of consideration and research in its own right, was not so relevant for this project, which was seeking to develop more of an insider view of each movement.

However, as we shall see in the next chapter where I report the results of my analysis of these, I became a member of two email discussion groups for people of colour with an interest in Buddhism. These groups are based in the US. Gaining access to these was relatively straightforward, and I was treated very much as an insider, as I am myself a Black Buddhist. Perhaps because of this, my experience as a researcher did not feel dissimilar to that of my participant observation of the groups for Buddhists of colour I engaged in offline. In becoming a member of these email groups, I made clear the nature of my research project and that I would only quote from postings with the permission of the poster. My work was generally well received by the groups' owners and moderators. I was also able to share initial findings of this project with these groups and this led to further contacts that were able to provide further information for the research. I tended to 'lurk' on the groups, examining the postings that came in, only posting occasionally. My observations suggest that

²⁶ See for example the Internet article by Ken Jones (1997) and the anonymously authored FWBO-Files ("The FWBO-Files," 1999)

the groups function as social networks, tending to serve more as means for sharing information than as discussion groups. As networks they serve to lessen the isolation that many of their members feel as Buddhists of colour, especially for those in the group for Black Buddhists. Posters (especially for the Black Buddhists group) often use online names, which to me suggests that Internet technologies have facilitated the development of online identities which allow a space for expression that is not as available to them offline as minority members of a minority religion. The space opened up by the Internet allows them to discuss concerns such as their frequent isolation and marginalisation within Buddhist institutions, and strategies to encourage dialogue with other people of colour for whom Buddhism is not a traditional religion.

1.6.3 Interviews

The interviews I conducted with participants (thirty-nine in all) were all semi-structured. Although not strictly biographical, interviewees were generally asked for biographical information about their childhood experiences of religion, life experience of 'race' and racism and their process of conversion to Buddhism. In some cases, leading members of each Buddhist movement were asked for details about their role and how this impacted on the development of diversity within that movement. As Caroline Knowles (2003, p. 75) suggests, the interviews proved to be a rich source of 'thick descriptions' not only about participants' lives in general but about 'the social categories through which forms of public recognition, like race or ethnicity, are transacted and the political landscape on which all this takes place.' Each interview was audio-taped and fully transcribed and then the audiotape and/or transcript sent to each interviewee for feedback, to provide interviewee validation of the transcripts. Following this process, the narratives in the transcripts were subjected to a close reading and coded with the computer programme for qualitative data analysis NVivo 2.0. The epistemological status of the interviews (Byrne, 2004) was that they were seen as both *topic* (in terms of looking at how the narratives were constructed in each interview) and *resource*. For details of the dates and venues of each interview, see Appendix 1. For copies of the interview schedules used with participants, see Appendices 2a, 2b and 2c.

1.6.4 Approach to Data Analysis

At first, I considered that conventional discourse analysis (Gill, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Tonkiss, 1998) might be the best approach to adopt, especially given its success in analysing issues around 'race' and racisms (for example Wetherell & Potter, 1992). However, I later felt concerned at the anti-realist approach to language that most discourse analysis adopts. In line with the approach of subtle and critical realism that this study takes, I felt it necessary to consider the ways in which material reality lies behind and underpins discourse, so as not to misunderstand the agency of participants and the realities of their lives. Also, as Buddhist ethics focus very much on the intention of the actor, as well as the content of their actions of body, speech and mind, I felt it important to adopt an analytical strategy that was in keeping with the meanings of participants. I therefore came to feel that narrative analysis (Riessman, 1990, 1993, 2001, 2004) was the most appropriate to use, especially for the documents and transcripts that I worked with. Through this means I could come to see the ways in which 'race' was narrated and thus brought into being by using an analytic strategy in which language was *both* topic and resource.

The questions I applied to my data are set out above in pp. 28-30 and evolved out of my initial coding for themes. In the process of analysis I found that the NVivo 2.0 software I used was very useful for identifying themes that emerged in the analysis of documents, fieldnotes and interviews in keeping with the ability of computer software for qualitative data analysis to work with projects where language is primarily seen as resource. However, I found that when analysing the interviews and documents, the coding for themes often broke up the rich narratives I found. Also, while the software helped associate particular narratives with particular themes, it was less able to analyse narratives that emerged, especially from the interview data, so that it felt less able to uncover the full meanings that I felt participants were seeking to articulate in their accounts. I therefore in my analysis and my reporting have felt it important to endeavour to keep the narrative whole as far as possible. This has been especially the case for the conversion narratives and accounts of participants' experiences of 'race' and Western Buddhism, to maintain the integrity of participants' accounts. I regard this attempt to respect the integrity

of participant narrative to be an aspect of research ethics, and the next section discusses this in more depth.

1.6.5 Ethical Considerations

I have sought to address these principally through the feminist methodology outlined above in which I tried to develop a more participatory approach to this project, so that as far as possible, participants felt in some control about the way they were being understood and represented. Following Alan Bryman (2004, pp. 505-516), I discuss the ways in which ethics were addressed under three main headings: *harm to participants; informed consent and deception; invasion of privacy/anonymity*. There is also, in my view, the potential impact of dissemination not only on participants but on the wider community.

In terms of the first category, *harm to participants*, this potentially arose through difficulties raised by questioning sensitive areas such as experiences of discrimination or childhood religious conditioning and/or by writing up and disseminating project findings in a way that inadvertently reinforced pre-existing stereotypes of a movement. For example, in mentioning the appeal of Buddhist movements for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, one might be seen to supporting the thesis of a website ("The FWBO-Files," 1999) which alleges that the FWBO is a cult that promotes homosexuality. I found the advice of feminist researchers such as Ann Oakley²⁷ (1981) in terms of being open about oneself as an interviewer, inviting interviewees to ask me questions as well as me questioning them, and about validating interviewees' experiences and emotions helpful in this respect. I and participants of colour felt that particularly through the interviews, they were being given a voice that they had not had previously, countering a problem that bell hooks (1994) has raised that Buddhist practitioners of colour 'lack visibility and voice'. Also, often because of their experience of giving testimony about their experiences as Buddhist practitioners, participants proved quite articulate about the issues we discussed in interviews. I sought through participant validation and through academic feedback (e.g. through presentations at conferences) to ensure that the picture I was constructing of each movement was a reasonable one.

²⁷ I am grateful to Anita Naoko Pilgrim for this insight.

As regards the second area, *informed consent and deception*, all interviewees were informed of the research and its purposes prior to their participation. Inviting them to give feedback on their transcripts allowed them some control as to how they were to be represented and understood. Before engaging in participant-observation, I contacted the organisers of an event to check that it would be acceptable to them for me to participate and observe the activities they were running on the basis that anything quoted in my research would not be directly attributable to anyone. However, as with most ethnographic work, it was simply not practical to get informed consent from all involved. I felt that so long as it was possible for people to remain anonymous, it was still possible to engage in participant-observation in a way that respected the protocols of ethical research. Also, whenever I was approached by others and asked about the basis on which I was participating I usually tried to explain that I was a student of Western Buddhism and multiculturalism.

In terms of the area of *invasion of privacy/anonymity*, while it has been possible to attempt to anonymise the SGI-UK district that formed the basis of one of the case studies, it has not proved possible to provide anonymity to the London Buddhist Centre (LBC) because it is a longstanding public building. However, all efforts have been made to ensure people's anonymity is respected as far as possible, especially as in the case of the LBC, even though there has been a significant increase in numbers in recent years, people of colour continue to be a minority, particularly as Order members. This has affected the way that I have reported the results of my research as we shall see when we come to the reports of the case studies in Chapters Three through to Six. For instance, particularly for the FWBO, it has not been possible to provide the temporal depth that I would have liked in reporting more detail of the timelines of people's personal processes and experiences, as this would all too easily lead to people being recognised if these appeared in print.

In disseminating these research findings, I recognise that some of these describe painful experiences for participants around 'race', class and racism, as well as giving criticisms of convert Buddhist movements in areas that they find particularly sensitive. However, I consider that this project has been of overall benefit because its findings shed some light on the workings of hegemonic practices, especially those around 'race', and these are issues of considerable social significance.

1.7 EVALUATION OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This section considers the strengths and drawbacks of the methodological approach, the ways in which it is original and its possible implications for future studies of Western Buddhism. In methodological terms, I consider the contribution of my approach to further scholarship in Western Buddhism to be threefold. Firstly, it brings together work on the sociology of religion, particularly Western Buddhism with the insights of sociological work around 'race' and its impact on gender and class. This enables my research to be more strongly based on the premise that 'race' is the product of ongoing social, cultural, economic and historical processes (i.e. racialisation); avoiding the common assumption that 'race' is a social fact self-evident to the researcher of Western Buddhism. I especially consider this to be the case as my research draws strongly on participants' self-definitions of their positioning along various axes of identification as well as my own categorisations. Secondly, I follow Foucault's work on ethics and subjectivity and adapt Giddens' studies of reflexive subjectivity in late modernity to take more account of issues of power. This allows me to take greater account of differences in socio-economic status and to develop a treatment of religious conversion where the potential impact of social, cultural and economic forces on conversion to a non-theistic tradition can be more readily recognised. Finally, by using the classic techniques of ethnography for developing case studies of major Buddhist movements, and by drawing on the insights of feminist epistemologies on reflexivity and experience, I am able to bring both the experiences of people of colour within Western convert Buddhist movements and the implications of these for understanding processes of racialisation, gendering and class stratification within these movements to light. Because of a reflexive positioning and the involvement of participants in this research, this method does not require a researcher to have a particular social status in order to come to an understanding of their participants and research materials.²⁸ Having considered my research methodology, I now move on to outline the structure of the remainder of this thesis.

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THESIS

The next chapter reviews the literature that has largely emerged from the Western convert Buddhist practitioner communities in the US, and sets out the

²⁸ I am grateful to Anita Naoko Pilgrim for this insight.

themes arising out of it in relation to the research questions that this thesis seeks to address. I also consider the gradually increasing profile of Buddhists from communities of colour, mainly within the US over the past ten years, as this manifests through virtual communities that I have been a participant in throughout this project, new intentionally multicultural convert Buddhist movements and, life writing. I end this chapter with an outline of the issues raised by the literature reviewed in terms of the discussion of the fieldwork which follows.

Chapters Three through to Six explore the results of the fieldwork that forms the basis for the findings of this thesis. Two case studies were developed. The first, within Chapters Three and Four, of the FWBO's centre in Bethnal Green (the London Buddhist Centre or LBC) and the second, within Chapters Five and Six, of part of the East London region of SGI-UK. In chapter Three I set out a background history of the FWBO and LBC and consider the ways in which its founder Sangharakshita's teachings on subjectivity, community, aesthetics and social change are expounded and operationalised through setting out close readings of interviews with key members of the LBC's Council (the board of trustees for the LBC which is a registered charity). In Chapter Four I consider how people of colour are engaging with the techniques of the self provided by the FWBO and LBC and their processes of negotiating the boundaries of 'race' and class they encounter. I also discuss the measures that are taking place to promote wider awareness of diversity issues and the operations of 'race' within the LBC and wider movement and the steps that the LBC is taking to becoming more outward-focused and socially engaged than it was at its outset.

Chapter Five starts with a background history of SGI's presence in the UK and then moves on to consider how it addresses questions of social engagement (through the doctrine of *kōsen-rufu*, working for world peace through the promotion of the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*), of 'difference' through a commitment to celebrating cultural diversity and encouraging intercultural understanding and dialogue, the doctrine of *itai-dōshin*, 'many in body, one in mind,' and the teaching of 'the oneness of mentor and disciple' and of aesthetics. Chapter Six focuses more on the SGI district that formed the nucleus for this case study, Malcott, in East London. It discusses conversion narratives of SGI-UK members, and participants' processes of negotiating

issues around their religious background, 'race,' class and the response of their families and friends as part of becoming established within SGI-UK. It also considers how the African-Caribbean Heritage group for black people and their allies functions within SGI-UK.

In Chapter Seven, the final chapter of this thesis I give an overview of its main findings and assess the extent to which the aims of this research set out in this chapter have been achieved as well as giving a critique of the strengths and weaknesses of this project. I conclude by setting out possible future directions for further enquiry that arise out of the issues this project has investigated.

1.9 CONCLUSION

In this introductory chapter, I have tried to set out the natural history of my research project in order to elucidate the ways in which it has been built up as it has progressed. I have also outlined the structure of the remainder of this thesis. I now turn to the next chapter in which I review the literature from Buddhist practitioners that I studied as part of my exploration of the research questions.

CHAPTER TWO – MAPPING THE FIELD

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The last chapter, in its discussion of methodology, included consideration of the academic literature on Western Buddhism and its limitations in understanding the multicultural appropriation of convert Buddhism in the West by people of colour. During the past fifteen years, there has been an increasing variety of initiatives to further the involvement of people of colour in Western Buddhist movements. A highly reflexive literature is also emerging from some convert Buddhists about the issues involved in the multicultural appropriation of Buddhism by people of colour of ‘race’, identifications, diversity and racisms. This chapter reviews some of these initiatives and key contributions from this practitioner literature. It also sets out findings of two email groups for people of colour in which I have been a participant. These email groups (*cybersanghas*) are based in the US, yet have an international following, and this is reflected in their membership.

In my discussion of the initiatives, literature and email groups, I will consider:

- how ‘race’ is presented in terms of Paul Gilroy’s (2004b) rejection of ‘race’ as a category and affirmation of cosmopolitanism;
- the nature of the approaches to diversity and anti-racism (following Pierre-André Taguieff’s (2001) model of antiracist strategy that describes antiracisms as being either *universalist* or *differentialist* in their orientation);
- Avtar Brah’s (1996b) typology of difference as *subjectivity*, *experience*, *identity* and *social relation*;
- the emphasis on methodological individualism as compared to questions of social structure.

I draw on material from the US as well as from the UK in this mapping exercise because the Buddhist scene in the UK has close links with that of the US, with major teachers from the UK such as Stephen Batchelor often having a high profile in the US and *vice versa*. Also, black diaspora communities within the UK and US have a longstanding link of mutual influence with each other, as Paul Gilroy (1993) argues in his work *The Black Atlantic*. For example, these linkages can be seen in the email groups discussed in this chapter, in terms of the discussions that occasionally take place about the state of diversity in Western Buddhism either side of ‘the pond’ (i.e. the Atlantic).

The first main section of this chapter, which follows this introduction, reviews the literature on Western Buddhism within the UK and US to consider possible causes for the present lack of diversity¹ within Western convert Buddhist movements. Through comparing the processes through which Buddhism has been transmitted to the West, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, with the social and religious histories of diaspora communities of colour in these countries (who in the UK tend to be people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent), various suggestions arise. The second section outlines some of the strategies being deployed by Western Buddhist convert movements (particularly those based in the US where much of this work has taken place) to encourage greater ethnic and cultural diversity within their ranks. In the third section I give an overview of the efforts that Buddhists of colour, again largely from the US, are making to increase their visibility and voice, particularly through the formation of websites, *cybersanghas* and life writing. The conclusions from this chapter are outlined in its fourth and final section, which sets out the issues that are more fully explored by the fieldwork discussed in Chapters Three to Six of this thesis.

2.2 A HISTORY OF SHIPS IN THE NIGHT

2.2.1 Western Sanghas and Communities of Colour – Unconnected?

During the nineteenth century, Buddhism came to the West as a result of colonisation and the imposition of spheres of influence in Asia (Clarke, 1997, p. 71). Apart from Diaspora Buddhists, interest in Buddhism developed mainly in the upper and middle classes, who had access to Asian literature in translations. From the early nineteenth century to the 1880s, no Asian Buddhist missionaries are reported, so convert Buddhism in its early days in the West was very much an 'import religion' (Nattier, 1998), both in America and Europe (Baumann, 1996).

Buddhist sympathisers from Christian backgrounds were more accustomed to liberal, nonconformist traditions. Of those ethnic minorities in the West who were Christian, the majority had come to be involved in Christianity through missionary sections of the church that tended to be more critical of Buddhism than sympathetic to it. Interaction between people of colour and

¹ By diversity I do not just mean phenotypic difference but, as we shall see throughout this thesis, diversity through recognition and valuing of cultural and ethnic differences and a deeper engagement in issues of social justice arising from diverse forms of racialisation.

Buddhist sympathizers would also have been limited by the social conditions of racism at the time. In the United States, the initial promise of the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction were followed by a bleaker period of decreasing prospects for racial harmony and justice. As Timothy Fulop (1997) observes:

The last twenty-five years of the nineteenth-century have appropriately gone down in African-American history as “the Nadir.” Disenfranchisement and Jim Crow laws clouded out any rays of hope that Reconstruction had bestowed in the American South. Darwinism and phrenology passed on new “scientific” theories of black inferiority, and the old racial stereotypes of blacks as beasts abounded in American society. The civil, political, and educational rights of black Americans were greatly curtailed, and lynching reached all-time highs in the 1890s (*ibid.* p. 230).

The practice of segregation extended even to religious institutions, and can be observed in the US even to the present.² The prevailing attitude toward ‘race’ relations in the United States was described by Fannie Barrier Williams (1993), the only woman in the small African-American delegation invited to the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893 in these terms:

At present there seems to be no ethical attitude in public opinion toward our colored citizens. White men and women are careless and meanly indifferent about the merits and rights of colored men and women. The white man who swears and the white man who prays are alike contemptuous about the claims of colored men. (*ibid.* p. 149)

In the United Kingdom during that period – although there was no legalised segregation of black people from white people – an informal, yet significant, colour bar did operate. This was also a period of significant racial tensions, with organised attacks on black communities in Cardiff and Liverpool (Fryer, 1984, pp. 298-316)

People of colour would likewise have been underrepresented in the forums where interest in Buddhism initially developed. Although some Buddhist sympathisers took a progressive stance on many social issues, issues of racism in the United States and United Kingdom were not generally a focus of their attention. Thomas Tweed (1992, p. 88) suggests that in America, ‘although Euro-American Buddhists challenged the dominant social, political, and

² See for example: *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, (Emerson & Smith, 2000).

economic patterns in various ways, their dissent was most fundamentally cultural.'

Similar factors were to come into play during the next significant wave of interest in Buddhism in the West during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1960s saw a new wave of interest in Eastern religions as part of the countercultures of that period (Baumann, 1996) following the activities of the 'Beats' in the 1950s (Heelas, 1996). However, those attracted to Eastern spirituality were but one of a myriad of groups among the countercultures of the 1960s period. Some of these groupings were antipathetic to one another, having significant differences in their views about the strategies to be deployed in order to achieve social change. Paul Heelas (1996) suggests that:

one can think of the counter-culture in terms of three main orientations: that directed at changing the mainstream (for example, the political activists engaged in civil rights or anti-Vietnam demonstrations); that directed at rejecting mainstream disciplines to live the hedonistic life (the "decadent" world of "sex, drugs and rock-and-roll"); and that directed at finding ways of life which serve to nurture the authentic self (for example, by taking "a journey to the East") (*ibid.* p.51).

Each of these parts of the 1960s' countercultures had different appeal for different ethnic groups, with people of colour forming only a small minority of those 'rejecting mainstream disciplines' and 'looking to the East for Enlightenment.' I would also suggest that the profile of Buddhism provided by media coverage of the Vietnam War, in which Buddhist monks and nuns were seen protesting by self-immolation, while appealing to some, presented a more passive image to communities of colour that were working for civil rights in more militant ways. Hence once again, because of their location within society, people of colour formed a minority of those who were attracted to Buddhism. Furthermore, given that one of the principal ways that new religious movements spread is through word of mouth (Dawson, 1996), this would have been another factor working against the introduction of Buddhism to people of colour. The effect observed for Buddhism can also be seen in other 'Eastern' traditions, such as Hinduism, that were also gaining greater profile during the 1960s and 1970s. As in Buddhism, most of those converting have been white, middle-class people.

The issue of racial discrimination also gained significant prominence in the 1960s with the civil rights movement and the emergence of Black Power in

the United States. Post-war black immigrants to the United Kingdom also found themselves at the receiving end of intense racial discrimination, particularly in employment, education, policing and housing (Fryer, 1984, pp. 372-386; Phillips & Phillips, 1998). Black (at that time 'black' was a more coalitional and pan-ethnic term than it is now) people in the UK found themselves inspired by the anti-racist movements in the US and sought to form similar organizations. In both the US and UK, black-led faith communities played a key role in supporting anti-racist activity and the increasing politicisation of black communities during that time. The following subsection gives more detail of the religious traditions of communities of colour.

2.2.2 Religious Traditions of Communities of Colour

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, minority ethnic Christians tended to belong to denominations different from those in which a critique of Christianity was leading whites to embrace Buddhism (Tweed, 1992, pp. 92-94). Black communities developed their own creole traditions that permitted expression of their original culture and their perspective on their particular historical and social situations (Tweed, 1999). Such creole traditions were, and continue to be, significantly different from white-dominated Christian traditions (Long, 1997; Raboteau, 1995).

For black people of African descent another key factor in these creole traditions is what Long (1997) refers to as 'the meaning of the image and historical reality of Africa.' He mentions how during slavery,

one was isolated from any self-determined legitimacy in the society of which one was a part and was recognized by one's physiological characteristics. This constituted a complexity of experience revolving around the relationship between one's physical being and one's origins. So even if he had no conscious memory of Africa, the image of Africa played an enormous part in the religion of the black man....Even among religious groups not strongly nationalistic the image of Africa and Ethiopia still has relevance (*ibid.* p.26) .

The significance of Africa suggests that, whereas some in the 1960s counterculture would have sought out Asian religions, many black people would have been more likely to look to Africa for a sense of meaning. We can see this, for example, in the influence of Rastafarianism in the UK during the 1970s (Phillips & Phillips, 1998, pp. 294-297).

The final key difference that may impact on 'pushes' and 'pulls' would be differences related to the level of religious commitment of ethnic minorities compared to that of white majority ethnic people. Findings from the *Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities* in the United Kingdom (Modood et al., 1997) suggest that this is a key area where 'minority groups manifest a cultural dynamic which is at least partly at odds with native British trends (p. 356).' Though the number of regular churchgoers in Britain is decreasing, Modood *et al* found in their survey that nearly 20 percent of Caribbean people, a third of Indians and African-Asians, and two-thirds of Pakistani and Bangladeshi respondents aged sixteen to thirty-four – compared to 5 percent of white people in the same age range – reported that religion was very important to the way in which they live their lives (p.356). The survey reported that 'non-white Anglicans are three times more likely than white Anglicans to attend church weekly, and well over half of the members of black-led churches do so' (p.356); furthermore, 'black-led churches are a rare growth point in contemporary Christianity (p.300).' This suggests that a significant proportion of black people of African and Asian heritage are already firmly ensconced in a religious tradition, although not always Christianity. For example, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism have significant numbers of adherents from the UK South Asian population and have served as strong forces for mobilising and politicising sections of these communities. Furthermore, these faith communities often provide a network that provides cultural recognition and socio-economic support to socially excluded communities.

However, the survey also observed that as many Caribbean people as white people do not have any religion and that 'the general trend down the generations within every ethnic group is for younger people to be less connected to a religion than their elders (though perhaps to become more like their elders as they age)' (Modood, 1997, p. 356). This suggests that Buddhism might be more likely to appeal to the younger generation of black people than to people in the older generation. However, there is evidence of young South Asians from traditionally Muslim communities being increasingly attracted to revivalist versions of Islam.³ Given this qualification, what current 'pushes' and

³ For examples of how this phenomenon is being played out in the case study area of East London see Sarah Glynn (2002).

'pulls,' arising from the way that convert Buddhism has developed, might there be for people of colour?

2.2.3 Issues of Cultural and Social Relevance

Convert Buddhism in the West has largely developed as what Jan Nattier (1998) suggests is an 'import' tradition and it is to some extent useful to consider its aspects as a religious tradition in this respect. Key influences on the development of Buddhism in the West have been the notions of individualism, autonomy, and self-reliance that Tweed (1992, pp. 130-132) describes as:

... that call for mature self-regulation that echoed in the writings of Protestant reformers like Martin Luther, Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant, and Romantic writers like Emerson. It found expression in various areas of American life. It has been associated with life on the frontier. It was evident in the economic sphere... [and] the religious sphere... This individualism... became associated with Buddhism and affirmed by a number of American promoters of the religion. (*ibid.* p. 130).

Such notions of individualism continue to have a strong influence on the way Buddhism is approached by Westerners. This contrasts with the ways in which people from communities of colour are more likely to perceive themselves (Fronsdal, 1998; Hori, 1994; Tanaka, 1998). Victor Hori, in considering the differences between 'Western Buddhists' and so called 'ethnic Buddhists,' suggests that notions of the person differ radically for 'Westerners' (presumably white European people) and non-Westerners, with Westerners being more likely to see the person as an autonomous individual, and non-Westerners viewing the person as 'nexus of social relation' (Hori, 1994). This leads non-Westerners – and, I would argue, black and minority ethnic people – to tend to see themselves in terms of their family and community relationships compared to white majority ethnic people.⁴ Such cultural differences may not be identified by those seeking to promote Buddhism in the West, meaning that their implications are often not realised.

Another way in which significant differences between people of colour and white communities are being elided is demonstrated in the dialogue to develop Buddhist approaches to Western psychotherapy. In this debate, the considerable and developing body of work on black and minority ethnic people

⁴ I am not arguing here that this is a naturalised difference but a socially constructed one arising from the historical construction of the self in the West and the impact of racism and colonialism forcing increased reliance on family and community relationships for communities of colour.

and mental health is often not taken into account.⁵ This reflects a larger problem with the new scholarship on Buddhism in the West as I have mentioned earlier in the previous chapter. Only recently have scholars begun to consider issues of multiculturalism and ethnicity in analysing varieties of 'Western Buddhism' as compared to 'Eastern Buddhism.'⁶

The development of 'engaged Buddhism' offers new opportunities to address issues of ethnicity and 'race', especially as many of those involved in Buddhism in the US were also active in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. However, apart from the efforts of the Sōka Gakkai International, 'race' and cultural issues have not figured prominently in engaged Buddhism in the West (Moon, 2000; Rothberg, 1998). In contrast, despite a tradition of collusion with racist structures, Christian churches have decades of experience addressing issues of racial disadvantage and discrimination, which has given rise to a considerable body of theological work and reflection. Furthermore, many of the issues that socially engaged Buddhism has embraced, such as human rights, ecology, and peace, have been less pressing to communities of colour than criminal justice, community safety, education, and access to quality healthcare and employment. Hence, socially engaged Buddhists and members of communities of colour are generally unlikely to be working in the same arenas.

Communities of colour and engaged Buddhists are also more likely to approach similar issues from different vantage points. For example, with respect to the environment, black communities have been less involved than engaged Buddhists in ecology campaigns that emphasize the need for conservation (Kaza, 2000; Rothberg, 1998). On the other hand, certainly in the US,

⁵ See, for example, Kornfield (1994) and Watson (1998). Though the contributors to Claxton (1986) note that psychotherapy has developed on the basis of Western models of the mind, they do not go on to consider what implications this has given the diversity of the West, generally approaching the issue in essentialist terms, regarding it as the interface between an 'Eastern spiritual tradition' and 'Western thought.' For examples of the extensive work that has considered how Western psychotherapy can be adapted to address the needs of people of colour and the pressures on their mental health arising from racism, see Sue & Sue (1990), Bhugra & Bhui (1998), Pinto (2002). For a strong example of how Western psychiatry can victimise people of colour who are seeking therapeutic assistance see Knowles (1996).

⁶ One work that is an exception to this general phenomenon in taking an ethnic profile of respondents is Coleman's (1999) study of Buddhist groups from various traditions. But generally, even major studies such as Wilson and Dobbelaere's (1994) excellent survey of Sōka Gakkai in the United Kingdom, - though requesting participants' age and employment status - do not appear to take account of this issue, despite Sōka Gakkai's uniqueness among Western convert Buddhist movements for its diversity. Work by Hammond and Machacek (1999) on Sōka Gakkai in the United States also appears to make the same omission. *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Queen, 2000) makes some contribution to increasing the visibility of diversity issues within Western Buddhist scholarship as does the more recent review by the Harvard Pluralism Project (Dugan & Bogert, 2006).

communities of colour have been more involved in campaigns against environmental racism, such as cases of dumping of toxic waste in poorer localities with a high population of residents who are people of colour.⁷ Likewise, with respect to mobilisation around the UK/US war in Iraq and the so-called war on terror, the response of Western engaged Buddhists, while generally opposed to the war and the associated civil liberties measures arising from it, has taken a slightly different tack to that by British and American Muslims who have seen it more as a strong case of Western imperialism in the light of the ongoing issue of Palestine, as well as an exercise of militarist violence worthy of condemnation. Responses to issues of racial diversity and discrimination by Western Buddhists have therefore tended to be the exception rather than the rule, even within engaged Buddhist movements. Buddhists have to date had little engagement with communities of colour as ‘communities of resistance’ (Keith & Pile, 1993, pp. 34-36; Sivanandan, 1990) rather than with a small minority of people of colour as isolated individuals. This is in strong contrast to the approach of the Abrahamic faiths, Hinduism and Sikhism (religions that have a substantial presence amongst ethnic minorities in the UK), which have served as significant means of mobilising and politicising various minority ethnic communities.

2.3 ATTEMPTS TO WIDEN THE CIRCLE

Work on the links between Western Buddhism and general issues of ethnic diversity within Buddhist movements is very much in its infancy, most occurring during the last fifteen years within the US. So far, this tends to consist of *ad hoc* practitioner-driven initiatives, although these are becoming more systematic. The initiatives fall under five main categories, with examples given below.

2.3.1 Raising awareness and promoting dialogue

Most of the initiatives reviewed in this chapter fall in this group. They may involve public talks or articles in Buddhist publications or specific groups that seek to raise practitioners’ awareness and to encourage dialogue. One of the first examples of these was the special issue in the United States Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* on ‘**Dharma**, Diversity and Race’ in 1994,⁸ which included contributions from bell hooks (1994) on issues for Buddhists of colour practising

⁷ See for example Turner & Wu (2002).

⁸ ‘Dharma, Diversity and Race.’ *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Vol. 4(1), Fall 1994.

in the *sangha* and articles on the differences between Diasporic Buddhism and 'Western Buddhism' by Victor Hori and Rick Fields. The American Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) magazine *Turning Wheel* also had a special issue on this topic in 1999⁹ and since then has produced special issues on Buddhists of African descent, Buddhists of Asian descent, Buddhism in the Latin American context and on developing alliances between white people and people of colour to combat racism.

The level of debate has tended to be general, with discussions focusing on practitioners' attitudes and ways of developing greater personal awareness without more theoretical discussion taking place, although this was beginning to change a few years ago. In an issue of *Tricycle*, an African-American **Dzogchen** practitioner, Charles Johnson (1999), reflected on how Martin Luther King's vision of 'beloved community' (*ibid.* p.47) was 'a *sangha* by another name' (*ibid.* p.47). He suggests that Buddhist practices could enable African-Americans to transcend 'the internalized racial conflict' (*ibid.* p.112) of what W. E. B DuBois termed 'double consciousness' arising from discrimination against black people in American society. Johnson also suggests that Buddhist practices can enable all practitioners to let go of 'fabricated, false sense of self positions' arising from '*samsaric* illusions' (*ibid.* p.110) around race and 'all the essentialist conceptions of difference that have caused so much human suffering and mischief since the eighteenth century' (*ibid.* p.110). In this way, although he does not suggest methods by which this can be achieved, Johnson seems to be alluding to the Buddhist teaching of **anattā** (no fixed, permanent, essential self) as offering a gateway towards a post-race position such as that suggested by Paul Gilroy (2004b).

One way that awareness is being raised is through diversity workshops and committees. Sala Steinbach (Moon, 2000), however, points out that groups may often think that one workshop is sufficient and observes that 'it's just the beginning. It's so important to follow through (Moon, 2000, p.262).' She also observes the risk of burnout on account of being one of the few people of colour in a predominantly white *sangha* and being seen as 'the authority' on diversity issues (*ibid.* p.262). However, she also notes the difficulties of remaining silent. **Dharmacharini** Muditāśri, a Black-British female member of the Western

⁹ 'Diversity in Our Sanghas.' *Turning Wheel: Magazine of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship*, Summer 1999.

Buddhist Order who we will meet later in this chapter, observed the assumption *sanghas* can make that 'colour doesn't matter' in a way which suggests whiteness as an invisible norm. She made a similar observation of the dilemmas involved for black people entering the *sangha*:

Confronted with differences or conflict, a black woman is likely to have one of two responses. She can remain silent, seeming to concur with the 'colour-blind' approach, and avoiding standing out. Fear of acknowledging her difference, or weariness of the role of educator, is often at the bottom of this silence...Another equally unhelpful response is the exact opposite. Here, one becomes the centre of attention by highlighting every cultural disparity, thus becoming the group's educator on issues connected with black people...Ideally a middle way needs to be found between these two extremes. (Muditasri, 1997b, p. 233)

Some *sanghas* have sought to take ownership of diversity issues rather than seeing them solely as the responsibilities of people of colour who want to become involved. One example was the 'Healing Racism in our *Sanghas*' group developed in 1998 by BPF which disbanded after about three years with the possibility of reconvening as required. The group was formed after it found that many people of colour felt uncomfortable in Western *sanghas*, and that they often felt isolated, exoticised and disillusioned by finding the same unconscious and institutionalised racism that was in the wider American society. The group's starting premise was that there were people of colour who were interested in Buddhism, and that its aim therefore was not to proselytise people of colour, but to make American *sanghas* more open and welcome for anyone regardless of ethnicity who wished to practise. At first the group consisted of both Buddhists of colour and Euro-American (white) Buddhists. It then changed, after about nine months to just Euro-American (i.e. white) Buddhists when the members of colour decided to form their own group.

BPF also sponsored a white Tibetan Buddhist laywoman Vanissar Tarakali to develop a year-long training and curriculum-development course on 'Compassionate Transformation: A Buddhist Way to Unlearn Racism.' The course seeks to address three obstacles to white antiracist action: *racial shame* (at white privilege and at being white); *denial* (of the existence and effects of racism against people of colour as well as the responsibility of white people to address the issue) and *isolation* (feeling separate from white people who do not seek to become aware of and understand racism and white privilege). It incorporates community-building, education and spiritual practices to stimulate

awareness and compassionate responsiveness to issues of racism within each white participant's self and their respective interactions with people of colour. These spiritual exercises include meditation, visualisation and bodywork, to stimulate awareness of how white people's racist perspectives towards people of colour are also somatised (Fahim, 2007). Tarakali was led to develop the course following personal experiences that made her feel that personal and intellectual awareness of racism were in themselves insufficient to promote change. She felt that Buddhist techniques of the self enabled her to:

stay awake about racism, and also to relax the shame I felt about white privilege. I noticed the more I focused my Buddhist practices on racism, the more I could stay awake and listen to people of color without defensiveness. I could act more spontaneously. (*ibid.* p.25)

Within the course then, white racism is seen as a personal habit which white people can overcome through individual change that enables them to take action in a broader context. The work against what Tarakali refers to as the 'racial shame' of white people that she describes as:

feeling as if there is something inherently flawed about me that I cannot change. For a white person, racial shame can mean that I deeply believe that my people are, or that I am, inherently oppressive to people of color

suggests a realist approach to 'race' in which whiteness is not to be abolished (as has been advocated by some for example, Ignatiev and Garvey (1996a; 1996b)) but to be reformed so as to be divested of the impulse to supremacy and domination and refusal to acknowledge the privilege associated with it. Moreover, the level of emphasis on the affective and somatic dimensions of whiteness within the course can lead some to an overly-psychological approach that suffers from the problem of methodological individualism and what Amrit Wilson has referred to as seeing racism as 'a temporarily disfiguring individual disease' (cited in Leech, 2005, p. 42).

BPF also suggests – in their guidelines for BASE¹⁰ programmes organizing social action placements – that groups discuss racism and other issues around discrimination as part of their programme of activities. The general tone of the debate seems to be moving towards a more pluralistic model of 'difference'. However, though the emerging debate is a positive development, it currently tends to focus on instances of racism at the micro- and

¹⁰ BASE is the Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement in which groups of Buddhists affiliated with BPF organise programmes of socially engaged Buddhist activities within their local areas.

small-group level, i.e. difference as *experience* and *subjectivity*. While there is strong acknowledgment of difference as *social relation* by the BPF, it appears that issues of institutionalised racism from larger organizations within society that have such significant impact on black people's education, employment opportunities, social welfare, and access to criminal justice are yet to receive more large-scale, detailed and thorough examination and analysis by socially engaged Buddhists.

Another trend that can be observed in the debate around diversity in Buddhist movements is one that advocates 'intercultural sensitivity' as the best approach to adopt. Larry Yang, a meditation teacher of colour, has developed a set of eight precepts for diversity based on the fourteen **mindfulness** trainings of the Order of Interbeing established by Thich Naht Hanh. Yang's precepts seek to celebrate diversity of ethnicity and culture, as well as the diversity of other axes of difference, and advise a cultural relativistic approach, i.e. one of *heterophilia*. They advocate a non-violent approach towards the treatment of conflict that can arise through addressing difference, e.g. not using force, becoming aggressive or using harsh speech. This approach is problematic on at least three grounds, the first being the assumption that it is cultural difference that gives rise to racism rather than differences of socio-economic power that cannot be solely reduced to the individual level. In this case the precepts' strategy becomes one of a misguided methodological individualism. The second problem is that advocating human rights issues such as gender justice (e.g. opposing female genital mutilation) can be assumed to be due to a lack of respect for cultural difference, which is seen as integral to a person. The final issue relates to the second – the essentialist assumption that culture is an essential core part of someone's identity rather than something that is itself subject to psychic, social, economic and historical conditions and is often malleable in the light of these. While seeking therefore to show respect to people for their 'cultural identity', the precepts potentially present other problems in their insufficient recognition of processes of cultural hybridisation.

The Shambhala tradition of Tibetan Buddhism developed through the late **lama** Chögyam Trungpa is also developing strategies for embracing cultural and other forms of diversity and developing outreach programmes to address the needs of groups that are under-represented within this Buddhist

movement.¹¹ Like the initiatives of Spirit Rock and Buddhist Peace Fellowship, this has received support from the highest levels of the tradition's leadership. The Shambhala tradition's initiatives aim to proceed on the basis of cultivating an 'enlightened society' in which its members have the mental approach of 'no bias' towards difference. In these materials, difference as *subjectivity* and *experience* are the focus and *heterophilia* is the approach. Although however, the mind of 'no bias' is a metaphor for the Buddhist ideal of enlightenment, Shambhala's approach could easily read at the level of relative, everyday truth as one of a liberal individualist and relativist quietism with indifference to racism in the here and now. Here it might be useful to recall Donna Haraway's (1991) criticisms of relativism as a viewpoint that is a 'way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally' which proves to be 'a denial of responsibility and critical enquiry' (*ibid.* p. 191).

In short, many of the initiatives outlined above seek to affirm and celebrate difference, with most taking little account of the broader social and historical contexts through which these differences arise. There is therefore a tendency towards methodological individualism. The limitations of such a perspective are particularly well illustrated in a recent article in a special issue of *Turning Wheel*, the magazine of the BPF, on 'Building Alliances to Address Racism'. The article by Filiatreux (2007) discusses her experience as a general manager of a rice-drying plant. She observes in her piece that her attempts to promote equity between the Mexican and white staff were not only sabotaged by white workers but also by other rice plantation owners, who saw the measures she was taking as a threat to industrial relations between Mexican and white workers in their own firms and consequently to their own profitability. As a result of the resistance to her attempts to institute anti-discriminatory measures, she was forced to resign her position and was subject to threats from the local community. Although she says that if she were again in the same situation she would organise provision of diversity training for the white workers, clearly the ability to see her good intentions put into practice could not have held sway in the face of wider socio-economic and historical structures of 'race' and class which required wider mobilisation and support if they were to be effectively challenged.

¹¹ The materials can be obtained from <http://www.shambhala.org/congress/diversity/> (Diversity & Accessibility Working Group, 2005).

Perhaps the focus on the individual in most of these initiatives can be accounted for by the religious approach of these forms of Buddhism that focus on the individual practitioner, and the lack of serious analysis by socially engaged Western Buddhist thinkers of racism and racialisation. More importantly they can be seen in the context of wider social trends in the US in which there has been a backlash against measures such as affirmative action and other gains made by the civil rights movement. The result of this move away from a socio-historical discourse seeking to affirm claims of justice¹² has been that most organisations in both the US and UK now utilise a discourse that seeks to ‘manage diversity’ and ‘celebrate’ it in a way that individualises social difference as part of a process that advocates the ‘racelessness’ and colour-blindness that hegemonises whiteness critiqued by Lentin (2004).

2.3.2 Peer support and practice groups targeted at people of colour

These serve as ongoing forums where black people or people of colour can explore issues around ethnic diversity, discrimination, and disadvantage, as well as their impact upon them as Buddhist practitioners. BPF (Winston, 1999b), for example, established a peer-support group called the ‘People of Color Sangha’ group that met monthly. One participant described it as a ‘watering hole,’ a place where ‘your shoulders can come down a little bit, because you’re not the only one. This gives tremendous support for my *dharma*¹³ practice’ (Winston, 1999a). This would seem to echo the point made by African-American *vipassanā* meditation teacher Lewis Woods when he suggested as an interim measure the creation of ‘a predominantly African-American meditative community, where Black folks can go to study and practise the *dharma* without having to deal with racism and Eurocentric assumptions, attitudes and behaviours’ (cited in Fields, 1998, p. 198). Since then, a range of groups covering a variety of traditions have developed, especially in the San Francisco Bay area of California in the US.

¹² The notion of justice is again one that some Buddhists find problematic on the grounds that it posits a duality between good/evil, just and unjust that polarises rather than brings people together. This is part of the wider issue of there being no normative treatment of the ethical precepts of Buddhism it being for each Buddhist tradition to decide for itself, resulting for instance in widely different approaches to eating meat and drinking alcohol.

¹³ Throughout the thesis *Dharma* is used in its sense of the second main meaning given in Keown (2003 p. 24) as ‘the totality of Buddhist teachings’.

There are also emerging *cybersanghas* such as the email groups for black Buddhists and for Buddhists of colour¹⁴ that I have been a member of as a participant-observer since the start of my fieldwork in 2000. The email group for Buddhists for colour arose out of the people of colour caucus group formed in November 1998 by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship mentioned above. As well as its initial monthly meetings to practise meditation and support other members' Buddhist practice, there were *Dharma* discussions on a wide range of topics covered including: working with internalised oppression; engaging with hurt, outrage and anger; working with violence and maintaining balance in everyday life ("Making the Invisible Visible - Healing Racism in Our Buddhist Communities," 2000, p. 54). Although the group continues to function as a virtual community and has some nationwide coverage, there is a much wider range of meditation groups and outreach initiatives for people of colour that are now publicised on the list on an ongoing basis. As well as announcements of forthcoming meditation events and retreats targeted at/seeking to include people of colour, the list advertises arts events, vacant accommodation and job vacancies that occur. These vacancies tend to be flatshares, houseshares, spaces in residential spiritual communities as well as positions in **non-profits**¹⁵ that would particularly welcome people of colour with a spiritual practice. The list also promotes socially engaged Buddhist initiatives, and often has mailings advertising social actions/lobbying initiatives in the Bay area such as those for agricultural workers. For the majority of those who regularly post on the group, it functions as a local and politicised/politicising community in which issues of 'race' and racism, as well as those related to other axes of difference such as gender and sexuality, are engaged with from the standpoint of Buddhist practice. Here difference is more often spoken of as *identity* and *social relation* and the group can be considered an example of a 'community of resistance'. While the group questions attachment to identity, for active posters, identity is not to be jettisoned at the outset but is the platform from which ***bodhisattva*** activity to benefit all sentient life arises, in the same way as the lotus of enlightened compassion is said to emerge out of the mud of ***saṃsāra***.

¹⁴ These can be found at blackbuddhists@yahoogroups.com and buddhists-of-color@yahoogroups.com respectively.

¹⁵ See glossary. An organisation that works in the public or private sector without any monetary or commercial profit. Any profits that are made are put back into the business and/or donated to causes in keeping with the aims and objectives of the business.

The email group for black Buddhists formed in September 1998. In contrast, this group follows the insistent anti-essentialism of Buddhism by seeking to problematise identity and question what some on the list regard as over-investment in it. Moderated by a disciple of the late *Vajrayāna* teacher Chögyam Trungpa who has the online name of Friendly Dragon, the group is not exclusively open to people of African descent with an interest in spirituality and/or Buddhism but includes white people in its membership. With regard to the lack of representation of black people in most Buddhist movements (the Shambhala tradition is the one she mentions here), Friendly Dragon (2004) says:

[Can't guarantee what you will find among the faces at Shambhala centers = 'rice and peas'- but hey thats they (*sic*) way it IS = reality. Which is why we have this cyber sangha where you can color me:-) (Email: Comfortable with Uncertainty, February 6, 2004)

Friendly Dragon is therefore suggesting that the existence of this *cybersangha* is what in Buddhist terms is referred to as a **skilful means** (*upāya-kauśalya*) by which people of colour (in this case those of African descent) can feel more likely to be reflected back as they attempt to practise techniques of the self such as Buddhist meditation. She is arguing that the present lack of representation in Buddhist *sanghas* of people of African descent (hence the reference to rice and peas, a dish which is often a key feature for members of the African diaspora) is the way it is (the reality of the situation, hence the capitalisation of the word 'is' in the email) so that there is no point becoming upset about it. Rather one needs to accept this as the way things are at present and cultivate a more 'enlightened', equanimous response to this state of affairs rather than one rooted in exasperation and/or despondency. This is not to say that such an approach lacks a critical focus on questions of power and privilege, albeit a gentle one. In one posting, after a white member taoist.hermit1, explained that he had joined the group 'to help me understand the particular concerns and needs of black people with regard to Buddhism' (2007b), Friendly Dragon (2007) responded:

To ___ the Taoist Hermit who 'identifies' as 'white'.

You are cordially invited to deconstruct, clarify what exactly do you mean? Please interrogate this 'whiteness' which to many appears as a propagandist social construction of RACE; it is institutional, systemic & signifies unexamined privilege, entitlement and power, a possessive consciousness and pretensions of superiority. This invitation is extended also to folk who identify as 'black'. Please

deconstruct and interrogate the meaning of this 'blackness'. (Email: BBs, February 12, 2007)

Friendly Dragon is therefore inviting all members to see for themselves through contemplation that 'whiteness' and 'blackness' in themselves are 'not-self', i.e. like everything else, do not have an essence that can be considered as part of a soul. Being 'not-self' they cannot be taken as a basis for organising everyday reality and it is a sign of existential ignorance and attachment to dualistic notions to act as if they are. This invitation was however, flatly rejected by taoisthermit1 (2007a), who in his response said:

your message referring to 'unexamined privilege, entitlement and power, a possessive consciousness and pretensions of superiority' was racist and totally uncalled-for. I've shown none of these attitudes. My behaviour has been discreet and respectful. There is absolutely no reason why I should have to defend myself against these allegations from you solely on the basis of my ethnic background. Your pathetic attempt at balance by asking black people to define themselves (without using the same racist allegations against them) does nothing to alleviate the vicious hostility of your comments.

The people who use this group seem to be a decent lot with a real interest in Buddhist practice. But I intend to unsubscribe because you've shown yourself as you really are and quite frankly I'm disgusted. (Email: Re: [blackbuddhists] BB's, February 13, 2007)

While therefore taoisthermit1 is happy to place his gaze on people of colour to interrogate 'blackness' in relation to Buddhism he becomes uneasy when invited to turn that self-same ethnographic gaze back on to himself in order to reflect on and interrogate his own 'whiteness'. He fails to realise that his focus on 'blackness' problematises black people as the ones with problems about Buddhism (or 'particular concerns and needs' as he puts it), and that he too has 'race' as a white man. He is therefore arguing from a position of 'racelessness' that does not see the privileges of whiteness and its consequent racism as a significant issue for black people with an interest in Buddhism.

Mailings to the group often inquire about where the poster can find local instruction in meditation and/or Buddhism and/or a *sangha* that is likely to be friendly to people of colour. In keeping with the commitment to questioning over-attachment to any identity, including one of being Buddhist, a broad and inclusivist view of *Dharma* is taken as many of the mailings, particularly those from Friendly Dragon, recommend websites where 'teachings' from a variety of traditions (including secular, politically progressive ones) can be found as well

as Buddhism on the basis that these can point to 'awakenings' and can help practitioners move away from dualistic mind. Friendly Dragon, in keeping with her links to the Shambhala tradition, is keen to assert that the point is not for anyone to convert, i.e. adopt any belief system, but to follow the **Buddha's** example and learn the truths posited by Buddhist philosophy for oneself. Members are also keen to draw bridges between traditions such as Buddhism and Christianity, a faith that most members have been brought up in.

Friendly Dragon describes members of this *cybersangha* as 'Technicians of the Sacred', a term first used by Mircea Eliade to describe shamans on account of their ability to mediate between spiritual and temporal worlds and to enter altered states of consciousness. Of the various techniques of the self that are recommended and practised by members of this egroup (which include Advaita, African drumming, voodoo, yoga), Friendly Dragon encourages members to practise Buddhist meditation on a regular basis. She offers personal guidance in this on request and recommends Angel Kyodo Williams's book *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Fearlessness and Grace* (2000) as a source of information on this. Meditation (especially techniques from the *Dzogchen* tradition) is described as a technique of the self that can help one cut through dualistic mind and therefore 'neurotic' notions such as 'race', 'black/white' and so forth. It is also a technique of the self that can help one progressively develop more forbearance and compassion for all life. In this way, one can re-orientate one's mind to alter responses to racism from ones that can cause people of colour more suffering.

In keeping with the emphasis on meditation, members of the group are encouraged by the moderator to have a contemplative approach, and although there is discussion, the aim is to prevent the group from becoming 'overly discursive'. For instance, the group did have a weekly chat-room discussion in its early life but this petered out, largely due to lack of interest. Although not closed by Friendly Dragon, the chatroom was seen by her as conducing to 'idle chatter' and wasting time that could be better used in meditation and reflection.

In short, this *cybersangha* seeks to apply principles of Buddhist philosophy to the question of 'race' and racism in order to enable members to free themselves from the suffering these cause, especially for people of colour. Through what is basically 'skilful means' in which networking of teachings can take place, members of this *cybersangha* can cultivate the 'enlightened society'

visualised by the Shambhala tradition in which difference is respected and valued as being in accord with the way things truly are. This 'enlightened society' seeks to cultivate in its individual members (through its techniques of the self that 'turn inwards') a wise and compassionate response to current day realities, that transcends dualistic notions of self and other. In this way, ignorance and dualism become the main focus of members' critical gaze, rather than questions of 'race', racism and white middle-class domination of Western Buddhist convert *sanghas*.

2.3.3 Outreach and targeted initiatives

These are targeted at people of colour to encourage their participation and involvement in Western Buddhist movements. For example, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order's centre in San Francisco, which is chaired by a Chinese-American member of the Western Buddhist Order called Viveka, has an ongoing programme of regular meditation classes for people of colour. The centre also hosted workshops for social activists of colour to help them 'recharge their batteries' and prevent burnout. The meditation classes for people of colour are now part of the centre's programme for 'affinity groups,' which include groups for men, parents and children, lesbians, and people suffering from depression.

Also, as we shall also see in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, for several years, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order's main centre in London has organised specific events for people of colour who are newcomers to meditation. These are organized as part of its programme of specialised events for different groups as a way of responding to particular needs that they may have. For example, there have been events targeted at lesbians and gay men. The events for people of colour have had a good response, but so far the majority of those attracted have been African-Caribbean women. Events for people of colour in London were initially organized at the newcomers' level in order to assist the eventual participation of those choosing to take things further in the mainstream *sangha*. This would appear to echo the approach taken by Sōka Gakkai International in its 'heritage groups' that will be discussed in Chapter Six.

In the United States, specific retreats for people of colour are organized by the Spirit Rock meditation centre and Spirit Rock also provide scholarships for people of colour to enable them to attend retreats generally. According to

Sala Steinbach, these appear to have increased the number of people of colour attending Spirit Rock events (Moon, 2000). The increased participation by people of colour at Spirit Rock may perhaps not just be due to its outreach programme but also to the additional work it has been doing to develop commitment to addressing diversity issues at its highest levels as can be seen from the statement of intention of its Diversity Program Initiative (Spirit Rock Meditation Center Diversity Program Initiative, 2002). The focus on 'race' by the diversity committee seems to suggest a realist position is being taken to this axis of difference as opposed to a 'post-race' one, i.e. 'race' is seen as being substantial in its own right. Moreover, there seems to be some recognition of the social and historical context by which the diversity committee of Spirit Rock have come to recognise 'race' as having particular importance. The commitment to act with other Buddhist movements to address 'race' issues in the community also seems to suggest some recognition of the broader social dimensions of 'race'.

2.3.4 Social action programmes

This category includes Buddhist social action programmes in which a significant proportion of the beneficiaries are people of colour. Most of this work has taken place in the US and as far as I am aware there have been few if any such programmes within the UK engaged Buddhist scene. Examples of those co-ordinated by BPF are Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement (BASE) programme placements organized on this basis: a doctor's service at a clinic for low-income patients; support counselling to marginalized Latina women in a community centre and in a group home for severely emotionally-disturbed pregnant and mothering teenage girls; support to public schools seeking to develop initiatives around equity, diversity, and powerful learning to enhance educational achievement; and the foundation of an urban community garden project. There was also a special group on diversity with its own email list called 'Diversity BASE' that ran for some time but has now disbanded. BPF is currently developing as part of its work on prisons, a 'Transformative Justice' programme. The work on prisons has proved crucial given the high proportion of the prison population who are people of colour.¹⁶ The project has found that

¹⁶ It is reported that in the US more black people are currently in prison than are in college (BBC News, 2002), and some have said that the numbers in US prisons are greater than the amount who lived under chattel slavery.

although meditation is being taught in prisons, on release, few ex-prisoners find themselves welcome at Buddhist centres where they would like to develop their practice. Hence, as well as continuing to teach meditation in prisons (as do ***Buddhists from other traditions***), ***BPF is developing the 'Coming-Home' initiative*** in order to:

serve ex-prisoners and the greater San Francisco Bay Area community. The vision of Coming Home is to act in fellowship with those who have found the resolve to practice the dharma while imprisoned. This project is intended to meet the material, emotional, and spiritual needs of people coming home and the larger community.

Premises are being sought for the project which will have a meditation space and facilities for job search, drug programmes and other social work interventions for ex-prisoners and their families. The initiative is being co-ordinated by Bhante Suhita Dharma, an African-American monk who was initially ordained into the *Theravāda* tradition, but has also received ordination into other ***Mahāyāna***¹⁷ traditions. As well as experience of working with marginalised communities such as homeless people and ex-prisoners, Bhante, as he likes to be known, has a degree in social work (Senauke, 2007).

In terms of BPF's work to develop social programmes that particularly benefit people of colour, so far BPF reports a moderate level of success in this area, but reports some difficulty in getting more diverse participation because of the currently low level of ethnic diversity in the convert *sangha* and lack of links between 'diaspora' and 'convert' *sanghas* (Winston, 1999b). There is also the issue of its uneven presence across the US. Hence, when Hurricane Katrina struck in New Orleans, because of the limited Buddhist presence in Louisiana, BPF was unable to provide as much assistance on the ground as it would have liked. Its then Executive Director, Maia Duerr, however, issued a public statement strongly criticising the institutionally racist response of the government to the disaster. BPF also made donations towards initiatives working on the ground to rehabilitate victims (Senauke, 2007).

2.4 COMING OUT FROM THE MARGINS

Over the last fifteen years many Buddhist teachers of colour have emerged and they are developing a strong following especially among other people of colour. They have aimed to provide spaces that are open to all where people of colour feel welcome and any needs and/or issues they raise will be

¹⁷ See glossary in Appendix 4 for definition

addressed effectively and with sensitivity. These teachers include public figures such as bell hooks and Alice Walker.

As well as an increasing profile of people of colour as Buddhist teachers and leading figures in the project of diversifying Western convert Buddhist movements, along with the development of *cybersanghas* detailed in the previous section, people of colour are increasingly gaining visibility through life-writing that details the impact of Buddhist techniques of the self on their sense of identity, particularly in the context of how this has been affected by forces of racialisation and racism. Buddhists of colour in the US and UK are also documenting how their experience of racialisation and racism affects their understanding of Buddhism. Much of this literature has emerged in the past ten years. In this section I will discuss the life-writing of *Dharmacharini Muditāśri* (Muditasri, 1997a; 1997b; 2002) who was mentioned above.

2.4.1 Muditāśri – Finding a Buddhist Postcolonial African-Caribbean Voice

Muditāśri is a black British woman who has been involved in the WBO for nearly twenty years and is a close friend of mine. She is working on her autobiography and as part of that process has written various published pieces about her experience of migration from the Caribbean as a young girl and subsequent settlement in the UK, as well as her journey into Buddhism and negotiating barriers of 'race' to become a senior member of a predominantly white Buddhist movement. Although her piece (Muditasri, 2002) about migration is very personal, it illustrates the many difficulties faced by migrants from Britain's former Empire as they tried to take their rightful place in what they had been told was their 'Mother Country.' The emotional impact of social processes of discrimination in housing (between the ages of 11 and 19 her family moved seventeen times) and in education (being placed in a lower ability class without being tested to find out what her actual intellectual capability was and having to deal with racist bullying without support from teachers) on a child are strongly brought out.

In *The Moon and Flowers* Muditāśri (1997b) writes about how in choosing to develop an interest in Buddhism that arose through travel, she anticipated that by doing so she would again be 'going it alone' (p. 232) as a black woman in a white dominated arena and that it would be her determination to develop her practice of Buddhist techniques of the self that would be the

main factor rather than any potential isolation that might accrue to her. She suggests that: 'White teachers of meditation and Buddhism need to be more aware of what is going on in the world, and particularly of the effects of racism on black people' (p. 237) whilst maintaining a focus on Buddhism, 'for it is this which brings us together and helps us to identify wrong views' (p.237). She also mentions the ramifications of a lack of awareness of white privilege, resulting for instance from her attempt to live in a Buddhist shared house on a racist housing estate. Again, in this piece focusing on her personal experience and that of her black female friends who were engaging in Buddhism and meditation, she brings to light wider issues about the interface between society and one's personal practice of Buddhism. Although affirming a common humanity, her work illustrates the processes of racialisation affecting many people of colour in the UK.

One of Muditāśri's difficulties has been having her work edited in a way that allows her voice to fully come through. Although her piece in 2002 had black editors who were sensitive to the 'racial' aspects of migration her work tries to portray, her other pieces have not received such treatment. bell hooks (1994, p. 44) writes:

When people of color are reluctant to enter predominantly white Buddhist settings it is not out of fear of some overt racist exclusion, it is usually in response to more subtle manifestations of white supremacy. Even to speak or write for a Buddhist publication where white people are in power evokes the concern, and sometimes the fear, that one's words, thoughts and being may be distorted, presented in a way that speaks only to the need of white readers.

Such fears are unfortunately not groundless as can be seen from the way articles written by Muditāśri have been dealt with to date by white editors.¹⁸ For instance, the chapter she submitted for *The Moon and Flowers* (1997b) was edited to air concerns about 'political correctness' (p. 238) that do not appear in the original piece. Furthermore, when *Dharma Life* (Muditasri, 1997a), the former magazine of the FWBO decided to feature an article based on Muditāśri's chapter it chose to headline the piece with the statement (p. 36):

CUTTING ACROSS BARRIERS: Black Buddhists in the West must seek a middle way between ignoring racial issues and stressing the differences. For the Buddha's message, says **Muditasri**, speaks to our common humanity. (emphasis in original)

¹⁸ In citing the whiteness of the editors it is not their ethnicity that is of concern but the lack of awareness they have shown of whiteness being a relative rather than universal standpoint.

The piece also included the strap line: 'I was at the Buddhist centre not to represent my **ethnic group** but to find a way beyond my conditioning' (p. 38 – emphasis in original). In emphasising these aspects that the author had intended to encourage black convert Buddhists to resist the burden of representation they might encounter in white-dominated convert Buddhist movements, the *Dharma Life* piece suggested that 'race' was only an issue for black people. Muditāśri (1998) strongly protested at this treatment of her text in a letter published in the subsequent issue of *Dharma Life* in which she said:

I emphatically distance myself from the eurocentric misinterpretation of the article ...I was saddened and embarrassed to be so misconstrued. ...

This distortion can only convey the chronic myth that being black is intrinsically problematic and which means we alone have to compromise. Black people are expected to adopt a white perspective. But the fact is that, irrespective of cultural or ethnic conditioning, we must all work towards a middle way. This means recognising rather than denying our differences and thereby ultimately transcending prejudice.

Even when such editing has not taken place, the way in which Muditāśri's work has been contextualised has revealed interesting insights about the (white) editorial mindset. Her article in *Lotus Realm* (the former women's magazine of the FWBO) appeared in a special issue called 'Crossing Cultures' whose front page had photographs of the Union Jack and the national flags of St. Kitts (where Muditāśri was born), India and the United States to represent the authors of different features on the theme. Given that the 'representative' of the United States was in fact a self-identified Chinese-American (herself a *Dharmacharini* named Viveka) and that Muditāśri identifies herself as Black British, the front page seemed to have little understanding of the questions of hybridity that work such as Muditāśri's and Viveka's raise.

Nonetheless despite what she perceives as attempts to blunt the edge of her arguments, Muditāśri has managed to get some exposure of the issues of 'race' that many people of colour have to address within themselves and within white-dominated Buddhist movements in which they wish to be full participants. Her complete autobiography if published is likely to bring more of such insights to light, especially as the literature around women in Western Buddhism currently has relatively fewer contributions from women of colour.

2.5 CONCLUSION

As can be seen especially from the three sections above, Western Buddhist convert movements throughout their history have been racialised and class stratified via various cultural and socio-economic processes as white and middle-class institutions. Although Western convert Buddhism is itself an example of cultural hybridisation, its largely white middle-class adherents have tended to be highly selective in terms of what they have taken from the 'East' and in their engagement with the communities of other people of colour. This perhaps is an example of the ways in which cultural hybridity can serve more hegemonising claims. As Pieterse (2001) and others suggest, it is the issue of power that is relevant here. However, Buddhists of colour, particularly in the US, are increasingly asserting themselves and are beginning to come into the limelight of the Western convert Buddhist world. And through this process, various questions arise for all convert Buddhist practitioners that have various counterhegemonic as well as hegemonising consequences.

For example, in terms of the question of ethnic identity, some are interpreting the doctrine of 'non-self' as meaning that one should reject all identity claims, including those based on 'race'. This can lead, as we will see later especially in Chapters Five to Six, to 'post-race' and cosmopolitan positions that question notions of blackness/being a person of colour and in so doing, by corollary, question ideas of whiteness and 'race'. It also can lead through the affirmation of an identity of fundamental 'humanness' to the often unwitting confirmation of a position of 'racelessness' and colour-blindness that Alana Lentin (2004), following David Goldberg, critiques as hegemonising a discourse of unmarked whiteness. Other practitioners, suggesting that one needs to recognise what 'race' does, draw on the identity of being a person with 'race' as *upāya-kauśalya* (a skilful means in which one might appear to be doing something against Buddhist tenets for the greater good). They (such as the active posters in the buddhists-of-color *cybersangha* and members of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship) suggest that affirming a standpoint of being a person of colour or an anti-racist white person who practises Buddhism can be a legitimate and effective path towards an eventual deconstruction of all identity claims.

Buddhists of colour are also sharing their struggles of negotiating the predominant white and middle-class nature of most Western convert Buddhist

movements. In doing so, various strategies are emerging for them as individuals. Some are choosing to engage in struggle and dialogue so that they can participate more fully in these *sanghas*. Others (such as many members of the blackbuddhists *cybersangha*) engage to a lesser degree, to the point of taking the path of the solo practitioner that bell hooks (1994) refers to as developing ‘the monastic culture within.’

In terms of the various dimensions of difference highlighted by Avtar Brah, i.e. difference as *subjectivity*, difference as *experience*, difference as *identity* and difference as *social relation* within these movements, few convert Buddhist movements have made major reference to ‘difference’ in terms of its wider social and political contexts, preferring to focus on its experiential and psychic dimensions. This has resulted in an emphasis on strategies based on models of intercultural sensitivity and understanding and/or of psychological understandings of white racism. There is also the question of the degree to which the healing of psychic wounds caused by racism and other forms of oppression, and increasing sense of agency reported by some Buddhists of colour as arising out of their practice of Buddhist techniques of the self, enable Buddhism to potentially become a ‘combative spirituality’ (West, 1999) that might empower others in the wider community – especially those who struggle with social exclusion.

Another question is how, in a situation of religious and ethnic diversity, such as the case study area of East London, do Western convert Buddhists relate to strategies developed to address the political ramifications of ‘race’, ethnicity and multiculturalism? With regard to anti-racist strategies that have been adopted, most of approaches described above have been along the lines of what Taguieff (2001) refers to as ‘differentialist’ approaches to anti-racism. As such they focus on the ‘different needs’ of people of colour and the need for intercultural sensitivity. While this can be of some utility in challenging the colour-blind approach critiqued by Lentin (2004), this can have the effect of further centralising whiteness as a hegemonic norm within convert Buddhist movements, with people of colour continuing to be seen as deviants.

Of course the issues I have highlighted here are not solely applicable to Western convert Buddhists and their *sanghas* but are ones that overlap with those arising in the whole debate around multiculturalism and ethnic/religious diversity which is ongoing within the postcolonial West. And, although these

questions have largely arisen through my consideration of literature from practitioners in the US, they recur as we shall see below in the UK context, and we shall encounter these in our explorations of the fieldwork that take place within the next four chapters. It is to these that I now turn, firstly considering the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order centre in Bethnal Green, East London.

CHAPTER THREE – THE ‘SETTING CULTURE’ OF THE FWBO AND LBC

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I reviewed strategies mainly developed in the US, but also in the UK, around the multicultural appropriation of convert Buddhism by people of colour. I suggested that, while these throw some light on issues of ‘race’, racism and racialisation in convert Buddhist movements most tend to be predicated on methodological individualism and so have limited social impact. I would suggest that within the West, socially engaged Buddhism is very much in its infancy compared to more established religious traditions that have a stronger following amongst people of colour. This is in part due to the currently low proportion of convert Buddhists within both the US and UK (less than 0.3 per cent of the UK population according to the analysis of the last census in 2001 given by Robert Bluck (2004) and that prepared by the UK government’s Office for National Statistics (2001b)). Groups targeted at Western convert Buddhist also tend to be newer religious movements. The ways in which convert Buddhism has developed in terms of ‘race’ and class stratified that we considered in the last chapter is another key factor.

From here on I come back to the UK to explore what strategies are being developed to promote diversity within two of the largest convert Buddhist movements in this country. These are the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and the Sōka Gakkai International-UK. I will consider what these developing strategies elucidate about dominant discourses within each movement on the subject of racism, racialisation and ‘race’, and their impact on their members who are people of colour.

I will first discuss strategies developed by the FWBO (also known as ‘the Movement’), particularly its centre in East London, the London Buddhist Centre (LBC), arguing based on my findings that although the LBC has had a longstanding concern with outreach to people of colour, there is an apparently hegemonic discourse of unmarked whiteness within it and the wider Movement that positions black people and people of colour as the ‘rest’ outside the West (Hall, 1992b). This discourse is one of a ‘universalist’ racism (Taguieff, 2001) that argues ‘racelessness’ and requires people of colour to negotiate a white, middle-class and to some extent masculinist norm during the course of their involvement in this movement.

This chapter contains five sections. In the first section, I set out a background history of the FWBO and LBC that sets out its key practices. The second section explores its approach to social engagement in this movement's early days. The third section examines, in relation to the questions of 'race' and ethnic/cultural diversity, the Movement's key ideas and vision about relationships to the Buddhist tradition generally, conversion to Buddhism, *sangha*, subjectivity, social action, culture and aesthetics as expounded by its founder Ugyen Sangharakshita. In the fourth section I consider how these ideas have been responded to on the ground by discussing the ways in which this resultant discourse is being interpreted by key members of the London Buddhist Centre's (LBC's) Council¹ and how this discourse manifests in the teaching given to the public at the LBC's classes for newcomers to Buddhist meditation with their implications for the multicultural appropriation of Buddhism by people of colour. In the conclusion I draw the findings of the first four sections together to show how the Movement is implicitly racialised in a way that appeals most to white bohemian people (who are more likely to be middle-class) with an interest in 'alternative' spiritualities.

3.2 THE FWBO – A HISTORY AND OUTLINE OF KEY PRACTICES

The FWBO was founded in 1967 as the Friends of the Western *Sangha* (becoming the FWBO a year later) by Sangharakshita, a white Englishman. Sangharakshita had been ordained as a Buddhist monk in the *Theravāda* tradition and had lived for many years in north-eastern India. He studied with teachers from a variety of Buddhist traditions and in this way developed an understanding of Buddhism that was not exclusively defined by the dogmas of any one school.

At the invitation of the English *Sangha* Trust he returned from India to England in 1964 and settled in the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. He saw considerable potential for the development of Buddhism in Britain. The English *Sangha* Trust believed that only traditional *Theravāda* monasticism, which Sangharakshita had strongly criticised while he was in India, constituted *sangha*. In contrast, the Buddhist Society (another major Buddhist organisation in the UK at that time) was seen by some critics to promote Buddhism as a spiritual pastime rather than a fully committed engagement with the *Dharma*.

¹ The Council is the board of Order members that are trustees for the LBC which is a registered charity.

Sangharakshita's approach to Buddhism met with disapproval from both groups. In 1966, while paying a farewell visit to India, Sangharakshita was informed by the English *Sangha* Trust that he would no longer be welcome at the Hampstead Vihara. As Stephen Batchelor (1994) puts it: 'Some of his unconventional ideas and behaviour had proved unacceptable to the English *Sangha* Trust' (*ibid*: 333). Sangharakshita, however, chose to see this as an opportunity to develop a new Buddhist movement in Britain as the start of a project to develop a new form of Buddhism for a modern society that was 'secularized, and industrialized' (Sangharakshita, 1990a p. 18). A year after founding the FWBO he conducted the first ordinations into the Western Buddhist Order.

Sangharakshita's position vis-à-vis the British Buddhist establishment struck a chord with the counter-cultural enthusiasms of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Sandra Bell and Stephen Batchelor note, the founding members of the FWBO were mainly in their early twenties and were attracted to Buddhism via the strand of youth culture combining the use of hallucinogenic drugs with versions of Eastern mysticism. One of Sandra Bell's (1991) informants reported:

There was a sort of rift between Sangharakshita and the Buddhist Society people. They felt he was attracting the wrong sort...all these hippies. They went for a middle class, conventional style... (cited in *ibid* p. 109)

As stated in the literature review, this section of sixties counterculture was one with very few people of colour who, in contrast, at that time were more focused on addressing the potential implications of postcolonialism and the civil rights movement in the US for their situation in the UK.

Sangharakshita was keen that the Movement he founded would be led by those who were regarded as 'spiritually committed', rather than those who had paid a subscription. There are now three levels of involvement in this movement, the first being 'Friend' that applies to newcomers and regulars. People in this category do not necessarily feel any connection with the FWBO and Sangharakshita and may pursue a range of practices including non-Buddhist ones. In the second category are *Mitras*. These are people who have decided to become more involved in the FWBO. For many years the requirements for being a *Mitra* were as follows:

- a regular meditation practice

- a commitment to keeping in regular contact with Order members
- feeling that the FWBO is the Buddhist group they will practice with to the exclusion of all other religious and spiritual groups
- a willingness to assist Order members in their work to support their FWBO centre

Members of the Western Buddhist Order form the third category. They have responsibility for directing the activities of the FWBO and have become Order members following a period of training. They follow a separate set of ten precepts but do not necessarily live a monastic lifestyle.

From its outset, the FWBO has emphasised meditation as a principal technique of the self and it is the predominant means through which most people are introduced to this movement. Most newcomers are taught the *mindfulness of breathing* (a technique to develop attention and increasing focus on one's breath) and *metta bhāvanā* (a technique to progressively cultivate universal lovingkindness) as *śamatha* practices that conduce to the calming of the mind. Hence meditation is often introduced by this Movement as a means of managing the stresses and strains of modern life.

These two introductory practices form part of a 'system of meditation' developed by Sangharakshita (1990b) in which one starts with these two practices as part of what he terms as the 'stage of integration' followed by the 'stage of positive emotion'. As one progresses through the movement, one encounters the other meditations in this system. During the retreat in which one prepares to become a member of the Western Buddhist Order, one encounters the 'stage of spiritual death', in which one contemplates the six elements (earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness) of which one's being consists. This is followed by 'the stage of spiritual rebirth' in which one contemplates a Buddha or Bodhisattva figure that is received at ordination. To prevent meditation being associated with concentrating one's mind on a meditation subject, one intersperses one's practice of these meditations with the 'Just Sitting' meditation.

The Movement has now grown to become a large network of centres, each of which is an independent registered charity run by its more senior local members (usually Order members but in some case *Mitras*). Usually around these centres are single-sex residential communities and community businesses (known as Team Based Right Livelihood Businesses, or TBRLs). It

has expanded from the UK to mainland Europe and non-European countries, as well as having a significant membership within India as a result of its work with *Dalit* and Ambedkarite communities.

During the 1990s, Sangharakshita increasingly withdrew from his role as preceptor and head of the Movement, although he continues to be respected as its founder. This started with delegation of his responsibilities as preceptor of new members of the WBO to senior Order members in the late 1980s, and culminated with the handover of his role as Head of the Order in 2000 to the College of Public Preceptors, a group of senior Order members.

The movement has attracted controversy on a range of grounds, such as its approach to gender (see fuller discussion in 3.3.4 below), a perception of exclusivism and triumphalism (for example, Jones, 1997) and the sexual activities of its founder. Its encouragement of single-sex teams who live and work together and its tolerant approach to same-sex sexual relationships has led to accusations that the movement is anti-family and promotes homosexuality. This led to a strongly critical article in the *Guardian*, a UK newspaper (Bunting, 1997), later followed by the anonymously authored "FWBO Files" ("The FWBO-Files," 1999). These articles were counteracted by the Movement's Communications Office but the allegations have continued to circulate on the Internet, especially in Usenet Buddhist groups. This has led to considerable debate within the movement and given rise to several significant changes in the Movement's structure and the practices of many of its members. In 2003, the then Chairman of the College of Public Preceptors, Subhuti, relinquished its role as Head of the Order, on the grounds that the Order was meant to be a 'free association of individuals'. In the College's view, it did not therefore make sense for the Order to have a head. Secondly, there has been increasing decentralisation with more responsibility being handed to individual FWBO centres. This has meant that there is a decreasing emphasis on national FWBO centres co-ordinating training for ordination. Oversight of such training is increasingly seen as the responsibility of local *kulas* (groups of Order members chosen by the candidate, including the prospective preceptor). However, to ensure quality and coherence, the ordination process is overseen by the College of Public Preceptors. Thirdly, preceptors are no longer appointed for life but are now chosen in consultation with Order members and *Mitras*, and their position is reviewed every five years. Fourthly, the

requirements to become a *Mitra* have been changed to make it easier for people to become *Mitras* if that is their wish. The requirement that *Mitras* practice exclusively with the FWBO has also been removed. Order members and *Mitras* are also more likely to draw on other teachings apart from those of Sangharakshita than was the case in the past. Finally, the demarcation of *samatha* and *vipasyana* practices within Sangharakshita's 'system of meditation' is being blurred, with a wider range of practices (especially 'insight' practices based on mindfulness) being available to regulars who wish to take these up. As we will see especially in the next chapter, FWBO centres are increasingly making their techniques of the self available in forms that are more accessible to a secular and multi-faith society.

The effect of these more recent measures for decentralisation and opening-up is that there is now a critical appreciation of Sangharakshita within this movement. It is unclear what these new measures will mean for the movement in the future, especially after Sangharakshita dies. However, efforts are being made to preserve overall coherence while allowing for local adaptation and initiative. These efforts include regular meetings of the Chairpersons of FWBO Centres as well as ongoing meetings of the College of Public Preceptors.

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THE LBC AND FWBO APPROACH TO ENGAGED BUDDHISM

As the FWBO grew it became necessary to find permanent bases where the burgeoning *sangha* could meet and Buddhist activities could be organised. This led to the need to develop a more permanent FWBO centre in inner London. At first it was anticipated that a site for what was to become the LBC would be found in central London but costs proved prohibitive. A disused Victorian fire station in Bethnal Green was obtained from the Greater London Council. It was initially anticipated that work to convert this into a Buddhist centre would require relatively little in terms of resources of time and money. It was also realised that Bethnal Green was closer to central London than had been expected. Subhuti, the Order member who led the building project, hoped that this centre would extend the appeal of the FWBO beyond the hippies it so commonly attracted (Suryaprabha, 1997).

In fact the building project proved to be more extensive and demanding than anticipated. The project took over three years to complete and the LBC

opened in 1978. The proposal to allow the FWBO to convert the old fire station for use as a Buddhist centre was at first opposed by the National Front through letters in the local press (Leech, 2002). However, this opposition ceased when the Buddhists concerned were found to be white and middle class. The National Front was very active in the area around the LBC at the time of its formation, with several strongholds in the locality (Leech, 2001, p. i). It was regularly selling newspapers in Brick Lane at a time when the local Bengali community was developing in the area, at a site less than a mile from the LBC. The East End where the LBC is based has a longstanding reputation for anti-Semitism, racism and organisation by far-Right and fascist groups as well as opposition to these. However, these factors and their potential implications for any black and other minority ethnic people who might want to use the LBC do not appear to have been on the minds of the (predominantly white majority-ethnic) people developing the LBC and its facilities. This, according to David, one of my research participants, was even though a member of the community involved in the building project was quite severely beaten by a local fascist group. It seems that the people renovating the old fire station had little interaction with the local area, choosing to focus on the project, in part because it proved to be much more demanding than at first anticipated. There was relatively little thought given to engaging with the local community apart from, according to a senior Order member involved in the building project at the time, a suggestion to run *karate* classes as a way of attracting more local people to the LBC – but nothing became of this.

The vision of 'engaged Buddhism' during the time of the building project suggested by Sangharakshita in a lecture given in 1975 was that the Spiritual Community (Sangharakshita's term for the collectivity of committed members of the *sangha* which will be discussed more fully below) 'does not have to justify its existence to the world' in a narrow utilitarian sense (Sangharakshita, 1990c, p. 117). He described the contribution of the spiritual community to the world firstly as keeping the spiritual community in existence because this 'helps to develop a more wholesome atmosphere'. The second contribution he described was 'building a bridge between the world and the spiritual community' by conducting 'various activities that are conducive to the development of skilful mental states and [that] help people evolve.' The examples he gave were

'meditation classes, retreats, Yoga classes, and courses in human communication' (*ibid*).

This suggests that the FWBO initially saw its practice of engaged Buddhism very much in terms of developing itself and its institutions as opposed to developing and supporting collective responses to issues arising within the localities in which it was based. Through such an approach it was envisaged that what Sangharakshita describes as a 'New Society'² in the midst of the 'Old Society' would develop through formation of a network of centres, communities and right livelihood businesses (initially co-operatives).³ It could be argued that the stance taken by the LBC at that time was extremely pietistic when compared to that of other local faith communities, many of which have a longstanding engagement with local concerns of poverty, social exclusion and 'race'. Some have been involved in these local issues from their outset (Leech, 2001(Holtam & Mayo, 1995). The LBC and its associated communities and community businesses have been seen as constituting a 'sort of Buddhist village' (Subhuti, 1988, p. 150, 2001), and a 'Buddhist enclave' (Leech, 2001 p. 137). For details of key features in this village see, figures 3.1 of the LBC), 3.2 (of the LBC entrance and 3.3 (a map of key sites in the 'Buddhist village') below:



Figure 3.1: The London Buddhist Centre (LBC)

² See below and in particular *Buddhism for Today* by Dharmachari Subhuti (Alex Kennedy), Windhorse Publications, Glasgow, 1988.

³ For details of Right Livelihood businesses in the FWBO see Martin Baumann's 'Work as Dharma Practice: Right Livelihood Cooperatives of the FWBO' in *Engaged Buddhism in the West* edited by Christopher S. Queen, Wisdom Publications, Somerville MA, (2000).



Figure 3.2: LBC main entrance

Businesses in the Buddhist Village



Figure 3.3: Map of LBC community businesses (Team Based Right Livelihoods) in the Bethnal Green Globetown area (from LBC website)

According to the model developed by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown (1998) the vision of the FWBO of engaged Buddhism was one which almost exclusively aimed to develop a *creative sustainable alternative*, i.e. the *New Society*, envisaged as above and to *shift consciousness* through the personal encounter of persons with organisations that formed part of the network of the *New Society*. It did not at that time involve engaging in *holding actions* through involvement in explicit campaigning work.

Before further examining the FWBO's developing response to issues of diversity and racism however, I want to examine the Movement's discourses on the nature of religion and Buddhism, conversion to Buddhism, individual subjectivity, the development of collectivities and social change. How in the FWBO are individuals considered as subjects and, following on from that, what are the implications of this for diversity issues within the Movement? To answer this I want to move on to the next section in which I first set out Sangharakshita's teachings on these issues, which form the foundations of the movement he founded.

3.4 SANGHARAKSHITA'S TEACHING & 'DIFFERENCE'

In this section I consider the ways in which Sangharakshita's teaching stands in relation to questions of social 'difference', starting with a discussion of his schema for Buddhist conversion in terms of levels of Going for Refuge (discussed below).

3.4.1 Buddhist conversion in the FWBO

The FWBO very much sees itself as presenting to 'the modern world' the essential and what it regards as the universal 'core that lies at the heart of all the Buddhist traditions' (Vishvapani, 2001, p. 13).⁴ As part of this process, Sangharakshita (see for example 1986b) has fervently and constantly argued that conversion to Buddhism is essentially an individual matter based on personal commitment to 'Going for Refuge' to the Three Jewels of the Buddha, *Dharma* and *Sangha*. He observes Going for Refuge occurs in various forms in all Buddhist traditions but sees it as something that has become undervalued in the traditional Buddhist world (*ibid.* p.14). The idea of Going for Refuge as central to the Buddhist life is one of the key principles of this Buddhist

⁴ From <http://www.fwbo.org/>. Accessed on 20/4/2003.

movement (Sangharakshita, 1999). It is seen by Sangharakshita as the 'fundamental Buddhist act, repeated at every stage of spiritual life and including every aspect of experience' (Subhuti, 1994, p. 99).

By Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, one is (Sangharakshita, 2000c, p. 16):

Going for Refuge to the Buddha [which] means accepting the Buddha and no other as one's spiritual guide and exemplar. Going for Refuge to the *Dharma* means doing one's utmost to understand, practise and realize the fundamental import of the Buddha's teaching. And Going for Refuge to the *Sangha* means looking for inspiration and guidance to those followers of the Buddha, both past and present, who are spiritually more advanced than oneself.

Sangharakshita sees Going for Refuge as operating on a range of five levels, meaning that he regards conversion in Buddhism as a progressive as well as an internal and individual process. Although it is seen as ongoing and developmental, within the context of the FWBO we shall see that there are ritual points that act as markers, in particular the point of ordination into the Western Buddhist Order which is taken as the act of fully committing oneself to leading a Buddhist life within the context of this Movement.

The first level is referred to as *cultural* or *ethnic (sic)* Going for Refuge which Sangharaskshita describes as:

simply reciting the Refuge-Going formula in Pali, or some other language, just because it is part of your national culture. In Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma one often finds people reciting the Refuge-Going formula ... without understanding its meaning. It is just part of their culture and has no real spiritual significance for them. (Sangharakshita, 1986b, p. 24)

Here the *Dharma* would be seen as having some influence on a social and ethical level, although one's Buddhist identity might be a 'nominal' one.

At the next level, *provisional* Going for Refuge, one would show:

some definite response to the Three Jewels and some awareness of their true significance. ... However, despite [this], they still have many other competing interests and ambitions. These do not, at this stage, allow effective dedication to the spiritual path. (Subhuti, 1994, p. 93).

At this stage Subhuti suggests, one would be participating in a *sangha* by regularly attending classes in meditation and *Dharma* study.

The third level, effective Going for Refuge is one where an individual:

can put enough energy behind Going for Refuge to make it an effective act. Despite other competing interests and ambitions, they are sufficiently drawn to the Three Jewels to be able to commit

themselves to making systematic steps towards them. ... [a]t this point ... the spiritual life begins in earnest.

Within the context of the FWBO this would be the point at which one is recognised as able to enter the Western Buddhist Order.

The fourth level of *Real* Going for Refuge is taken as coinciding with the point of Stream Entry⁵, where one is no longer on the mundane Buddhist path, but has gained Insight and entered the transcendental path. The fifth and final level *Absolute* Going for Refuge is taken as the point of Enlightenment itself.

The hierarchy of 'spiritual commitment' is supposed to operate within the FWBO by Order members taking the lead in operating the institutions of the Movement on the grounds of their level of commitment to the Movement and to practising Buddhism. All are welcome to attend activities provided by the Movement as Friends who may be *newcomers* or *regulars*. Should someone decide that they want to commit themselves further they can become a *Mitra* (Sanskrit for 'Friend') through a simple public ceremony that usually takes place at celebrations of Buddhist festivals. If they then wish to develop their commitment to the Movement further they can request ordination and enter a special training process of study and meditation retreats in order to help them develop their *Going for Refuge* further to the point at which it becomes *Effective*. When this process (which is not of a standard duration and can take several years) is judged to be complete by Order members to whom the candidate is close, and they are considered ready for ordination, they are then admitted via a ceremony to the Western Buddhist Order. They receive a Buddhist visualisation practice and new name, usually in Pali or Sanskrit, representing spiritual qualities (actual and/or potential) that their preceptor has recognised in them.

This model of Buddhist conversion, being essentially an individualised process that manifests in the individual practising meditation and in-depth study of Buddhist texts within the context of lifestyles that are neither lay or monastic, is not unlike the stance taken by other convert Buddhists in the West. Western convert Buddhists can have a tendency to see themselves as more committed to Buddhist practice than their fellow Buddhists from the Buddhist diaspora. They can also regard themselves as more convincing advocates for the practice of Buddhism in the West, and more capable of adapting 'timeless truths' of

⁵ See entry for *Stream Entrant* in glossary

Buddhism for a Western audience (see for example Nattier, 1998, pp. 190-191). This model of Buddhist conversion is then very much a hierarchical one in which most Diaspora Buddhists come at the very bottom on the basis that they have not made a 'personal' commitment to Buddhism. This brings us back to the point I made in Chapter Three (see p. 55) where I argued following Victor Hori (1994) that Western convert Buddhism has developed in a way that privileges modernist concepts of the autonomous, rational individual associated with whiteness. This contrasts with the way most communities of colour understand the individual as 'nexus of social relation'. In this way Sangharakshita's model of conversion becomes highly culturally and 'racially' specific by tending to privilege the experience of white majority ethnic converts as being more authentically 'Buddhist' than that of Diaspora Buddhists who often have come to Buddhism through their family and wider community connections.

I now turn to other ways in which Sangharakshita's teachings are implicitly racialised by discussing Sangharakshita's views on subjectivity, collectivity and social change.

3.4.2 FWBO Building Blocks for Social Change: The True Individual, Spiritual Community and New Society

Sangharakshita (1990a) has argued that the predominant problem for the modern world is that of what he terms the development of 'the individual', and that this is the task he sees as crucial for the resolution of current social problems (Sangharakshita, 2000b). As well as his schema of levels of Going for Refuge, Sangharakshita has suggested a model for the path of personal growth and spiritual development that uses the term 'evolution' as a modernist metaphor for the path of developing consciousness (Subhuti, 1994, pp. 75-81). According to this schema, the Lower Evolution is evolution as charted by the physical and life sciences and is governed by biological instincts for survival. This culminates in the development of the individual human being that stands at the threshold of the Higher Evolution. Unlike the Lower Evolution, which is seen as automatic and at the level of the species, the Higher Evolution is a matter of an individual's personal choice requiring ongoing effort and commitment.

In terms of the evolution of consciousness, the Lower Evolution is evolution within simple sense-consciousness up to the point of self-

consciousness where humans become able to identify themselves, take personal responsibility for their futures and form the 'aspiration to develop as an individual' (*ibid.* p. 78). The Higher Evolution begins at the point of reflexive self-awareness and traverses the range of development of human consciousness to transcendental consciousness up to **Buddhahood**. Sangharakshita describes 'the group' as the human social unit of the Lower Evolution, as 'a collectivity organised for its own survival' (Sangharakshita, 1990a, p. 21). Examples of 'the group' are class, caste, tribe, nation, and in particular the family which is seen as the most basic unit of the group (Subhuti, 1994, p. 79). Sangharakshita has described individuals in 'the group' as 'statistical individuals' (1990a, p. 23). The religious expressions of statistical individuals Sangharakshita describes as 'ethnic religion' (Subhuti, 1994, pp. 79-80). In contrast, 'universal religion' is seen as reflecting 'the values of the individual and of the Higher Evolution' (*ibid.*, p. 80).

In terms of most of humanity, Subhuti argues:

Most human beings immerse themselves in the group in one or more of its forms, living for its sake and its Lower Evolutionary ends: the survival and propagation of the species. Group members have no really independent life of their own, distinct from the group: their thoughts and views, their values and goals, are those of the group to which they belong. If the individual is to undertake the Higher Evolution he must differentiate himself from the group in deepening self-awareness. Once individuals have begun to tread the path of the Higher Evolution they will eventually become what Sangharakshita has called 'true individuals', those within whom a higher or transcendental consciousness has arisen. (*ibid.*, p. 79)

Sangharakshita's notion of developing 'true individuality' does draw strongly on Western Liberal and Romantic traditions. Subhuti however, argues that it differs from these by being a process of perpetual self-transcendence that leads to one increasing in compassion and recognising 'one's essential identity with all things' (*ibid.*, p. 80). Furthermore in his reading, 'the group' is seen as an evolutionary necessity and not all groups are to be opposed. Groups that support the development of 'individuality' are termed 'positive groups' (*ibid.* p. 120).

'True individuals' experience themselves not only as independent of the group but also in relation to other 'individuals', and this mutual experience gives rise to the consciousness of the 'spiritual community' (*ibid.* p. 121). It is this consciousness that is seen as forming the basis of *sangha*. The 'spiritual

community' and 'the group' are seen as being in mutual tension. The 'spiritual community' seeks to absorb the group so that its members become part of it, firstly by transforming 'the group' through persuasion and example into 'the positive group' and from then on into the 'spiritual community'. 'The group' which is seen not only to surround the 'spiritual community' but also to be in midst of its members' consciousness, is seeking the regress of the 'spiritual community' back into 'the group'.

In terms of the social aspect of the Movement, as individuals go for Refuge:

[t]hey come into a new and significant relationship with one another. Sharing as they do commitment to the spiritual path, there is a very deep connection between them. Those who genuinely and effectively go for Refuge share a harmony and empathy that amounts to a new kind of consciousness. The nature of this new kind of consciousness is quite hard to understand and communicate, since it is neither of the group nor of the individual, but above and beyond them both. It combines the complete autonomy of the individual with complete harmony with others who share the same commitment to the path. (Subhuti, 1994, p. 99)

The WBO has been described by Sangharakshita as 'the spiritual community in a particularly pure and uncompromising form' (cited in *ibid.* p. 20) and as being at the heart of the project of the 'New Society', Sangharakshita's term for the society that comes into being when the 'spiritual community' has transformed 'the group' into the 'positive group'. 'The group' is seen as representing 'the old society'. In the initial stages the task of the 'spiritual community', is to form 'a series of New Societies in miniature' (*ibid.*, p. 222). The FWBO and its institutions are therefore to be seen as representing efforts to build the 'New Society' from the 'Old Society'. So how are differences to be treated within the New Society within this paradigm?

3.4.3 The New Society and 'difference'

In developing the 'New Society' which is meant to be open to all irrespective of social distinctions of age, sex, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and so on, differences generally are to be understood by its members thus:

[s]ocial transformation of the old society into the New consists in people ceasing to relate to each other as group members and beginning to relate as individuals. Each will see every other primarily as a human being rather than as the member of a particular sex, family, age, class or caste, tribe, nation or race. The spiritual community exemplifies this social transformation in its purest form.

Its members have come together out of a common desire to develop as individuals, rather from any group interest, such as blood relationship. At its best, there are no barriers based on group attitudes between members of the spiritual community. At the very least, all will be making systematic efforts to surmount whatever barriers there may be. (*ibid* p. 234)

Sangharakshita's idea of 'the individual' as free from 'the group' can be seen as an attempt to re-present the *Dharma* by use of ideas of the subject developed in modernity as metaphors for what he hopes will prove a Buddhist point of departure. The 'true individual' in his reading may be understood in the context of the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā*. This doctrine asserts that there is no abiding, separate, essential, autonomous self with which one can identify, so represents an anti-essentialist approach to all forms of identification whether at the micro- or macro-level. It suggests that members of the New Society should not see themselves as 'racially' marked, but as distancing themselves from these markers of social categorisation as a significant means of primary identification. It would suggest that they might be open to what in Avtar Brah suggests might be classified as *difference as subjectivity* and *difference as experience*, but less so to *difference to identity* and *difference as social relation*, the latter two aspects of difference being more associated with 'group consciousness' and 'statistical individuality'.

'True Individuality' could therefore be rendered as identitylessness: to the extent to which one sees oneself as over-determined by what are regarded as mundane markers of identity, one could be seen as being a 'statistical individual' who should be further encouraged to develop one's 'true individuality'. The true individual has been characterized by Sangharakshita as one with:

[s]elf-consciousness or awareness, positive and refined emotions, independence of mind and freedom from group conditioning, creativity and free-flowing energy, aloneness and frequent unpopularity (Sangharakshita, 2000a, p. 128)

Subhuti has described Sangharakshita as being 'careful to speak in Buddhist terms rather than the terms of modern social and political ideology with its long list of isms: racism, sexism, ageism, etc.' and quotes Sangharakshita as saying:

As Buddhists we don't really need to think in terms of these isms at all. We have got a better and much more beautiful vocabulary that deals with these same human problems. For instance, we have the

beautiful word 'mettā' (*sic*).⁶ You develop mettā towards all living beings. And 'all' means all, you don't have to specify age, sex, class, or race: you just treat all you meet with mettā. So let us discuss problems in Buddhistic terms, rather than in terms borrowed from modern ideologies and attitudes that are really quite alien, even inimical, to the spirit of the *Dharma* and that, more often than not, lead to the very sort of conflict they are meant to overcome. (cited in Subhuti, 1994, p. 236)

In the process to realise *true individuality*, Sangharakshita has been described by Subhuti (*ibid*: p. 215) as viewing many ideas that he sees as extant at the current time as inimical to the spiritual life. These he describes as 'pseudo-liberalism'. Some examples he gives with their putative consequences are:

Egalitarianism destroys respect for teachers and leaders; the language of rights leads to a sense of deprivation, even among the most materially fortunate; gender politics obscure basic human facts and distracts from fundamental ethical issues; ... populism leads to mistrust of high culture

Subhuti then goes on to suggest that Sangharakshita regards 'political correctness' (for example, the censoring of language for any trace of what is deemed to be racism, sexism, ageism, etc.) as even worse than pseudo-liberalism (*ibid*: p. 215). In one of his aphorisms Sangharakshita (1998, p. 74) states:

'Political correctness' is one of the most pernicious tendencies of our time – far more pernicious than pseudo-liberalism, of which it is probably the extreme form

Sangharakshita (1987) has also suggested in terms of debates around human rights issues that the focus should be on duties as opposed to rights, arguing that:

Duties consist in what is due from us to others, and are based upon giving, whereas rights consist in what is due from others to us, and are based (from the subjective point of view) upon grasping and getting. ... the clamorous insistence upon our rights, upon what is legally, morally or even spiritually due from others to us, only strengthens greed, strengthens desire, strengthens selfishness, strengthens egotism (*ibid* p. 42-43).

It would be overly simplistic to suggest that Sangharakshita's approach to anti-discrimination movements sees them as wholly suspect. For instance, he has strongly championed the movement to end Untouchability in India,⁷ and the

⁶ According to Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003), metta is the Pali form of *maitrī* meaning love, goodwill, or benevolence.

⁷ See for example Sangharakshita (1986a) *Ambedkar and Buddhism*.

FWBO in India has a large and strong wing of Order members, *Mitras* and Friends from *Dalit* communities.⁸ In rejecting the notion of rights, Sangharakshita is rather placing himself with some Buddhist scholars who consider the idea of human rights as incompatible with Buddhism on the grounds that to them it reinforces the ego and notions of an essential self.⁹ Overall Sangharakshita's presentation of the individual can be seen as a firm rejection of the politicisation of identities as such within a broadly liberal stance, while maintaining that the Order and movement he has founded is unified on the basis that it is and should be open to all, regardless of any type of social difference. As he stated in a talk (Sangharakshita, 1999) to members of the Western Buddhist Order: 'All are seen and valued, by themselves and by others, primarily as individuals.'

We will see that Sangharakshita's perspective on these matters has understandably so strongly shaped the debate around the issue of 'difference' of ethnicity within the Movement, with the problem often being regarded as one endangered more by an attitude of 'political correctness' than by lack of awareness and racism as such. Before however, moving on to that, we shall now consider how this notion of 'identitylessness' has been understood in relation to gender.

3.4.4 The New Society, gender and sexual identity

Sangharakshita established the Western Buddhist Order as an institution whose members are 'neither monastic or lay' and in which 'commitment [to following the Buddhist path] is primary, lifestyle secondary' (cited in Subhuti, 1994, pp. 145-146). Both men and women receive the same ordination and follow the same set of (ten) ethical precepts, although if a member wishes to be celibate, they follow a different version of the third precept proscribing non-celibacy.

In its early days, the FWBO was quite critical of the nuclear family for what was described as its 'restrictiveness and exclusivity' (Subhuti, 1988, p. 177). This provoked controversy within and outside the movement along with its favouring of same-sex as opposed to opposite-sex institutions and activities. Members were encouraged to, as far as possible, attend single-sex retreats,

⁸ See for example Alan Sponberg (1996), Terry Pilchick (1988) and Hilary Blakiston (1990).

⁹ See for example Ihara's (1998) essay in *Buddhism and Human Rights*.

live in same-sex residential communities and work in same-sex 'team-based Right Livelihood businesses', which were seen as key institutions of the FWBO. This became known as the 'single-sex principle' of the FWBO, and its introduction in the 1970s was by no means a smooth and easy process, leaving many women feeling marginalised (Suryaprabha, 1997) (I discuss the ramifications and rationale of the 'single-sex principle' in more detail below). As part of the introduction of this principle, people in the movement were encouraged to de-emphasise sexual and romantic relationships in their lives and to see themselves as working towards celibacy.

Homosexuality has never been proscribed by the Movement, and men involved in the Movement were encouraged to prioritise friendship with men over their relationships with women, and not fear any homoerotic feelings in their friendships with men, even if they decided not to act on these (Subhuti, 1994, p. 166). Furthermore, Sangharakshita has said that there should be no discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation within the Movement.

In the light of an initial perceived under-representation of homosexuals in the centre, the LBC developed a longstanding outreach programme to gay men in the 1980s. The high proportion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) participants in the study (35.7%) also suggests that because of their sexuality they were more open to an alternative religious tradition to the Christian one most had been brought up in. When asked, many LGBT participants replied that the non-judgmental and tolerant nature of Buddhism as taught by the FWBO with regard to homosexuality compared to other religions had been part of its appeal to them.

However, practitioners in the Movement are encouraged not to 'over-identify' with their sexual orientation, in keeping with the idea that one should not be too involved in 'group membership'. For instance, as one participant said when describing his sexuality:

Probably a sort of bisexual. Although it's possibly more gay than bisexual but I'm not sure that I'd describe myself as gay because I've never been part of the gay scene. I've never felt gay in that sense actually. So it's been more bisexual in terms of sexual experience as well. But also bisexual doesn't feel right 'cos I'm sure there's a bisexual scene and I've never been part of the bisexual scene either!

The participant is therefore indicating that he is not part of a special interest group around his sexuality, particularly one that might be formed around 'identity politics', or one that might be termed a 'community of resistance'.

Within the FWBO, the discourse of gender was previously couched in essentialist terms and seen as arising out of the different biological natures of the sexes (Subhuti, 1995a). These differences meant that women were seen to tend to have more of the 'feminine' qualities of 'softness, compliance and concern for others', while men tended to possess more of the 'masculine' qualities of 'strength, initiative and independence' (Subhuti, 1994, p. 165). Sangharakshita had said that it is important that men and women seek to relate to others as 'individuals', and to move beyond 'exclusive identification with one's biological sex' (Subhuti, 1994, p. 167), but before that point is reached, it was best for men and women to be as separate as possible on account of what was described as a fundamental tension between the sexes:

The difference between the sexes leads them to look at each other with a mysterious longing, at the same time as they are repelled by a deep and natural incompatibility of aims and interests (*ibid.* p.165).

This difference was seen as applying even to homosexuals, 'the essential differences being deeper than sexual orientation' (*ibid.* p. 164). In this discourse therefore, gender was binary and functioned within a 'heterosexual matrix' to use Judith Butler's term (1999a). It was not seen as being significantly modulated by other axes of difference such as class or ethnicity, although the ascription of qualities might perhaps be most relevant to North European heterosexual middle-class men and women. The binary separation of the sexes within the movement also continues to make the position of transgendered people unclear, with them in effect having to choose a position in one 'wing' or another.

What were seen as masculine qualities were privileged above feminine ones because masculinity provided the drive and initiative that provided the necessary momentum for living the spiritual life and pursuing the Higher Evolution (Subhuti, 1995b). Women were described as equal in soteriological terms because they could overcome their innate tendencies that led them to having a preference for the Lower as opposed to the Higher Evolution if they made 'manly effort' (Subhuti, 1995b, p. 97). In a seminar with some of his disciples that took place in the 1980s, Sangharakshita has also described women who are highly spiritually developed as being in effect 'psycho-spiritually' men.

However, the single-sex practice of this *sangha* has proved attractive for many feminists and lesbians for social and political reasons, because of its

resulting principle of providing women-only contexts that are considered to be helpful for Buddhist practice. For example, as Alison, a bisexual participant, put it in her interview (08/06/2004):

I think on the one hand I felt there was quite a bit of misogyny in the Movement and on the other hand I felt you know with the single sex, what was then called principle, that made sense to me, and I was quite happy because it was part of my feminist days, that seemed to work for me, that worked for me, so, even though I did feel that there was quite strong elements of misogyny, there were strong elements that came through structures, not structures, but ethos and cultures in which women were particularly valued. Because I felt very confident in that for myself, I didn't get too hot and bothered about it. I mean had a very strong basis, very strong foundation of who I was as a woman, strong belief in my womanhood. Just thought a lot of it was just silly, a lot of stuff that I read was how I was, thought, 'That's a bit silly, never mind. (laughs) They'll come round to it one day.' And they have!

Alison had therefore drawn on her sense of her own personal experience of what being a woman was ('a strong belief in my womanhood') and the pockets (not structures) within the Movement where she sensed that women were valued. The 'subjugated knowledge' she had developed through her strong sense of female identity and the areas within the Movement where women were able to have relative autonomy had enabled her to feel confident that her perspective would eventually prevail and although there continue to be aspects of misogyny within the Movement, these are not as pronounced as they previously were, while women have continued to assert themselves within the Movement.

The previous general discourse on gender has not gone unremarked upon by other people of colour who have engaged with the movement. For instance one black gay male interviewee, Mike (23/08/2001), described his experience of the Movement's national retreat centre for men, *Padmaloka*:

it was unapologetically white male dominated. It was, it had a very similar feeling to, ... Parliament. Very similar feel to Parliament. A sense of white male dominance, just unquestioned. Absolutely unquestioned. No concessions to anybody or anything.

We will hear more from Mike about this aspect of the men's wing in the next chapter. In his interview, Mike went on to express reservations around the core ideas in *Women, Men & Angels*¹⁰ by the senior Order member Subhuti (1995b)

¹⁰ The title of Subhuti's book, *Women, Men and Angels: An Inquiry Concerning the Relative Spiritual Aptitudes of Men and Women* came from an aphorism by Sangharakshita (1995, p. 65): 'Angels are to men as men are to women – because they are more human and, therefore,

that outlined his understanding of Sangharakshita's view that women have less aptitude for living the spiritual life than do men. (After much debate within the Movement, this book was withdrawn by its author, who expressed regret that it had been published when, in his view, it should have appeared as an internal discussion document.) Mike, after saying that he had felt that 'there was always this question of the place of black people in general, particularly those women in relation to the Order as a whole', said:

if Subhuti believes this, not only believes this but wants to also exhibit his belief in this about the relationship between men and women, what does he think between white people and black people, men, white women and black women?

Mike was therefore indicating that for him as a black gay man, questions of gender could not be so easily separated from discourses around 'race' and were in fact inseparable. Before however, going further into this in the next chapter, I will consider how Sangharakshita's views on the New Society and ethnic difference worked out in relation to black people and people of colour engaged with the Movement in practice. I will first outline the teachings of Sangharakshita on art and culture and how these have been interpreted by his disciples.

3.4.5 The New Society, art, aesthetics and cultural difference

Sangharakshita has placed considerable emphasis on the production and viewing of fine art and high culture as a means of Buddhist spiritual practice. He sees it as one of the principles of the FWBO and says (Sangharakshita, 1999):

We emphasise the importance of culture, great music, literature, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture — all help us to broaden our sympathies and extend our experience. They enlarge our imagination, they refine and direct our emotions. At their best and greatest they may be bearers of spiritual values, values which are in principle identical with those of the *Dharma*, values which can help us to transform our lives.

Sangharakshita first developed his views on the relationship between religion and art in a series of four essays written during the 1950s collated and published as *The Religion of Art*. In the first essay in the volume, Sangharakshita (1988b, p. 54) suggests that his comments are directed to:

more divine.' Subhuti's essay was intended as an exposition of this aphorism and was allegedly written at Sangharakshita's request.

'Modern man, by which we mean modern western man and his imitators in eastern countries', suggesting that modernity is being regarded as synonymous with an unmarked whiteness. The title essay in *The Religion of Art* draws on modernist ideas of the potential of art to replace religion as religion becomes seen as less relevant to people's lives, because of art's perceived ability to develop sensibilities, as well as Romantic ideas of the importance of strong emotion and individual imagination. In the essay, Sangharakshita argues that participating in 'true art' has nothing to do with egoistic pleasure or enjoyment but rather that such participation can reduce the ego sense. He differentiates between four different types of art (Harris, 2002, pp. 377-378). The four categories are firstly, work that is religious in subject but non-religious in sentiment. Sangharakshita's example is much 'mushy' Christian art that 'positively strengthens the ego-sense'. The second category is 'naturally or essentially religious art that is religious in sentiment but non-religious in subject, such as Shelley's poetry or a Chinese landscape painting.' In the third category comes work that is religious in subject as well as sentiment, for example, a Buddha image. The fourth and final category is art that is religious neither in sentiment nor in subject. This refers to almost all contemporary art, which is dismissed as 'pseudo-artistic rubbish'.

In Sangharakshita's typology, 'true art' falls under the second category above. He also sees 'true art' as reflecting 'values of the individual and of the Higher Evolution' (Subhuti, 1994, p.80) and regards the artist as an example of the 'true individual' when engaging in creative acts (Sangharakshita, 2000a). He suggests that the religionist of art should feel compelled 'to protect himself from bad art as carefully as he would take precautions against being infected by a particularly dangerous and virulent disease' (Sangharakshita, 1988c, p. 104).

Also in terms of the role of popular culture in the life of the religionist of art he suggests:

The devotee of the Religion of Art should be as much ashamed of being found with a sensational tabloid newspaper in his hand, a pair of unsightly factory-produced vases on his mantelshelf, or with two or three volumes of cheap fiction in his bookcase, as he would be if caught picking someone's pocket. (Sangharakshita, 1988c, p. 105)

In his *Advice to a Young Poet*, Sangharakshita (1988a, p. 141) suggests to his aspirant that:

In these days of close international contact, if not only co-operation, the poet, no less than other men (*sic*), has to keep himself open to

the impact of multitudinous influences. The English poet, for instance, must learn to appreciate, at least in translation, the best poetic work which has been done not only in French, German, and Italian, but also in Arabic, Persian, and Chinese. No non-English poet, on the other hand, especially if he is working in one of the undeveloped minor languages of the world, can afford to neglect the unequalled riches of English poetry. Such a commerce between the languages and literatures, but especially the poetic literatures of many times and lands, will contribute to the growth of a newer and more truly international Poetry which will embody the ideals and aspirations, not of any single race or people, but of humanity.

This suggests that a poet should have a cosmopolitan approach, but one that privileges English literature as that which is relatively more 'developed' compared to others, in fact such poetry contains 'unequalled riches,' a position that has some unfortunate resonances with the infamous Macaulay minute on Indian education.¹¹

Sangharakshita therefore sees the notion of Beauty, as the good and the true, in essentialist as well as spiritual terms, hence as being outside historical, socio-economic and cultural considerations and capable of being judged more or less objectively. During the 'culture wars' that have developed in late/postmodernity about: the nature and function of art (Eagleton, 1992); the concept of 'taste' and the distinction between high and popular culture (Bourdieu, 1984); the notion of the artist as solitary 'genius' working outside social and cultural factors (Bourdieu, 1993); the comprehensiveness of the literary and artistic canon given questions raised by multiculturalists (Louis Gates Jr., 1992) and feminists (Pollock, 1999), and the universality of 'Western' culture, Sangharakshita, as well as opposing 'political correctness', has argued strongly that the canon should be regarded as foundational to the project of developing Buddhism in the West. Although he has given examples of 'true art' developed by artists from the 'East', the majority of his examples of this have tended to be of the work of white, predominantly male, European artists. This position has been strongly argued in the pages of the Movement's magazines through the recommendation of such texts as Harold Bloom's (1994) *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages*, which suggests a list of canonical literary works, only listing some by authors of colour in one of its appendices (entitled interestingly 'The Chaotic Age') and not discussing their

¹¹ This minute written in 1835 by Thomas B. Macaulay advocated that Indian education should take place in English. It claimed that the superiority of Western to 'native' literature was such that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.'

work in the main body of his text, which runs to over six hundred pages. Bloom also in this text attacks the rise of 'ideologically-driven' literary studies among academic critics. In advocating such an approach within the Movement, senior Order members are therefore arguing that notions of Beauty can be argued from a universalistic perspective to which 'difference' should aspire. Yet again, Beauty is to be seen in terms of an unmarked whiteness with advocates of the position 'Black is beautiful' being usually seen as advocates of 'folk art' who speak as advocates of 'the group' rather than from a standpoint of 'true individuality'. We shall now see how the teachings of Sangharakshita are being responded to on the ground in the next section, which focuses more on the LBC.

3.5 'DIFFERENCE' ON THE GROUND OF THE LBC

In this section, I discuss how 'difference' is conceptualised on the ground at the LBC by the more senior Order members who, at the time of their interview, were involved in teaching and running the LBC. I will first discuss my observations made from mixed classes for newcomers at the LBC. I will then outline some close readings of some of the interview narratives with key members of the LBC's Council, i.e. relatively senior Order members who are members of the board of trustees of the LBC, and other senior Order members linked to the LBC via their involvement in the ordination process which, at this point, was more centralised around *Padmaloka* (the FWBO's national retreat centre for men) and *Tiratanaloka* (the women's retreat centre that was the then centre of the training process for women's ordination). These Order members were chosen as representative of the leadership of the LBC so as to get some indication of the various processes involved in developing involvement within the FWBO and WBO.

3.5.1 LBC public classes for newcomers

The data described in this section comes from participation-observation of the then weekly newcomers' drop-in class at the LBC during the session covered by the period September-November 2000. I will give a composite description of the classes I attended during this time.

When I arrived at the centre, I would usually find the main entrance door to be wide open (normally there would be an entryphone to get in). I would walk through the entrance into a small gardened courtyard with a fountain. At the

end of the courtyard there would be an open glass door with someone inside holding a bowl to collect the class fee which at the time was £5 waged, £2 unwaged. Then I would go to the cloakroom to remove my coat and shoes. No one told me that I would need to do that. Being a regular member of the centre and member of the WBO, I knew that was what I was expected to do. From the cloakroom I could have gone to a small bookshop, but more usually I would go to the reception room where there might be forty to a hundred people present, of whom about two-thirds would be women and about five would be people of colour sitting and standing around waiting for the class to start in an atmosphere not unlike a doctor's surgery. I sensed that it was not so much that people were anxious but most seemed unsure what to expect from the evening, and few talked with one another at this stage of the evening.

Five minutes before the class started, the class leader, dressed in ordinary clothes but wearing a white stole (called a *kesa*, which in Japanese means robe) around his/her neck to indicate that they are a member of the WBO, would come out into the reception area. S/he would welcome the people waiting there and say to them that if they are going to an ongoing six-week course for newcomers (which could either be in various themes associated with Buddhism) they should follow the people going offsite to the Gallery Café.¹² If they were learning meditation as taught by the FWBO for the first time, or felt they needed refresher instruction, they should follow someone else and go to the small meditation room (not referred to as the usual term shrine room). Everyone else would be invited to join the leader in the main meditation room.

When I went to the class for total newcomers in the small meditation room, this was laid out with meditation cushions and chairs. After giving advice on posture, the leader with her assistant went round and checked that people were comfortable. The main Buddha statue (or *rūpa*) would be uncommented on, and there would not be candles or incense on the shrine. The class leader explained that we were being taught the *metta bhāvanā*, a meditation to develop universal lovingkindness that takes place in five stages. In the first one cultivated lovingkindness towards oneself, the second towards a good friend, the third someone that you felt indifferent to, the fourth someone you regarded as difficult and finally towards all beings. We were led through the different

¹² This was formerly one of the community businesses associated with the LBC but has since passed out of LBC ownership.

stages of the meditation, and in the fifth stage the leader reminded us of the diversity of languages in London and all the different varieties (I think she meant ethnicities) of humankind as well as of species. After about twenty-five minutes the meditation concluded and the class went back to the reception for refreshments, where we joined people who had been in the large meditation room. People seemed more relaxed and chatty and team members were dispersed throughout the reception room, chatting to the attendees. Towards the end of the tea break, announcements were made by the class leader about forthcoming courses, retreats and festivals by the LBC. However, during this time, none of the activities specifically for people of colour were ever mentioned, even though these are also targeted at newcomers.

At times, after the tea break people came together in the large meditation room to hear a talk by an Order member who belongs to the class team. The *rūpa* (Buddha statue) on the shrine would not be referred to, and again there would be no candles or incense on the shrine (unlike figures 3.4 and 3.5 below that show photos of shrine and *rūpa* in the LBC's main shrine room)

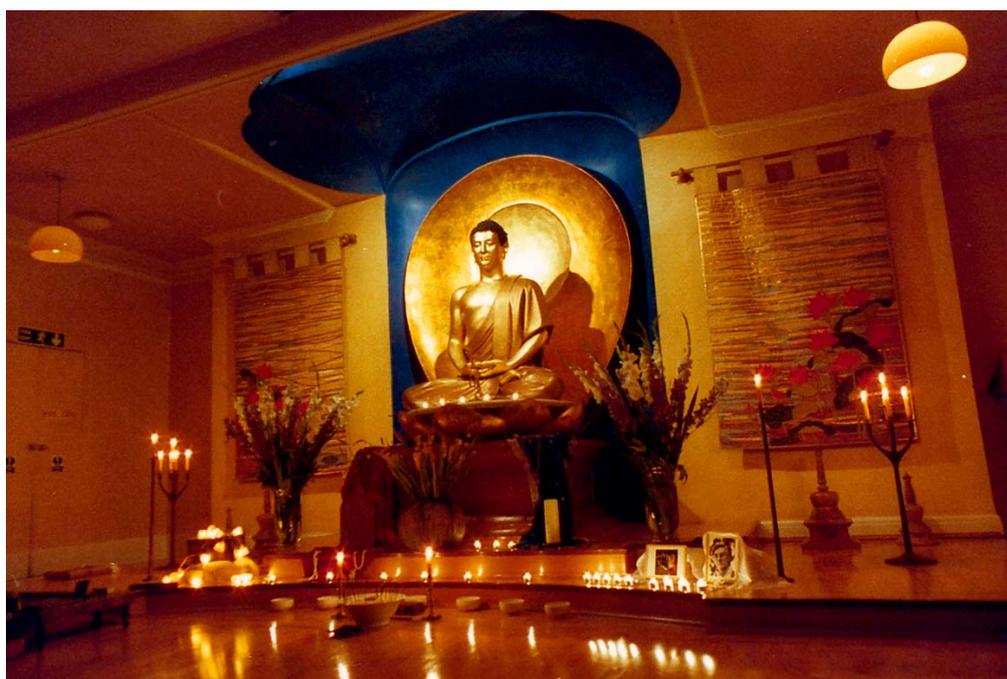


Figure 3.4: Photograph of LBC main shrine room by Alban Leigh (used with permission)

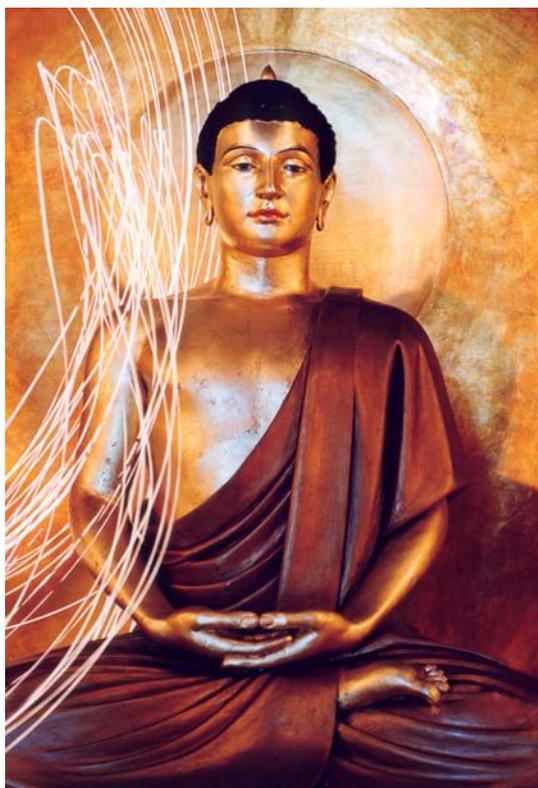


Figure 3.5: Detail of *rūpa* in fig.3.4. Photograph by Alban Leigh (used with permission)

The *rūpa* had been sculpted by a *Dharmachari* named Chintamani who had at the time been strongly influenced by the idea of Greek classical sculpture being foundational to the Western sculptural tradition (Suryaprabha, 1997), and had been keen to give the sculpture a ‘Western’ rather than ‘Oriental’ appearance as part of the project of developing a ‘Western Buddhist culture’.

On this occasion the talk was part of a series on ‘Buddhism in the Modern World’. The Order member introducing the talk started by saying that Buddhism is something you do rather than just read or talk about, and that the question that the talk would try to answer is ‘How do you do Buddhism (an ancient tradition) in the modern world?’ The speaker then explained that the talk was about her life and how she tries to practise Buddhism in the situations in which she finds herself. She hoped through this to give a sense of what Buddhism has to offer. She mentioned the story of how it was predicted when the Buddha was born that he would be a great world ruler or a great spiritual teacher. The father of the future Buddha did not want his son to become a spiritual teacher, so he gave his son everything he could desire. Despite this, the future Buddha went outside the palace gates and saw sights that set out the reality of the human predicament of old age, sickness and death. These led him to feel that his life lacked meaning. He saw the sight of a wandering *sadhu* who embodied peacefulness and calm and then felt he had some way of

dealing with the human condition. He therefore decided to follow the *sadhu's* example, and left home to live the life of a mendicant.

The speaker went on to say how during the 1980s she had gone travelling for six months in India after some time feeling a nagging dissatisfaction on a deeper level that she had tried to bury with activity. She had felt surprise at this dissatisfaction because her life gave her time, money and leisure. In India, things like old age, sickness and death were 'very much in my face'. This began to alter her perspective. When she saw an advert suggesting 'How to make life more meaningful' she took it up and went on a ten day meditation retreat. On her return to the UK, she found herself experiencing culture shock, especially when seeing a fudge shop after all the poverty she had seen in India. This gave her an urge to continue to meditate, so she saw an advert in *Time Out*¹³ and went to the regular newcomers' class at the LBC. She then said 'You never know where it might lead'. She now felt that both the practices she was taught (the mindfulness of breathing and the *metta bhāvāna*) were crucial in the modern world.

Through going to the LBC, she found herself in something a bit like a Buddhist village. She felt that the businesses associated with the centre (Team Based Right Livelihood businesses, TBRLs) had had a broader effect on Bethnal Green. She was very affected by how friendly people were, as well as the emphasis on friendship within the FWBO. In terms of her work, she had worked as a teacher because she wanted to have a positive effect in the world. However, she found herself getting stressed and feeling that what she did was never enough. She felt more able to be herself whenever she was helping out in one of the TBRLs. In practice her work had alternated teaching with working in this business, and she had learnt that 'It's not what you do but how you do it'.

She experienced her workplace as an interface between Buddhism and the world. Doing a two hour stint on the counter could be a bit like a stint of *metta* practice because people she liked came in, friends, people she felt neutral about, and people she found difficult. She tried to treat each person she encountered 'as a human being'. One of their customers who had never visited the LBC had said to them, 'If you want to find the Buddha they should come to your street.' She also tried to practise mindfulness and awareness in her work. Mindfulness taught her that life isn't elsewhere but right here and now. When

¹³ *Time Out* is a weekly listings magazine for events in London.

she cleaned, she tried to do this without thinking of finishing the job and doing something else. Mindfulness was crucial because the equipment she worked with could be hazardous and she had received injuries when using it.

One Buddhist story she found particularly inspiring was that of the monks Anuruddha and his companions Nandiya and Kimbila, who lived together in friendliness and harmony.¹⁴ The story was inspiring to her because they maintained loving-kindness in thought, word and deed. Sometimes she glimpsed that harmony in her weekly team meeting.

In conclusion, she felt that practice in the modern world was primarily about deepening awareness and love. As a Buddhist in the modern world she wanted the glimpses of awareness and *metta* she had received to be more and more her experience. She wanted to live life with more awareness and love, and appreciated the simplicity of quietness. In conclusion she felt that one didn't need to do anything special to practise in the modern world, even though it was very different to ancient India, one still needed awareness and love.

The Order member who had introduced her said at the end of the talk how he had been reminded of the Zen saying 'Nothing special'. There was nothing special or flashy about practising Buddhism in a modern world for which the emphasis was pleasure. The talk had looked at the tension between pleasure and meaning, and in the modern world we had lost the sense of meaning, so chased after pleasure. He said how on retreat one could have both meaning and pleasure. A retreat gives one a heightened sense of awareness that could be quite pleasurable and meaningful.

I have described this Order member's talk at length because I found her account of her conversion to Buddhism in the talk exemplifies several aspects of its anticipated audience. Firstly she draws parallels with her experience and that of the Buddha-to-be in terms of having more than what one basically needs, yet still finding life dissatisfying. Her 'fateful moment'¹⁵ (Giddens, 1991b, p. 167) occurs when she is out of her usual environment, travelling in India. Giddens suggests in terms of people's predicament in late modernity that ontological security is largely sustained through routines. However, these routines, while providing security, are often lacking in moral meaning. Because

¹⁴ This story is recounted in Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's *The Life of the Buddha* (1984) pp. 114-115.

¹⁵ Giddens defines *fateful moments* as 'moments at which consequential decisions have to be taken or courses of action initiated.'

of this they can be seen as either empty or overwhelming. Individuals can face existential crises when their routines are radically disrupted, or when they seek to take greater reflexive control over their self-identity. In these contexts, 'fateful moments' can leave the individual feeling bereft as they bring moral and existential dilemmas to the forefront. Giddens argues that people in this situation are facing a return of the repressed and lack the psychic and social issues to manage their experience.

The speaker's routine had been altered by travel as a tourist, which as she admitted, she had time, money and leisure to undertake, something that is more likely if one is middle-class. She was travelling to go neither on pilgrimage, nor as a member of a diaspora back to a 'homeland'. For her, at the same time in the modern West, as Giddens suggests, day-to-day social life has become sequestered from 'sickness and death in terms of connecting points between social life and external criteria concerning mortality and death' (Giddens, 1991b, p. 168), while in India sickness and death are 'very much in my face'. She decides to learn meditation as a technique of the self (Foucault, 1997c) to cultivate the psychic resources she feels she needs at this time. The unsatisfactoriness she experienced was not due to material deprivation but to finding life lacking in meaning, and she had sought to ameliorate this through meditation. The 'culture shock' she had experienced had given rise to another 'fateful moment' in which she decided to continue to learn meditation, this time with the FWBO after seeing another advert.

One thing led to another and it led to her altering her work radically so that she can cultivate the social resources she feels she needs to continue with her personal process. The business she worked for, like other TBRLs, does not pay a salary but 'support' towards living expenses which means that one is often living on a lower than average wage. People in these situations are thus choosing a life of voluntary simplicity, again an objective that is more likely to resonate with middle-class people wishing to disengage from the hustle and bustle of modern life as opposed to people seeking to emerge out of poverty and/or who have dependents. There are also contradictions in the talk in which for the newcomer, Buddhism is simplified as being about cultivating awareness and love and not requiring significant cultural change, even though all Order members have non-English names which they use mainly in Buddhist contexts such as the classes I have described. Also, the relative spaciousness of the

speaker's work environment compared to others cannot have been lost on any member of the audience who wished to change their lifestyle, especially as she herself mentions that she found the work environment of teaching difficult. Her talk is therefore an account of her journey to finding an 'alternative' that is more likely to be sought by the bohemian middle-class, who are more likely to be white majority ethnic people. Unintentionally, Buddhism is related as something that fits in more with white and middle-class experience and aspirations.

Having considered one of the ways in which the LBC constructs its audiences, I now wish to turn to a discussion of the ways in which senior Order members who run the LBC approach questions of diversity within that institution, through a close reading of their interview narratives.

3.5.2 LBC Council members and associated senior Order members

I asked seven members (just over half the membership) of the LBC Council, and two senior Order members linked to the LBC (all of whom were white majority ethnic, apart from two who were from minority ethnic groups), for their views on: why relatively fewer people of colour especially black men participate in the FWBO and LBC; the LBC's outreach programme for people of colour; and their approach to diversity issues in the LBC and FWBO and ideas for further development.

It was generally suggested that people of colour who came to the LBC observed themselves being a minority in classes and for those reasons decided not to pursue their involvement further. This was described as particularly true for black men, as most of the participants of colour around the LBC are female. Views of the issue seemed to boil down to it being a question of homophily. For instance, the LBC's President (CP, 01/06/2002) suggested:

Well, what I've come to think over the years is that probably any attempt to attract people to anything will fall into the danger of reproducing the same kinds of people, if you see what I mean. That you will attract people who are like you. Little bit different, a little bit divergent but there's a tendency I think, I suspect, for any institution to settle into a particular sort of cultural appeal. I don't think it's necessarily from anything to do with prejudice or anything of that kind. It's partly just like attracts like, it's just a natural law. Partly a certain failure of imagination and a failure to recognise that if you don't do something about it that will happen. And you will naturally just go on attracting the people who are most like you. And I think that has been the case with most of our centres

Thus the social practices of individuals were seen to some extent as being part of a 'natural' tendency to band together on a similar basis, which perhaps goes back to the tendency of people to lapse, in FWBO terms, into 'the group'. It was not so much a question of people being excluded or being less welcome to share a particular collective space. By implication, the discourse of 'race' in this section of the interview suggested that the application of 'race' and racialisation of FWBO space was a 'natural', organic process that did not reflect 'prejudice' or ill-will in its implementation. Rather, it was a failure of people to think outside the box and to work against a 'natural' tendency. While I agree with CP that ill-will is not a primary motivation, the views that white people (or black people) are more likely to attract themselves to share a space they develop rather than create a multicultural one suggests a particular raciology (to use Paul Gilroy's term) of 'race' being part of 'natural law' rather than a social, historical and economic formation that is in fact a fiction, even if it is strongly felt to be real. The project of creating multicultural groups, while desirable and commendable to the CP, was therefore going against the grain for people, as 'race' (or any other significant axis of 'difference') was hard-wired into people, so required reflexive effort for its transcendence.

Given the general view of the primordial nature of 'race', it was almost inevitable that interviewees in this group tended to see a lack of visible role models, i.e. a lack of committed practitioners of colour engaging in formal *Dharma* teaching at LBC public classes, as a primary cause for people of colour not usually pursuing an interest in the FWBO, suggesting that the whiteness of the LBC culture was primarily seen in phenotypical rather than discursive terms. It was also said that the FWBO is finding it generally difficult to attract men to its events and the low participation of black men was largely seen in that context. This was even though, for example, as of July 2003 the proportion of black women/women of colour involved in the ordination process (11 out of 66 – 16.7%) was over four times that of black men/men of colour in the ordination process (1 out of 26 – 3.8%).

One senior Order member mentioned the content and presentation of the FWBO's *Dharma* teaching as a possible factor in people of colour failing to develop their involvement in the FWBO, though some Council members mentioned the need for more introductory outreach activities outside the LBC. Here again most Council members saw phenotypical rather than discursive

whiteness as off-putting to people of colour. This suggested to me that many Council members (all of whom apart from one were white) held what Kaplan (1997) refers to as a: 'narrow understanding of a politics of identity (only blacks can work on blacks, whites on whites)' (*ibid*: footnote no. 19 p.328). Some Council members mentioned that as people developed friendships with people in the Centre this often led to them becoming more fully involved. The then LBC Chairman mentioned that he felt more could be done to befriend people of colour who were taking an interest in Buddhism.

In terms of the LBC's outreach programme to people of colour, the events taking place as part of this were generally seen as positive and the programme was seen as the main means by which people of colour would become involved in the FWBO as here they did not find themselves in a minority. It was generally envisaged that eventually those who wished to develop their interest in Buddhism would move on to participate in mixed classes at the LBC. Interviewees were keen for this transition to take place as part of creating a more diverse *sangha*. Some spoke of their concern about the development of 'a black *sangha*' being against the universalistic ideal of *sangha* to which the FWBO is committed. Most Council members often assumed that participation in LBC mixed events would not be problematic for people of colour once they had been through what was seen as an introductory context, so 'race' would become less of an issue as their involvement in the FWBO developed. The then Centre Chairman suggested:

I think at that stage, somebody does respond to the *Dharma* then the issue of colour probably decreases because what they're interested in is the *Dharma* and so you can be befriended by somebody who's an experienced Order member regardless of colour as it were. Obviously there'll still be probably cultural issues and stuff like that but then if somebody does respond to the *Dharma* then it's much easier to deal with those things.

Becoming more engaged with the *Dharma* as presented by the Movement would mean that a person of colour would move away from any attachment to 'race' or 'difference' they might have, especially in terms of what Brah describes as *identity* and sense of *social relation*. This might suggest that, as most white people are not aware of being white, but of being 'just people' (Dyer, 1997), people of colour were being expected to take on white identity formation as they became more interested in the *Dharma* as taught by the FWBO. People of

colour were therefore being expected to aspire to a condition of 'racelessness' as part of their practice of Buddhism in this movement.

However, one senior *Dharmacharini* who was the link between LBC and *Tiratana* (11/06/2002) suggested, referring to a diversity workshop that had recently taken place prior to her interview at the LBC:

we already have at the LBC a certain emphasis on developing activities for black people in order to attract black people. But in order to give black people a context in which they might feel more relaxed to pursue further classes in meditation and *Dharma* study, I think that only goes so far. I think we need a forum which is both black and white people looking at their conditioning and possible responses to that. So I think that's very positive. I hope to see more of that.

This *Dharmacharini* has been engaged in a longstanding dialogue around diversity issues mainly with one black *Dharmacharini* but also with black *Mitras*, including some involved in the ordination process. She was suggesting, unlike other Order members that were interviewed, that greater attention needed to be paid to 'difference' and the socialisation processes involved in this.

Racism was largely defined as overt and intentional acts of ill-will based on race, though one Council member (the then women's *Mitra* convenor, interviewed November 2000) suggested that racism could also involve exclusion of people of colour. The then Centre Chairman suggested this when asked for his definition of racism:

Well if somebody says to me that I'm a racist I assume that they're saying that they think I'm somebody who's prejudiced against people of other races, yeah? Who's anti- or is prejudiced against and willing to discriminate against, or even persecute or oppress people of other races. If someone tells me I'm a racist, that's what I think they think of me yeah? So I don't find that helpful in getting into a dialogue. I mean it's already as far as I'm concerned, already making an assumption about me which isn't true. Yes, so that's how I would interpret it. Although I do know that the label or the term can have other significant nuances of meaning for people who are involved in racial politics. So perhaps one thing that could be helpful, would be getting the terminology right in the sense that where everybody is using the same terminology (indistinct), with minimum misunderstanding. Rectification of terms (laughs)

Because of this definition of racism, which is similar to that suggested by Jorge Garcia (1999), who argues that racism should not be seen in structural or discursive terms but in moral ones as acts of viciousness, the level of awareness around diversity issues was seen by some to be quite good because what would be seen as extreme acts of racism were not a problem for the LBC.

However, the then Chairman mentioned that many in the Movement might not be well-informed about current affairs (at the time of the interview the MacPherson inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence and its findings on institutionalised racism were being widely debated in the media). He saw this as being because they were at a stage in their practice where they might have little engagement with the world outside the internal workings of the Movement. It is possible for some in the Movement to live and work only with others from the FWBO, as its institutions include residential communities as well as the community businesses mentioned earlier. Some such people might have such minimal contact with the media and current affairs that they might only know about a forthcoming election when they received their polling card in the post. This suggested that, if a significant proportion of the Movement felt a need to be apolitical and removed from the workings of the wider society as part of their Buddhist practice, they would be unlikely to be aware of developing debates around 'race' and racism in the wider society.

However, the Centre's President did acknowledge the existence of racism and its potential impact on mutual understanding between different ethnic groups and said in his interview with me:

in our Movement we need to wake up to that because we're giving subtle messages to people that we may not intend and we've got to try to go beyond those. We don't want to go into sentimentality and guilt and so forth, or into political analysis, that's not our business. But our business is to try to understand people and communicate with them, which means understanding where they are coming from.

There was also interest amongst Council members in learning more about differences between ethnic and cultural groups and it was felt that this awareness would organically develop through having more people of colour involved in the LBC. As the then Men's *Mitra* convenor said:

I mean it seems to me part of those sort of awarenesses come out of contact. So in a way, in some ways it is a bit of a difficult situation. If you don't have black people involved, you don't know you know, what they specifically need or want or how they see the world. So really in a way you can't sort of very easily address that. But you know, the more they I think people like that do get involved the more likely, you know, that sort of awareness will develop.

Friendship was also mentioned as a particularly effective strategy, as this had made a profound difference for another Council member concerned. Yet another mentioned the practice in the Movement of sharing life stories and living together in retreat conditions as a means of dissolving barriers and cultivating

mutual understanding. No interviewee suggested the possibility of white people educating themselves about 'race', racialisation and racism in order to develop a critical and reflexive approach to whiteness that did not rely primarily on contact with black people/people of colour.

Most interviewees were keen to avoid approaches that they saw as promoting guilt and fear in white people and preferred individualised and personalised strategies. Some also referred to black/white relations as having inherent problems of mutual distrust and suspicion, and were keen that strategies were not used that they saw as exacerbating these. They were concerned that black and white people unite on the basis of what they saw as the Movement's spiritual ideals. In particular, most were suspicious of initiatives for forums on diversity issues with a facilitator external to the Movement. As the then Centre manager put it:

CM: my fear is that somebody from outside might bring with them certain attitudes that perhaps might not be that helpful for us trying to be more and honest in our communication.

Int.: So it really is a question of tactics isn't it, what we're talking about and strategies, isn't it?

CM: Yes it is. Yeah, yeah. And I think that tactic and strategy needs to be through somebody's Going for Refuge. Through [black *Dharmacharini's*] Going for Refuge she's able to communicate something which other people can connect with on the level of Going for Refuge. And I think that'll be far more beneficial than just tackling it from a linguistic point of view, or a more psychological point of view, or even you know a political point of view.

Facilitators and sources from outside the Movement were often suspected of being unable to appreciate the significance of the principles of the Movement and developing Spiritual Community – not having the *Dharmic*¹⁶ approach that most Council members referred to as being necessary. Most Council members spoke of the need to avoid 'the discourse of race' and 'the language of race relations'. It was felt that an approach built on sharing individuals' experiences was to be preferred. Politics were very much to be avoided and political approaches to the issue were seen as not representing a 'Dharmic approach'. The Centre's President, while being supportive of the diversity workshop that had, at the time of the interview, recently taken place (facilitated by a senior *Dharmachari* who is a practising individual and group psychotherapist), had this to say:

¹⁶ An approach based on the Dharma, i.e. a Buddhist approach.

I'm not saying that individuals may not want to get into that political analysis and that may not be valuable. But I don't think that as practitioners and communicators of the *Dharma* that's centrally our business. Our business is to respond to individuals and to help them to develop and to share our own efforts to develop with them. So I don't think the political analysis is central to that effort. Of course, you can't ever avoid politics entirely, and you may find yourself in certain situations, for instance in India,¹⁷ where politics is inescapable and you have to have some kind of political analysis.

Thus issues of 'race' and racism in the West were to be treated very much on an individual(ised) basis, with no explicit consideration being given to their being embedded in a matrix of socio-economic status and power. Some suggested that their approach to the issue was primarily one of mindfulness and *metta* (Pali for lovingkindness) and that that was sufficient for all issues. In terms of the politics of the issue, the Centre's outreach worker (19/04/2001) said: 'I think I'm open to ideas, as long I'm not going to be dragged into politics 'cos I'm no political animal at the best of times.' The then Centre treasurer (November 2000), described his concerns about a 'political' approach as follows:

I think we've gotta be careful about the whole language of racism and the assumptions behind it. The assumptions behind the language 'cos I think it can easily erm be language that is at odds with the *Dharma*. 'Cos it can easily turn into a language of victim and victimisation, which isn't actually to do with the *Dharma* and I don't think helps either side, do you know what I mean? Blame, and feeling a victim, etc.

This interviewee was the only person of colour on the Council and to some extent his concerns might have been about the privileging of structure over individual agency. The individualising approach, while well-meaning, was described by Henry Giroux (1997) in his account of his experiences of the pedagogy of whiteness as follows:

when students destabilize or critically address 'whiteness', they are likely to do so in a power-evasive discourse in which white racism is often reduced to an act of individual prejudice removed from the messy contexts of history, politics and systemic oppression. (*ibid.* p. 307)

In line with the individualising discourse of Sangharakshita towards social issues, most Council members found themselves consistently attempting to bypass the messiness of 'history, politics and systemic oppression' seeing references that might be made to it by people 'outside' the Movement to

¹⁷ Here the LBC President is referring to the Movement's work with *Dalit* (ex-Untouchable) communities.

conduce to victimisation and in particular, the production of guilt and fear in white people. To some extent the 'difference' of people of colour was to be best seen as a relatively minor one of cultural difference and not one of power. Not only that, 'difference as social relation' and 'difference as identity' (Brah, 1996b) were seen as being outside the provenance of the *Dharma* as taught by the FWBO, a sign that the person of colour was not really interested enough in the *Dharma* and suggested, as Mike reported in his interview about his experience of trying to raise such issues, that one needed to 'further develop one's individuality'.

3.6 CONCLUSION

There is a subtle yet apparently hegemonic discourse of unmarked whiteness within the FWBO that positions people of colour as Other and their concerns about social positioning as being outside the terms of reference of the *Dharma*. This manifests mainly in the examples used to present Buddhism at LBC mixed public classes and in FWBO texts. The ideal of *True Individuality* is seen as best represented by a liberal unmarked whiteness. It also manifests strongly in the mainstream FWBO's Eurocentric views of the nature of Western culture and Buddhism, as both being entities with transhistorical, transcultural essences. Such a perspective gives little recognition of the contributions of people of colour to the cultural forms of the West and to Buddhism generally. Thus, although the rhetoric on 'individuality' suggests that people within the Movement should relate to one another as 'human beings', the tendency towards 'race-thinking' while espousing 'racelessness', failure to challenge racism within and outside the Movement, and the privileging of white middle-class high culture means that the Movement becomes, as Mike suggested in his interview 'inscribed with whiteness', rather than the cosmopolitan multicultural space Paul Gilroy (2004a; 2004b) advocates. The discourse results in what Taguieff (2001, p. 20) would argue is a *heterophobic* racism that sees difference between 'races' as negative and therefore something that should as far as possible be negated. This difference between 'Us' and 'Them' is to be abolished, not in this case by extermination of the 'Other', but predominantly either: 'by a dialogue led by the finality of consensus (communicating makes commonality, engenders a community of minds and hearts)', and, I would argue more commonly in this case, 'by assimilation of the collective "Them," reduced

in the preliminaries to individuals without marks of belonging, to models of Us' (*ibid.* p. 20).

White participants in the FWBO are relatively unaware of the ways in which they too could help black people who wished to participate in its mixed activities feel fully included and welcome. Through the dualistic approach to racism revealed in their narratives, they rightly see themselves as people with good intentions, as opposed to being racists who are people who do not 'mean well'. They tend to see the low participation of people of colour mainly as a result of the attitudes of people of colour preferring to 'keep themselves to themselves' because of negative experiences with 'racism' that have occurred prior to their encounter with this movement. This lets this movement's predominantly white members off the hook, and unwittingly problematises people of colour as the ones with the real difficulties 'fitting in', difficulties that are best addressed by Buddhists of colour who are in this movement. This leads to a 'burden of representation' being placed on Order members and *Mitras* of colour to encourage people of colour to become involved in this *sangha*. Furthermore, as this is designated as the 'Dharmic' approach, the correct Buddhist approach to the issue, questioning this discourse becomes extremely difficult for newcomers to this movement and its more junior members.

In this way, white participants reproduce the racist discourses that emerge within the wider society whenever white-dominated spaces are challenged, by suggesting that it is people of colour's biases, rather than the discursive whiteness of the space, that is the main problem to be solved (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). This attitude reflects the prevailing discourse that sees people of colour as being the only ones who are racialised and who have 'race', unlike white people. White (middle-class) people can extend sympathy to people of colour 'in their plight' as a minority who occupy a less transcendent position. However, they need not place their gaze back on themselves to question their own socialisation, attitudes and positionalities. Also, the encouragement of such reflexivity by people who are 'outside' the FWBO is seen as highly likely to result in guilt and fear in white participants, rather than elucidating the ways in which white people are themselves racialised. It is therefore often seen, particularly by senior members of the LBC, as potentially counterproductive.

In terms of class, participants in mainstream FWBO teaching situations are required to have considerable stocks of what Bourdieu describes as 'cultural capital' (1986), stocks that working-class people and people of colour are unlikely to have inherited or to possess in 'sufficient' quantity. The LBC does make its activities available at concessionary rates for people on low-incomes and offers some activities, including retreats, to some free of charge, and this is helpful for those with lower economic capital. However, the presumption of familiarity with Western high culture (in terms of reference made to Western philosophy and the 'canon' of Western art and literature) increases the requirement for cultural capital.

But, as we saw with gender above, challenges to this hegemonic discourse are continually being made. The next chapter will explore how these challenges arise through the use that black practitioners within the FWBO make of the techniques of the self this movement provides in shaping their identities, especially around ethnicity and their positioning within the movement. It will also look at the work that the centre has been doing to raise its awareness of diversity issues through workshops and its increasingly outward-looking and socially engaged tendency.

CHAPTER FOUR – FWBO AND LBC AS CONTEXT FOR ‘SELF-FASHIONING’

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we looked at institutions and doctrines of the FWBO and LBC and found in them a hegemonic discourse of unmarked middle-class whiteness as being ‘the West’ for which Buddhism is being translated. In this chapter we will explore how black people and people of colour involved in the FWBO first encounter this movement and negotiate this hegemonic discourse while engaging with the ‘techniques of the self’ (Foucault, 1997c) such as meditation and other exercises that this movement provides. We will consider the implications of these negotiations on the development of their subjectivities (Foucault, 1997a), their identities in relation to ethnicity and their own positionings within this *sangha*. I will also in this chapter outline the measures taken by the LBC to increase its ethnic diversity apart from its outreach programme of targeted activities, and discuss the potential implications of their racilogies.

I will start with a brief history of the LBC’s outreach programme to people of colour and then go on to a demographic profile of the people of colour who participated in this case study. From there I will consider people of colour’s first encounters with the Movement, their processes of further engagement with it and decisions regarding whether to ‘convert’ or ‘not’ and their negotiations with discourses of ‘race’ and class within the Movement. The effect of the Movement’s technologies of the self on their processes of identification will be discussed, following a consideration of the responses of participants’ family and friends to their interest in Buddhism. A description of the role and function of events for people of colour follows, and the chapter ends with discussion of the LBC’s diversity workshops and their racilogies.

4.2 HISTORY OF EVENTS FOR BLACK PEOPLE/PEOPLE OF COLOUR AT THE LBC

The LBC’s first activities for black people were courses for black lesbians on ‘Dealing Creatively with Conflict and Stress’ that took place from September 1988 at the Camden Lesbian Centre in North London. In these classes, teaching in Buddhist meditation and retreats at FWBO centres were provided along with training in other techniques for conflict and stress management. The

events were started by a black regular member of the Movement who wanted to encourage other black lesbians to become part of it. As noted in the previous chapter, the Council at that time saw the course as a way of promoting the LBC to black lesbians who might not ordinarily come to its general introductory classes on the grounds that these were 'too white'

Black lesbians were defined as lesbians who were able to trace their descent:

through one or both parents, to Africa, Asia, the Middle East, China, including the Pacific nations, Latin America, the original inhabitants of Australasia, North America, or the islands of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. (Hensman, 1995, p. 24)

The term 'black' was therefore seen as political and coalitional and as being based on communities' shared experiences of and struggles against imperialism and colonialism, as it was quite widely understood within social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly those influenced by the Left. Hensman herself in her chapter recognises that this definition has been contested for not reflecting the significant diversity amongst these groupings. In fact the term has been contested for many years in the academic literature (for a recent review of the debates see Peter Aspinall (2002) who suggests that political blackness is heading for demise). However, rather than restricting the definition of 'black' to people of African descent, as is more common now, organisers of LBC black activities have retained its coalitional and pan-ethnic connotations. In their publicity for these events, the term people of colour is now used instead of black, such being more recently defined as: 'anybody with one or more parent from African, Asian, Caribbean descent, as well as those from East Asia and Latin America' (London Buddhist Centre, 2007).

The usage of the term people of colour is to encourage people who do not originate from African and Caribbean communities to attend black events. Nonetheless, the majority of attendees of LBC black events tend to be African (largely people from the African-Caribbean diaspora) with a few Asian people. The organising team for black events has not yet succeeded in finding an alternative term that all people from its target groups are likely to identify with.

Over the years the target group for these events broadened from black lesbians only to black women during the early 1990s and from there to black people generally in the mid 1990s. Even so, the majority of attendees are black women, with black men usually being a small minority (often only one or two

men out of a total group of ten to twenty). This has been a concern to the organising group who have sought to encourage more men to join it, as it has feared that its predominantly female membership may be off-putting for men who wish to come to people of colour events. In addition, an informal support group for men of colour interested in Buddhism has developed which has met on an *ad hoc* basis.

4.3 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF RESEARCH SAMPLE

Fourteen people who identified as people of colour were interviewed. All were at various levels of involvement in the Movement but the numbers who defined as regulars, *Mitras* and Order members are not given in the table below as these might allow people to be personally identified. To get a sense of who in communities of colour the Movement was appealing to, all interviewees (not just black people) were asked for their: age; level of highest educational qualification: if they or their parents had been immigrants to the UK: personal definition of their social class and that of their parents; (dis)ability status; personal definition of sexuality and ethnicity. The results for interviewees of colour are as follows:

Gender¹	Male (6)	Female (8)		
Age range	26-35 (3)	36-45 (10)	46-60 (1)	
Social class	Not sure (2)	Working class (1)	Educated working class (1)	Middle class (10)
Social class of parents	Working class (9)	Middle class (5)		
Other family members Buddhist?	No (10)	Yes (4)		
Disability status	Disabled (3)	Non-disabled (11)		
Sexuality	Heterosexual (7)	LGBT ² (5)	Undefined (2)	
Was participant immigrant?	Adult immigrant (1)	Childhood immigrant (4)	2 nd generation diaspora (9)	
Education	Under 16 (1)	First degree (6)	Postgraduate diploma (1)	Postgraduate degree (6)
Ethnicity	Black UK (3) Black European (1) Caribbean English (1)	Black Caribbean (3) Afrikan (1) Black African (1)	Asian (Indian) (1) British Asian (1)	Mixed race (2)

Table 4.1: Demographic details of FWBO interviewees of colour

In examining social class for the purposes of this study, occupation and income were regarded as insufficient material from which conclusions could be drawn, especially for this case study. Many interviewees while well educated, had low incomes because they were in low-paid work or unemployed. Others might have chosen a life of voluntary simplicity in which they lived on a minimal income. Since some participants worked for FWBO community businesses earning the minimum wage in an occupation that was regarded as low-skilled or non-professional (e.g. in the retail trade), participants were asked to define their and their parents' social class for themselves and asked for their highest level of educational attainment. Asking about educational attainment gave me a sense of participants' social class based not solely on their *economic capital* but also on their level of what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as *cultural capital*. As discussed in the last chapter, such *cultural capital*, especially where unmarked by 'race' and to some extent gender often improved access to the key principles of the

¹ Proportionately more men than women were included in the sample so as to identify possible reasons for their under-representation in those people of colour who attend the LBC.

² LGBT is short for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered.

FWBO. Furthermore, in several cases, especially for white middle-class people, earning a lower wage in an FWBO community business and living in shared housing as part of a single-sex residential community for several years had enabled them to acquire higher levels of *social capital* (in terms of community networks that could prove extremely valuable in a movement that strongly emphasises friendship between its members as one its technologies of the self). It also facilitated the generation of *symbolic capital* (in terms of status and esteem) within the LBC and in some cases the wider FWBO community.

As can be seen from the above table, the majority of participants (9 out of 14) were 2nd generation immigrants (i.e. their parents were immigrants to the UK) and were aged 36-45. The fact that younger members of the diaspora did not appear to be involved in FWBO activities may accord with Modood's (1997) suggestion that 'the general trend down the generations within every ethnic group is for younger people to be less connected to a religion than their elders'. In line with people who had converted to Buddhism generally, most came from non-Buddhist families and had at most only one Buddhist relative.

5 out of 14 - 35.7% defined as LGBT, over five times the estimated UK average of 5-7%, a high proportion even taking into account the tendency of LGBT people to migrate to major conurbations such as London. This proportion may be in part due to the earliest phases of the outreach programme to people of colour being targeted at black lesbians and then black women. It may also be an effect of the Movement's approaches to gender and sexuality as discussed in the previous chapter. Inaba (2004, pp. 120-121, 132 footnote 113) also reports in his study that the average level of tolerance of homosexuality within the FWBO is significantly higher than the UK average as measured by the European Value Systems group (FWBO mean score 9.23 compared to UK average 3.69) and notes the controversy that has surrounded the Movement around this issue as well as the outreach to gay and lesbian communities undertaken by the FWBO. This tolerance may create a space in which LBGT people of colour feel more comfortable than they might do in other spaces.

Although most participants' parents were working class, the majority in the sample saw themselves as now being middle class, largely because of the level of their educational attainment, and the fact that they were holding down or had held down professional jobs. It is interesting that so many in the sample held postgraduate qualifications (7 out of 14), suggesting a high level of

attainment of cultural capital, even if their stocks of this inherited from their parents were likely to be quite low. This, along with data from white participants, suggests that a high level of *cultural capital* makes it easier to participate in the FWBO. Even the one participant who said he had left school with no qualifications described himself as self-educated and said that he had passed a university access course as a mature student. The proportion of participants of colour who had obtained first or higher degrees (13 out of 14, 92.9%) is significantly higher than that found by Keishin Inaba (2004, pp. 92-93) in his study of altruism within the FWBO (72.9%). I would suggest that this is due to the relative lack of inherited cultural capital for participants of colour compared with white majority ethnic participants. This means that they have to go to greater lengths to acquire the large amount of cultural capital required compared to their white peers. Given the low level of educational attainment and *cultural capital* within most local communities of people of colour this is noteworthy as a possible barrier to local communities' ability to engage with FWBO techniques of the self.

In the next section, I will turn to participants' narratives about how they encountered the Movement, what attracted them to the techniques of the self that it offers and how their negotiations with the Movement's hegemonic discourses had affected their processes of identification around ethnicity and 'race'.

4.4 PEOPLE OF COLOUR'S ENCOUNTERS WITH THE MOVEMENT

Participants' reasons for approaching the Movement and engaging with its techniques of the self came under the following types:

1. Most commonly, wanting to learn meditation because of an interest in personal (or less commonly spiritual or psychic) development or in stress management. This desire might have been triggered by a suggestion by friends, travel, reading, or an interest in 'altered states'. People in this group were rarely bothered whether the meditation they learnt was part of a religious tradition or not, they were just interested in meditation as a technique of the self in its own right.
2. Deciding to pursue an alternative spiritual path from their childhood religion following a personal crisis.
3. Most rarely, curiosity about the LBC as a feature of their local environment and what went on there.

I will give examples from participants' narratives of these processes, starting with Diana. Her initial interest was in learning to meditate in order to discover states of consciousness that she had experienced at various times in her life, especially as an outcome of taking drugs, doing creative writing and dancing in nightclubs. In the early stages, the nature of the religious context of the meditation practice she was doing did not matter to her, more its ability to help her to realise altered, less inhibited states of consciousness. As she told me:

D: I never called it a meditative state but I knew that I got to this place where I lost ego and I could do these things which I just usually wouldn't be able to do. And that was really quite amazing. So through that journey when as I got older I became aware of people who did meditate you know X, there was [also] _ she was called Y then and those kind of people who used to go off and do meditation retreats. And then some mates of mine were doing meditation nearby here, I think transcendental meditation, (I'd like to do more transcendental meditation actually it's quite amazing) and so that was it and I just thought yeah, you know, OK I have a form.

Meditation was primarily useful to her as a *technique of the self* in its own right, as it was originally for almost all participants from the FWBO. Her decision to learn meditation in a Buddhist context arose because her original meditation teacher moved away and several of her friends and acquaintances were learning meditation at the FWBO's London Buddhist Centre.

In contrast, Susie decided to learn about Buddhism because:

Susie: ... one of my motivations for getting involved was a very strong fear of dying. I thought I was going to die. I was 21, 20 actually. I thought I wasn't going to reach my 21st birthday. It was a very strong experience for me. And Buddhism at that time I counted Buddhism, 'cos I had a whole year from 20 to almost 21 where I was in that kind of state of not knowing whether I was gonna live or die, and needing some help and some guidance. And one of the main things for me was that I didn't want to die with any regrets. I wanted to feel that I'd made the most of myself and life. Really like fulfilled my potential if you like. And I wanted to feel that I'd given as much as well to the world. When I encountered Buddhism it kind of showed me that I could do that. It showed me that I could develop my potential to the fullest. It showed me how to not die with regrets. And for me that was living ethically. And it also showed me that there was a path which led to a point where one isn't afraid of death. 'Cos it was a very strong fear, so I was very much looking for I don't want to be afraid of dying. 'Cos I knew intellectually it was a natural process and that all life has to die. But I also knew I was extremely afraid of it and Buddhism showed me that actually you can develop one's mind to the extent that death, you really experience death as just a stage, you know a change. And that actually impermanence or death is

weaving all through life at all times. So I think it gave me a framework, very much gave me a framework to understand my experiences that I was already having, and then gave me guidance to actually develop.

Susie's intense and existential fear of death had been triggered by an experience she had whilst travelling in which she had been at risk of losing her life. This 'fateful moment' (Giddens, 1991b, p. 167) led her to decide to move from being a lapsed Christian into an altogether different religious tradition with which she had minimal contact as a child. In this case, the techniques of the self were the package of Buddhist practices presented by the FWBO, with their offer of a new religious identity that seemed more promising to Susie. This package presented her with a methodical approach to developing the self that could help her overcome her anxiety about death.

Mike's initial contact with the LBC however, was entirely accidental as the result of a bet he made with his workmates:

Int: Can you tell us why you decided to learn about meditation?

Mike: As a bet. I used to work around the corner from London Buddhist Centre in the early 90s and my colleague or someone who used to work in the same building as me although not necessarily in the same organisation we're friends and we used to go to lunch at I can't remember the name of the café but it's in the café called the Cherry Orchard and they used to have a grocery shop which was run unbeknown to me by the FWBO but it had a certain feel to it and then these people used to disappear and go behind this red door which I now know is the London Buddhist centre but I didn't know what it was. And we used to go past every day and at the time there was this time, there was this what I now know as a *Windhorse* but there was this big mural fresco of this horse which could be seen, which was visible from the street. And so every time we used to go past, after we'd gone to the Cherry Orchard we'd all go into the grocery, forgotten the name of the grocer's shop to get our lunch we'd see this horse and we'd say 'What the hell is that?' And we'd see these people come out and disappear behind these doors, not knowing what was going on. So we had this bet saying whoever went in first, found out what was going on would get a bottle of wine. So being the drinker that I was I was here to win this prize so I think the next week or so, a couple of weeks later drummed up the courage to just ring that doorbell and go in. And I did. And of course it was a lunchtime, 'cos that was the only time I had to do it, and they were running these lunchtime classes. So I went in, and there was a lovely comfy lunchtime class, and I thought 'Oh well what is this class?', they said 'meditation class' I thought 'Well all right I'll try it' and so I tried it and the rest is history as they say.

Int: Right, right. So basically you almost learnt about meditation by accident. You weren't thinking 'Oh I want to do it'?

Mike: No. I wanted to win the bet.

Int: It didn't matter that you were looking for Buddhist meditation either?

Mike: No, no.

4.5 FWBO AND PEOPLE OF COLOUR: FURTHER POINTS OF ATTRACTION

In developing involvement further, in most cases, having learnt meditation, interest in Buddhism itself gradually and organically developed as the individual observed it having a positive cumulative effect upon them. For example, in Diana's words:

D: I decided to learn about, it just really trickled. I went on a retreat and I was just so inspired by generosity. I remembered thinking I was getting bored of the Wednesday class thinking 'Oh I want something a bit more' and it was too beginnerish and I started going to Thursday class and I remember sitting there thinking I must be an idiot if I think this isn't having an effect. And so it really subtly went in really. And I think what it was, is that I actually let go, I actually did let go of my Christian faith when I was in Jerusalem. I actually let go of it and was very aware that I'd let go of it. And it wasn't like I felt like, although it was quite traumatic that I did let go of it, it wasn't like 'Oh my God I've got to find something to fill it.' I'd let go of it but then I'd filled it with drugs and whatever really, so hence it just naturally kind of came into my life really. I had no; I didn't have a death or anything like that to think 'Oh my God I want to know about the meaning of life'. And then I suppose at the end it was very womb-like. I feel like Buddhism has been very womb-like really. And I feel I've actually got to a point where I have to start growing and maturing as an adult with Buddhism 'cos I've been like a kid, a child with Buddhism and you know it has really held me. And it's been very nurturing for me but now I need to really grow and take it further.

The image Diana uses for her process of conversion to Buddhism as a positive gestation period is interesting given her childhood difficulties with an abusive biological mother, and several stints in children's homes and with various foster parents. She decides that rather than continue at this 'child-like' stage she wants the process to develop further and to develop an adult sense of being a Buddhist, someone who is less passive and more independent of the parent while still being positively linked to it.

Others were attracted by ethical practice of Buddhists they saw exemplified at the LBC, for example James:

Int: And why did you decide to learn about Buddhism?

James: Well again I think it was because I was impressed by the way

that some individuals were trying to live and to understand the code that they were trying to live by, it seemed essential to learn about the tradition that they came from.

Int: So you were attracted by Buddhist ethics basically and how it was being lived in people's lives?

James: Yeah. I'd say that was the thing I found most moving, yeah.

From sensing that meditation and their general Buddhist practice was having a positive effect, participants then went on to decide whether or not they were going to become *Mitras* with the FWBO, and sometimes from there to request ordination into the WBO. In their individual process, their willingness to become more involved in the Movement was most strongly affected by how they perceived Movement boundaries of 'race', gender and class and we will discuss these in more depth in a later section of this chapter.

Other issues that arose to a lesser extent were:

1. The participant's personal position regarding the notion of 'spiritual hierarchy' within the Movement wherein greater authority is held by those who are perceived to be most spiritually committed and mature relative to authority being held by the individual and their sense of their developing experience.
2. The participant's perception of religious exclusivism (in terms of Buddhism generally and/or other religions/spiritual traditions) by the Movement and having to personally endorse such a stance to demonstrate their commitment to it.
3. Perceiving that deepening involvement would give rise to greater access to techniques of the self provided by the Movement that would assist their personal process of self-development as well as more opportunities for leadership within the Movement, i.e. that by becoming a *Mitra* or Order member they would have access to: training in different meditation practices; in-depth *Dharma* study; more in-depth retreats and opportunities to teach and lead meditation and Buddhism classes within the Movement.
4. Their sense of personally meeting Movement criteria for ordination/becoming a *Mitra* and their willingness to make what were seen to be the necessary changes for this.

In terms of (1) and (2) above, these factors could be seen as manifestations of trends towards secularisation that discourage exclusivist claims by religions and encourage increasing individualisation and

personalisation of religion that is giving way to an emphasis on spirituality (Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Szerszynski, & Tusting, 2005). However, they were not mentioned by white interviewees as issues, so perhaps cannot be just seen as part of this wider trend within society being demonstrated within the second generations of the people of colour diaspora. Perhaps they can also be seen as reluctance to give predominant authority to what is perceived as a 'white' institution and a wish to reserve this to what are developing as highly hybrid ethnic and religious experiences. This hybridity is felt by the participant to be necessary for developing an integrated narrative of the self, bringing disparate strands of the self together, where one's childhood religion may be a focal point of diaspora culture. For example, as one Caribbean woman called Sheila who was brought up Catholic described her 'shopping-basket' and New Age approach to religion:

Sheila: People aren't comfortable with it because I'm like 'Well actually I'll take that bit and I don't want that bit. And I'll take that bit and I don't want that bit.' You know if you're uncomfortable with that then that's OK. But you want to take everything as you take the whole can of it whole. I can't do that. It's not in my nature. It is not what I came to do. And specifically being of proud African-Caribbean heritage I've always in my bones, in the morning I wake when I see myself in the mirror I see my Caribbean heritage and I'm so proud of it. I am not about to leave it and take up somebody's culture from the sub-continent. This does not wash with me. If I believe even a teeny bit in reincarnation I came here as a Caribbean person for a reason. I don't come here as an Algerian. I don't come here as a Botswanan. I didn't come here as Tamil. I did not come here as a Pakistani. I came here as somebody from the diaspora that had gone from Africa, the Caribbean to London. And there's something specific about that combination I have come here with my soul to explore. I am not about to just jettison that and wholeheartedly take on either Tibetan stuff or South Asian stuff or whatever. I didn't come to take your stuff on board. I came here to explore my Caribbean-ness and what it means to be human in this skin. And that's one of the major clashes I find about the institutional structures about speaking in Pali, speaking in Sanskrit. I can't bear that speaking in Sanskrit stuff you know? I think in creole. Creole is my language. I like my language. I can't just leave all my community behind for you.

During our interview, I found myself understanding Sheila's statement as indicating the terms on which she wished to engage in a hybrid tradition such as Western Buddhism. In our interaction, Sheila's statement at this point did not jar with me in the way that it might have done had Sheila been white and majority ethnic, where I would have read the statement as indicating that the interviewee wished to maintain the integrity of their whiteness. I found myself

feeling some sympathy with Sheila's statement, especially as in another part of her interview she was highly critical of the ways in which white people engaged with the westernising Buddhism enterprise in ways that she thought sought to appropriate Asian cultures. Sheila was specifying that she was speaking from a 'racially' subjugated standpoint, and sought to obtain access to teachings in terms she could more readily access. As always, hybridity is about rejecting some identities and not others. Exercises of hybridity that hegemonise whiteness, such as those seen in Western convert Buddhist movements such as the F/WBO (Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and Western Buddhist Order), are distinct from those of subjects positively seeking to negotiate the experiences of enslavement, colonialism and forced migration that are key aspects of the African Caribbean diasporic experience.

Sheila is therefore suggesting that her particular experience of being from the African diaspora means that she wishes to develop her spirituality in a way that develops that heritage, and acknowledges her transnational links and biography, rather than require that she take on the trappings of another ethnic culture, even if it is one usually associated with people of colour. For her, being a member of the African diaspora means that she has to build on being part of the Black Atlantic (to use Paul Gilroy's term). Developing her multi-sited and hybrid nature for her is a fundamental element of her spiritual practice ('there's something specific about that combination I have come here with my soul to explore. I am not about to jettison that'), and is not to be subordinated to the cultural requirements of any religious or spiritual ideology that for instance require her to speak words in a language that is not her own (even 'traditionally Buddhist' languages such as Pali or Sanskrit). It is as if by being already displaced (as a woman of African/Caribbean heritage) she does not wish to undergo further dislocation by taking on cultural trappings that are alien to her as part of her spiritual quest. She is asserting that being from the African-Caribbean diaspora makes her uniquely historically positioned to explore post-colonial interchangeable identities because her experience of forced and voluntary migration makes her able to grasp the doubleness of the post-colonial.³

This point also relates to the need to recognise the particular transnational links and biographies that have varying implications for people of

³ I am grateful to Rebekah Lee for this insight.

colour from different ethnic groups. More on this area is brought out by Beth, an African-Caribbean woman, in her interview (21/11/2000) where she describes her experience of a pilgrimage to India to visit Buddhist sites. This was to lead her to have second thoughts about her involvement with the FWBO and to withdraw from the Movement for a while on her return to the UK.

I went to India last year. We went to do the Buddhist sites, a kind of pilgrimage, Buddhist sites. I didn't really know what India would be about and I thought I'd gone there with no assumptions. But as the experience went on, I had gone there with assumptions. One of the things that surprised me about India was the mix of Hinduism of Buddhism together. At the time I couldn't quite be clear about either of them. It was too mixed. There wasn't, it didn't have a distinction. So that was a little bit about my having second thoughts. And also I wasn't particularly inspired by the sites I went to. I found India as a whole, the religious aspects; I thought India would be a spiritual place that was my assumption. And I found it also to be a very materialistic place. That's what I found and I found that surprising. And that it's so mixed in with religion. So like if you went to a temple there'd be people asking you for money. And we're not talking beggars; we're talking people who are living in that way. And also I went with a group of, I was one black woman among at some points, we were there for five, four weeks. I was a black woman among five white women, four or five white women. And I found that, very painful in India to be a black woman among five white women, because the assumptions the Indians put on our relationship which were, one place we went to was, a group of boys or teenagers came round and they asked if I was their slave, you know, the group of women, I was a slave to these women. They couldn't see that there was an equal relationship. I had to be in a subordinate position. And I found that painful. But the biggest thing I found painful about India was the level of being looked at. Being looked at by, being a novelty. I felt I was a novelty in India. You know I'd either get crowds of people round me wanting to touch my hair. Or just very, very direct stares. Very direct looking. And I wasn't used to that. In England you're not visible. People don't look at you. Or I don't look at people. And it was a shock. And it was quite relentless in India. So that kind of put me off because I didn't feel supported by the group I was in as well. I didn't feel supported by them. They couldn't understand my experience. Oh I don't know if they couldn't but I felt that we were distant in my experience. I just felt not supported. And what was I practising? 'Cos I was going round to these sites and they didn't mean much to me. And I, you know, I see all this what's supposedly Buddhist iconography, Buddhist figures and they're Hindu figures. You know it was like a whole identity kind of. I didn't know my identity there. And people couldn't place me in England. They had no experience; they didn't have any idea that there were black people in England. It was also a thing of, I must come from Africa. Africa, Africa, Africa. They couldn't see me. They may sometimes the Caribbean, but mostly it was Africa. So for three, four months after I came back I didn't particularly want to come to LBC at all. I didn't meditate. You know I

didn't have very much contact with them at the Centre after that. Although I'd had asked to be a *mitra* before I went. And kind of set back my becoming a *mitra* because I wasn't meditating. I stopped meditating because the experience was too painful. I think on hindsight now that I'm looking back at it, it felt too painful, for me to be directly dealing with it through meditating. All that was thrown up about identity, where did I belong? I didn't belong here. I didn't belong in India. What am I doing in India? And the poverty. And what you're seeing. It was raw. It was raw. Raw experience.

Her experience of feeling that there was no place for her in India and that she was not recognised by other Indians as a pilgrim unlike the white woman in her group proved to be extremely painful ('I didn't know my identity there'). The Indians around her could not appreciate her position as a member of the African diaspora whose primary location was in the West and to a lesser extent in the Caribbean. Beth became an African Other who could not be as easily placed within the local Indian imaginary unlike her white companions. She was not seen as equal to the Indians (as a fellow person of colour/postcolonial subject) or to white people "they asked if I was their slave." Perhaps Beth is experiencing the approach the Indians she engaged with had taken to Africa as a result of colonial stereotypes circulating at the time of the British Empire. An experience that Beth believes will inspire her faith in Buddhism (the pilgrimage) throws her full-frontal into the messiness of the postcolonial as she also witnesses hybridities she had not anticipated, i.e. the hybridity of Buddhism with Hinduism in India. Although she is a Buddhist in the land where Buddhism was born, she finds herself 'a stranger in a strange land'. The white women in her group are unable to relate to her 'raw' experience and can continue in their more privileged position in which they can place their own gaze upon India without question, leaving Beth feeling 'unsupported'.

However, Asian participants who came from India found their connection to Buddhism fitted well with their transnational links and biographies. James mentioned that he had learnt about Buddhism at school and said:

I already had a background to know that meditation was a good thing, and that I hadn't really cracked it myself, not that I think I've cracked it now, but then I hadn't found a motive to really get into it more. But through conversations with some of those people [in the FWBO] I started to feel "Well yes I'd like to give it a try". And I think something of the background of the story of the Buddha from ancient India, you know two and a half thousand years ago, that's something I felt I could connect with because of my own, you know, links with north India and so on, and my own understanding of Hinduism, I felt it was a general background so it wasn't completely alien.

The transnational links of these participants were fortuitously acknowledged by the Movement, one participant having his *Mitra* ceremony in India and another being ordained there, rituals whose location felt particularly significant and appropriate to them both.

In the next section I will further discuss how participants went on to negotiate their position in the Movement.

4.6 NEGOTIATING SPACE IN THE MOVEMENT: PEOPLE OF COLOUR'S APPROACHES

People of colour who had had inclinations to become more involved in the Movement often in practice negotiated the aspects mentioned in the previous section as part of their ongoing involvement. Most of the strategies expressed concern at the white and middle-class ethos of the Movement. However, there was a spectrum of attitudes depending on the extent to which people felt like 'fish in water', a term that Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127) uses to make the following theoretical point:

And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a "fish in water": it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted.

In other words, the level of ease that someone experiences within a social world will depend on the extent to which that world relates to their conditioning around class, 'race', gender and other axes of difference.

In terms of the first category of '*being like a fish in water*', this only applied to one case. This was a participant of colour who unlike other interviewees of colour, worked in a team-based Right Livelihood and lived in a community. He felt that, due to the lack of explicit racism within the Movement, it provided a space in which he could practise with ease and little difficulty. As he said about his response to the Movement:

You see partly what's, my upbringing I guess at school and at university I've been used to being the only non-white person, the only black ... person. So most of my friends most of my life have been white people, do you know what I mean? Certainly all my colleagues at work, most of them were white anyway. So it's not that I felt particularly out of place in that sort of environment. So I think I've had an advantage in that sense, because although I wasn't born here, I was certainly very young when I came here.

He therefore drew on his significant life experience of negotiating predominantly white (and middle-class) environments that had helped to shape his *habitus* and thus was able to engage with the Movement with relative ease compared to

most participants of colour. This certainly did not mean that he was at variance with his ethnic community of origin and his family, as he continued to maintain contact with them and he described their approach to his Buddhist faith as extremely positive. Perhaps this explains why in terms of diversity issues, this participant (who also, at the time of his interview, held a prominent position in the LBC) tended to agree with the predominant opinion of Council members outlined in the previous chapter.

The second range of attitudes I term as: '*Keeping one's eyes on the prize*'. This involved working to meet the requirements for ordination/becoming a *Mitra* on the basis that it was access to Buddhism and its techniques of the self as provided by the Movement that one wanted above all else. This was usually based on strong commitment and belief in efficacy of meditation as a technique of the self. People in this category however, were I suggest like fish who felt the weight of the water upon them yet determinedly continued to swim in it. Like the person who 'felt at home', participants drew on the skills they had developed while engaging in other predominantly white environments. As Antonia (04/04/2001) said:

I was used to getting on with my life without having myself physically reflected back by other black people. And I was so, so determined to become a Buddhist that, that was my main thing. I think I've quite a strong independent streak, and I felt the fact that there was nobody, no black person was there to reflect me back wasn't a major factor. It may be for other people but it wasn't for me.

At the same time, participants in this part of the spectrum would also continue to maintain contact with the community of their ethnic origin to provide support for that aspect of their identity. She went on to say:

I think for a black person to get involved with the WBO you have to be quite courageous, you've got to have quite a bit of backbone. You know there's no one to share a joke with in patois for example, or the sort of gestures and nuances of my upbringing as a woman of Afro-Caribbean descent. I've generally had to go outside to find others with whom I could interact with in that sort of way. But ultimately what I'm trying to do with the FWBO is the, is more important for me than those other things. I've been prepared to sacrifice those, but it's also been very important for me to maintain my links, both black and white, but particularly with my black friends, it's been really important for me to retain those links whilst I forge my commitment to the FWBO. Of course I wish there'd been someone there I could share a patois joke with or make a gesture which would have meaning. Yes. Or talk about certain books that you'd read, which is putting a particular Afrocentric perspective. But I think that's slowly changing. But it's a slow process, very slow, and I've had to learn to be patient.

Participation in the Movement therefore required a person of colour to have determination because people in this group needed to prioritise working towards their spiritual aspirations over having their felt needs from their ethnic identity and postcolonial predicament being met. These needs are met largely by people of colour from outside the Movement. I would liken this situation to being LGBT in a heteronormative environment. While there might be no hostility directed against a LGBT person in such a context, the prevailing culture is not one that reflects one's desires and cultural interest as fully as one might like. One therefore finds oneself on the margins of such an environment, at least to some extent, and having to mobilise psychic resources in order to feel a significant part of the space.

People in the third category chose a strategy of what I call, '*Vocally dissenting participation*.' This involved engaging in processes for deepening involvement in the Movement while more vocally expressing opposition to tenets which one disagreed with and in some cases 'breaking the rules'. In such cases, participants would indicate that their identity as a Buddhist did not mean identifying exclusively with the Movement, even if it was the main context they had chosen for their practice. For example, for Diana, in terms of her feelings about Sangharakshita being regarded as her teacher:

Diana: ... Sometimes I have real thinks, 'Yes I do want to, I know that I'm Buddhist'. I suppose the thing which although I asked for ordination quite early on, it took me three years to go because I had a lot of resentment and anger.

Int: You mean three years to go to *Tiratana*?

Diana: Yeah. Around the Movement it being so white etc. But I suppose at the end of the day for me it's I most probably will get ordained into the FWBO but what I'm aware of is that you know and it's that the FWBO isn't going to be only place for me to practise. That's what I'm aware of. And it's whether I know that I'm Buddhist. I know that. And quite honestly I just feel like well Bhante's one of my teachers but quite honestly he's not the only teacher. ... But I know that I'm Buddhist. It's not a problem.

At the time of her interview, Diana was a *Mitra* involved in the ordination process. One of the conditions for being accepted as a *Mitra* at that time stipulated that the *Mitra* would not 'shop around', i.e. go to other Buddhist groups, as part of their commitment to the Movement. This was even more of an expectation for those involved in the ordination process. Diana went on to

say when asked whether she had experienced any conflict between being a Buddhist practising in the FWBO and her cultural or ethnic identity:

Diana: No I haven't because I see Buddhism as bigger than the FWBO. ... See, the FWBO is just a framework and I do not see Buddhism as FWBO. Very far from it. I see that actually, FWBO is a product of Buddhism really. That's how I look at it. I think there's too many people in the Movement (in chanting tones) 'Oh Bhante, Bhante and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order', and 'If it wasn't for Bhante' and I think 'Get a life' because quite honestly Bhante is an amazing person and he is a vessel of the Buddha. There are many and he is somebody who's become a vessel and who's been a teacher but actually you know it was really refreshing when I heard an Order member, a very experienced Order member say 'Oh that's one of Bhante's theories', it's not [absolutely] true. And we're taught that and I remember that was around the Higher Evolution. We were taught that and the way we were taught 'This is the Word' and I was thinking it was really refreshing when you hear Order members actually acknowledging 'Well actually Bhante did have theories, but they're not necessarily right.'

Diana's approach therefore was to ignore hegemonic discourses within the Movement and its exclusivist claims and 'just get on with it'. Her position is analogous to the one given by the Black female sociologist Felly Nkweto Simmonds (1997) who says about her position within academia "In this white world I am a fresh water fish that swims in sea water. I feel the weight of the water ... on my body" (*ibid.* 227).

At the same time Diana took comfort from the increasing debate around the place of Sangharakshita and his teachings within the Movement occurring in its 'post-Sangharakshita' phase arising from his retirement as head of the Movement, and the increasing decentralisation taking place. However, for others in this category, vocal disagreement, if felt to be futile (as some participants of colour who had attempted to engage in it found in the Movement's less 'open' period), could result in them choosing to become members of the next category or leaving the Movement altogether.

The fourth and last position was, '*Staying on the fringes of the Movement*' feeling like fish out of the water altogether, in some cases waiting until the aquatic climate was more conducive to them. This category includes people who are *Mitras* and some who have requested ordination yet are not significantly involved in the LBC and its institutions. Some in this group decided (for example, after engaging in dialogue on issues that concern them) that the FWBO would not be the principal institution for their future spiritual

development. Some were 'waiting' until the Movement 'came round' to a position they could more comfortably live with. For example, Steven, who expressed interest in becoming a *Mitra* but had difficulty with the expectation that *Mitras* be vegetarian, said:

Steven: I can understand they want me to stop smoking dope and I have more or less anyway. Because it's for my own character and for my own good and so forth. But when it comes to eating meat, well the way I see it is, last time on a Summer retreat, I was watching the bees dropping out there with the pesticides that are being sprayed. And I was watching the birds eating the dizzy bees, and I've often been at a waterhole and found a dead fox, or a dead this when I'm out in the wild doing my stuff. And basically I know the modern methods of farming that are killing whole sections of the earth. They're having to import topsoil 'cos they've killed all the worms, beetles and all the things that put the nutrients back in the earth. So to my mind, yeah? to kill a whole section of earth, along with a million insects along with a load of small fowl, along with badgers and foxes and so on and so forth unwittingly, is worse than to sacrifice one cow for a piece of meat readily. So although many people would argue against that, that's not the issue. The issue is that if I'm faced with an Hobson's choice, which I am because of my budget, yeah? That I can't afford organic foods. Therefore I'm faced with a choice of two evils. And if someone wants to put a limitation even on that choice, they're wrong, yeah? So as long as that's part of what you need to do to be a *Mitra*, then I don't want to be a *Mitra*, because there'll be this bone of contention there and it will get in the way, it will make me feel resentful. So I decided, but after discussing that with [the then men's *Mitra* convenor for the LBC], he's basically saying that the *Mitra* system is changing, and is going to change so that people can do it when they feel they're ready. Should that happen I'd request to be a *Mitra* tomorrow.

Steven is talking about how due to his financial situation (living on benefits) he is unable to have a vegetarian diet that is based on organic food which given modern farming methods he would consider to be more ethical. Therefore he feels he has no choice but to have a diet which includes meat. His ability to practise what is seen in the Movement as an 'ethical choice' is limited by his lack of financial resources, but at the time of the interview that is not recognised by the Movement, so Steven has to wait until such recognition of his situation arises.

However they came to be in this category, the majority continue to use the Movement's techniques of the self while having minimal if any involvement (e.g. attending general classes or retreats, or activities for people of colour from time to time). So in arriving at their respective positions in the Movement, what

were the boundaries in terms of 'race' and class which participants felt they had encountered as part of their involvement and how had they approached these?

4.7 PARTICIPANTS' AND FWBO BOUNDARIES OF 'RACE'

As argued in the previous chapter, participants of colour often found themselves encountering racist attitudes. These were described as occurring frequently and operating at every level of commitment in the Movement, from Order members 'downwards'. It was rare that hostility would be expressed to people of colour, but there was a process of making them 'Other' and 'outsiders' through the unwitting application of direct and more subtle boundaries towards people of colour within the Movement.

4.7.1 Direct boundaries

Here the Othering process would involve things like putting hands in people of colour's hair, especially if they were of African descent, treating people of colour as exotica. Other examples would be the use of the word *white* to mean purity and *black* to mean impurity, evil even.

4.7.2 Subtle boundaries

These were more common and like those discussed in the previous chapter were often experienced as excluding people of colour who went to mixed events. Sheila, at the time of her interview was still quite upset about her experience at a mixed women's retreat that she had attended some months previously. At that stage she had decided that she was a Buddhist and wanted to become a *Mitra*. Yet, as she found out more about the Movement, she became increasingly disillusioned with it. However, it was her experience of racism on the retreat along with other associated factors that led her to decide to withdraw from the Movement altogether, and to feel that 'to know FWBO was to not like them.' While on the retreat she was ignored and ostracised, leaving her to become distressed to the point of tears, and during the interview she experienced distress and anger at the memory of this, even though several months had passed. As she said in her interview:

Sheila: I don't need to put my skin amongst you. You can be how you like but I don't need to put my skin amongst you, that's simple as that. I'm sure that I can put my black backside in a Catholic church. I'd rather do that when that church is full of people like me.

She felt unable to complain about how she was treated, because she felt she lacked the support of the organisers of the retreat, one of whom she sensed

was racist in a 'benevolent, patronising' manner. Sheila also was chronically ill at the time, leaving her feeling less confident about mounting a challenge to the covert, yet high level of racism she was facing.

Sheila: ... it wasn't overt. No one would ever say to you, I know, I respect working class people 'cos they say to you 'Fuck off nigger'. I know where I stand with you. But this subtle sitting down at the table and fucking never catching my eye and never looking at me, never talking to me.

Int.: Not including you.

Sheila: How do you put your finger on it? You know you can't challenge that. 'Cos the minute you challenge it you become aggressive.

Int.: Yeah.

Sheila: And it was there. It was going on all the time. (recording indistinct at this point) ten days (recording indistinct at this point) It's not easy. You have to be very active not including that person.

She therefore felt that attempting to challenge the situation would only worsen matters and give rise to an effusive liberal denial that racism was involved. However, things on the retreat took a twist Sheila was to find particularly offensive:

Sheila: ... not everybody excluded me. There was that girl who was (recording indistinct at this point) actually there were two like that. And then there were the other ones who didn't look on me when I first arrived (recording indistinct at this point) and I opened my mouth and went 'Oh. She's not an angry young black woman. She's quite nice actually. We can talk to her.' And suddenly you become their best friend. Which is a different type of racism. But it's that kind of 'You need to be like us if you're really cultured' type racism. But it's still racism. And then the time that they're nice and friendly to you 'Oh you're so nice. You're so great. We really like you.' Actually you didn't talk to me for two days, you waited for me to prove myself. I don't need to prove myself to you. It's a different type of racism. It's that sort of 'You need to come over to us'. Well actually I'm not coming over to you. I didn't change. For the last I'm still Sheila. And by that same token if my sister had come here what would you do to her? You'd have excluded her for the whole time? Articulate middle class people only please. Er 'scuse me, I don't want that shit. For me once you start demeaning me and then effusively praising me I know something you wanna do some story on me and I don't deal with that. You get (recording indistinct at this point) they're afraid of you 'cos they see you as the - God - black person with a chip on their shoulder, then you open your mouth and 'Oh she hasn't got a chip on her shoulder she's alright after all.'

Int.: Yeah, yeah. They relate to you on the basis of their anxieties because they're white. Their anxieties as white people rather than you as a person in your own right.

Sheila: Absolutely, absolutely. Absolutely. Yet I feel that as an insult to not just me but to my sister who's less articulate than me who's extraordinarily working class, to my mother, to my father, to my community, to all my family. I feel that as an insult to my family and to my people, I feel that as an insult to them. And that's when I get furious. Because that gatekeeping racism that we'll let you through won't let me through. And Sheila has the right to turn her back to it. People say 'Don't worry about it 'cos you'll get through, you'll get through.' I'm not worried about me who gets through, 'cos in a sense I do get through. It's not me I'm worried about. It's more my community. And you understand that you insult my community, you'll understand why I'm upset.

I have included this extract at length because it shows, I would argue quite clearly, Sheila's experience of feeling unwelcome by other women on the retreat on the basis of their stereotypical views of her as an African-Caribbean and working class woman, which although never stated are clearly communicated by their avoiding her throughout the retreat. Sheila feels so vulnerable during the retreat on account of her illness that she feels unable to request exemption she requires from the work rota, something that as an ill (in fact disabled) woman she is entitled to do. Perhaps because she feels she is standing out enough already, she feels unable to ask for 'more space', even if it is space that she is entitled to as an ill/disabled retreatant. Furthermore, being ill and marked with disability she feels more vulnerable and unable to assert herself. Perhaps she already feels marked enough by her 'race' and class that she does not wish to draw attention to another 'difference' she has.

Sheila's experience of racism relates back to Fanon's (1986, pp. 109-140) observations in his chapter 'The Fact of Blackness' when he recollects the maelstrom of emotions he feels when confronted by a white girl who persistently shouts at her mother, 'Look, a Negro!' and then later shouts: 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' In this way, Fanon's body is being inscribed by whiteness as pathological, a source of terror. Thus Sheila experiences her own black body as a signal to terror that signifies that white women on the retreat must avoid her. I would argue within a context of a religious retreat situation, where one can often become more open and vulnerable, this is an especially loaded situation for a person of colour to be in.

When one white woman on the retreat 'discovers' that Sheila is not 'aggressive' she offers her the olive branch of being an 'honorary white', like the exceptional Negro history teacher/physician Fanon (1986, p. 117) refers to who is tolerated as an exception to the rule – a sign that whiteness practises

universality rather than racist exclusion. This 'offer' however backfires as Sheila, while not confronting the woman making the offer, does not graciously receive it, feeling further insulted by it, experiencing it as patronising and condescending. She does not wish to be included on white women's terms but to be recognised as someone who is entitled to partake of the space as a human being as of right, not as a gift of whiteness. Later in the interview she repeatedly explained to me how the benefits she used to pay for the retreat on which she had been so maltreated were 'hard-earned' by her parents' contribution to the UK's economy. Thus a retreat that Sheila was hoping would confirm her faith and desire to be a fuller member of the community represented by the FWBO was one that gave her the strong impression that she could not safely share the space. The 'gatekeeping racism' Sheila refers to in which boundaries are initially set and then removed was never explicit, yet no less devastating in its effect – the effect of power.

In Mike's case, he found himself excluded at *Padmaloka* (the national retreat centre for men in the FWBO) even more subtly through a failure to genuinely connect with him as a black man. It was this along with a feeling that his concerns about hegemonic discourses around 'race' and gender were not being addressed that led him also to withdraw from the Movement.

Mike: It's difficult to say because most of the time that which was spoken in silence so it wasn't that anybody said anything. I mean again this is difficult to talk about because often when I talk about, in talking about relationships with whiteness often you know, we have to work in the realms of these experiences are not recognised in evidential terms, often it's a feeling. Like if I were in a space with white people and I think you know, 'I'm encountering racism' in terms of the how and you know, right down what was said that was racist, well it doesn't to me work like that. It often is either a tone or a feeling, an atmosphere that gets generated and it's very rarely anything that anybody says, it's rarely anything that anybody does, but there's an atmosphere and a feeling that's generated which in general seemed to me to be quite hostile to me. And then there's also there's, bit difficult to put again to name it, but kind of like clubbiness, a kind of I don't know and again this is nothing in the way that both masculinity works and whiteness works where there become these means of association which again, don't, aren't necessarily named, in fact they work precisely because they're not named, they just happen, they just work like that and I felt an outsider. Not because again anybody said anything or did anything but because this association was seen to be taking place of which I was not a part.

Int.: So you feel you were being frozen out?

Mike: I couldn't even put it as strongly as that.

Int.: Was it that the language to use things was particular?

Mike: I'm sorry it's really difficult to name it. It wasn't frozen out. I mean that comes closest to describing it, but it wasn't actually that. There was almost chilliness around it. And I dunno I find this in terms of white male association in general. There's a kind of association that as a black man I am not, I do not associate in that way. I don't have this kind of, there's a kind of, it's not just a coldness towards me it's a coldness they have in their own association with each other which I cannot participate in because I don't associate in that way. And it wasn't that I was being frozen out because people did talk to me, they were quite friendly to me. Order member X, you know, I spent a lot of time with him talking to him. But it's about the way that white men associate with one another in you know, almost exclusively white male settings. There's a particular kind of way that white men associate and I've noticed it not just there but in other places.

Int.: Is it, I'm just trying to think about, you were talking about white male association. Are you talking about the white male association that you get very often in kinds of sort of like mainstream power structures?

Mike: Yes.

Int.: Like say Civil Service for example?

Mike: Yeah.

Int.: So it's almost like this kind of milieu was manifesting in that setting?

Mike: Yes, absolutely.

Int.: So what happens is there's an idea about who the normal subject is?

Mike: Yes, perfect.

Int.: And who the average person is?

Mike: Yeah.

Int.: And one in that session doesn't realise that one is really talking very much Richard Dyer again, one doesn't realise one is just talking about oneself?

Mike: Yeah.

Int.: But you think that you're talking about the whole of humanity.

Mike: Yes, exactly. There's a normalisation process going on, definitely. Definitely. Where yes, the white male subject is being constructed and the ways in which they speak, their gestures, their interaction is all.

Int.: Their worldviews.

Mike: Their worldviews, everything.

Int.: Are being constructed as the universal subject.

Mike: Yep.

Int.: But you're not because you're not the white male, you're not the universal subject so you feel excluded.

Mike: That's it. That's it. But that happens without being pointed out. Nobody points to you and says 'You are not the universal subject', you are just not a part of that.

In this interview, my interchange with Mike shows the shared understanding of whiteness and racism we have arrived at through our respective insights from our academic study and personal experience. Mike's account suggests again that, unwittingly, space is silently being demarcated. He experiences his fellow white male (and quite likely, predominantly middle-class) retreatants communicating their concerns and the subject matter of their lives as if their situations apply to everyone and as if their opinions represent a universal perspective and the norm. Because he does not have the appropriate *habitus*, Mike cannot participate on equal terms, because the terms on which he is being asked to be 'just one of the guys' are inscribed with whiteness, and quite probably being middle-class. No one explicitly says to Mike that he cannot inhabit the space at *Padmaloka*, but implicitly lines of demarcation are being drawn. And where racism is seen in Garcia's (1999) terms 'as a motivational/volitional matter, in short, as a form of moral viciousness', challenges of racism are automatically ruled out on the ground that no such viciousness is taking place. Thus whiteness can continue its normalising practices and espouse its partial, privileged and relative perspective as the universal one.

4.7.3 Challenging boundaries of 'race'

Some participants of colour reported that they had attempted to challenge racism within the Movement and that this had been effective. Women were more likely to report this than men. Others felt that the challenge had had no effect whatsoever and that people had responded by being defensive and guilty and the critic felt frustrated by this. Many said that they had at times not challenged incidences of racism because it was so prevalent within the Movement and they felt 'battle-weary,' were concerned not to be labelled as 'troublemakers' so prioritised what challenges they made, or that they sometimes 'couldn't be bothered'. Some were also concerned that any criticism they made was constructive, so in some cases were waiting to find the best way to express their concerns.

We will now go on to discuss participants' experiences of class boundaries within the Movement.

4.8 PARTICIPANTS' AND FWBO BOUNDARIES OF CLASS

Lower class people were more likely to be excluded by LBC activities through not having the '*savoir faire*' that middle-class users were more likely to have in terms of their communication and knowledge of art and high culture, in other words through not having the higher level of cultural capital and *habitus* that middle-class people were likely to have. These cultural boundaries were seen to operate quite subtly, Philip for example observed:

Philip: ... And also there's the whole notion of the social you know, all organisations have agendas, although the FWBO is based on a spiritual er agenda, you know, it's composed of people with real prejudices, you know, er, with class differences, you know and a lot of er, there is a lot of class differences built in into the way the organisation works, which is not visible to those within the organisation because it's taken for granted, you know. So, and also there are cultural differences which have to be recognised erm, you know, and so, you know so I would contend that some way that you know, maybe fifteen or twenty years ago you know, when people say about the police you know are racist, people say, 'How can the police be racist? They're neutral.' You know, 'They work for all of society' you know, but the police are composed of mostly white male you know, and erm, the people who sort of who are in the hierarchy you know, they come from different social strata, you know. You know, so if you come from a particular social upbringing you're more likely to get ahead, you know, in the police than others, you know and so when, the police is the police you know, it's not that agenda, it's not about race or anything like that but in fact there are both in hidden prejudices that people come into the organisation with and then are reinforced by the way organisation is, and you know, so long as all the policemen are white and male you know, they would not see anything like being sexist or anything like that. As soon as women start to come into the police force then they had to change, as soon as black people come into the force they have to change. So in the same way, you know, I think a lot of people think that because this is a Buddhist organisation, you know, that therefore things about race, gender, class doesn't really apply because you know, it's a spiritual organisation. But we're dealing with real people and everybody has their own issues, has their own history, has their own background, and they bring it into the organisation, and then there is a cultural norm that the organisation encourages, and different ways of speaking, you know, and also certain forms of aggression are allowed and other are taboo (laughs) you know. So you know, erm, sarcasm and all the sort of middle-class way of fighting you know, is not seen as an issue, whereas being blunt or swearing you know, expressing your feeling in a raw manner, is frowned upon as being unskilful, but erm, different cultures have different ways of expressing themselves and that has to be taken into account. So you know, those are the

things you know, as I see, that there has to be a kind of cultural recognition of the fact that, you know, if you look at the people coming into the LBC in the early days, they did come from a certain particular background, and because of that particular background they built institutions around that particular way of thinking, so you know, the values that were, that are, valued you know, reflect that kind of background, you know, the background and it was assumed, and you were self-selecting anybody who didn't agree with that would automatically be voted out anyway by the way the organisation worked, you know, you had to go through certain hoops to go further, so yeah.

In other words, to 'get ahead' in the Movement, one needed to have a similar *habitus* to the people that were considering one's process. The censure of blunt language, direct speech and use of expletives shows that these modes of communication are seen as excessive, as going against the 'bit of a vegetarian, speak softly kind of style' as Jane, who described herself as a white middle-class woman, said of the LBC ambience in her interview (20/11/2000). Beverley Skeggs (2005) argues that in these ways working-class people (particularly women) are seen as lacking in moral worth:

It is up to the individual to 'choose' their repertoire of the self. If they do not have access to the range of narratives and discourses for the production of the ethical self they may be held responsible for choosing badly, an irresponsible production of themselves.

In choosing to 'tell themselves' inappropriately, working-class people (should they get that far within the Movement) show themselves as not producing themselves well and show themselves to be lacking in skills that are seen as essential for future progress. This is because, should they speak 'inappropriately', they are more likely to be seen as breaching what are described as Buddhist principles of not engaging in harsh speech, even though none of the Buddhist ethical precepts are moral absolutes.

But these boundaries are not impermeable. In retreat settings, barriers between classes can be negotiated as Steven (who described himself as having 'white trash' family and as being himself 'mixed trash') suggests:

Int.: So what difference would you say, you know, being around the LBC has made to your life as a whole?

Steven: Well it's helped me in my struggle. It's made my outlook somewhat more constructive. And more importantly, I'm beginning to slowly overcome some of my biases and stuff, you know. When you go on retreat and you find a middle class person who you've always resented the whole of what they stand for, whatever, crying and messed up and talking honestly and saying things like, 'You know what it is, I think people are jealous of you.' And I'm like, 'Well why

would they be jealous of me?' and she's like, 'Well because you have the ability to be angry or to be anything you want and just outspoken about it, whereas the middle class way is pretentious and it's this and that and it had'. Well basically what I'm saying is that I realise now more and more that everyone is subject to their conditions and no matter how rosy it might look their life is, that most of them have problems too, yeah? On the last retreat I was, there was a guy and we were sitting there doing the communication exercises and during which I was in awe because he had travelled the whole world, he spoke seven different languages. He was a hairdresser, he was pretty well off and whatever. And it seemed to me that all the things I'm sitting here thinking I would have done if I didn't have kids or I would like, basically he was what I would call accomplished. And quite often that makes me feel inadequate or unaccomplished or whatever you know, because I haven't done that much in some ways, although I've had other things to deal with. But then he tells me he's in therapy. I said, 'Well what the hell could you be in therapy for?', you know it was like 'Leave it out!', I just thought this is a rich person throwing their money away, it's what they're doing, they're just, you know. But then when he told me why and that basically he was on the coke scene and there was a lot of drinking and this and that and since he was doing meditating and the Buddhism, he doesn't do that no more and now he feels alienated from the people that he works with and so on and so forth, well it was a very basic thing, the very basic thing that I myself have gone through when I've outgrown my own friends, when I decided I wasn't doing smack, and I wasn't doing this and I wasn't doing that, whatever else. I've gone through the exact same thing. So it's made me able more to relate to people on a personal level as opposed to being very biased immediately or being very stereotypicalising people and just having made my mind up thinking they're not my kind of people and I don't want to talk to them or whatever. So it's helped me immensely overcome my own bias which in turn has helped me to not be so bitter and resentful about everything, you know, and to realise. And on top of that one of the main things of my anger when I was a kid was I couldn't understand, I still can't to some degree, how people could be so indifferent. How you could walk down a shop starving hungry, squatting and this that and the other, and you would just get looked at like a vagabond, and all you want is a bag of chips or whatever. And how people could be driving past in their Rolls Royces or whatever else and not give a flying fruit for whether you lived or died, yeah? I could never understand people's indifference to other people, people's heartlessness basically yeah? So coming here and finding so many people that have got hearts, has restored some of my faith back into human nature, yeah? Is what I'm saying, yeah, you see that? And then realising that them people, even when they're from very different backgrounds from mine have still got the same issues and the same problems and the same subjections of their conditions and so on and so forth, well it's, yeah that's how it's helped me. It's just helped me overcome a lot of my own biases, a lot of my own resentments, a lot of my own, you know, some of which I'm still working on, and some of which I've just completely lost. But overall it's made me able to relate

a lot better.

By seeing the middle-class woman's desire to emulate his mode of expression, a desire to imitate aspects of working class culture by someone who is middle-class that Beverley Skeggs (2005) suggests is quite widespread amongst middle-class people, and realising that like him middle-class people can have psychological and communication difficulties as well as issues with substance misuse, middle-class people become demystified and he can see that in some ways they are more similar to him than they are different. So how else was Buddhist practice affecting participants' processes of identification?

4.9 FWBO TECHNIQUES OF THE SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR IDENTIFICATION

Participants often found that their engagement with meditation and Buddhism changed how they perceived being a person of colour. For instance Diana said about her personal approach to spirituality:

Diana: ... actually if one is truly spiritual, has really got to the essence of spiritual I think that's the point of kind of, it's Stream Entry at least, maybe not Enlightenment. But it's the point of Stream Entry what one is able to let go of black self/white self, female self/male self and that actually what we're working with is with the soul really. Because I remember somebody saying quite recently that actually at the end of the day, you know on one level we can say that we're all human beings, 99% we have in common. And that thing that we don't want to suffer and we don't want pain but that 1% can be really quite huge as well, become quite big, really. We allow it to get really really big that 1% and that's really quite interesting that distortion. So I feel like you know if I got to the point of I feel like I'm living a spiritual life, I'm moving towards a spiritual life and I'm trying to live a spiritual life but I can't say that I've actually got to the point of being spiritual life. I feel that I have moments of that spirituality.

This is significant given her extensive involvement in movements for anti-racism, feminism and queer liberation during the 1980s that were shaped by 'identity politics'. Later in the interview, she spoke of how: 'I've loosened my attachments to my blackness and to my lesbian self and my female self' thus indicating that she had moved away from these fixed markers of identification. Another term for '**Stream Entrant**' is 'stream-winner' who Damien Keown (2003) in his *Dictionary of Buddhism* defines as: '[a] person [who] is securely established on the path to *nirvāṇa*⁴ and has eliminated the first three of the ten fetters.' The first of these fetters, according to the Dictionary of Buddhism, is

⁴ See glossary in Appendix 4 for definition

'belief in a permanent self'. Though the concept of 'soul' is consistently refuted by the insistent anti-essentialist stance of Buddhism, Diana sees Buddhism as offering her an opportunity to realise what she sees as her essential human nature of 'not-self' (*anattā*) that transcends binary oppositions, and which helps her, in her words, 'to let them go'.

Through meditation and Buddhist practice, one participant found himself moving away from 'race-thinking' (Gilroy, 2004b) and questioning the essentialist notion of the black/white and other binary notions of subjectivity. Answering the question how he saw his spirituality might differ from white people Philip, an African man, said:

Philip: ... I don't think of it like that because from where I'm, from where I'm thinking about it it's not actually dependent on the fact that I'm a male or the colour of my skin. But you have to start off from where you are which is the fact that you're a male and you're black and you have a whole history behind you. And, and so, that will, er, it will colour how you approach things you know, the style in which you absorb information of, all your cultural history will you know, inevitably colour that, because of the way you've been conditioned. But if the whole point is to be unconditioned, then part of the progress you make yeah is, starting to re-examine your conditions and as you rake through your conditions you start to find, I start finding out that a lot of the ideas I have of myself as a male is not really, there's nothing really masculine you can really pin down, or the idea of blackness you know, it's useful up to a point but there's no such thing as black thinking or, or white thinking, you know, So yeah, so in the same way, although each individual has their own different take on what spirituality is, you have to work on that to uncover your conditioning and see it trans, see how you're conditioned as a male, as a black person, as a heterosexual, you know, all the various things that you identify with, which make you you, unique. Er, you have to sort of unravel all that.

Philip thus expresses how his Buddhist practice enables him to transcend his conditioning as a black man and see beyond it to it being 'not-self'. This is distinct from the position endorsed by the hegemonic discourse of unmarked whiteness within the Movement, because here whiteness is seen as equally contingent, relative rather than universal.

In terms of addressing quotidian racism, participants reported that an indirect effect of practice had led them to consider racism as a product of the three unwholesome roots (greed, hatred and delusion) that are in all human beings. As a result they felt challenged and in some cases able to feel more compassion for themselves and for people who discriminated against them.

Having considered, the impact of participants' religious/spiritual choice on their processes of identification, how did this choice affect their relationships with family and friends?

4.10 RESPONSES OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS

In terms of the multicultural appropriation of Buddhism, one of the things that might need to be taken into account is the responses of ethnic communities of origin, family and friends to participants' interest in this religion. This is particularly so, given that for minority ethnic people, faith communities can provide a network that may offer social and economic support. Participants however, largely tended to report these relationships as positive and encouraging of their interest, usually on the basis that applying Buddhist teachings can help to improve relationships of those closest to one. One participant mentioned that his family had provided financial support when he had left a relatively high-paying job in order to work in one of the LBC businesses for lower pay, even though he was no longer able to provide financial support to his mother as he had done formerly.

There was an exception to this trend with Philip reporting that he had decided to approach the issue with sensitivity not due to outright hostility from his family but due to their unawareness of Buddhism as well as their commitment to Christianity

Philip: you know people do have prejudices as to what a Buddhist is, you know. The most other Christians, they know what a Christian is, you know, you can (indistinct) them and not be a good Christian, but at least they know what they are, but you know, the black Buddhist, you know, is doesn't appear on the radar for generations (laughs), so (laughs) it's going to take some time for them to adjust (laughs).

The tactic that he was adopting was for him to introduce changes in his identity gradually to his family to reassure them by his becoming a Buddhist and vegetarian he was not abandoning his community and heritage, nor would he be proselytising about his religion and change in lifestyle. This seemed a delicate process that caused him some anxiety:

Philip:, as I said, you know, in Africa you know, everything sort of revolves the social, climate revolves around the church, you know. It doesn't matter which church you go to, (laughs) so long as you go to a church and in fact you know, you go to different churches in order to make friends with different people and all that kind of thing. So you know, to stop going to church, was seen, would be seen as quite a challenge, you know. But, when I stopped going to church, I think

although people weren't happy that, you know, they took it as, as shunning them, yeah, but because I don't, I meet them now outside of church and I sort of lay the foundation in which you know, they've known me. You know, it's not like suddenly I've become ... a changed person, you know, there's still a lot of the personality of the churchgoing [Philip] still here, you know. So they can relate to that, you know, so they don't see me, as a threat to their Christianity or I'm going to try and convert them into Buddhism or anything like that, you know. So that has allowed me to sort of maintain my connection, you know, with the churchgoing family, you know, even though they know I'm no longer a Christian, but I will still attend the Christian, I will still go to the weddings and all that you know, if somebody wants me to pray, or pray for me I wouldn't say no. If somebody wanted me to pray for them I wouldn't object to that, that's you know, reason for that. But all changes I found have to be done, have, have to take into account the people around me, so although I'm moving a lot faster than people around me. I do not want to disrupt too much of their life, but the disruption is inevitable, but what I'm trying to do is, trying to introduce more and more of my self, that's quite different from the way I used to be. But they can see that as I haven't abandoned you know, I haven't abandoned my past, I haven't abandoned my heritage. Just because I'm a Buddhist doesn't mean I'm no longer African, it doesn't mean that you know, I'm no longer willing to speak to another Christian member of the church and anything like that, or I won't attend their funerals or something like that. So yeah, I mean, ..., they've sort of adjusted to the fact that I don't eat meat quite, quite well, you know, but if they come to me, I still keep meat in the fridge for guests, so anyway, one of the complaints I had with my brother-in-law was one his sisters is a vegetarian, you know. Not only is she a vegetarian but she would feed, the cat and the dog vegetarian food, you know, and she would feed her children vegetarian food, and you know, a couple of years ago, you know, yeah, they caught them eating McDonalds (both laugh). Yeah, not only that, but they'd been eating it, sneaking behind, eating meat behind their, their mother's back, you know. So now this sort of tendency that all vegetarians are loonies, you know (laughs). You know, they're not only content to be vegetarians but they want to make everybody vegetarian whether they want to be or not. (laughs) So you can see, that though I'm vegetarian, I'm not gonna force (laughs) vegetarianism down them, but then, I will introduce them to, you can eat vegetarian food and it can be quite pleasant it's not just all Brussels sprouts and greens (laughs)

As an African man, he realised that religion, in this case Christianity, was a means of mobilising what he felt to be his community. Philip was therefore keen to reassure members of his community that although he had converted to another religion, he still kept at least one foot in his community by not refusing totally to attend church and provide meat for his visitors when they wished it. He also sought to reassure them that he was not proselytising about his lifestyle as a vegetarian, a lifestyle that others in his community might find outrageously

'alternative', but that it did have its merits. Given what we heard from Antonia above about how she participated in the Movement yet retained her links with her community of ethnic origin, it would suggest that Philip is involved in similar negotiations between his ethnic identity and the identity he is developing as an FWBO Buddhist. He wishes to maintain the social capital he has as a member of the African diaspora as part of keeping the integrity of his own transnational links and biographical connections with Africa ('Just because I'm a Buddhist doesn't mean I'm no longer African'). In a Buddhist movement that makes much of the need to detach oneself from different markers of identity, such as one's ethnic group (something that is seldom consider themselves to be racialised), this makes his progression within the FWBO a more tentative process than it might be for his white majority ethnic peers.

We now move on to consider participants' views about LBC activities for people of colour.

4.11 EVENTS FOR PEOPLE OF COLOUR

The data described in this section comes from participation-observation of the activities organised for people of colour from LBC events for black people from September 2000 to the present including a one-week retreat in May 2001 and another one in July 2002; and meetings of the organising group for black people's events from September 2000 to October 2003. I will give a description of one of the day retreats entitled 'Quest for the Authentic' I attended that took place in Brixton during 2002. Prior to the event there had been leafleting in the local area to publicise it as well as a mailing to the people of colour list which at that time had around 80 people.

About an hour before the event was due to start, four black *Mitras* and a black *Dharmacharini* arrived at the yoga room of a swimming pool to set up the venue. At the front, some of the *Mitras* set up a simple shrine with shrine cloths, a Buddha statue, a couple of candles and a bowl for incense. Others set up seating and refreshments which, as well as tea and biscuits, include Caribbean bun and cheese.

People started to arrive, most on time, but some came late to the event. Overall fourteen people attended, six of them men, a number of men which was unusually high for such events. Most of those attending were African-Caribbean, with two South Asian women and two African men. One woman came from Brighton.

The event started with a body awareness meditation led by the *Dharmacharini* to aid relaxation and as a preparation for the other meditation practices that were to take place during the event. After a break, the mindfulness of breathing was taught, and in introducing the practice, the *Dharmacharini* talks about how she had heard meditation described in terms of a body being split into separate parts that when you whistled all came together again. She mentioned how the metaphor spoke to our experience of being diaspora. After introducing this practice there was a tea break and then the *metta bhāvāna* was taught. People were then invited to break up into small groups to discuss how their practice had gone during the day.

In the small group I was in, Andrea spoke about how she now chose to go into situations where there were largely black people. She had worked in organisations with white people but they had found her too confrontational around racism. As a result she had decided to 'choose her battles carefully'. She said of being with black people that 'it feeds your soul'.

After the small groups the *Dharmacharini* invited us to share our experience of meditation practice in the wider group. One woman, Marie, said that she had hoped that there would be discussion about the difficulties of being authentic as a black person in the outside world. There then followed several contributions on this topic. One South Asian woman talked of how, after feeling more in touch with herself as a black person/person of colour due to doing meditation, she had felt she needed to protect herself on entering the wider white world. 'You can imagine what would happen if a black person wearing dreads came to the Buddhist centre' she said. There was then debate about the degree to which one should go to mixed as opposed to black-only groups.

Marie mentioned how she had recently realised that she did not have to take responsibility for everything other black people did, especially if it was bad. An African man who has attended an FWBO residential week-long retreat for people of colour responded that he knew what that felt like, especially if you heard someone had done something bad on the news he tended to think 'O God, I hope it isn't someone black'. He talked about how he had had a profound experience on the black people's retreat last year and how he had felt that the retreatants had just been able to be human beings without the issue of 'race' being raised during the retreat.

The woman from Brighton talked about how she had gone to a Buddhist group and been the only black person there. Those present had been invited to share their experience and she had shared an experience about racism. The white people present had heard it as her accusing them of racism. After trying to work through the issue three or four times to no avail she no longer went there.

During the discussion one Caribbean woman talked about how it was usual for people to gather together on the basis of race and that it was not necessary for white people to feel guilty if hardly any black people attended meditation classes and other such like events. She was going to the FWBO Brixton class and noted the concern from its organisers because she was the only black person coming to the class but she just ignored it and 'got on with her thing' which was to learn about meditation.

The other African man then said about how it was funny that white people were teaching people how to relax (he indicated later in the discussion that he had heard about meditation from books) when they were not as relaxed as black people – white people were only giving black people what was theirs anyway. He pointed out that 'Buddhism is from the East', to general agreement from the group.

The *Dharmacharini* intervened when the discussion was almost becoming polarised between those who preferred black dominated spaces to those who use mixed spaces to say that she had been 'a mover and shaker during the 80s' and had seen these kind of discussions quite a lot in black groups and how these conversations had destroyed many groups for black people she had been involved with. She felt that it is best that such conversations take place in the context of practice. The South Asian woman then talked about how she felt confident that we could have such discussions without 'cutting each other up'. Marie also says how she felt it was important that we be able to address the issue of who had done what to whom and to say 'You did this, and you did that', in terms of giving white people responsibility for racism. Dave talked about how he felt it was important for us as black people not to give away our power to an external source. A team member talked about how she was learning to say 'I was hurt when you did so and so' and is realising how she can hurt others. I quoted the line 'now oppressor, now oppressed' from the Patience Agbabi (1995) poem *The Black, the White, and the Blue*.

After the discussion vegetable curry roti, a Caribbean snack, was served as the main part of the light evening meal that was offered in the programme. Before the end of the event photographs of the group were taken by a *Mitra* on the team. When she explained that she wanted to take photographs of black people meditating someone exclaimed 'Black people breathing, black people eating!' Sheila said that she no longer went to 'FWBO white events' and that she objected to having her photo used. She said that what happened was that the same old photograph got used again and again and you knew whenever you saw the photograph that you would be the only black person there. Another South Asian woman also said that she did not want to be photographed. There was clearly fear that there would be tokenistic use of any photographs taken.

At the end the *Dharmacharini* read Hakuin's *Song of Meditation* putting across the issue that although we were looking for an authentic self, realising the Buddhist teaching of 'no-self' is the goal of Buddhist practice. She also mentioned how through the *Dharma* she had found a positive sense of belonging. There was then a short period of the 'Just Sitting' meditation practice and the group broke up. Several people commented on how good they felt the day had been and said they would come again.

The nature of the discussion, 'How can black people be themselves in all their fullness in a world that doesn't fully value them?', perhaps arises through the awareness of one's emotions and mental state that emerges out of meditation, especially a practice like the *metta bhāvanā* where one is engaging directly with one's emotions, as well as the ongoing experience of a racist society. The fact that the space is for people of colour only allows participants to express themselves without fear of defensiveness, denial or guilt from white people. I often heard participants comment on the hearty laughter on retreats for people of colour that they felt they would not be able to express in mixed-settings. Sheila said in her interview about her feelings about retreats for people of colour:

Sheila: ... It's nice when someone doesn't like you because they don't like you! (laughs) Do you know what I mean? Do you know what I mean? I don't have to go 'Do they not like me because of der-der-der-der-der' No story running there. People can not like me. I've met individuals who've said, 'Sheila she's just too much!' and that's OK, that's so cool. Like that woman who was running the retreat, anyway I forget the name she obviously just didn't like me. And I loved her to be able to stand up and say 'I don't really like you. I don't really like you.' And I just felt 'Good on you woman! Good. Don't like

her'. (recording indistinct at this point) that story's not round me, it's just you and the woman. It's just you and me and that's not fine. You can't just not like me because I'm black and that's not, when you don't like me because I'm me, you like me 'cos I'm me then you like my family. I'm so proud of my family. I'm so happy with my family. I love my mother, my father, my sister, my cousins, my nephews. They're me. And that's when I stand up I'm with them. And I walk in that room. Suddenly I don't have to carry all of them with me anymore. I'm not carrying them with me. I'm just carrying me. I feel like I'm in this group where I can be sulky. I can be sulky and not have a chip on my shoulder. You know that? You go to the retreat 'You know I won't talk to no people that day' but I'm afraid it's a sulky person. I was a sulky person on my first retreat I was really ill actually. First retreat I was on, I was very ill. I was really sulky. And nobody went 'She's got a chip on her shoulder.' They just went 'Oh well you were sulky.' And you know that's cool. That's cool. Whereas if I'd been on a white retreat and feeling sulky you'd get that feeling 'Oh black people' (recording indistinct at this point). Suddenly there's a whole story behind you. The first retreat I went to I just felt like 'Oh God' I remember it was black woman with really short hair, *Dharmacharini* _ said to me 'You're like a completely different person from the first time you were on retreat.' I said 'I know. When I was on the first retreat I was in a really bad space physically.' And it wasn't, d'you know what I mean? And I was allowed to be in a really bad space physically without them assuming that 'Oh God' this that. I was in a really, physically I was just having difficulty getting words out of my mouth, which sounds so bizarre, people who know me like 'You didn't speak?' and I thought it was nice to be somewhere and just curl up into a corner and just watch. Because every word that came out was like fire drawing out of my soul. I was just, I mean, I'm much better now than I was a few years ago, I was just, painful homeless shit. I was literally, I'd moved house I think it was the same weekend. I'd been kicked out of my Dad's house where I'd been living and I was just, in this tremendously scary, scary, scary place. And I didn't have words to express my fear and anxiety as well as my physical collapse. 'Cos they didn't know what was wrong with me and I was walking less and less. I was actually basically catatonic with fear. And actually I could do that in this nice place. 'Cos like I never, I couldn't leave London 'cos no money and I went for free. I went for free do you know what I mean? It was like, I feel like a ? among black people (recording indistinct at this point). It was fine, it was just fine.

Sheila can experience herself directly and just 'be' without the presence of white projections onto her blackness. There is also space for her illness and disability to be within a context of community, unlike her experience of the mixed women's retreat she describes above. Events for people of colour therefore form a space 'out of whiteness', i.e. a space in which white middle-classness is not foregrounded, so issues of concern to people of colour can be more readily highlighted and explored. These are spaces where cultures of people of colour

can be celebrated. This celebration takes place through the references made in teaching and discussion, the food provided, and the provision of a space free from white racism, and to some extent, privileging of being middle-class. Thus, to some extent, attendees feel more able to be open, relaxed and able to express themselves than they might in mixed activities. Here people of colour can experience themselves just as ‘human beings’ and be freer of the racism that is institutionalised⁵ within the Movement. Some people of colour felt there was little space for them outside these events for participation in the Movement, that mixed activities would not be accessible to them for some time and increasing diversity within the FWBO would require considerable work and appetite for change. So what are the measures being taken at the LBC to address these issues?

4.12 LBC INITIATIVES – LEVERS FOR CHANGE?

4.12.1 Diversity workshops and their racilogies

At the suggestion of a black *Mitra*, and in response to ongoing dialogue and internal debate around diversity issues, the LBC has held several workshops on diversity and discussed the issue at its *Dharma* Activities Committee that is a sub-committee of the LBC Council. The workshops have been led by a white senior Order member who is a practising individual and group psychotherapist, sometimes together with a *Dharmacharini* (usually black) with experience of group facilitation. These have been a significant development in the ongoing debate within the LBC, with some recognition now being given to institutionalised racism within the LBC and wider movement. From April 2005, these workshops have been co-led by myself and the senior white Order member who pioneered them.

⁵ In mentioning institutionalised racism I am referring to the definition given by the MacPherson Inquiry (1999) that describes it as: “The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people”. (section 6.34). This inquiry popularised a concept of institutionalised racism within the UK, but the concept had been in extensive use by social scientists and anti-racist activists for several decades. Although the FWBO shares many of the features of organisations that are found to be institutionally racist, there is little literature on institutionalised racism that relates specifically to faith communities, especially those in non-theistic traditions such as Buddhism. I feel that literature relating to Buddhist movements and their difficulties of institutionalised racism is yet to be developed and while it will draw on that already available is more likely to arise out of debates within socially engaged Buddhism.

In the workshops, the approach to 'race' has tended to be psychological rather than socio-economic or historical. In these workshops I have observed that white participants usually did not initially see themselves as having 'race' unless they were from a minority ethnic group. In addition the annual festival to celebrate *Sangha* in 2002 focused on the issue of diversity and used led-meditations, reflections and a talk to raise the issue among the wider membership of the LBC. Some white workshop participants voiced concern at these events about veering towards 'political correctness' within the Movement.

The workshops share elements of exercises for 'race awareness training', through their focus on how people do or do not experience 'race' on a personal level. Such training has been savagely critiqued by Sivanandan (1985) for its individualising approach and what is seen as its resulting inability to address racism in its more collective, politicised, insidious and institutionalised forms. Phil Cohen (2002) however, while warning of the dangers of 'methodological individualism' of a wholly psychological approach, has tentatively suggested that psychoanalytic approaches can be of assistance in addressing racism:

[p]sychoanalytic insights provide a powerful resource for getting to grips with some of the trickier aspects of both popular and institutional racism, provided they are applied in a nonreductive manner, and in a way that supplements rather than replaces other readings. (*ibid.* p. 197)

Given the emphasis within Buddhism on developing awareness of what tends to be unconscious, the workshops have more recently striven to supplement individuals' understanding with an approach that discusses racism at its more social, historical and institutional levels through input in group discussions and presentations and the provision of handouts that give resources for further reading and discuss the nature of white privilege.

Another potential difficulty for the workshops, as with most initiatives around 'diversity training', is that they can reify differences between ethnic groups and consolidate 'race thinking' (Gilroy, 2004b). In this way, differences can become absolutised and the process of Othering can continue, albeit in a different yet equally dangerous form with new essentialist stereotypes emerging (Gilroy, 2004b). This could be a significant risk, given the concern that participants of colour expressed that their actions on mixed retreats were often seen by white fellow retreatants as representative of all people of colour. It

could seem likely because of the workshops' use of models for 'racial identity development' developed by psychologists, to highlight the conditionings of different ethnic groups (see Sue & Sue, 1990, pp. 93-117). It can also ignore specific issues for participants of mixed heritage who often refute binary notions of 'black' and 'white'.

This is a difficult issue, because many participants of colour felt that the Movement has given insufficient attention to difference, so some recognition of it appears necessary. The workshops are therefore seeking to steer a middle course between the current Scylla of 'colour-blindness'/'racelessness' and the Charybdis of 'race-thinking'. It is also hoping to do so through encouraging a critical and reflexive gaze on whiteness, while recognising that the risks that this could prove another way of hegemonising whiteness (Ahmed, 2004). Given the hegemonic discourse within this movement, which is one which Taguieff (2001) would describe as closer to *heterophobia* because of its notions of whiteness as universality, it has seemed to be wiser at the present juncture to make difference more conscious, but in a way that affirms participants' common humanity.

In terms of the approach within LBC leadership, although the current Chairman has expressed support, the level of participation in the workshops by those involved in teaching at the LBC has been low. Also, there has been little systematic discussion at Council level of the issues of institutionalised racism that have emerged through the dialogue. This is of concern as the Macpherson Inquiry observed that:

It [institutional racism] persists because of the failure of the organisation openly and adequately to recognise and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership. Without recognition and action to eliminate such racism it can prevail as part of the ethos or culture of the organisation. (section 6.34)

However, an informal group of practitioners that developed to discuss diversity issues has emerged from the workshops that met from time to time. It is however, currently unclear as to how these workshops and associated initiatives will facilitate more thoroughgoing change.

The LBC is however, increasingly engaged in activities to benefit its local community, and is engaged in a large scale building project called *Breathing Space* to facilitate more of such activities taking place. These initiatives are not necessarily explicitly Buddhist, but seek to demonstrate how the techniques of

the self provided by this movement can be used by various sections of the community for other means. Brief details of these initiatives are given below.

4.12.2 Activities for carers

The LBC has been organising activities for people who are the primary carers of elderly and disabled relatives/friends over the past three years. Facilities offered include a weekly drop-in group at the LBC as well as weekend retreats where carers can draw on teachers of Alexander Technique, massage as well as meditation and relaxation techniques in order to develop strategies for managing the stress arising out of their caring role. The local authority has recently provided funding for carers' retreats so that local carers can have some respite care. The activities have achieved a significantly multi-ethnic and multi-faith following (sometimes half of the retreatants on a carers' retreat may be people of colour and people of faiths other than Buddhism) and are very much organised within a secular framework, and it is made clear that carers need not be concerned that these activities will be used as a means to proselytise participants.

4.12.3 Mindfulness based cognitive therapies

Within the Movement generally, interest has mushroomed in the potential of mindfulness techniques and cognitive behavioural therapies to assist those affected with chronic pain in pain management and to prevent relapse back into addiction and into depression. The LBC has developed a series of courses for those recovering from addiction, people in chronic pain and people with depression that instruct people from these groups in the use of these techniques. The work of the LBC has attracted media interest with articles in the local press as well as national papers, i.e. *The Times* and the *Nursing Standard*. It has also been noted that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has supported the use of mindfulness based cognitive therapies in the management of depression. Again, the activities are organised within a secular framework. The local authority in which the LBC is based is funding some of the places in the courses that seek to prevent relapse into depression. The take-up by people of colour has been lower for these courses than for the carers' events. In terms of the courses on depression, this may be in part due to the tendency of people of colour with mental health problems to

be more likely to be offered medicinal and custodial interventions by clinicians rather than counselling and other psychological therapies.

4.12.4 Involvement in London Citizens' Organising

The London Citizens' Organising is an independently funded coalition of faith groups, schools and trade unions that works to mobilise communities around local issues. Unlike other groups that seek to influence service delivery through participation in the community participation bodies organised by local authorities, health services, regeneration bodies and other key providers, Citizens' Organising takes a more independent approach by, for example, organising meetings with stakeholders, and emphasising the need for these agencies to be accountable to their local communities. It trains members in leadership skills and in the ideas of democracy and active democracy. The notion of 'relationship' is fundamental to Citizens' Organising, with members being encouraged to see themselves as being in relationship with one another, working for the common good of their local communities across their differences of faith and so forth. Also stakeholders are encouraged to see themselves as being in relationship with Citizens' Organising and the communities that form a part of it.

The LBC has been involved in the East London wing of Citizens' Organising (TELCO – The East London Citizens' Organising) since its outset in 1996 and is an active member. TELCO has been active on a range of fronts, in the light of the significant level of regeneration activity and gentrification within East London. It has been concerned that this regeneration activity benefits the local community, especially given the impact of the regeneration of Docklands and the gentrification of East London. It has a range of campaigns, including one for a 'living wage' for London workers. Other campaigns are in progress around the Olympic development, and for affordable housing in East London. A key campaign is that entitled *Strangers into Citizens*. This is advocating that the contribution of undocumented migrants to the economy and community be recognised through the granting of citizenship. Given the xenophobia often directed against migrants and asylum seekers, and the 'moral panic' around migration, it is significant that the LBC has taken an approach to the issue that deviates from the usual popular discourses.

4.12.5 Globetown Community Project

This is an offshoot of the London Buddhist Arts Centre (LBAC) that arose out of a wish to share members' skills in the arts and the facilities of the LBAC more widely with the local community. Initiatives have included an arts and health project that included access to Bengali translation and had a significant level of take-up from local Bangladeshi women, aikido classes for young people and a storytelling project for local older white women and Bengali young women. The project also provides benefits advice, workshops on drumming and mask-making, and advice on healthy eating. The project has been awarded funding from central Government as part of the programme to develop cohesive communities, and this is for a series of storytelling workshops in which Christian and Muslim women share their stories. In this way, the project hopes to make its arts facilities more available to the process of developing community relations.

4.13 CONCLUSION

The hegemonic discourse of unmarked middle-class whiteness within the FWBO discussed in this and the previous chapter positions people of colour as Other, the 'constitutive outside' of the West rather than Westerners like 'themselves'. In this discourse, people of colour may be positioned in a range of ways that leads them to feel outsiders at FWBO mixed events. They may be seen as 'exotic'. Alternatively they may be seen as 'undesirable' in terms of being made to feel unwelcome at mixed activities. They may also be regarded as 'bearers of difference' from the hegemonic norm by being perceived to be essentially outside the West and/or being seen to have 'race', unlike white people, who are presumed to be 'just people', especially where people of colour draw attention to questions of difference. Finally, and most commonly, they may be seen as 'bewildering others' in the sense that some white people around them in mixed activities feel genuinely unsure about how best to relate to them. Some well-intentioned white members of the Movement seek to prevent this Othering process by treating black people 'just the same' with the unfortunate result that difference, through being ignored, still remains a hidden 'Other'. Activities for people of colour are therefore appreciated, not because of the physical absence of white people, but because they provide a space in which people of colour can be celebrated, recognised and valued. The repositories of *Dharma* teaching, discussion and experiences of people of

colour and their activities represent 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 1980, p. 82) within the Movement.

Although the Movement embraces diversity in principle, largely because of the way that the notion of the 'True Individual' has been understood, assimilation to a white liberal middle class norm is the main notion of diversity in practice. There is also some scepticism from people of colour about the Movement's willingness to change matters. Nonetheless, it is very important to note that there is an emergent dialogue around diversity within the LBC and the F/WBO more generally as senior Order members are recognising the need to address these issues. The increasing engagement of the LBC and Globetown Community project in initiatives more specifically addressed to the local community may also encourage change and increased awareness, and it will be interesting to see what discourses around 'race' develop and how these relate to those within UK society at large. The impact of these engagements in the longer term, therefore, remains to be seen.

CHAPTER FIVE – ‘SETTING CULTURE’ OF SGI-UK & MALCOTT DISTRICT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The case study in this chapter considers the setting culture of SGI-UK in the case study area. My findings suggest that the SGI-UK is significantly more diverse than other British Buddhist groups and that this diversity is at least in part due to its relatively more anti-racist, cosmopolitan and multicultural approach to questions of Buddhist practice, culture, ‘difference’, aesthetics, ethnic identity and social engagement. The chapter starts with a look at the background history of SGI-UK and describes its key practices. It then considers its key ideas and vision about: *sangha*, subjectivity, social action, culture and aesthetics as expounded by SGI’s President Daisaku Ikeda and how they have been responded to on the ground in its Malcott district and associated chapter in the East London region.

5.2 THE SŌKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL (SGI) – A HISTORY

Sōka Gakkai International is a lay organisation based on the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism that originated in Japan. The movement was founded by the educationalist Tsunesaburō Makiguchi (1871 -1944) as Sōka Kyoiku Gakkai in 1930. Nichiren (1222-1282) was a monk who studied in the Tendai tradition, and believed (like some Pure Land and other Buddhist schools at the time) that he lived in Final *Dharma* Age (Japanese: *mappō*) that had been predicted by Shakyamuni Buddha. However, unlike the Pure Land school leaders of the time, Hōnin and Shinran, who focused on devotion to the Buddha Amitābha in order to gain rebirth in his western paradise, Nichiren (also known as Nichiren Daishonin which translates as ‘the great sage Nichiren’) came to believe that the *Lotus Sūtra* was the pre-eminent Buddhist teaching and that all others lacked efficacy in the age of *mappō*. He therefore advocated devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra* as the sole means of counteracting the degeneracy that he saw in the current state of affairs in Japan as illustrated by ongoing, famine, natural disasters and a series of adverse astrological portents.¹ Nichiren’s advocacy was primarily through the method of what has come to be described as *shakubuku* i.e. debate, preaching, and submission of memorials to government authorities (Stone, 1994, p. 234). For this vigorous advocacy, Nichiren was to

¹ According to Jacqueline Stone (2003b, p. 249, see also footnote 49 on p.432) these date from 1254 and included an epidemic recorded by Nichiren in 1260.

be exiled on two occasions, firstly to the province of Izu between 1261-3, and then to the remote island of Sado between 1271-4 (Stone, 2003b, pp. 251-261). His followers also faced persecution.

Sōka means 'creation of value', Kyoiku 'education', and Gakkai means 'society'. Both Makiguchi and Toda saw parallels in Nichiren's Buddhist ideas with their ideas of promoting a more progressive form of education than that prevailing in Japan at the time. From its outset, Sōka Kyoiku Gakkai affiliated as the lay arm of the Nichiren Shōshū sect, a priestly sect claiming to uphold the true teachings of Nichiren. During the Second World War, both Makiguchi and Toda were imprisoned for resisting the war effort and refusing to follow state Shinto worship, and Sōka Gakkai was forced to disband. Makiguchi died in prison in 1944. His disciple Toda was released before the end of the war. Toda's health had been greatly impaired by his imprisonment and he was to die in 1958.

After the war when a new constitution in Japan allowed for freedom of religion, Toda set about re-establishing Sōka Kyoiku Gakkai, re-naming it Sōka Gakkai ('Value Creation Society'). He oversaw a period of major growth to beyond his target of 750,000 households. But the process of making Sōka Gakkai a significant worldwide movement was to be overseen by Daisaku Ikeda who became the third president of Sōka Gakkai in 1960.

Like other members of what was to become Sōka Gakkai International (SGI) in 1975, what became NS-UK² (also in 1975) began in 1961 with a few Japanese carriers of the faith, mainly women, wives of British businessmen that they had become acquainted with in Japan (Waterhouse, 1997, p. 92). Their spouses were to be the first British converts (Wilson, 2000, p. 355). When NS-UK became established as a legal entity in 1975, it had around two hundred members but it has since grown to become one of the largest Western Buddhist convert movements in Britain with an estimated membership of around five thousand (Bluck, 2004, p. 95). Japanese people continue to be a significant proportion of SGI-UK's current membership and the early Japanese diaspora members are often referred to with respect as 'pioneer members' for their contribution in developing SGI in its early days. They are seen by some non-Japanese members as having a better grasp of SGI teachings that are sometimes seen as being more part of Japanese than Western culture (e.g. the

² NS-UK is Nichiren Shōshū-UK, the forerunner of SGI-UK.

importance of gratitude to one's parents). Japanese members are well represented within the leadership of SGI. For instance, although all the three General Directors of SGI-UK have been white male UK nationals, Kasuo Fujii has been Vice-General Director to each of them.

Unlike the emphasis in most Western Buddhist convert sanghas on meditation practice, the core practices of SGI centre on the *Lotus Sūtra* and involve:

- a) Faith: believing in the **Gohonzon**, a sacred scroll to which Nichiren Buddhists chant that is believed to embody the law of life and is meant to be a representation of Buddhahood;
- b) Practice: Chanting **Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (daimoku)** a salutation to the title of the *Lotus Sutra* and performing **gongyo** (a twice-daily ritual in which one recites portions of the *Lotus Sutra* and prayers). Also sharing Buddhist teachings with others;
- c) Study of the teachings of Nichiren and application of these in daily life.

Members of SGI meet regularly to share their experience of the practice several times a month in various forums. The most local unit is the *district*. Two or more districts combine to form a *chapter*, and then another two or three chapters go to form a *headquarters*. From then on headquarters combine to become regions, and then areas of the UK. SGI is also organised into four divisions – for Men, Women, Young Women and Young Men respectively and each of these have leaders at district, chapter, headquarters, region, area and national level. Leaders are appointed on the basis of being more senior in faith and have responsibility for supporting members through co-ordinating group activities and providing personal counselling ('guidance'). The most basic group activity for members is the monthly discussion meeting (which is mixed in terms of gender) where they can share their mutual experience of practice and offer support and encouragement to others. This meeting is also a forum where guests can find out more about the practice, although guests are welcome at other SGI meetings. In addition to the mixed district and chapter meetings and various divisional meetings, there are special introductory meetings for newer members to help them become better acquainted with SGI practices.

A key moment in the development of SGI has been the bitter dispute with the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood that led to a split in 1991. At this time, the priesthood excommunicated all the SGI membership and advised them to join

their new lay division *Hokkeko*. Most of the membership however remained within SGI, which has maintained its strength following the split. SGI since then has emphatically declared itself to be a lay organisation and insisted that there are no intermediaries between the *Gohonzon* and oneself. As Esther (03/12/2003) described her feelings about the split and the then High Priest of Nichiren Shōshū, Nikken:

I think that they, you know what they are in fact saying to people is, 'You can't practise this Buddhism unless you do it through us.' You know, 'We're the kind of conduit', where Nikken in particular, the High Priest is the kind of conduit between the members and the *Gohonzon* and of course that's not true. You know, the reason that Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the *Gohonzon* was that absolutely it would be for everyone.

Such perceptions within the membership have led some scholars (for example Hurst, 2000; Wilson & Dobbelaere, 1994) to suggest that the split of SGI from the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood has been akin to the process of the Reformation within Christian Europe. Helen Waterhouse (2002) however, suggests that the picture might be more complex. Although she sees elements of Protestantism behind the split, she suggests that SGI is now so well-established that it has come to represent a tradition in its own right, especially for some of its non-Japanese members. This tradition has not been universally accepted in SGI-UK and the findings of Bryan Wilson's and Karel Dobbelaere's study (1994) suggested at that time that some members felt equivocal about the movement's structures. There was also concern within the movement about the quality of leaders and some wondered to what extent SGI-UK leadership structures based on the Japanese model were appropriate for the UK.

As a result of this questioning, a reassessment group was established in 1995 under the second General Director of SGI-UK Ricky Baines. He observed in his consultations with the membership that there were tensions between traditionalists who were reluctant to see change and modernists who desired new structures based on team-working rather than designated leaders within the existing stratified hierarchy. After a series of consultations between Baines and his leadership team, the Japanese parent organisation and other representatives from Europe, it appears according to Waterhouse (2002) that only minor changes were made meaning that the traditionalists largely won out.

With the end of this overview of SGI-UK's history we will now consider how questions of social change are addressed within SGI.

5.3 SŌKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE: WORKING FOR KŌSEN-RUFU (THE SPREAD OF THE LAW/WORLD PEACE)

Nichiren Buddhism tends to be world-embracing rather than world-renouncing. In his famous treatise *Risshō ankoku ron* (Nichiren, 2003, pp. 6-31) (On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land, WND 2 p. 24), Nichiren argues, ‘If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?’ Nichiren is therefore suggesting that social circumstances are a direct reflection of people’s correct practice of the *Dharma*, and where adverse, these can and should be corrected through what he considers to be correct Buddhist practice. Following on from this, a person’s environment is taken as a reflection of that person’s *karma*³ (this is the doctrine of *esho funi*, oneness of the self and environment). For example, one woman at a Malcott’s women’s division meeting described her experiences in a previous job in which her manager was relaxing while she was frantically dealing with a heavy workload as an example of *karma* that she was continuing to work with through her practice.

One therefore practises not solely for one’s personal benefit, but for the benefit of one’s wider environment and community as these are inseparable from concern for oneself. This is as one would expect from a teaching originating within the *Mahāyāna* whose spiritual ideal is the *bodhisattva* who, as Keown (2003) describes in his dictionary, ‘forgoes his own final enlightenment until other beings in *samsāra*⁴ have been liberated.’ SGI understand the objective of spreading the teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra* as being encapsulated in the phrase *kōsen-rufu*, which translates as to ‘teach and spread widely’ the Buddhist law. For this movement, its goal is ‘to teach the universal law of *Nam-myō-rengē-kyō*⁵ around the world.’ But *kōsen-rufu* for SGI is not to be reduced to proselytising its practices, for the term has also been defined by it as ‘world peace through individual happiness’ (Soka Gakkai International, 2003). It is understood by members that, having developed happiness through finding the practice, one will want to share the benefits of this with other people. In the

³ See glossary in Appendix 4 for definition.

⁴ See glossary in Appendix 4 for definition.

⁵ See glossary in Appendix 4 for definition.

most recent introductory study course for SGI-UK (SGI-UK Study Department, 2004a), Ikeda is cited as recently suggesting that *kōsen-rufu* should be understood thus:

'To become happy not only ourselves, but to enable others to become happy as well. To bring harmony to our local communities. And to help our nations flourish and bring peace to the whole world. The lives of those who pray and work to achieve these goals pulse with faith that is dedicated to realizing kosen-rufu.'

'Kosen-rufu is an undertaking that we must pursue in society, in the real world. Kosen-rufu is an indomitable struggle for peace and justice in which we must fight unceasingly against the negative and destructive forces found in the real world.'

'If we're going to live this life, we must not waste it on trivial, self-centered pursuits, but instead live for a lofty ideal. And the most lofty ideal is worldwide kosen-rufu. Those who continue to uphold a great philosophy, a great ideal, and a great religion are unsurpassed victors as human beings.'

Kōsen-rufu is therefore to be understood more broadly 'as a vision of social peace brought about by the widespread acceptance of core values such as unfailing respect for the dignity of human life' (Soka Gakkai International, 2003)

Thus, for the members of the SGI, kosen-rufu means the ceaseless effort to enhance the value of human dignity, to awaken all people to a sense of their limitless worth and potential. It is for this reason that efforts in the fields of peace, humanitarian aid, educational and cultural exchange are all seen as vital aspects of the movement for kosen-rufu. For these promote the values that are integral to human happiness. (Soka Gakkai International, 2003)

SGI (2003) argues that this does not mean conversion of everyone across the globe to Nichiren Buddhism. The main obstacle to world peace is seen as:

... the entrenched inability to recognize the dignity of life. Ideologies teaching that certain people are without worth, that certain lives are expendable, undermine the common basis of human dignity. The failure to recognize one's own true potential and worth is always linked with the denial of these qualities in others. Violence has its wellsprings in a gnawing lack of self-confidence. (*ibid.*)

Because of the teaching of *esho funi* there is no sharp dividing line between those who are 'saved' and those who are not. Change in one individual therefore benefits all those in contact with them, especially those with whom that individual is connected (*ibid.*). This is understood within the movement as the principle of 'life to life' transmission through which peace can be advocated.

For example, Luke,⁶ a black senior schoolteacher who was leader of Malcott's headquarters Men Division at the time of the interview, described it in these terms:

Luke: ... There's no separation between work and Buddhism and life and family and Buddhism. Erm, in fact you know, Buddhism isn't separate, Buddhism underpins it all.

Int.: Hmm-hmm.

Luke: And that's what made it so attractive for me and why I work so hard in my own way. I don't see myself as kind of Billy Graham evangelistic type figure that stands up on a soapbox and tries to convert people, you know. I think Buddhism's much more subtle and more profound than that, you know. I think all the little charges that I've worked with you know, some of the charges (indistinct) and connected with me, some haven't. But it's that life-to-life connection.

Int. Hmm-hmm.

Luke: And when you see them two or three years later you say, 'Oh hi Sahdia!' you know, 'Oh you remember my name!', or if you see them ten years later and say, 'Hi Natalie, how are you doing?', 'Oh gosh! You remember?' Yeah, 'cos you remember lots of names, (indistinct). That's the difference between having a job and somewhere where you come to work and then you (indistinct) erm and you wish you could be elsewhere standing that before, or having a life-work that you really enjoy because you can see the value that you can create, and erm, and how you can help people to swim against the tide.

SGI (2003) also distinguishes its vision of *kōsen-rufu* from other more millenarian and apocalyptic ones promoted by some religious groups, suggesting:

... kosen-rufu does not represent a static end point. As SGI President Daisaku Ikeda noted in 1970, 'Kosen-rufu does not mean the end point or terminus of a flow, but it is the flow itself, the very pulse of living Buddhism within society.' In this sense, the 'attainment' of kosen-rufu does not suggest the end of history or of the inevitable conflicts and contradictions that drive history. Rather, it could be thought of as building a world in which a deeply and widely held respect for human life would serve as the basis on which these can be worked out in a peaceful, creative manner. This is not something, however, which we must passively wait for.

Buddhism teaches that it is something that we can begin to implement right now, wherever we are.

As part of SGI's general project of working for *kōsen-rufu*, much has been written within its publications about questions of 'race' and ethnicity, with Ikeda devoting a significant portion of his 1993 peace proposal to the UN to

⁶ Interview with Luke 16/7/2004.

these questions in response to the then ongoing conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. In his proposal, Ikeda (1993) argues that:

concepts like 'race' and 'ethnicity' are in large part fictitious, and ethnic identifications have typically been artificially constructed by one means or another. (p. 8)

He then goes on to state that:

in a world where ethnic and national identity have become the source of such brutal violence, a definitive revision of our understanding of the concepts is critical

and from there to argue for a new 'global consciousness' (p. 9) and 'transnationalism' (p.13) in opposition to nationalist and racist sentiment. However, this initial rejection of the concept of 'race' and problematisation of the notion of ethnicity seems to be a partial one as he then goes on to say in his critique of nationalism:

In most cases, its [nationalism's] authenticity is highly suspect. Countries like England and France, which are considered models of the modern nation-state, are ethnically and racially more diverse than Japan, for example. It was not so many centuries ago that they were loose federations of smaller tribal groups. (p.9)

So although there is recognition by Ikeda of the socially constructed nature of 'race', he feels unable to totally reject the term. This is perhaps not dissimilar to the UNESCO statement on race which while recognising that 'race' has no scientific basis expresses concern at the abuse of the term by lay people but does not go on to totally reject the term, seeing it as a 'folk concept'.

Ikeda has not only challenged notions of 'race', he has held dialogue with civil rights activist Rosa Parks and the grand statesman of the anti-apartheid movement Nelson Mandela. This has led to Ikeda being seen by some as in a similar vein to Martin Luther King and Mohandas Gandhi, and Ikeda's contribution has been particularly celebrated by Dr. Lawrence Carter, Dean of Morehouse College, the *alma mater* of Martin Luther King Jr. This led to the development of the exhibition and video 'Gandhi-King-Ikeda: Community Builders' and of the annual *Gandhi-King-Ikeda* peace award.

SGI therefore is an engaged Buddhist movement with a diffusionist model of social change by which individual practitioners can through their quotidian activity see themselves as social activists or as '**bodhisattvas of the earth**', the figures from the *Lotus Sūtra* who vow to protect and propagate its teachings. It also encourages a globalist approach to questions of ethnicity and nationality and has a weak constructionist approach to questions of 'race' while

challenging racism. The charter of SGI mentions as one of its objectives that it will respect individuals' cultures and encourage cultural exchange. However, the lack of references to hybridity in its materials suggests that there is a tendency within SGI to see cultures as discrete entities focused around nationality rather than social and historical processes, so in that sense it has an essentialist approach. Even so, SGI has gone some considerable way compared to other convert Buddhist movements towards addressing questions of ethnic identity and towards developing a model of multiculturalism which in terms of its moving away from an idea of 'race-thinking' is possibly closer to what Paul Gilroy terms 'planetary humanism' (2004b) and 'convivial multiculturalism' (2004a) than other convert Buddhist movements.

Most people first meet the practice through a personal encounter with a work colleague, friend, relative or most rarely acquaintance, as opposed to publicity via the media. Although flyers are produced for events and there are cards with the mantra on them, these function more as calling cards to be given as a reminder to anyone who has expressed interest in attending an event or in chanting than as publicity for widespread/hit or miss distribution. This is because spreading Buddhism within SGI is essentially seen as a process of 'life to life' transmission, as an African-Caribbean man named John (19/02/2004) explained in his interview:

we don't go out as an organisation you know, advertising for members. So we don't, there's not an advert in *The Times*, one advert in you know, *Time Out*, you know, or *Voice* newspaper, 'Come to a Buddhist meeting and join Buddhism.' What we do, we tend to ... get our members from our personal network of contacts. So my friends or the people that I know, or people that know me, or people that I work with, you know, I'm talking to them about Buddhism. Or they know me and they're saying, 'You've really changed man, what are you doing?' and I talk to them about Buddhism, you know. Or I'm going to a Buddhist meeting or I'm going to a cultural event and I think that one of my friends might enjoy it and so I invite them along. So it's always life to life, person to person, OK. ... So Buddhism is always trying to connect with people on an individual, life to life, heart to heart basis, if that makes sense.

The spread of Nichiren Buddhism for *kōsen-rufu* has been described as occurring through the process of *shakubuku* (which translates as break and subdue – a metaphor for vigorous debate and dialogue between the parties concerned), and is usually referred to as such within SGI meetings and publications. In actual fact what John is describing is what more usually takes

place within SGI, *shōju*, in which someone is persuaded about the claims of Nichiren Buddhism through the example of the person introducing them to it, as was explained to me at the first Malcott district meeting I attended. The method of *shōju* has been described as more appropriate than *shakubuku* for countries where Buddhism is not established as a religious practice, although *shakubuku* is more usually used within SGI as a colloquial term.

SGI's model of 'life to life transmission' and focus on individual responsibility tends towards methodological individualism, although it should be noted it has collectively been involved in various humanitarian and peace promoting efforts around the world and is an NGO member of the United Nations. Members are also encouraged to play a positive role in the development of their local communities, and this can be on a more collective basis. For instance, Malcott district was involved with others in facilitating a memorial service organised at the borough council Town Hall to mark the death of a local schoolboy following a stabbing. As well as SGI members' meeting to chant *daimoku* (the chant of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*) prior to the event and providing security and ushering services through their Youth Division, the SGI choir sang at the event. Jacqueline Stone (2003a, p. 76), however, argues that SGI's approach of methodological individualism, while according with the tenet in most forms of socially engaged Buddhism that mental cultivation is required for effective social change to take place, leads to wider social structures that result in discrimination and militarisation being ignored. She suggests of SGI and other similar Nichirenist movements' mode of social engagement that it: '[i]s a style of social engagement that tends to 'work within the system'; it does not issue a direct challenge to existing social structures or attempt fundamentally to transform them.' (p. 77)

Using Giddens's (1991a, p. 159) typology of how social movements can address the challenges he sees as inherent within modernity, SGI could be categorised as a peace movement, especially given its concern with nuclear disarmament and the increasing industrialisation of war. It could be also said that SGI addresses each of Giddens' (1991a, p. 157) four dimensions of utopian realism for engaging with modernity. Its programmes of: 'life politics' are its politics of self-actualisation through individuals realising Buddhahood via SGI's techniques of the self; 'emancipatory politics' through addressing politics of inequality by affirming the potential for Buddhahood for all beings; 'politicisation

of the global' via the struggle for *kōsen-rufu* ranging from quotidian individual activity to the UN level; and 'politicisation of the local' through work to engage with local communities where SGI members are based.

5.4 SGI AND 'DIFFERENCE' – *ITAI-DŌSHIN* AND THE UNITY OF MENTOR & DISCIPLE

Issues of authority and tradition have been an ongoing source of debate within Western Buddhist movements, with various approaches being taken by different *sanghas*. Like all religious movements, especially newer ones, wishing to establish themselves on a more permanent basis, SGI is addressing questions of its basis for legitimacy, authority and its place within tradition. This has been especially the case since its split from the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood in 1991, and for SGI-UK since the 'reassessment process' of 1995 to explore its structures mentioned earlier.

In recent times therefore, SGI has increasingly emphasised the pivotal role of its three founding presidents, Makiguchi, Toda and now Ikeda, including expression of gratitude to all three of them in the silent prayers made by all members as part of their daily practice of *gongyō* (the twice daily recitation of portions of the *Lotus Sūtra* with prayers with *daimoku*) from December 2004. As Esther described it, the three presidents are seen as forming a lineage:

Yes, he [Ikeda] is part of a lineage, yes. I think President Toda who came before him and is his teacher and then Toda's teacher Mr. Makiguichi had that strength, vision and obviously Mr. Toda and Mr. Makiguchi were in Japan, just at the point where Japan was involved in the Second World War, and the people of Japan were forced to, worship Shinto, you know it's where Emperor worship is incorporated into all the different schools of Buddhism. And they knew, you know, from their study of Buddhism that wasn't the intention of the Buddha or of Nichiren Daishonin, and they went to prison for their beliefs. So Makiguchi died and Mr. Toda came out and established, re-established actually, the Sōka Gakkai because it had kind of fallen apart. Again people were afraid you know, of the government, afraid of you know, the same fate. So it's really since the Second World War, that it's really kind of grown and blossomed. So yeah, that's why really I have enormous regard for President Ikeda. I trust him absolutely.

Esther is describing the sense she has of Ikeda not only being part of a lineage, but also of being her teacher, her mentor in promoting *kōsen-rufu*, the promotion of Nichiren Buddhism along the lines described above. Cultivating

such a sense of connection between individual SGI members and Ikeda has been increasingly encouraged within SGI.

The importance of unity among members has also been more emphasised within the movement through the teachings the 'Oneness of Mentor and Disciple' and of 'Many in Body - One in Mind', described as the two most important relationships in Buddhism at the July 2003 chapter study meeting for Malcott I attended. As we shall see later, the approaches taken to these questions have particular implications for practitioners' understanding of the questions of social difference in their lives and the strategies they utilise to deal with them. We will start however with considering the teaching of the 'Oneness of Mentor and Disciple' described in terms of the notion of *heritage* at the chapter study meeting.

The main presenter started by welcoming guests and those new to practice and said that at chapter study meetings people study the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and of Shakyamuni Buddha. She described Nichiren as someone who brought the teachings closer to us, and Shakyamuni as the historical Buddha. She then gave a snapshot history of SGI. She mentioned that T'ien-t'ai had first established the importance of the *Lotus Sūtra* in China in 6th century CE and it was Nichiren who developed *daimoku*. The first founding president of SGI, Makiguchi, in the early 20th century brought the teachings alive for the current era. The second, Toda, propagated the teachings in Japan and the third, Ikeda, brought them alive for the current age. Ikeda was described as someone who 'brings the practices up to date for the 21st century'. Having through this outline established the lineage of SGI; she mentioned how the Bodhisattva vow was to propagate NMRK worldwide, thus working for *kōsen-rufu* (world peace and happiness). We were here at the right time and place to realise that vow. To practise it was essential to have a mentor who could pass the teachings on to us. This did not involve blind faith or obedience, rather the mentor's guidance was followed because one could see how he had actualised the teaching in his life. It did not involve trying to follow a set of rules or copying someone as part of doing this.

Building the mentor-disciple relationship in other teachings was usually done through face-to-face meetings, or through an esoteric practice in which the teacher was met 'on another plane.' However, this was not required. Instead one was encouraged to chant for one hour per week to express support for

Ikeda's life. The main presenter felt she had experienced benefits since she had started to do this and that this did not involve sublimating one's personal goals. She asked the floor 'What does chanting to understand Ikeda's heart mean?' A woman replied 'His intention and spirit.' The main presenter agreed that it was his burning passion for world peace and the happiness of others that one was seeking to resonate with. In building world peace, every act in daily life is important and had to outweigh the negative tendencies of disrespect in one's life. One could not act in isolation otherwise 'people of evil intent' would rule the world, nor could one attain enlightenment in isolation. By meeting with others, overcoming one's differences with others, one could work for *kōsen-rufu* and universal respect for human life. So the mentor-disciple relationship is based on bringing out one's unique qualities. This one did through one's *human revolution* and work for *kōsen-rufu*. Members were chanting to be in rhythm with Ikeda's heart and to protect him with their lives. One could develop one's bond to Ikeda by chanting to the *Gohonzon* that one would put Ikeda's guidance into practice, study and action.

The teaching of mentor-disciple has further developed within SGI-UK so that it is now presented as Nichiren being seen as SGI members' 'mentor of life.' The study material for the introductory level course (SGI-UK Study Department, 2004b) suggests that he has that position on these grounds:

We consider that Nichiren Daishonin is our mentor because he provided us with a profound teaching. He first expounded Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and inscribed his enlightened life-condition in the Gohonzon, which enables us to reveal our own inherent Buddha nature. His life is an inspiring example of the potential an ordinary human being has to single-mindedly achieve all their goals. We are able to read about his extraordinary life in the many letters of encouragement he wrote to his followers. Consequently, Nichiren Daishonin has been called the '*mentor of life*' (6).

Because of his major contribution in spreading Nichiren Buddhism around the world, Ikeda is termed as SGI members' 'mentor in *kōsen-rufu*'

His example has shown us how to practise and spread Nichiren Daishonin's teachings in twenty-first century. Therefore, he has been described as the '*mentor for kosen-rufu* [widespread propagation]' (7). SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's guidance and activities are thoroughly based on his profound understanding of the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

However, the study material emphasises:

The mentor-disciple relationship in Nichiren Buddhism depends upon

the disciple or how the disciple responds. We choose the mentor, not the other way round. If we look at this from another angle, we can see that it is the activities and achievements of the disciple that validates the mentor. This concept is very different from a traditional understanding of the function of religious leaders, such as guru's (*sic*), saviours or saints, to give security and reassurance to their disciples.

One member associated with Malcott district explained to me how he had developed his connection with Ikeda, or Sensei as he is known, in his interview as follows:

Patrick: ... I had no connection with Sensei up until about five years, three or four years ago. I knew who he was, I read his guidance. I accepted that he was the general, you know, the international leader of the SGI but it wasn't until 2001 that I particularly remember making a deep connection with his life and really profoundly understanding what his function and his role is within this Buddhist, erm canon of what our relationship to him is. And I do accept President Ikeda as my leader, and my master in this life. And it's based on the master-disciple relationship and the oneness of master and disciple.

Int.: Can you tell me more about that?

Patrick: Yes. The master and disciple relationship is whereby you practise to a point where, the way my master and disciple relationship developed I started chanting for my mind to be in rhythm with Sensei's mind, for my heart to be in rhythm with Sensei's heart and my life to be in rhythm with Sensei's life, President Ikeda's life, because I had no connection with him. And in doing so, what it did it made me realise that I have full responsibility for *kōsen-rufu*. So rather than waiting for President Ikeda to offer down an edict of what I ought to be doing, I knew what I needed to do. I knew that I needed to develop *kōsen-rufu* within my small sphere of my life, based upon the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and upon President Ikeda's guidance. And in the oneness of master and disciple is when I just understood how to develop *kōsen-rufu* as Sensei would, as President Ikeda would. So the master and disciple relationship is a relationship whereby you accept, you choose a master in life because you know that master talks sense and will not lead you astray. And the oneness of master and disciple is when you know exactly what the master's intentions are, and set out to realise those intentions without being told, or guided. They come from within.

Int.: So do you feel those intentions are about what you were saying about *kōsen-rufu*?

Patrick: Yes, it's about creating world peace, about creating value in my world, in my space as it were.

There is therefore, considerable scope within the process of developing one's connection with Sensei for self-empowerment. In this process one is placed back onto oneself in terms of one's own responsibility for practising

Ikeda's interpretation of Buddhism correctly while having a sense of being part of a valid lineage. Within one's own personal space and mundane activity, one is building world peace and fulfilling the *bodhisattva* vow, without necessarily having to make major social or political interventions.

In terms of the teaching of 'Many in Body – One in Mind' or *itai-dōshin* as it is otherwise known within SGI, in the study material for SGI-UK's introductory level course, it is stated that 'Unity starts with the individual' and the importance of individuals working wholeheartedly towards achieving their personal goals is explained. The material then goes on to say that to truly fulfil one's potential and achieve personal happiness, this is not all that is involved. Nichiren is quoted as emphasising the need for unity amongst his followers and he is then quoted as saying:

All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind, transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation. When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation can be fulfilled. But if any of Nichiren's disciples disrupt the unity of many in body but one in mind, they would be like warriors who destroy their own castle from within. (Nichiren, 2003, p. 618)

This suggests that for disciples of Nichiren, Bourdieu's aphorism about the relationship between *habitus* and feeling like 'fish in water', means that members should relate to one another as fish who feel at one in the water. Any differences that arise, including social differences of 'race', class, etc. are to be seen in this light. Given the doctrine of *esho funi*, the oneness of self and environment, members of SGI-UK would in the first instance look to themselves should they feel uncomfortable about their 'aquatic environment' as we will see later in this chapter when participants' relate their experiences of 'race' and class in SGI-UK.

In the chapter study I attended there was also a presentation on the issue of *itai-dōshin* (the bond between fellow members). In this, Ikeda was quoted as likening *itai-dōshin* as 'the bond of comrades in faith' in creating *kōsen-rufu* and as likening the result as a great tapestry. The co-presenter on this theme said that effort is involved in achieving such a state of unity. The meanings of various permutations of *itai-dōshin* were discussed as follows:

Itai-dōshin was described as applying in terms of anyone's interactions with others in which they were working towards a common goal, and in the case of SGI that goal is *kōsen-rufu*, *itai* meaning 'many in body and *dōshin* 'one in mind'. With *itai-ishin* (many in body, many in mind) working towards a common goal collectively was not feasible. In the case of *dōtai-dōshin* we had one in body, one in mind which meant everyone dressing and acting in the same way in a way that denied the specific individuality and dignity of each person. With *dōtai-ishin*, one in body, many in mind, although everyone looked and acted the same, each member had different objectives which again meant that working towards a common goal was not feasible.

In the case of *itai-dōshin* the presenter noted that, particularly in the UK, individuality was prized. However, in SGI, people were practising collectively. She said that Buddhism always calls us to have a questioning mind. However, people did not all have a strong, confident sense of themselves as individuals. It was therefore possible to submerge oneself in the group and not really express one's full personality and individuality. So if *itai-dōshin* was to be realised, individuals had to take responsibility and express their uniqueness. The individual's contribution to the group could only come about through development of oneself. This process of self-development, known within SGI as *human revolution*, was important. One could develop a self that conforms to the group if one's sense of individuality was weak, so one needed to make a determination to become an individual. She quoted Makiguchi as saying: 'Self-denial is a lie. What is important is to seek happiness for oneself and others.' Hence *itai-dōshin* involved a challenge to express and develop oneself. To achieve anything of value this was necessary. She described *dōtai* as faith aimed at realising *kōsen-rufu*, which was the wish of the Buddha.

In terms of one's fellow SGI members, one could find oneself focusing on what one dislikes about others. However, the co-presenter said, Nichiren was asking Buddhists to develop the power of the mind in order to focus on *kōsen-rufu*. This meant one needed to be aware of the focus of one's mind and changing it from slander and regret to *kōsen-rufu* through the process of human revolution. If one felt critical of a fellow-member from a base and slanderous perspective, one could focus on their contribution to *kōsen-rufu*. With one's focus on *kōsen-rufu* one could then receive the heritage of the ultimate law. One could feel that in chanting in front of the *Gohonzon* that one was chanting

in the presence of Nichiren. The co-presenter had sensed this as a result of studying the text *The Heritage of the Ultimate Law* and felt that ‘this works’. She sensed that Nichiren was seeking to establish *itai-dōshin* for *kōsen-rufu*, especially with those one struggled with.

The main presenter then spoke of how Ikeda (or Sensei as he is known within SGI) had sent many messages to the UK focusing on unity. This she said was a reminder from Sensei that the achievement of unity was a process that transformed weaknesses and let one grow. She quoted Ikeda as drawing attention to the Buddhist teaching of interconnectedness in his saying: ‘Our own existence is inseparably connected with all life.’ So one practised for one’s happiness and that of everyone else. It was necessary to overcome all the differences and separation and causes of conflict in the world. Everyone was needed and there were no exceptions or exclusions in this practice. Every member had a mission for world peace.

While this culture focused on stories which were about ‘getting at others’, in SGI members were trying to support and help one another rather than focusing on other people’s faults. One needed the good friends one met in meetings to keep one going. She quoted Suzanne Pritchard, the Women’s Division leader for the UK, as saying that chanting only to develop oneself to the ultimate was selfish because this limited one’s contribution to *kōsen-rufu*. It was important to work with ‘difficult people’ and, as each of us was a difficult person, this was the best way to transform and develop oneself. So we needed to ‘break the habit of criticism’ which was hard as the current age was one in which differences were emphasised. In attaining unity one was attaining Buddhahood (the highest life state). This involved greeting other people as if they were a Buddha (in other words, recollecting their Buddhanature).

To put the teaching into practice, one developed a solid sense of self through pursuing one’s human revolution, which meant examining what stops one being happy and changing to be a better person rather than comparing oneself to others as opposed to seeing if one was progressing. It was necessary for one to break the habits of criticising and judging because, if there was a lack of unity, one lost one’s inheritance. The forces that caused disunity in the world were described as being well-organised, hence wars and other conflicts. Therefore it was important for good people to be organised. So as not to take things personally, it was necessary to depersonalise things, and the

presenter said that females had a tendency to 'get more emotional' which needed to be guarded against. Rather than taking things personally, one could see the person in terms of *kōsen-rufu* and in terms of their contribution to that goal. The first General Director of SGI-UK had said that it was not possible to really like everybody. For *kōsen-rufu*, every type of person was needed, and each person needed to be really determined to change their critical natures. Some research suggested that the Egyptian Pyramids were not built by slave labour but by concerted effort. SGI members were trying to build 'pyramids of peace' so each member needed to change their critical behaviour and replace critical thoughts with supportive thoughts that sees each person's contribution to *kōsen-rufu*. She ended by suggesting that one took as a personal challenge: 'What can I try and practise on a daily basis to realise *itai-dōshin*?' and recited the poem 'The Abundance of Life' by Ikeda in which he pledges to do what he individually can to promote *kōsen-rufu*.

At the end of the presentations questions from the floor were invited. The first contributor from the floor suggested that although some younger members of SGI-UK wear uniforms this is not *dōtai-dōshin* because they still remain individuals and the uniforms are just to show that they're performing a particular function. The training these particular members receive is not to make them subservient, nor are the uniforms, which rather make it clear who people should ask for ushering and security at meetings. The uniform also challenges the younger members' egos as a reminder that they are there to support members, not to martyr themselves. It was suggested by the main presenter that one's personal insecurities force one not to wear uniform because one does not have a strong enough sense of self. When one is criticised it was important not to lose a sense of self and to remember that one's relationship to the *Gohonzon* is absolute (because of one's Buddhahood). One could also make criticism less wounding. The key issue was not the wearing of uniform but the function one was carrying out. Luke then spoke from the floor about how uniforms could set boundaries, of how Year 10 girls in his school had not initially wanted to wear their school uniforms on a school trip but had changed their minds when they were approached by locals not as school-girls but as local girls. The girls had decided they wanted to wear their uniforms in future 'as a protection'. Also wearing uniform could give one a sense of pride in a positive sense.

Someone observed that people can hide behind uniforms, and the main presenter said that the notion of evil in Buddhism was different to how it was seen in the West. In Buddhism, evil is seen as ignorance of **Buddha-nature**. Nichiren had described his disciples as evil people with three poisons (greed, hatred and stupidity), and within SGI reference is made to 'fundamental darkness', the attitude of denying one's and others' Buddha-natures and interconnectedness arising from these. Not realising this connectedness with everything else those who harm others don't realise that they are therefore harming themselves. However, they are usually quite well organised, so it was necessary for good people to organise. It was important to note though that experiences of *itai-dōshin* could not be forced as they all sprang from the oneness of master and disciple.

The meeting ended with a man from the floor giving an 'experience.' He talked about another man that he detested that he is now a good friend with after chanting to be in harmony with him. His protagonist was at first a work colleague that he couldn't stand. Then his adversary started attending SGI meetings, so it was harder for him not to be around him, so he sought 'guidance' from a SGI-UK leader about what to do. The guidance he received said that he should chant until he could find something about the man that he could like. He did this and after what was a long time trying this, seemingly without success, saw his adversary wearing a suit that he liked. He went back to his leader with this and was told, 'Now chant to always see him [the adversary] in that suit' which he did. Although he didn't see his former adversary in that suit again, over time, he found himself increasingly able to get on with him and now they were good friends. The former adversary has gone on to become a 'strong member' of SGI. The main presenter said that was a good demonstration of changing our criticising attitudes.

To see how individual members can relate to the principle of *itai-dōshin* in terms of issues of 'race', Luke in his interview with me mentioned how his approach to such questions had changed as a result of his practice:

Int. So has your, has the way that you experience racism and your awareness of racism and ethnic and cultural identity changed since you joined?

Luke: Most definitely.

Int. And how does that, how does that manifest?

Luke: Because what you are in terms of your colour is just

superficial. And therefore it's not something, I wouldn't look at something like I might have done thirty years ago and I'd not have liked them because they had short hair and were wearing braces and the boots and they had tattoos with swastikas on their arms or anything like that. Erm I would still see now somebody that had a Buddha nature, and if I spoke to that person and they chanted *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, they could still have their boots and braces and skinhead haircut but they would now be enlightened or becoming more enlightened (indistinct) because of their own Buddha nature and thereby being a Buddha. And over time they would like myself change from whatever they were into something better.

Luke had been heavily involved in black politics in East London during the 1970s and 1980s, so for him seeing a skinhead at a meeting would have been akin to seeing a potential fascist or, at best, an extreme racist during that time of his life. As a result of his Buddhist practice, he would now see such a person in radically different terms and rather than feeling afraid of them or wanting to avoid or denounce them, he would see now that person as someone who was fundamentally on the same wavelength as himself.

Through the doctrine of 'the unity of mentor and disciple' perhaps one might be seeing what Weber (1968) referred to as the routinisation of charisma. It is not yet clear what will happen within SGI after the death/retirement of Ikeda, but SGI members are being encouraged to have a sense of personal connection to him as well as to Nichiren. One can see therefore that in SGI the question of unity is again principally subjected to the principle of methodological individualism. The study materials and meeting make no reference to ecclesiastical or other organisational structures or the possible ramifications of social divisions such as 'race', class, and so forth for members' perceptions of and interactions with each other. This is interesting given the period of assessment that SGI-UK went through in the 1990s. Patrick described his perspective of his functioning within SGI-UK as follows:

... I learnt very quickly that the organisation was anything that I wanted it to be, as opposed to what anybody else made it. I was the organisation.

Hence the encouragement to members through study discussions that they need 'to learn how to transcend the differences' between themselves. They are also reminded that they should:

recall that everyone has the qualities of a Buddha deep in their lives, even if it is not yet apparent. (SGI-UK Study Department, 2004b)

Hence they should always respect others as such, however difficult they might find that to be. Each member is therefore encouraged to look to themselves to see their potential contribution towards unity and maintaining the lineage of Nichiren Buddhism, and is advised that individual practice which truly bears these principles in mind will make a major contribution towards self-empowerment, social improvement and a higher quality of life for oneself and others.

Having seen how SGI approaches social engagement in Buddhism, how does it approach questions of gender and sexuality?

5.5 SŌKA GAKKAI, GENDER AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

Whereas the soteriological status of women has been questioned in some Buddhist schools, Nichiren affirmed the ability of women to gain Enlightenment through the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* in several of his writings, saying at one point that female devotees of the *sūtra* are superior to profane men and that women need not become men in order to become Enlightened (Faure, 2003, pp. 91-93). Also in Nichiren Buddhism, there is no fixed ethical code, as members are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves, their actions and their impact upon themselves and their environment. A popular aphorism in SGI is that Buddhism equals daily life (Wilson & Dobbelaere, 1994, pp. 57-59). SGI has been more considerably positive towards the nuclear family than has the FWBO and has specific sections for young people and children as well as organising regular events for families.

In terms of homosexuality, same-sex relationships are not proscribed although this has not always been the case. Previously, in the US, gay people were encouraged to chant and marry in order to become heterosexual (Corless, 1998, p. 256). I have also heard from a gay man who was one of the speakers at a meeting organised by the *Absolute Freedom* group about how he chanted to become straight (without success!) after receiving guidance (advice) from his group leader.⁷ However, now, the mood is more tolerant and supportive. Within SGI there is a group for LGBT people called 'Absolute Freedom', named after a Buddha who appears in the *Lotus Sūtra* who is believed by some to represent Nichiren. The group is involved in propagation campaigns at LGBT

⁷ I understand from Jamie Cresswell at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy-UK that such advice was not an official policy position of SGI-UK. However, it is clear that although the organisation is now more encouraging towards lesbians and gay men, this was not always the case.

events, to encourage members of these communities to become involved in SGI-UK. Meetings of the *Absolute Freedom* group are open to all in SGI in order to increase understanding of LGBT issues throughout the organisation. Furthermore, President Ikeda has sent positive messages of encouragement to each of the SGI international LGBT conferences that have taken place in the US. However, full equality has yet to be achieved, as Abby (20/03/2005) told me that, although SGI performs commitment ceremonies for heterosexual couples, it did not when she was interviewed do this for same-sex partnerships. Now that the Civil Partnerships Act has been passed within the UK, same-sex couples can have their relationships celebrated at Taplow Court. SGI is registered to officially register heterosexual marriages, but same-sex partnerships have to be registered at a registry office prior to the celebration by SGI.

This small element of heteronormativity within SGI that I have observed expresses itself in its meetings, not as homophobia, because in the women's division and local district meetings I have attended I have always been warmly welcomed as an out lesbian, and my partner invited to meetings. However, the overall tone of the meetings is such that heterosexual feelings and aspirations do predominate. At one point within Malcott, possibly during the 1980s when lesbian separatist ideas were widely debated within lesbian/feminist communities, issues of lesbianism/feminism used to create lively debate at its district meetings, as Barry explained to me in his interview:

Barry: X said there used to be a lot of lesbians in Malcott.

Int. Oh did there?

Barry: Aye, and he used to get on a really big soapbox about it, 'cos he said, a lot of them would bring along all their girlfriends and they'd sit around and not say anything about Buddhism, and we should be talking about Buddhism. They'd bring their fucking feminist shite and sort of, you know, 'Why isn't women doing dadadadada, what do you think about that as a Buddhist blah blah blah?' And eventually he got really fucking tired of that, 'You know is this a lesbian group or what rarerarara?' (laughs) there was an ongoing debate between them and he smiles at it nowadays and he thinks it's really quite funny, but that was his trip at the time, yeah? But [Malcott's borough's] like one of the tightest concentrations of lesbians in Europe

Int.: Yes, it is.

Barry: You know. So, you know, and again like I say it's quite appropriate that should be embodied within the relationships within the groups, you know. But these are some of the issues that raise themselves. If that hadn't been a going debate we would at some

point, we wouldn't be really doing our job, you know. And so there was that. I mean, you talk about race, there was that; there was the gender orientation thing.

Barry is therefore making clear that there was considerable tension between lesbians and feminists and some men within Malcott district. Some of the men, like X, saw the issues that lesbians and feminists were bringing into the group as not being 'about Buddhism', but Barry suggests that the debate was itself an essential part of the process and reflected the social character of the local area in which Malcott is based, even though Barry was not personally receptive to what lesbians and feminists had to say. The debate, although not pleasant for all concerned, might be said to have reflected the mission of Malcott district, to deal with issues arising within its locality head on. By the time of my arrival, the small number of lesbians in Malcott's membership seemed to be established as quite strong members of the district. It seemed that 'both sides' had mellowed in time and at one meeting, a lesbian member happily shared her experience of how through practice she had learned to respect and appreciate a male work colleague who, in contrast to her being a left-leaning *Guardian* reader, was a Tory reader of the *Daily Telegraph*.

I would also suggest that SGI's heteronormativity also expresses itself in the way gender roles are organised within this movement; although as Abby and Patrick (14/02/2005) suggested this may reflect the culture around gender in Japan. SGI has separate divisions for men and women, and for young men and young women respectively. People from the youth divisions can decide to perform duties at larger meetings as part of the 'dedicated groups', and in such capacities wear uniforms. The young men's Sōka duties involve security of the venue and the young women's Lilac duties are ones to do with giving hospitality by ushering, providing refreshments and ensuring that people at the event are comfortable. This is not to say that this allocation of duties passes without comment. Like Helen Waterhouse (1997, p. 124), I have heard other young women express their disagreement with this policy around Lilac duties in my interviews with them. However, Patrick suggested that this gendering of roles possibly arose from Japan and might in time change, even though the current arrangement did have benefits for members. In fact, Donna, who used to be a member of SGI-Italy, said in her interview that in the youth divisions, young men and young women performed the same roles except that women did not

perform security duties after dark. On having been in the Young Men's Division and then the Men's Division Patrick said:

Patrick: ... it's enabled me to respect young women, and respect women. Because through battling with my own demons in the Young Men's Division and in the Men's Division, when I've been with the Women's and Young Women's division, not to say that I don't have my difficulties, but I can so see that the difficulties are mine. 'Cos being, when you practise with men, it's like you're being held up, you're being held up, a mirror is being held up to you. So you see your own nature and so that when you go into the Young Women and Women's Division, you see what your baggage is that you're taking into those arenas, so you can be more respectful, you can be more understanding. You can be less authoritarian and domineering as men usually are around women.

Int.: Hmm-hmm. I find it very interesting that the men do Sōka and the women, the young women do Lilac, and I was wondering, you know, if you could explain more about that for me, and how you feel about that?

Patrick: Well, well I was always told the Value-Creative group, we're both now called dedicated groups, and you dedicate yourself to these groups for a period of time. Sōka means Value-Creation, and Lilac is a value-creative person too. And I think by the nature of, you know, these are groups that have come out of Japan, which I think to all intents and purposes, are kind of traditionally and culturally driven. And I can see that there will come a time where there perhaps not be that differentiation in this country. But however, we are still developing and evolving, and I think it's necessary for this point because men, you know, it's characteristic we stood on the street corners to guide people to meetings. It was safer for men to do that. Lifting chairs, lifting furniture, men were stronger, so for those reasons. However, I know that there are young men and young women today who would be quite happy to just swap roles. Young men can look after the Gohonzon and the fruit and do the more you know, frilly things as

Int.: Hmm-hmm

Patrick: and young women can do the opposite

Int.: Hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm, hmm.

Patrick: But I just think but those are great opportunities for young men to practise and develop with young men, and young women to practise and develop with young women.

As well as enabling individual members to 'mirror' one another better, the separate divisions have further benefits. For instance, I often found there was a much greater depth of emotional sharing at women's division meetings I attended than at district meetings, which are usually mixed.

In SGI, the president of the SGI, Daisaku Ikeda has also spoken of men having 'hard power' that makes them more likely to start wars, and women having 'soft power' that gives them a specific role in SGI's work to promote nuclear disarmament and world peace. This 'soft power' arises out of women's roles as mothers. Although this is a classic designation of (predominantly heterosexual) femininity it has led to a considerable level of international campaigning by women within SGI for peace (Usui, 2003).

As well as men having a more orthodox 'masculine' role within the organisation, male leaders are slightly more prominent within the organisation than their female counterparts. At the regional meeting to kick-off the New Year in 2004, the leader of each chapter (a collection of two to three districts) came forward to state their New Year resolutions for the chapter. In each case it was the leaders of the men's division that took this role, suggesting a gender hierarchy. Atsuko Usui has also suggested that 'the structure of the Sōka Gakkai organisation continues to function along gender lines' (2003, p. 197). Abby in her interview with me suggested:

Abby: ... I think it would be really nice in the next twenty years or so to see a Sensei that's female. Now that shouldn't be something that's radical or feel radical but it does.

Int.: Hmm-hmm.

Abby: And I'm not angry about the fact that there hasn't been because obviously historically that wouldn't make sense. But I think that the fact that Nichiren all those centuries ago actually said that women could be Buddha is amazing, and testament to his belief that we are all equal, and I think it needs to continue to be pushed and seen.

Int.: Hmm. So the fact that women can attain Enlightenment needs to be seen in terms of their visibility in leadership roles?

Abby: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah.

Daisaku Ikeda in a seminar on the *Lotus Sūtra* (Ikeda, Saito, Endo, & Suda, 2000) has suggested men need to take a more prominent role within SGI and commends women's considerable work on the ground within the movement.

IKEDA: Beautiful women who protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra⁸—today these are none other than the members of our

⁸ The English Buddhist Dictionary Committee of Soka Gakkai (2002) define a **votary of the Lotus Sūtra** as "one who practices and propagates the *Lotus Sūtra* in exact accordance with its teachings" and describe Nichiren as stating he regarded himself as the foremost votary of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Japan during his life.

women's and young women's divisions. ...

SAITO: Indeed, their fierce resolve to protect the SGI puts men to shame!

IKEDA: Men need to work harder so that women don't have to go to such lengths. It's inexcusable for men to take the efforts of women for granted.

Ikeda thus likens women in the SGI as being akin to the goddesses who vow to protect those who practise according to the spirit of the *Lotus Sūtra*. He has also suggested in one of his guidelines to the men's division of SGI (Hasan, 2000) that it should seek to be the 'golden pillar' of *kōsen-rufu* through: having a seeking spirit throughout their lives; winning in the workplace and contributing to their local communities. At the SGI General Meeting for 2005 in the Royal Albert Hall, Robert Harrap, the Men's Division leader for the UK, said that his message for men at the meeting was that in Ikeda's terms they were the 'citadel that provides a happy haven for your family.' Robert also said that the Men's Division of SGI-UK had independently resolved that they wanted to see the membership of SGI-UK grow to 10,000 by Ikeda's 80th birthday. This suggests that men are expected to play a leading role in their families, workplaces and communities and within SGI. Jacqueline Stone (2003a, pp. 92, endnote 41) suggests in her argument that SGI's approach to social issues has conservative aspects:

Gender definition is a case in point. Compared, say, to traditional Buddhist temple organisations, both Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai give women immense scope to express their abilities through leadership roles, especially within the women's divisions. However, the ideal image of the female lay Buddhist espoused in these groups is largely limited to a traditional one of wife and mother, and few women appear in the higher echelons of organizational leadership. This has begun to change, however, in Sōka Gakkai International branch organizations outside Japan.

This suggests that SGI like the FWBO sees gender as a male/female binary operating within a heterosexual matrix (J. Butler, 1999a). However, SGI's heteronormativity appears to appeal more to black heterosexual people, and its privileging of conventional masculinity based on gender roles in Japan conforms to the masculinity of relatively more black men in the black community. SGI is now more tolerant of homosexuality, but in Malcott this has not yet resulted in the level of positive action that FWBO, especially at its East London centre, has taken to date with LGB communities. However, this may change as the Absolute Freedom group develops further.

Having considered the issue of gender identity we will now consider how SGI approaches issues of culture and aesthetics.

5.6 SŌKA GAKKAI, ART, AESTHETICS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

As part of its aims to promote peace through culture, SGI has an Arts Division which has developed with the encouragement of Ikeda who is himself a prolific author and poet with a keen interest in photography. In a lecture given in 1989 at the Académie des Beaux-Arts (Academy of Fine Arts) of the Institut de France (Ikeda, 2001) that he suggested be used for basic study by artists within SGI, Ikeda describes art as inseparable from religion (p. 41) and describes art as 'a natural, irrepressible manifestation of human spirituality' (p. 40) that has appeared since ancient times. He argues that, in artistic endeavour, the soul of the artist tends to reunite with/rediscover 'this fundamental reality that one can call universal life' (p. 40), and from there says, 'It is from this fundamental reality that man derives the energy needed for rebirth' (p. 40). This suggests that art is seen by Ikeda as a spiritual exercise by which the artist can come into contact with Buddhahood. Ikeda then goes on to say that: 'Art is to the spirit what bread is to the body: a necessity without which it cannot renew itself' (p. 40) and argues that this aspect of art is what Aristotle described as catharsis. Ikeda suggests that art is able to perform this function mainly because of its 'Power of synthesis' and art's 'capacity to bring together and unify disparate elements' (p. 40).

Having considered examples mainly from the Western tradition, Ikeda turns to the East and discusses Japanese art, finding that 'An examination of the aesthetic content of Japanese culture shows that it, too, is colored by religious feeling' (p. 41). He suggests that in modernity there is a 'decline in the power of synthesis' (p. 41) of both religion and art (presumably due to the development of secularisation) in both East and West and expresses concern that: 'when man (*sic*) breaks his bonds with nature and the universe, his ties with his fellows will also be broken' (p. 41). To mend this break, Ikeda suggests the substitution of '*keichi-en* (a causal relationship, the function that links life to its environment) for the concept of the 'power of synthesis', deriving the concept of *keichi-en* from the Buddhist teaching of 'dependent origination'. He recalls that this teaching points to that of *ku* (voidness) and argues that *ku* represents life in a state of latency that, rather than being nihilistic, suggests what Ikeda terms 'creative life' (p. 42). He then goes on to say:

A creative life devotes itself to going beyond the individual self by continually transcending the limits of space and time in pursuit of a universal self. In other words, this creative life develops in leaps and achieves renewal each day, in keeping with the original rhythm of the universe (p. 42).

The creative life of the artist is therefore a means by which Buddhature can be contacted and the path of the bodhisattva can be traversed.

Ikeda therefore posits a link between art and religion as does Sangharakshita⁹ (perhaps this is not surprising given they are contemporaries). However, for Ikeda, art's linkages with spirituality and religion make art potentially transcendent because of its link and harmony with the wider environment, nature and ultimately the universe as opposed to art being a transcendent pointer to a transhistorical and transcultural notion of 'Beauty' in and of itself. Perhaps because of this, art is not of itself seen by SGI as being politically innocent. Indeed in Ikeda's (2000) Peace Proposal to the UN for 2000 he observes:

[c]ulture manifests two contrasting aspects. One resonates with the original sense of the word 'culture' and involves the cultivation of the inner life of human beings and their spiritual elevation. The other is the aggressive, invasive imposition of one people's manners and mores on another, inscribing there a sense of resentment and sowing the seeds of future conflict. In this case, culture serves not the cause of peace, but the cause of war.

Art can therefore have negative applications as well as more positive ones of being a vehicle of socially engaged Buddhism, in the case of SGI the promotion of peace through cultural exchange. In terms of recognition of art's potential negative aspects, in the main feature article of an SGI Quarterly on the theme of 'Music as a Force for Peace' ethnomusicologist Kjell Skyllstad (2004) makes mention of the ways in which music was marshalled in the cause of racism during the Nazi era and during the Serbian conflict in the former Yugoslavia of the 1990s. Also, Ikeda (2000, pp. 4-6) in his Peace Proposal to the UN for 2000, observes the cultural imperialism involved in colonial policy and takes considerable note of the late postcolonial scholar Edward Said's (1994) critique of this.

Ikeda in his lecture to the *Institut de France* also does not provide a ranking of different genres or periods of art and this is reflected in the general artistic practice within SGI. For example, at the General Meeting of 2005 for

⁹ See Chapter Three for discussion of Sangharakshita's approach to religion and art.

SGL-UK, various styles of music – jazz, classical, hip-hop – were performed as part of the event. In addition there was a series of dance routines (the meeting programme said to celebrate the rich diversity of SGL), starting with Japanese dance and then moving onto Middle Eastern belly dancing, Latin American dance, Indian dance, Spanish dance, Irish dance, UK dance and ending with African dance. Although some might see the series of dance routines described above as representative of national stereotypes, I would suggest that this represents a significant move towards recognising cultural diversity that would be less likely to be seen in for example most FWBO cultural events. This approach which embraces diversity in art practice means that although quality in art and fine art are appreciated within SGL, one need not be an aficionado of high culture to engage with the entertainment at SGL events. This means that one does not require high stocks of what Bourdieu terms *cultural capital* to participate in SGL activities, as we will see when we consider study within SGL in the next chapter.

In terms of the mode of cultural exchange within SGL, Ikeda (2000), in his 2000 Peace Proposal, argues that, while cultural relativism has done much to ameliorate the effects of cultural imperialism, it is too passive to be a viable strategy for developing pluralism in the context, for example, of disputes between Western and Third World nations about the universality of human rights or whether their advocacy by the West is a new form of cultural imperialism towards Third World peoples. He argues:

Any attempt to unravel differences and confrontations as complex as these must be grounded in something far more solid than passive acceptance or tolerance. Such attitudes cannot possibly provide the basis for a culture of peace or a new global civilization that will enrich the lives of people far into the third millennium.

He goes on to advocate a form of cosmopolitanism based on his extension of the movement referred to as 'cultural internationalism' (p. 8) by Akira Iriye to account for developments during the nineteenth century. This movement saw culture as a means for developing more cooperative relations between nations and defusing conflict that was causing an arms race. It began with information exchange between scientists and medical practitioners and the development of standard systems of measurement with the aim that the foundations of peace would be laid through educational and cultural exchange. Ikeda suggests that the networks created through these exchanges survived the

two World Wars and were foundational to the post-war efforts that led to the UNESCO Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Ikeda asserts are 'two key documents that express the common aspirations and conscience of humankind' (p. 8). Ikeda goes on to suggest that it is NGOs who are continuing the work of these networks through their global activities and says:

I believe that these activities are the first signs of an emerging trend toward what might be termed cultural interpopulism, a movement for cultural interaction in which ordinary citizens are the protagonists. I am convinced that this approach will play a key role in the work of building a new culture of peace.

This 'cultural interpopulism' focuses on:

the deeper issues of cultural identity rather than the more superficial layers of political definitions and concerns.

because:

if we are overly entangled in the national dimension, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that national identities are often quite deliberate constructs created for political ends. The greatest danger, of course, lies in falling into the trap of reifying these constructs, that is, viewing them as unchanging entities or essences, with an absolute ontological standing.

He argues that while nation states will continue to play a key role, NGOs are best equipped to deal with questions of cultural identity because:

The main actors of cultural interpopulism, by contrast, are the many civil society organizations, the NGOs and international NGOs (INGOs), which are propelled by a powerful spirit of volunteerism among the people themselves. Here we see not the carefully constructed façade of governments and states, but the richly diverse faces of humanity. I believe that there is great potential for this kind of cultural interpopulism to interact with and support forward-looking political initiatives, based on a sense of appreciation and recognition of the respective roles and strengths of each. This is one of the avenues we should be exploring; it can equip us to respond to the complex demands of our diverse and rapidly evolving multicultural world.

Ikeda is therefore arguing for a federal and moral cosmopolitanism that evolves out of grassroots movements' ongoing work together on the global level. It would be based on the fundamental principles of the UN, even though he acknowledges that some UN members take exception to the universality of notions such as human rights. However, Ikeda does not go on to give more detail as to the 'deeper issues of cultural identity,' the phrase suggesting to me that Ikeda sees ethnicity as functioning on a more primordial level. One could

also argue as to the extent to which NGOs are representative of local grassroots communities, especially given their increasingly professional character and in many cases structures of First World agencies working in the Third World. And it would seem that developing this model in this way is again based on a premise of methodological individualism that privileges individuals' agency over recognition of social structures. This is especially so as the 2000 Peace Proposal goes on to discuss 'The Power of Character.'

5.7 CONCLUSION

The foregoing has sought to highlight the range of strategies through which SGI seeks to foster and celebrate diversity within its membership, firstly through consideration of its approach to social engagement, then its approach to gender and sexual identity and finally its approach to questions of culture and aesthetics. These allow SGI members, in keeping with the world-embracing philosophy of SGI, to actively engage with their environment and feel empowered to change it through their self-development. SGI members are encouraged to develop their own personal sense of unity behind a leader, a person who has put considerable thought into how racism is to be challenged, cultural and ethnic diversity are to be embraced and celebrated and cosmopolitanism promoted. Ikeda's view of Nichiren Buddhism as positing a 'Buddhist humanism' that can work for social change, and his thoughts on a multiculturalism rooted in universal and democratic values, is again moving towards what Paul Gilroy describes as 'convivial multiculture' (2004a) and 'planetary humanism' (2004b). I would argue that all these factors create an organisational ethos into which ethnic minorities can feel welcome and fully engage themselves. In the next chapter we will consider the engagement by SGI members associated with Malcott district with SGI's techniques of the self, and the effect it has on their sense of ethnic identity and encounters with racism within society.

CHAPTER SIX – SGI-UK AS CONTEXT FOR ‘SELF-FASHIONING’

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we looked at institutions and doctrines of the SGI-UK and found in them a more cosmopolitan approach to culture and ethnicity than that taken by other Western Buddhist convert movements. This chapter focuses on individual participants’ experiences of SGI, especially black participants (here defined as people of African and Caribbean descent) and other participants of colour. It also looks at the ways in which SGI-UK practices enable its practitioners of colour to live with, manage and challenge racisms within this movement and the wider society. It is organised into six sections, the second exploring the demographic profile of interviewees from SGI for this research. The third section considers people’s initial encounters with SGI and how factors of participants’ religious backgrounds, ‘race’ and class affect their conversion to Nichiren Buddhism and participation in SGI-UK. In the fourth section I discuss how SGI techniques of the self (Foucault, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c) impact on participants’ experiences of ‘race’ and identity and the responses of participants’ families and friends to their Buddhist practice. The chapter’s fifth section outlines the activities of the African-Caribbean Heritage group (formerly *Abibbimma*) within SGI-UK and how these compare with other specialist groups within SGI such as the *Absolute Freedom* group for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people. It is suggested in the concluding section that SGI-UK’s diversity has arisen partly through its efforts to promote itself and partly through its efforts to make its techniques of the self, chanting, study and propagation generally accessible.

6.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF RESEARCH SAMPLE

Seventeen people from SGI were interviewed. The demographic profile of interviewees is as set out in the table below:

Gender	Female (8)	Male (9)			
Age range	26-35 (6)	36-45 (7)	46-60 (3)	60+ (1)	
Social class	Working class (7)	Educated working class (1)	Middle class (3)	Unassigned (6)	
Social class of parents	Working class (10)	Middle class (5)	Not sure (1)	Unassigned (1)	
Leader in SGI?	Yes (8)	No (9)			
Other family members Buddhist?	Yes (10)	No (7)			
Disability?	Yes (1)	No (16)			
Sexuality	Heterosexual (12)	LGBT (2)	Unassigned (3)		
Was informant migrant?	Adult immigrant (3)	Childhood immigrant (3)	2 nd generation diaspora (8)	No (3)	
Education	Under 16 (1)	NVQ2 (1) GCSE (2) 'A' level (2)	Year 1 university (2)	First degree (6)	Postgraduate degree (3)
Ethnicity	Black UK (4) Black Caribbean (3) Black African (1) Black Other (1)	Mixed (1) 'Hybrid'/Other (2)	White UK (2) White European (1) Irish (1)	Unassigned (1)	

Table 6.1: Demographic details of SGI-UK interviewees

In terms of age, the membership of SGI in the sample has a wider age range than does FWBO. This may be in part because of SGI's youth divisions for young men and young women respectively, as well as its divisions for adolescents (the Future group) and for children. However, like the FWBO,

there are few third generation diaspora members, none in the sample for SGI as was the case for the FWBO. This may be due to developments of secularisation meaning that religion appeals less to the younger generation within the black diaspora, apart perhaps from those who are part of Muslim communities that are increasingly mobilising around their religious identities. As for adult immigrants, unlike FWBO, all the adult immigrants in this sample were practising Buddhism within SGI at the time of their migration to the UK. Just under half of the members of the sample (8/17: 47.1%) were second generation diaspora.

There is a wider spectrum in terms of social class of SGI membership, with fewer middle class people (3/17) in the sample, making it more representative of its locality than the LBC. SGI members tended to be less definite about questions of social class (6/17 unassigned, 4 people in this category identifying their ethnicity as Black) in accordance with the current trend for fewer people to identify themselves in terms of social class. Also, black people can often find it hard to locate themselves in terms of social class, as even when they have 'socially progressed' for example through education, they are not necessarily accepted as part of the middle class, possibly due to their lack of *social capital* and other forms of *cultural capital* that are not institutionalised, so might find themselves in a more undefined space. In terms of the decreasing salience of social class, Anita, who identified as Black British, said in her interview (20/09/2004) when asked what her social class was:

Anita: Oh! God I haven't heard that question for about twenty years! I dunno. What are the choices?

(Both laugh.)

Anita: Obviously I don't define myself as anything.

Esther, a white woman, in her interview described her position when asked how she identified in social class terms as follows:

Esther: Oh blimey! Well I don't really think in those terms, I mean, I find it very difficult to think in those terms actually.

Int.: Why?

Esther: Maybe it's the notion of class that it kind of jars with me. I mean, I don't know. I don't know what to say about that really. I mean I work, so I'm a worker. I'm also a kind of professional so I suppose, I suppose that somebody might define me as middle class, but I don't feel that for myself much, and I don't feel like exactly working class either. Maybe it's time to get rid of those definitions.

Both Anita and Esther are suggesting that they do not 'fit' easily with existing models of class and so feel uncomfortable with identifying with any definite position. I would suggest this is because, although they held professional positions, they were less well-educated, so were lacking in cultural capital they felt they needed to define themselves with confidence as middle-class.

Furthermore, most in the sample (10/17: 58.8%) described their parents as working class suggesting that in their childhoods they had little access to social capital and forms of what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as cultural capital that would enable them to become 'full members' of the middle class as adults. When we look at levels of educational attainment for SGI members we see a wider range than for the LBC membership, with the proportion of SGI members who have not participated in university level education (6/17: 35.3% - 5 people in this category defining their ethnicity as Black) being almost five times higher than that for FWBO (1/14: 7.1% - participant mixed-race). As we saw in the last chapter, the SGI perspective on aesthetics means that large stocks of cultural capital are not needed to engage with its artistic productions. Also as we will see later in this chapter, although study is a key practice within SGI, the way in which it takes place requires less cultural capital than would participation in study activities provided by other Buddhist groups.

In terms of sexuality, a smaller proportion defined as LGBT (2/17: 11.8%) than did the FWBO sample (35.7%, over five times the estimated UK average of 5-7%). While most SGI interviewees were prepared to define themselves as heterosexual, three SGI members preferred not to define their sexuality at all, with one describing their attitude as: 'I do what I want to do, with whoever I want', suggesting reluctance in these individuals to fix their identity for this axis of difference.

When we look at ethnicity, we note that none of the sample is Asian, unlike FWBO, and that most are of African heritage. As I observed a small minority of South Asian members in the East London region overall, the lack of Asian members in Malcott may be because Malcott is in a part of the case study area where Africans and African-Caribbeans form the majority of the minority ethnic population. It is interesting to note the diverse ways in which people chose to identify themselves in their interviews. For example, when Luke was asked to describe his ethnicity he chose to answer: 'I don't have an ethnic group. I'm a human being', suggesting a more cosmopolitan approach to

questions of ethnicity in his case. Both female interviewees who had migrated to the UK as adults mentioned the socially situated nature of ethnic classifications, with one Latin American interviewee Marina (04/10/2004) answering: 'Er, that's in this country, I think it's black. In this country I'm black.' Others like Sophie, a light-skinned woman of colour (08/07/2004), chose to emphasise the hybrid nature of their identity as follows:

Int.: How do you define your ethnicity?

Sophie: If I have to define it with those boxes on forms, it's Other.

Int.: Right. So if you didn't have to, what would you say?

Sophie: I say, my family were born in Guyana. I'm of Portuguese, Amerindian and African heritage. I was born in England. My cultural reference points are mostly English, though I have experience of being brought up in a Caribbean household where we eat Caribbean food, and accent is Caribbean. I cannot do a Caribbean accent, and I will not affect one, I mean, that's why I only tick a box Other. Because these, these identities mean nothing to me. And also I am not sure, unless I am certain why those identities are being requested and in what context they're being evaluated, I don't understand why they have to ask me. In the context of government information, it's to make sure that they're addressing you know, everyone in the community, that I understand. But I don't presume (indistinct), in terms of my needs, I'm not going to say that I'm a person of colour because they will decide that my needs are in a, within a specific box, and I believe it more privileged than that because of the very virtue of having this colour skin. So, I have to know the context in which I'm asked to be able to give the right answer, I think.

Interviewees' responses in terms of class and ethnicity, and to a lesser extent sexuality, suggest that SGI members are more reluctant to identify themselves in essentialist terms, preferring to acknowledge the ways in which identities are context dependent and contingent. As we will see later, this non-identification does not necessarily by any means ignore the factors arising from discrimination that mark certain identities and not others. I see it as rather reflecting a more anti-essentialist stance to questions of identity.

6.3 BUDDHIST CONVERSION TO THE SGI-UK

6.3.1 First encounters

In terms of what first brought interviewees to Buddhist chanting, most started after it was recommended to them by someone they had met. The initial attraction for participants was:

Firstly and most commonly, being impressed by the example of an SGI member they personally knew, so being prepared to try the practice when it was

recommended to them. For Patrick (14/02/2005) his first encounter was through a friend:

I was introduced to Buddhism by a friend of mine. We were then both actors and she had become a Buddhist, I was away working, and she sent me a card, a Christmas card with this phrase written in it, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, written in the card. And then, I'd never come across it before, didn't know what it was, so I rang her up and asked her what it was, and she said, 'Oh, I've become a Buddhist.' And I kind of thought, 'Well OK, it's good for you' and never thought much about it. But this particular girlfriend, you know we were very close, so it did obviously resonate with me somewhere. A few months later I found myself in the Caribbean working on a film and I heard this noise coming from below my hotel bedroom one day and you know, for a couple of days I kept hearing this noise in the evening, like a mumbling, repetitive mumbling. So I went down to the next floor and listened at every door and I found this door where the noise was the loudest, knocked on it, and there enough there were two actors, a stunt man and another actor from the film and they were both chanting. And I knew they were chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* and I said, 'Oh, you're chanting that *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*!' and they said, 'Good, do you want to join us?' And I had nothing else better to do so I did. And I just went in started chanting, and I never stopped.

Secondly some people were advised to try chanting in order to resolve a difficulty they were having in their lives. Amanda (03/11/2004) went to a complementary health practitioner to resolve a health problem she had at the time. The practitioner recommended a special diet but, when this initially seemed less effective than Amanda had hoped, she went back to the practitioner who gave her a card with *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* printed on it. Amanda decided to give it a try and found:

I went home and I remember that evening I done it, and the following morning I done it, even next morning and evening and then all of a sudden I kind of, it kind of took off, in that I was doing a few minutes to start with, and then I thought, 'Well, I quite like the feel of this! Let me do a bit more.' So I must have done probably ten minutes morning, ten in the evening and then I gradually built up to like half an hour morning, half an hour evening. I'm thinking, 'God this is great!'

Thirdly, some other people found their curiosity being piqued by what they heard about the practice or chanting itself. Matthew (17/08/2004) was acting in a play when he first heard two fellow members of the cast chanting *daimoku* and was intrigued by it.

Matthew: ... they were really nice people anyway. I was doing a play. Just before they started going on stage, they maybe chanted before a few minutes and it sounded really nice to be honest with you, you know. And it's not as if I asked them and I really sold me something, you know. It was more a case of I was just really, really

curious to find out more as to what this Buddhism was all about really.

Int.: Because of the way they carried on, or because you were just interested in Buddhism?

Matthew: No, their chanting, they just sounded incredibly harmonious doing the chanting, and, you know it wasn't just the sound, it was more like something in this for me, something more, not quite sure what it is, but the only way of finding out is by delving into it more.

Fourthly and finally, some were on a general search for a spiritual/religious tradition that would meet their needs for personal happiness and a sense of meaning in their lives. Anita as a young woman decided to investigate Buddhism

Anita: Because I was very unhappy and I met a friend of my mother's who was very outgoing, and I'd written a list of all the different religions that I wanted to look into, and then one of the ones, I think it was just Buddhism and Christianity actually, it might have been Hinduism, I'm not sure. But I think there were just two or three, but Buddhism was the top one. And I investigated Christianity and didn't like it. Spoke to my mum about being, becoming a Buddhist, and she said, 'Oh right, Brenda's a Buddhist, go and talk to her!' So it was a very easy transition. Once I'd started to question, 'Why are we here?' and 'What's going on?' and all that stuff and actively sought out a religion, decided I needed to have a religion.

Int.: Right, so you were looking for a purpose in life? For a sense of meaning?

Anita: Yes, I suppose yes. Yeah.

Unlike the process of conversion in the FWBO where deciding to learn how to meditate did not necessarily mean that one became a Buddhist, for some people the decision to chant was a process that Lewis Rambo (1993) describes as a period of 'experimental conversion.' Through this 'experiment', one was trying the practices out and provisionally identifying with the faith to see how this worked for one's life. One is usually invited to try chanting for oneself with a goal in mind for a period of time so as to 'have actual proof' of the efficacy of chanting. The period of time suggested varies but at most would be one hundred days, i.e. just over three months. When this was first explained to me by John he said that sometimes at first things could become worse once one started chanting as, I was to learn in my later interview with him (19/02/2004), had been the case in his experience:

I did it for three weeks. And I think it was all right, then the last day of my of the third week, OK, I think it was like on the Saturday. And I remember, it was so clear in my mind, I was chanting and then this explosion, no this, this, it was like a maelstrom of rage was just whirling up inside me. I was so angry. I mean, one minute I'm

chanting these, what I think are stupid words, and the next minute I am just so angry, I am so, I am spitting blood with anger, OK. And I'm so angry, I could really kill somebody. And so I finish chanting, I'm in this rage and I don't understand why I was feeling so angry, because nothing's made me angry. And then the 'phone rings, and I grab the 'phone and it's __. And then I, I then started, I was swearing, 'What's the fuck going on man? I've been chanting and now I wanna kill somebody!' He just burst out laughing. And you know in cartoons, you know, if there's two people on the 'phone you can send your hand down the 'phone line and come down the other and you can strangle the other person? (Laughs) You know you can do that in cartoons? (Laughs) I wanted to do that with my hand, send it all the way down that telephone and just kill him! And I said, 'I'd kill you!' And he was laughing and laughing and laughing, and I thought, 'What is going on?' And he said, 'Perhaps that's your proof.' And so a penny just dropped. Because I was the typical angry young black man, OK? Everybody who is black, in Europe, certainly in Great Britain, has had to experience so much racism, so many put downs, so much undermining that, that you choke back a lot of things that you're not able to say, or can't say, either for fear or because of repercussions, OK. So you have this real anger within you, seething anger within you. And I was a really angry young man. I really was, I really was, to the extent that my anger used to get so bad sometimes, that I would lose friends, so that you know, someone would do something to me, OK. And I'd get so, so angry I couldn't talk to them, I couldn't talk to them. Because I knew if I, if I said anything to them I would just erupt and I would totally lose control. So I knew that I was an angry, angry person, OK, deep down. I wasn't really admitting it to myself, but I knew I was. And he said, 'Perhaps you needed to let go of that anger.' No he said, 'Perhaps you needed to see that anger and let go of it and realise what it's doing to your life, OK. And perhaps that's why. You may be chanting for a car' because I was chanting for a Ford Escort Cabriolet, OK because I thought, 'Well, fuck it, you know. He said I can chant for anything, I wanna chant for a car. A brand new sports car! You know, see if I get my sports car. If I get my sports car then perhaps there's something to this Buddhism, you know!' (laughs) So what have I got to lose? I could have been driving a car, I thought, well yeah three weeks then you get a car, man! Yeah, this really works! And instead I've got this, this, this, this, outpouring of anger. And you know what? I have never been as angry as I used to be. It's like I lost it. I mean, for a while, you know my first few years I was still having to deal with my anger, OK. But, I've never been the angry young man that I originally was. And I knew that [John's friend] was right, I knew that that was my proof. And the thing is, because I was chanting for the material, but I got an immaterial benefit, but one that really I needed to get, so it was the best I could have got. The car, I could always buy a car. But to lose your anger, in the sense of that out of control gripping rage that I had, was just proof to me that this works. And it was my proof. And I thought, this is worth investigating.

John's experiment with the practice therefore put him very much in touch with his repressed feelings about the racism he had experienced as a black man within UK society. However, his account of his experience, rather than being seen as threat/direct aggression or a means of pathologising and stereotyping him which it might have been in other contexts, was positively embraced by his sponsor (an older black man) creatively and sympathetically. I would suggest that it was initially both the 'proof' of the practice and his sponsor's response to him enabled John to continue to engage with the practice as a means of healing from his experiences of racism and the anger they had generated within him.

Another factor in John's experience is the doctrine within Nichiren Buddhism of the *ten worlds* that teaches that various modes of human experience contain the seeds of Enlightenment if one engages with the practices of this Buddhism. Also each of these worlds is regarded as having both a positive and negative aspect, apart from the world of Buddhahood, which is wholly positive. One of the remaining nine worlds is the world of anger. The suggestion within this school of Buddhism that anger can be a launching pad into Buddhahood is an unusual one within the Buddhist world, in which anger is usually seen as an aspect of the root poison of hatred and thus viewed negatively. However, Richard Causton (1995), the first General Director of SGI-UK, suggests that anger is:

[a] source of the energy needed to fight injustice and inequality. It is Anger, the awareness of the self, which enables us to assert the inherent dignity of our own individual lives, as well as that of others, and to challenge those who would seek to dominate, repress or manipulate. Anger in this sense is thus the passionate driving force for personal and social reform and can, therefore, be as creative as it is usually destructive. (p. 53)

The person would also usually learn how to chant *gongyō* with the person who had introduced him or her to SGI (their sponsor). In my case, I was first taught *gongyō* at a Malcott district planning meeting (a meeting to plan the monthly district discussion meeting), where the leaders slowly went through the liturgy (which is in 13th century Japanese) in order to help me follow it. There are also audiotapes and CDs of *gongyō* chanting available and introductory meetings for newer members are usually arranged at local level so that they can learn how to perform this ritual correctly.

One then proceeds to attend one's local district discussion meeting if one is not already doing so, though some attend these meetings before deciding to

try chanting for themselves. As we will see, the district meeting is often where one has one's first collective experience of SGI, and every effort is made to make guests feel welcome. For instance, in my first encounters with SGI, I was usually accompanied to meetings (held in people's houses) and my companion(s) would endeavour to answer any questions I had and engage with me in dialogue about my own practice of Buddhism. After some time (about six months after attending my first district meeting), I was judged sufficiently aware of SGI practices and procedures to be able to attend meetings on my own initiative and effectively participate in them, as I found when I tried to ask questions in meetings after that period. For example, participants were genuinely mystified as to why I asked what *ichinen*¹ was at a local women's division meeting after I had been attending for about nine months.

When one feels ready, one can then apply to receive one's own copy of the *Gohonzon* (the *mandala*² to which SGI members chant) and to become a member of SGI. Receiving the *Gohonzon* is taken to represent a commitment to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism for the rest of one's life. As John explained:

Int.: So what made you decide to get the *Gohonzon*?

John: Because I realised that this was the expression of the ultimate truth in life. And that it was going to provide me with all of the answers that I was seeking.

Int. The *Gohonzon*?

John: Well the practice. The *Gohonzon* is a symbol of the practice. So by getting the *Gohonzon* what you're doing, you're symbolically saying I'm committing myself to this for the rest of my life, and lifetime after lifetime, OK. So as I knew that you know, the practice was an expression of the ultimate truth, as I knew that I wanted to practise it for the rest of my life, and it would provide me, the practice would provide me with all the answers I needed, getting the *Gohonzon* that symbolised the practice was the necessary next step for me. And you're always encouraged to get it, the *Gohonzon* that is, if we feel that you are able to make that wholehearted commitment to Buddhism for the rest of our life, for lifetime after lifetime, OK. So having got to that point I thought, 'Yes, that's what I want to do.' Because it also means you know you work for your own happiness, and for the happiness of everything, every other single human being on the planet, the universe. So it's quite a big undertaking. It's a big commitment. Because you can't then say, 'Oh well, Saddam Hussein is a son of a bitch and he's just an evil bastard.' You can't say that

¹ *Ichinen* means 'a single moment of life' according to the Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism.

² See glossary in Appendix 4 for definition

because one of the cardinal teachings of Buddhism is that everybody's got Buddhahood, so Saddam Hussein's got Buddhahood, so he's got the potential to be a Buddha, you know, even though he's done all the atrocities that he has. So you then, always have to always look for the good points in people and work with those.

Deciding to become a member of SGI in Buddhist terms is therefore undertaking to develop the *bodhisattva* spirit. One's application is usually sponsored by the person who introduced one to the practice, and a chapter leader will visit the applicant's home to clarify for themselves that the applicant is doing the three basic practices and has been for at least three months. These practices are the twice daily recitation of *daimoku* (the mantra *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*), *gongyō* (portions of the *Lotus Sūtra*) morning and evening, attendance of district and chapter study meetings, sharing the practice with others and personal study (which may involve simply reading SGI-UK's monthly magazine *Art of Living*). The chapter leader's visit to the applicant's home is to ensure that the applicant is able to understand what is involved and is willing to commit themselves to fulfilling this for the rest of their life. Also that the applicant has a *butsudān* (a cabinet that houses the *Gohonzon*) and a suitable place within their home for a Buddhist altar (photograph of a typical one below):

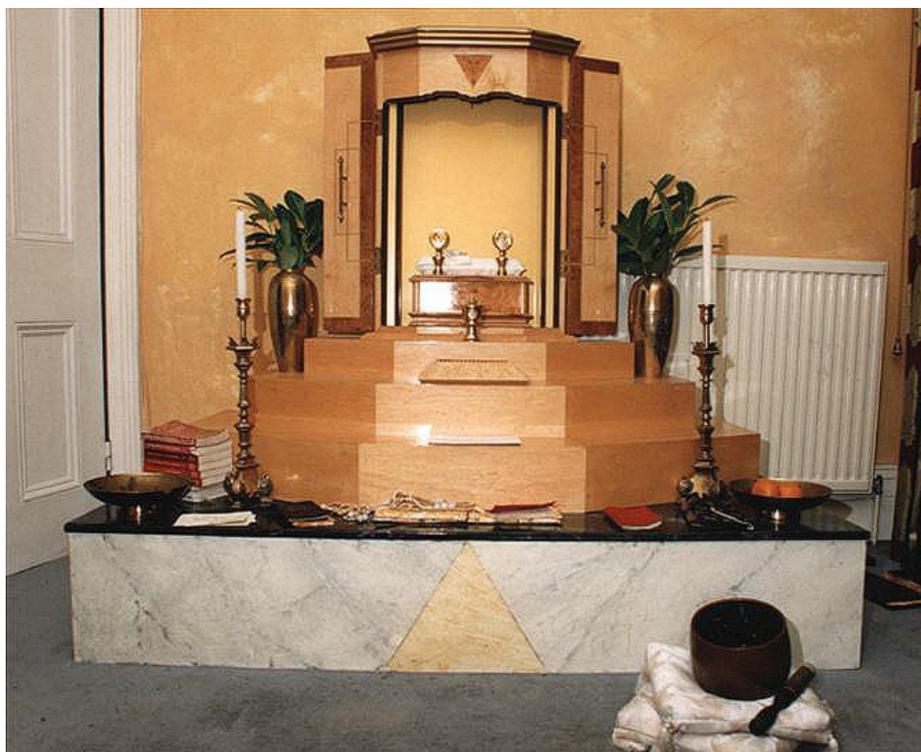


Figure 6.1 Photograph of an SGI altar by Michael Farrier (used with permission)

(The *Gohonzon* is not included in this photograph on the grounds that within SGI, photographs of *Gohonzons* are prohibited. Evergreens are offered as

opposed to cut flowers to remind one of the Nichiren Buddhist teaching of the 'eternity of life'. As one can see, there is no Buddha statue on the altar on the grounds that such images detract from one seeking one's own Buddhahood within. With such an altar, one therefore does not have the problem with possibly not identifying with particular iconography on the grounds that it does not resemble the phenotype of a specific ethnic group.)

Should one's application be successful, one attends one of the monthly *Gohonzon* conferral ceremonies at the SGI-UK national headquarters at Taplow Court, and at a later date enshrines one's *Gohonzon* within one's *butsudan* at home. The *Gohonzon* receiving and enshrinement ceremonies tend to be celebratory moments acting as significant markers in a person's life.

I will now turn to discuss the ways in which participants' religious background affected their conversion process and life within SGI.

6.3.2 Finding a home in SGI: issues of religious background

Most interviewees had already left any childhood religion they had well behind them when they first encountered SGI. But the decision to receive the *Gohonzon* and enshrine it was not always a straightforward process for individuals. For some black participants who had been brought up as Christians, it brought up issues for them of whether they were 'praying to an idol' by chanting to the *Gohonzon*. Sometimes these issues could take some time to resolve in an individual's life. For Peter (25/07/2004) the issue became quite acute:

Int. ... you mentioned that you did have concerns about taking up Buddhism because of your religious background at first, how did you deal with that?

Peter: I just did. I can remember actually saying to my friends who were still very much into Christianity and they had big issues with it, (indistinct) and I remember saying that I was going to practise Buddhism but I wouldn't get a *Gohonzon*. So I practised fully but there was still something about worshipping an idol if you like, i.e. the *Gohonzon* because of that Christian background, so there was a lot of fear attached to that, and I can remember when another friend of mine knew that I was getting more into Buddhism, and he was getting people into Christianity. He brought one of his Christian leaders round to see me, and the *Gohonzon*, my *butsudan* used to be here then, you know, in this corner (points to a corner in the room just left to where Int. is sitting on the sofa).³ And I didn't actually have it open,

³ It was interesting to note that at the time of the interview Peter had his *Gohonzon* and *butsudan* prominently displayed against a wall in a central position in his front room.

'cos I was preparing to get *Gohonzon*. And when they came round I was literally sitting like this, and my back was kind of trying to shield the *butsudan* so they wouldn't actually see it. I was that, looking back it was really silly but you know, I was that kind of self-conscious or ashamed of, I needed to, you know pray to this external thing, I don't know. So it was very, very difficult. I dealt with it by asking many people a lot of questions. I used to speak with John obviously, ask him many questions. He could answer some, and I was left to grapple with some, and that was helpful too. That's how I dealt with it, or how I deal with it.

Int.: So how long did it, did that process take all in all?

Peter: Erm, I think once I actually got the *Gohonzon*. I started practising in, in March '96, started chanting in March '96 and then you could only get erm, you could only receive *Gohonzon* twice a year which was May, November. Whereas now it's different, you know, *Gohonzon* ceremonies are every month. Erm, and so I could have if I had pushed for it received *Gohonzon* in May of that year, but I wasn't sure that I actually wanted to do that, you know, commit to it. I liked the philosophy and stuff but I needed to know more. So I got *Gohonzon* in November, and I think by then I was really developing a, you know an effort approach. I was just like, I need to kind of sort my life out, and they're certain things I want in life, certain things I'm not happy with and you know, if there's a God let him come and punish me basically.

Int.: Sounds like when I came out as a lesbian! (laughs)

Peter: Yes, yes. You just have to live by it.

Peter thus resolved his internal conflict by an act of defiance against the authoritarian 'god' that was obstructing his conversion process and his determination to continue to empower himself using the techniques of the self he had encountered through SGI. Others chose a different resolution, for example Charles (01/08/2004) described his process in this way:

Int.: ... did you have any concerns about taking up Buddhism because of your religious background?

Charles: Well it did affect how I viewed how the whole practice can be practised. Especially that you had to practise what we call the *Gohonzon* and stuff, and the fact that it was from my previous religion and religious beliefs, it was like praying to an idol so to speak. So I saw that as me praying to something, you know, which I didn't see, I would have viewed from my Christian perspective as, sort of idol-worshipping, you know, evil you know. Putting your beliefs in a wooden box and

Int. Hmm-hmm.

Charles: stuff like that. So at first it was very difficult for me to accept that. But I suppose as I read more about what that thing actually represented and what it meant and the fact that it actually held no power of any kind of all, it was a reflected sort of image of

what you trying to attain, then I began to feel a bit more comfortable with it. When I brought it back, it directed me back to myself, I was actually praying to myself,

Int. Hmm-hmm.

Charles: you know, drawing on my Higher Self and that was just something to keep my focus,

Int.: Hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm.

Charles: rather than me praying to it for anything to happen,

Int.: Hmm-hmm.

Charles: it was a focus for me to be able to draw my Buddhahood from within myself. So in effect I was praying to myself,

Int.: Hmm-hmm.

Charles: and that made me more comfortable with it.

Robert Bluck (2006, p. 95) notes that:

the *gohonzon* may be referred to in SGI literature either as 'a symbolic representation of what is already latent within an individual' or as 'an object which has its own intrinsic power' (Waterhouse, 1997, p. 106). Members are sometimes ambivalent about its exact status, and it seems unclear as to whether the *gohonzon* itself or the person kneeling in front of it is the agent of change.

By choosing to view the *Gohonzon* as an aspect of himself (seeing it as a representation of the Buddhahood as immanent within himself) rather than an external object with power, Charles became able to bypass the 'anti-idolatry' doctrine of his Christian conditioning and engage with his practice more positively than he might otherwise have done.

Having considered the barriers posed by participants' religious conditioning to their conversion to SGI Nichiren Buddhism, I now turn to consider how issues of 'race' are encountered within this movement by its practitioners.

6.3.3 Finding a home in SGI: issues of 'race'

People seldom spoke of 'race' issues presenting a barrier to their involvement, but some did mention initially finding district meetings, (where one is more likely to meet people from a range of backgrounds whose only common factor is an interest in Buddhism) difficult because of 'race'. As John explained in his interview:

I didn't like the people. You know, I'm very independent. I like my own space, I like doing things by myself and I couldn't get on with these 'Buddhists'. Because I didn't see myself as a Buddhist. I saw myself as somebody who knew that this worked and was finding out more about it, I wasn't a Buddhist, OK. I went to these meetings, I

saw these Buddhists and I just didn't like them. I just thought, they're just not my kind of people. And I thought, 'I don't know if I can do this. I'm not sure I wanna be with those kind of people.' Because at that time it was mainly white people around, you know. No young black guys like me. And I thought, 'I'm not sure I wanna do this.' Because [my friend who introduced me to the practice is] black. He's older than me. And so I thought, 'I don't know if I'm going to go to these meetings, I'm just gonna chant and read.' So because you know, because practice and study, you know, they said. So it's like, practice is like chant *nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, you know doing *gongyō*, so I'll do that. Study yeah, I'll do that. Tell people about Buddhism, yeah I could do that. Attend meetings, no forget about that bit (both laugh). Leave that to one side. So I did that for about a month. And I was really suffering and really struggling and not getting any benefit from chanting. And the great thing is that when you're taught about the practice, the person who tells you has a really important relationship with you. He's there to support and encourage you and to answer your questions and to explain what's happening because it's like you're going through changes. So some of them might be totally new to you and quite confusing. So somebody who's actually been through that understands and can give you the benefit of his experience. He's not in anyway an expert, but he just talks to you with an open heart on whether, 'I felt like that' he can say 'because I was doing this and this is how I got out of it.' So he gives you the benefit of his experience. So I was regularly meeting and talking with my friend who actually just kept on encouraging me, and he said, 'You don't have to anything you don't wanna do. At the same time though to get the full benefit of practice you've got to attend meetings'. Because he said, you know, 'If you don't like these people, that isn't their problem, that's your problem. So what you're gonna do when you meet other people that you don't like, are you gonna cut them out?' So he said, 'In the end you'll have to cut out about nine-tenths of the world, and there's just one-tenth of people that you like.' And he said, 'If you try to live your life that way it's going to be so narrow. So this is really all about growth.' OK, so I started going to meetings, and it was a real struggle, it was a real struggle. (a) talking in meetings because I thought, 'What do I say to them?' and (b) being around people who I really didn't like. I didn't feel like a Buddhist.

At the time when John was first getting involved, black people were still a small minority in SGI-UK (then NS-UK) and most of its members tended to be white and middle class and so had the appropriate *habitus*. John therefore initially therefore felt like a 'fish out of water' in discussion meetings, which are seen as a forum for studying Buddhism and where people share their experiences of how Buddhist practice is affecting their lives. This feeling of not fitting in ('I didn't feel like a Buddhist'), of not being able to relate comfortably to the other Buddhists around him apart from his sponsor because of factors of 'race', class and age, was therefore something he had to deal with, but he was supported in

this by his sponsor. His sponsor, in accordance with the methodological individualism of SGI, did not however address the issue in terms of social issues of 'race' and class but in terms of personal likes and dislikes and 'creating value' in relationships. For John, the question of feeling like 'fish out of water' was to be resolved not by questioning the aquatic climate but by examining himself in accordance with the doctrine of *esho funi*, the oneness of self and environment.

One question that might arise is how people related to the fact that SGI-UK originated in Japan and the implications of this for some of its white members who might regard certain aspects of this movement in Orientalist (Said, 1995) terms. However, like Wilson and Dobbelaere (1994, pp. 94-5) I found that most participants had not had any particular attraction to things Japanese and that their attraction to Nichiren Buddhism was overwhelmingly pragmatic. Participants had tried SGI's techniques of the self and found that they were effective for them in terms of their objectives for self-advancement and self-improvement. As a result they had decided to engage with this movement.

SGI participants very rarely reported encountering racist attitudes within the movement. I would suggest that this is largely because of the cosmopolitan ethos of SGI-UK and the anti-racist stance of its President Daisaku Ikeda as well as the multiculturalism of Maccott district. Some mentioned that at national level the leadership was largely white, and that some in the movement were less aware of issues of 'race'. In the few cases where interviewees reported racism they tended to describe their response in one of three ways:

Rebuking the enemies of the Lotus

For the majority of participants like Luke, it was felt important to challenge racist comments whenever they were voiced within SGI:

Int.: ... Have you ever felt the need to criticise the way someone in SGI has dealt with racial or cultural issues?

Luke: Yeah, I mean I would say I felt for me if somebody's (indistinct) handle something badly I'll just say, 'That's terrible' you know, and there's a reason for, 'It's terrible. And I suggest you go away and chant about it and come back and have a dialogue with me over it.' I mean that's how I would approach it. And when it has happened people have come back and chanted about it. It's a central premise of Buddhism as well that you speak your mind. If you see someone acting against the spirit and intent of the *sūtra* and you fail to correct them then you're the enemy of Buddhism. So in terms of

that you've gotta be honest and forthright. Hmm.

Int.: So you haven't ever felt like criticising someone in SGI about those issues but not done that?

Luke: I, no way! If I'm not happy then I'll say what needs to be said there and then. So, I wouldn't criticise [national senior leaders of SGI-UK] to you saying, 'Have you thought the way they handled something was really bad, and it had racial racist undertones', I'd say that directly to them at the point of delivery.

Int. Hmm.

Luke: Which indeed is how it should be, you know. And they can then reply and say what they think. And that's fine, I listen to what they have to say and I'll process it and if needs be I'll come back with something else. But I wouldn't label the organisation as being institutionally racist because an individual has said something or done something which might create that impression, because SGI is more than one person and one individual and one set of individuals.

Even though Luke is prepared to challenge statements he finds racist, again in keeping with the methodological individualism of SGI's approach he does not see the movement in institutional terms but as a collection of individuals practising together. Hence he does not regard any racist comments by SGI members, however senior, as reflecting a problem of institutional racism within the organisation. This is not dissimilar to the view of the FWBO of itself as a Buddhist movement. However, the processes of racialisation within each movement are quite different, one privileging whiteness as universal Westernness, the other encouraging a more cosmopolitan approach to questions of 'race'.

Sophie also described the mediation process by which, as a leader within SGI, she had confronted a racist assumption made by a member against another member. This was difficult because the member who was allegedly being discriminatory did not see her behaviour as such. As Sophie described it in her interview:

Sophie: ... It meant that we had to have dialogue. It was very painful. I found it very painful because I couldn't believe I was having to address this and also I did feel paranoid, so I'd think, 'Well maybe I'm being paranoid.', and that's where the *daimoku* comes in, that's where the practice, you know, SGI is just any other organisation without the *daimoku*. Because the *daimoku* that all parties chanted resulted in a healing of wounds. And you know, and the person that had the most difficulty with it actually I think removed herself, possibly from the organisation, I can't remember. But certainly isn't in this country. I know that for a fact. And I think there was a huge amount of value caused by the discussion and by the understanding that took place. But also, the person that was being discriminated against,

because of this notion of personal responsibility had to take that on in terms of their faith. You know, why was this being directed against her? And it couldn't just be because of coloured skin. Because many black people don't experience, they will say they don't experience the same sort of, you know their experience is very, very different. And that's the other thing you know, sort of universalising this experience, although it is the experience of a community, it is not necessarily the experience of each individual. And so, you know but she could see that there are, there was a pattern in that, that, that came from before that wasn't necessarily to do with it being racial, these things being racially motivated. So it's much more complex. And we had to deal with it within the context of the organisation. Because again it has to transcend those political, boundaries. That's part of it. That's how it manifests itself as a poison. But in terms of how it's dealt with through faith, it's dealt with very much through *daimoku*, very much through the wisdom to look at people as human beings, and then engage in dialogue based on that understanding. And which is, which is again a very different way from dealing with it out there which is to take to the streets and march against racism, you know. Which up until now, as much as I'd like to think, things have shifted a little bit mainly because of the number of mixed-race relationships there are out there, but you know Martin Luther King, his voice still hasn't really been heard, not really. Not in world politics, you know (indistinct). So, so all of that stuff hasn't really amounted to much. But within Buddhist philosophy there is something that can make change possible. Because it allows for difficult discussions to take place that are painful and difficult, that couldn't possibly really happen 'out there' because people don't feel safe enough or secure enough, or don't have the spiritual, common spiritual basis from which to start that discussion. And it definitely always has to start from prayer. And this situation probably took about a year to resolve. So it's, because it is very, very painful for everybody, because you want to revert back to how you would be out there, you know. But there is a, there is something in Buddhist philosophy that says, 'No you can't, you've got to take this on as a personal victory, and it's got to be a victory for everybody.' And the problem is a victory for everybody out there usually means that people of colour are given the illusion that they've won something but they actually haven't, you know ultimately. So, so you know, it's not happened very often. I mean this is the one incidence that I can think of that it has happened. It was very, it was in my practice probably about eight years into my practice, something like that. And it was very, very painful, but has, I mean looking back now and looking at those, looking at the relationship with these people now, you know, the victor, the victor has been the person who was the victim. You know, she's had incredible proof in her life. And the person who was the aggressor actually has disappeared and I don't think is terribly happy at the moment. So because the understanding of cause and effect is so strict, so you have to find a way through these things different from out there. But it can only be done through prayer I think, 'cos it's very, very difficult to do it another way.

Int.: So you felt that it ended up in a victory for all concerned?

Sophie: It was a victory for what was right, and what was right was to do with Buddhist concept of respect and justice. And that's, you know and that's erm, you can't turn your back on dealing with it that way if it happens within the organisation. You just can't.

The approach Sophie took meant all the parties involved were encouraged to look at their own responses and approaches to the incident and to 'race' in their lives. This is again in keeping with the doctrine of *itai-dōshin*, striving to enable people in disharmony to arrive at a common position, and the methodological individualism of SGI. As Diane Esguerra (1994, p. 16) says, for SGI the issue is one of '*Karma*, not colour':

Buddhism teaches that we have all created the *karma* to be born into the country where we are, the colour we are, and live the lives we do, through causes, both negative and positive, which we have made over many lifetimes. If we are being victimized or discriminated against, we have to take one hundred per cent responsibility for the fact that, at some time in the past, we have made the causes to be suffering in this manner. (*ibid.* p.16)

It did not mean that people were left unchallenged in the process facilitated by Sophie, especially considering that one of those involved (the alleged perpetrator) ended up leaving the country. Those who harbour racist feelings are also encouraged to rid themselves of the three poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance that are at their root, being warned that, if they do not seek to transform them, they will engender bad *karma* for themselves, as Sophie suggests happened in this case. Through this process, it is believed that all can learn to respect each other in order to develop a 'racially harmonious Britain of the future' (*ibid.* p.19). In this way, however one is racialised, all practitioners becomes equal before the *Gohonzon* as most will have to undergo what is referred to as *human revolution* to overcome issues arising from their socio-economic positioning.

Being pipped at the post

In some cases, people did not challenge racist comments they heard within SGI because others had intervened to challenge it before they had a chance to do so.

Taking it to the Gohonzon

Some SGI members were wary of criticising what they perceived to be racist comments within SGI without going through a further process of personal reflection in front of the *Gohonzon*, in order that any response they made to the issue came from 'a higher life state', in other words an attitude that was more

compassionate rather than one that was rooted in outrage and anger. But for others in this group, the turn to the *Gohonzon* might place the focus even more on themselves, for example:

Int. So you have had times when you've felt like criticising someone in SGI about racial/cultural issues but not done that?

Charles: I wouldn't say criticising by challenging somebody on that issue, but decided not to. Decided to use the wisdom of the practice to deal with it.

Int. What do you mean by the wisdom of the practice?

Charles: Wisdom of the practice means you know, taking your thoughts and what you find challenging or whatever to the *Gohonzon* while you're chanting and you chant about it, to sort of be enlightened to the best way to deal with. And often that not it leads you back to yourself to, 'Ah', you know you would behave if you were in that person's shoes, or why you think that person behaves. It means as I said before in fact you do have, or you do possess the same elements that you see in that person that you want to be so critical of.

Int. So *daimoku* helps you to feel more sympathetic towards the person you felt like criticising?

Charles: I wouldn't say sympathetic.

Int. Right.

Charles: I would say aware, enlightened to the devilish functions in the human condition I suppose and challenging those devilish functions rather than challenging the person themselves.

Int. Challenging the devilish functions in yourself?

Charles: In you. In yourself. Yes. 'Cos often or not that's where, that's where they are, they sort of exist. So you just see it just reflected through somebody else's actions.

Charles' interpretation of Nichiren's injunction not to 'slander' others in the movement was that one should be slow to judge the motives of others with him saying, 'I'm always sort of trying to be on my toes as not to be quick to judge, or even to judge at all.' This brings us back to the doctrine of *itai doishin* as it is interpreted within SGI – putting aside tendencies that may make one judgmental or condemnatory of others in favour of looking at oneself to see if the things one wants to criticise about others are rather an aspect of oneself, as a human being. This might therefore mean that one might want to point the finger against expressions of what one perceived as racism by others because of one's own tendencies towards racism, meaning that one would have to practise against that tendency (*human revolution*). This approach clearly takes the doctrine of *esho funi* (oneness of self and environment) and the

methodological individualism of SGI even further. By choosing to understand one's experience of racism in this way, one could regard oneself as over time becoming more empowered to manage it. This is because, as several interviewees said to me, in Nichiren Buddhism, complaining about one's life experience rather than engaging in practice as taught by SGI meant that one would often be making things worse rather than better for oneself. One had to respond to one's situation of feeling like 'fish out of water' by questioning one's own attitude to the aquatic climate and seeing oneself as primarily responsible for that climate and feeling of unease within it.

6.3.4 Finding their place in SGI: issues of class

As we saw in the demographic profile earlier in this chapter, most participants saw themselves as working class. Buddhism within SGI usually allowed participants to express their aspirations for social and economic advancement without expecting them to adopt a more 'middle-class' approach to life. For instance, we have seen in the previous chapter, the approach to aesthetics within SGI proposed by Ikeda is such that high culture is not privileged over other forms of culture, and different genres are used to provide entertainment at SGI larger events. Also, although study is a key practice in this movement, the approach taken to study is not scholastic and does not require in-depth or deeply philosophical knowledge of ancient languages or Buddhist concepts. Whereas in other Buddhist movements some have gone on to develop academic study of Buddhism, within SGI this is less common. And although Ikeda often makes reference to key Western as well as other literary figures, most members are not expected to have the same level of erudition. Cultural capital within SGI-UK, unlike the FWBO does not require one to be versed in Western high culture and philosophy to access symbolic capital within this movement. In fact such erudition can be seen as potentially causing a problem of being 'over-intellectual' in a movement that emphasises faith in its practices and teachings as a means of accessing its symbolic capital in terms of leadership positions and so forth.

Each month, the SGI-UK magazine *Art of Living* introduces the text that will be studied that month in chapters with a commentary from a senior leader. The magazine also includes 'experiences' in which members give their accounts of how their practice of Buddhism has enabled them to overcome material and/or psychological difficulties in their lives. Through these the key

points of orthodox practice: resolute determination to overcome the difficulty; study; chanting; supporting SGI activity; developing a sense of connection with one's mentor are made. There will also be pieces centred on Ikeda such as essays and accounts of meetings he has held as well as news of events within various SGI-UK localities. The study meetings often refer to Ikeda's commentaries on the *goshō* (Nichiren's letters) and *Lotus Sūtra* as the key way into a text. At district discussion meetings, people would often refer to Ikeda's exegeses of the *goshō* to explain a concept, and then towards the end of the meeting read an excerpt from the *goshō*.

Although it is possible to take examinations on SGI doctrine, (Waterhouse, 2002 pp. 125), I would agree with Robert Bluck's (2006, p. 96) finding around SGI that 'Study is seen as spiritual rather than academic'. I would go further to say that study is meant to have practical outcomes in one's life, to encourage one in 'correct practice' and to strengthen faith. For instance, at a Malcott district planning meeting where it was agreed to look at how doubt appeared in individuals' lives, it was agreed that the focus of the meeting would 'not be intellectual', instead looking at the ways that doubt limited one's expectations of life and of Buddhist practice.

In terms of the moral economy of this movement, there is the issue of how SGI approaches ethics. There is no explicit moral code within this movement, though it is anticipated that through practice people will inevitably seek to eliminate negative causes and promote positive ones through compassionate and altruistic activity. However, there is no expectation that members will become vegetarian or give up alcohol, although some may choose to do so. In fact, as Barry told me, some members had used the practice to obtain proscribed drugs. As he told me:

Barry: ... there were a lot of prostitutes in [his sponsor's] HQ and they were all chanting about their issues. Some of them were chanting for drugs. One of the guys in the HQ was chanting for dope and he was walking along the street and some window flew open and somebody threw a big cardboard box at him. He said, 'Wow!' What was happening was there was a drugs bust going on in the building

Int.: Hmm-hmm.

Barry: so he ran out of the street, looked in, and there was, there was his dope! (laughs) So he sat down and he got stoned for how many weeks, months, I can't remember. But of course he's completely bored of it by the time he'd gone through this box (laughs). And I think it's Blake says, the Romantic, that 'madman go round and

he'll come round sane.' Just you know, (indistinct) this is the way to go to find real value in your life.

In this way, through the practice this man was reportedly able to overcome his addiction.

The lack of expectation of a specific lifestyle was brought home to me when I went to the Royal Albert Hall to attend the last SGI General Meeting in May 2005. Before the meeting, SGI-UK members were gathered in the bar happily drinking, smoking and socialising with old friends. This seemed a strong contrast with the more sober atmosphere of tea-breaks at FWBO events, with various types of teas and cakes on offer.

This is not to say that no participants had had to negotiate barriers of class within SGI-UK in the course of their involvement. Sophie found it difficult to engage with the district meetings she was attending at first:

Sophie: Well the meeting thing was very difficult for me from very early on. I couldn't be doing with that, frankly. So I was always finding the meetings very, very difficult. And when I went to them I didn't particularly like them. That was partly because I was going to meetings in West London, where members tended to appear to be, although that was just an appearance to me to be much more affluent. So the whole, philosophy of it made absolute sense but then I was sitting in a room, beautiful big huge house and at the time part of my problems were, financial, you know? And not having very much money, and not really having a job that was sustaining me, giving me a living. And so I didn't want to want money. If that's what this practice was about, although I didn't have any money, I didn't want my practice and my spiritual belief system to be about getting it. But that was, that that was very, very difficult but [I] managed to kind of get over that with practice.

Like John who we heard from earlier speaking about the barriers that 'race' had initially placed against him becoming more involved in the movement, Sophie had no difficulty with the belief system of Nichiren Buddhism. She too first became involved with NS-UK which, as stated earlier, tended to be more white and middle class. For her, the barriers to involvement were ones of relative economic status, feeling uncomfortable with other more well-off members she was meeting, because she needed a larger income yet did not wish to be so needy. At that point therefore, she was not unlike the women in Beverley Skeggs's (1997) ethnography who did not want to identify as working-class but wanted to be regarded as more 'respectable'. At that time, with more economically privileged people she felt like a 'fish out of water' and wanted to

be in an economic position where she could be just human and not have to worry about her income.

so I practised a lot on my own in order to discover whether or not [it worked]. I'm not a great joiner, but I don't think many people in SGI are joiners. I think the more people I meet in SGI, they're a bunch of bloody difficult people who wouldn't normally want to join anything. Because they've all got their story of not wanting to join something. And I think it's an interesting group from that point of view. It is people [for] who, it's not because they wanna be a part of something it's because they understand that's the only way to develop their faith. So there's a nice tension.

She therefore came to the conclusion in time that through attending meetings she would gain most benefit from the practice which also enabled her to better negotiate the environment she encountered in the meetings. Again, like John in his early encounters with 'race' issues in the SGI-UK, she managed the feeling of being a 'fish out of water' by managing her responses to the aquatic climate in which she found herself even though she initially felt the weight of the water keenly.

Most participants, however, felt that the practice helped them to address social hierarchies of class more than their childhood religion had done. Luke described his approach in this way:

Luke: ... I've always been a kind of nonconformist anyway and having been brought up a Christian I just found that that was such a shallow philosophy, I mean I'm not attacking any Christians when I say that, but just this idea of when you're in trouble you pray and God will answer your prayers and you know, what do you do with the other 365 days in the week, or 64 days in the week when things are going good, you know? And I just thought, 'Well no, I don't want a kind of passive philosophy like that. I don't want a sort of passive life where somebody else outside is gonna provide for me ultimately. I want a more dynamic way of living, one which I'm in control with at the end. One in which I create my own destiny, and one where I stand and be found judged on the actions I've taken and the quality of life I've lived', you know. That's why Buddhism attracted me, because it says all human beings have got this incredible inner power and they can tap into this and once they're enlightened to their own power and potential they're Buddhas, and every human being has that Buddha nature. And I thought, 'Wow! Yes! That makes perfect sense. Of course we've all got this incredible talent and ability. It's the society that's been created that says we don't. Because this society's, people who manage the society will only lead a society that serves their ends. And the kind of passive Christian philosophy is one where *'The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate, He made them high and lowly, He made them in their estate.'* I could never subscribe to that, it's rubbish as far as I'm concerned. So some rich gentrified person has everything and then somebody else has

nothing, but the one with nothing has to be grateful because God will provide for them at some point in the future. You see that's not what I instinctively and intrinsically believe in my heart. I just know it's wrong, and I feel that because Christianity is so tied up with the rise of Protestantism in the seventeenth century, and capitalism that it's not a value-free philosophy. The philosophy serves the needs of the society and the ruling elites. So you know, there're some wonderful gentrified people who practise Buddhism, I'm not anti-gentry, I'm not anti-class. Those people who practise Buddhism who are wealthy, or from the Royal Family, or from the aristocracy, 'cos I know I get on very well with them, because they have Buddha natures and they're trying to create value in the same way that I am. When I practised Christianity I never got anywhere near any dignitaries because they was a real hierarchy in the Church, and I don't believe in hierarchies.

Whereas the pietistic Christianity Luke had been brought up with was teaching him to 'know his place' in society, Buddhism as taught by SGI was advising him it was '*karma*, not class' that was the issue and that anyone could 'pull themselves by their karmic bootstraps' as it were if they sufficiently wanted to. The doctrine of *itai-dōshin* meant that he could see himself as equal to upper-class members of SGI and that he did not need to defer to or feel separate from them. In this way class antagonisms were removed for him and he was enabled to feel more like a 'fish in water', perhaps because he was able to contribute towards the development of the aquatic climate in which he found himself as a member of SGI-UK.

Having considered how issues of 'class' were experienced within SGI, how did participants find their practice affecting the way they engaged with 'race' and racialisation in the wider society?

6.4 SGI TECHNIQUES OF THE SELF: EXPERIENCES OF RACISMS AND IDENTITIES

Participants often reported how their practice of Buddhism as taught by SGI enabled them to manage racism and overcome difficulties in the ways that they had been racialised, as well as enabling them to meet their personal goals and objectives. For example, Sophie, who is a light-skinned woman of colour who is often taken to be white (an error I myself made at the beginning of my interview with her), is often exposed to forms of racism that darker-skinned people of colour do not experience, e.g. extremely racist white people often feeling able to say things in front of her that she feels they would not do if she were visibly black. Sophie was brought up as a Catholic and her family experienced considerable racism from the church that precluded their full

involvement in it, e.g. her parents being asked not to visit the church and their children being denied Catholic school entry. This, and the church's inability to answer questions to her satisfaction, left her feeling 'betrayed' by Catholicism. Her positioning as a woman of mixed heritage often left her feeling isolated and targeted by the different ethnic groups that formed part of her heritage. Of this and the ways it was changed by her practice of Buddhism she says:

Int.: Can you tell us more about the kind of proofs that you were getting?

Sophie: An increasing sense of wellbeing, irrespective of the external circumstances ... it was very much what I needed at the time was a shift in how I felt about myself and myself in the world. So hope really, started to see things much more positively, started to not be a victim of my environment. That was a huge shift, feeling a victim because you know one's own identity crisis manifests itself in hating everybody actually because I wasn't – black people slagged me off, white people slagged me off, Portuguese people slagged me off 'cos I didn't speak the language. You know, there was just a series of slagging offs from everybody in the people of colour community as well as the white community, I just felt like I just couldn't win with any of that. And then finding my place in the world, you know, with those identities that just weren't easy to wear. So that was always underpinning the discomfort and unhappiness I think I felt, and the confusion. And to start to feel that it's OK to be me, that these things aren't important and actually I don't have to hate everybody, I just have to understand where that is all coming from historically, was a huge, huge shift.

This positive sense of identity in Sophie however, remains a constant context of struggle because of the pervasiveness of 'race'-thinking, that she says she is strongly opposed to.

Sophie: I don't ... have a concept of an identity that is to do with, 'I'm English', or 'I'm Guyanese', or 'I'm Portuguese'. Probably the closest I get to it is I'm a South Londoner and I live in East London (Int. laughs), you know? So I don't have that, I don't have that erm, I don't tolerate it because I don't, it's not something that is useful to me or meaningful to me. Erm, but I know, and respect those who feel, you know it's not that I'm not proud to be here. But I, I think my pride needs to be located in being a human being, being a woman, being a person that has to deal with the fact that we live a world community, as opposed to a person that deals, that deals with an identity that's to do with being on an island, you know. So I, so I, think that's, that's how I've been made up, I've been constructed socially I think.

Sophie refers to her fundamental identity as 'human being', seeing this humanity as being a global, cosmopolitan one that is part of the world, rather than being a transcendence of binary opposites on an individual, personal level. This perception is possibly reinforced by Sophie's teacher Daisaku Ikeda

referring to Buddhism as a 'planetary humanism'. Through her practice she is able to negotiate the relative truth of her ethnicity and the implications it has for the politics of people of colour with the absolute truth of her humanity, and therefore her Buddhahood. The Buddhist movement that Sophie belongs to therefore reinforces her desire and longing to be free of 'race'-thinking in this sense, and has enabled her to, in the terms of the practice, 'transform karma into mission'. As she put it when asked whether her practice helped her to deal with issues of 'race' and cultural identity:

Sophie: There's no doubt about it. No doubt about it. I mean taught by SGI, as taught, as SGI promotes and keeps pure the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. That is its purpose. Because I practise based on that purity, as advocated, and protected and taught by the SGI, I have come to these realisations. So it doesn't necessarily teach those things specifically. It looks at issues of respect, of justice. And it's the spiritual concepts of those things as well, because it is very interesting you know, the daily life definition of the actual spiritual understanding of it, and I come to my own understanding because these things are of concern to me. I suspect there are people in SGI where these things are not particularly of concern because they don't have to address them daily. When you live in an inner-city context, and I teach inner-city kids, you understand. I recognise the same kind of confusion about their identities as I had. This is part of my mission. So everything that I've experienced has become this incredible asset to be able to help the people with whom I work. I don't believe I have a mission to work in a non-multicultural environment. Because actually what I have to offer, because of what I've been through is very much to do with working with people who have experienced the same context as I have. But that's not the same for everybody in SGI. SGI members will have their own little battles and struggles that have put them in the situation that they're in at the moment, and you know, these issues may not be of significance to them at all. Well I think that's the same for certain members of the black community, as well as the white community, they may have very different issues, maybe particularly for example looking at health issues, there may be illness in the family. So that may be much more important to look at issues of, you know, physical health, mental health, well-being. They're not things I'm interested in.

In this way, Sophie has 'created value' out of the early painful experiences in her life, in the way that other members of SGI strive to do through their practice. The commitment of Buddhism as taught by SGI to the strong promotion of justice is also quite different from other forms of Buddhism that might encourage a more passive approach on the grounds that this is conducive to 'equanimity' and 'non-dualism'.

For black male interviewees, their practice seemed to have had a particularly empowering effect. Patrick described how he had been working as an actor before the days of integrated casting:

Patrick: When I was acting, growing up in this country, there wasn't really integrated casting. You got a part because the play required you to be black. It could be an all-black play, and I did do all-black plays which were great through the 80s and we were Talawa or you know the Royal Court doing a black play which was very topical and political to do black plays, it was great, you got work. And you got work within the Royal Shakespeare Company or the Royal National Theatre because that particular play required a black actor. So I was around at the time when there were a lot of plays that required these black actors. But when that tradition was no longer flavour of the month and there weren't these plays that were written with the one black actor, the black role, then I was out of work. And it was the biggest shock to my system to realise here I am black actor, 24, 25 years old. Up until that point I'd worked and worked and worked and worked and worked. And yet, a lot of the work that I did, every single role I played was because it required me to be black, not necessarily a good actor. There I was. And then there I was at 24, at 25, I couldn't get work for love nor money. And then I realised why. Because the plays weren't being written. There weren't the characters.

Int.: Hmm-hmm.

Patrick: There just weren't the characters. And that's when Buddhism, the organisation were really helpful because when the industry let me down I was able to put all that creative energy into the organisation really.

Int.: Hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm.

Patrick: And it was a perfect kind of cushion to all of that rejection. And as you know, there's integrated casting now, it's great to see it. They have characters on television played by black people because they just happen to be good actors.

By undertaking organisational activities within SGI, Patrick remained able to use the skills he was being denied opportunities to display because of the institutionalised racism of the theatre industry at that time. He was now successfully holding down a job in a voluntary organisation and felt that his practice had brought him down to earth. He no longer felt he needed to be a

celebrity in order to live a successful life, something he saw as a common view held within black communities, and had found contentment through his practice:

Patrick: A lot of black people do feel that if you're to really get them to the point where they really ask themselves a question, they do feel a lot of the time like second-class citizens. And they try to not do that, to not feel that way by really, really striving, really working hard, really overachieving. You ask the average black person, black kid, 'What do you want to become?' They don't ever want to be ordinary people. They don't want to have a shop or have a good job working for the council. They want to be pop stars and famous people. Why? That comes out of a deep, deep, deep sense of inadequacy. So in our community we have a sense of the roof without the walls. We have no stability. We have no sustainability, as everybody wants to be up there.

Int. Hmm, hmm.

Patrick: And for me that's one of our biggest problems as our race, and I have to take responsibility for that. To just be and, I was one of them, nothing wrong in being successful. There's nothing wrong with being at the top of your tree. But if you cannot sustain that, if you try to build a life for yourself that is in a way not true, I tried to become this incredibly successful and well known actor because I had a deep sense of inadequacy. So the roof of my success was placed on walls of insecurity and inadequacy.

Int.: Hmm.

Patrick: Eventually those walls come crumbling down, and that roof does too.

Int.: Hmm.

Patrick: So for me now it's to create to a life for myself that yeah, I'm an ordinary person. I may do fantastically well. I do do, I mean I'm not mediocre, I always do things that are seen by other people to be quite revolutionary, dynamic and out there. But I'm aware that the roof that I'm placing on my life now are built on walls of sustainability. It's not all bling bling for me.

Luke found that practising had enabled him to achieve his career goals within the education sector despite being in a context where the career progression of black teachers has been a serious problem:

Luke: Well, you know within eighteen months of practising I'd been to Trets in the South of France and I'd also been to Japan, to the head temple in Taisekiji.⁴ Once I'd committed myself to this, I was just up and running with it, because I felt I really understood it with my whole life. There were no questions that remained unanswered as far as I was concerned. And when I got back from Trets in November, from toso in Taisekiji in November 1988 that following summer I was made a member of the school senior management team. I went from the

⁴ This was before the split of SGI from Nichiren Shōshū when SGI was NS-UK.

rank and file straight into the senior management team. And the staff of the school were, 'Gosh' you know, 'Never been done before. So you've never been a head of faculty or head of department, had any human management experience, any management experience of any description. So you became a senior manager in this school.' For me that was actual proof of the power of this practice. That everything and anything is possible.

Int.: Hmm, hmm, hmm.

Luke: And I think that was probably the best interview I've ever given. Because I came back from Japan, having chanted *daimoku* to the original Dai-Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin, connecting my life with it and then came back to England and never stopped chanting *daimoku*, so when I had my interview it was just coming straight from my Buddha-nature to their Buddha-nature. And that's why I wasn't surprised that I got the job.

Int.: Hmm.

Luke: 'Cos the Buddha-natures were talking to each other.

He also felt that his practice enabled him to navigate the organisational politics which confront many black people in white-dominated organisations with the confidence that he would be eventually victorious.

In terms of managing racism in society, participants reported being better able to manage it through 'taking responsibility' for it. As Patrick explained the different way in which he now managed racism as a result of his Buddhist practice:

Patrick: ... I think what the SGI has taught me, is to take responsibility and then I'm aware of racism as a phenomena that we have to legislate against through law, through government. I'm also aware of my part in it. As a black person as long as I hold in my heart beliefs about myself or about my people that are beliefs of inequality and self-loathing and disparagement then like a magnet we will attract that from without.

Int.: Hmm-hmm, hmm-hmm.

Patrick: So what I do, how I deal with it in my own way is to look at my tendencies toward self-slander and tackle those in front of the *Gohonzon*, so that I don't cause other people, particularly white people, to want to slander me in those areas I'm already slandering myself.

Int.: Hmm-hmm. What do you mean by self-slander?

Patrick: Well if you believe that the reason why you are suffering, or you're in a particular place in life is because you're, somebody has placed you there or set upon, or you're not as good as anybody else that's self-slander. 'Cos we're all Buddhas, we all have the potential for Buddhahood. No white person has more potential to Buddhahood than me.

Int.: Hmm.

Patrick: And *vice versa*.

Rather than the teaching of *karma* and total responsibility for his life circumstances suggesting that Patrick was inferior and worthy of maltreatment, faith in his Buddhanature meant that he was constantly being called to live up to what he saw as best in his life and in this way empowering himself. His actions towards self-empowerment also did not preclude social action to ensure that people had redress against racism.

One question that might arise here is how being involved in a religion originating from Japan might relate to participants of colour's transnational links and biographies, especially as all of these participants are people from various parts of the African diaspora. However, no participants of colour reported any conflict between their ethnic identity and their religious identity as members of SGI-UK. As we have seen with Sophie above, participants felt able to address and resolve issues of identity that had been ignored by other traditions and ideologies with which they had been involved. They felt supported in their ethnic and cultural identities, in part due to the emphasis placed within SGI-UK on celebrating diversity and its cosmopolitan ethos. The 'dedicated groups' for people of colour, e.g. the African-Caribbean Heritage Group, that we shall meet at the end of this chapter, also served as a forum where SGI-UK members could address issues of transnational linkages and heritage.

White participants often spoke about how practising within SGI-UK had made them more aware of and sensitive to issues of 'race' and racism than they might have been otherwise. This was partly due to the multicultural nature of Malcott district, and partly due to the encouragement of Buddhist teaching to uphold the equality of all peoples and stand up for justice. In all, the SGI teaching of Buddhism led all participants to feel empowered to tackle issues of 'race' and racism.

We now turn to consider how participants' family and friends responded to their Buddhist practice.

6.4.1 Responses of family and friends

Most participants reported that the response of their family and friends had been positive about their Buddhist practice, with some themselves becoming SGI members. This was possibly because of the encouragement within SGI to share the practice with others. For a minority, issues of their

religious background remained an ongoing theme throughout their lives with SGI. For Jack, a white Irishman who had been brought up as a Catholic, he had found himself more marginalised within his family of origin on account of his conversion to Buddhism, as he explained:

Int.: You know, the fact that you know, you had that particular religious upbringing

Jack: Hmm, hmm.

Int.: How do you feel about it now?

Jack: Yeah, I mean it's a big deal to switch from one upbringing to another. I kind of felt you know that if it's my *karma* to practise Buddhism then how come it's my *karma* to be born in a Catholic family, and be brought, and then to kind of walk away from that? Yeah, turn my back on it. And of course, you know it causes quite a, it causes a lot of a rift with my, my birth family because they still follow the routines and rituals of Christianity and Catholicism where I don't, so to some degree I feel there are things that are very difficult.

Int.: Right.

Jack: I don't get asked to be a godparent or you know at baptisms for my nieces and things, so that's the cost I mean of practising.

In a context where religion is a focal point of mobilisation for a minority ethnic community, this suggested that, although Jack was happy to be a Buddhist, he had had to give up some aspects of his family life and friendships in order to maintain his convictions, and as a result had been marginalised in the social network this provided. In this way there could be some conflict between some people's cultural and Buddhist identities.

We now turn to consider how the African-Caribbean heritage group addresses issues of cultural identity and Buddhism.

6.5 SGI ACTIVITIES FOR PEOPLE OF COLOUR

SGI has several 'heritage groups' for people from various minority ethnic groups, such as those of South-East Asian or Chinese ancestry. These are seen as groups where people with a shared *karma* can meet to support each other with allies interested in these issues and have been established through grassroots initiatives and the support of senior leaders within SGI. The African-Caribbean Heritage group started life as *Abibbimma* ('sons of African fathers') in the mid-1980s and was open to all people of colour originating from Africa and others interested in these issues. There people could chant together about the concerns of members of the African diaspora in the UK and celebrate diaspora cultures. In September 2003, the group was relaunched as the African-

Caribbean Heritage group because it was felt that a new generation of the diaspora was emerging in the UK that felt less of a direct connection to Africa. This relaunch involved a *shakabuku* event in East London called 'Why Buddhism?' with sketches, 'experiences' (testimonies of SGI members' successes as a result of their practice), and speeches from senior leaders and musical performances.

As with all SGI specialist groups there is ongoing dialogue between the group's leaders and SGI senior leadership. There is concern at senior level that specialist groups do not unwittingly become separatist enterprises (hence they are usually open to all) but rather act as targeted vehicles for promoting Buddhism to sections of the community with particular concerns around social exclusion, as well as providing means for dialogue within SGI as a whole around issues of discrimination and inequality. Specialist groups are not meant to act as an alternative to the monthly district discussion meeting but rather to enable these issues of discrimination to be explored there as far as possible with the aim of increasing awareness within the movement as a whole.

6.6 CONCLUSION

Although not the result of any particular targeted action by itself, Sōka Gakkai has achieved a multicultural following that is generally acknowledged to be exceptional amongst Western Buddhist convert movements. Through its encouragement to share the practice of Nichiren Buddhism with others, its celebrity⁵ following and its relatively higher media profile, it has become more accessible than other Buddhist groups, which can in some cases be highly reluctant to promote themselves. The way in which the doctrine of *karma* and Buddhature is presented and understood by individual practitioners empowers people to feel able to rise above their circumstances and to move beyond various social divisions of class and 'race'. The doctrine that Buddhism equals daily life and the fact that people do not need to change their lifestyle or cultural practice to fit a moral code or particular form of aesthetics again makes the practice appear more accessible and the process of becoming a member is relatively simple. Also the lack of a priesthood means that the organisation, even though it has its own hierarchy of leaders, appears to be less hierarchical than other Buddhist groups that have a monastic wing.

⁵ For instance, Orlando Bloom and Tina Turner are high-profile members.

CHAPTER SEVEN – CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter of five sections, I summarise the findings of this thesis on the issue of the development of Western convert Buddhism in multiethnic and multicultural societies and consider the extent to which the aims have been achieved, along with the strengths and drawbacks of my research. Finally I set out the directions that future work on its themes might take, especially in terms of its potential implications for future scholarship on 'Western Buddhism'.

7.2 THESIS CONCLUSIONS

At the start of this thesis, I suggested that despite the burgeoning literature on Western Buddhism, there had been relative silence about the implications of work on transnationalism, processes of cultural hybridisation, postcolonialism, 'race' and identity and their potential interfaces with such scholarship. The ways in which Buddhist movements in the West are racialised were observed to have received little attention, except for the proposal of 'two Buddhist constituencies' of 'white' convert Buddhists and Diaspora Buddhists, chiefly by Paul Numrich (2003). I regard this as part a wider silence on the implications of 'race' for sociology of religion generally (see Wood, 2006 for a more detailed discussion of this problem), and that where such attention is given this tends to examine the issue in terms of theistic traditions. I argued this had led to an inability to account for the minoritisation of people of colour in Western convert Buddhist movements and did not consider the ways in which discourses of 'race' and racism within these movements compared with those in the wider society. I suggested that the ways in which Western convert Buddhist movements were affected by processes of class stratification, that are themselves closely linked to processes of racialisation, have been neglected. Likewise, the issue of how the take-up of Buddhist techniques of the self affected processes of racialisation and ethnic identification had not received significant examination.

In the introductory chapter, I suggested two key areas of enquiry had developed for this project, firstly: *What are the discourses of 'race' and class organised within Western Buddhist convert movements, and how do people of colour/working class people engage with these?* Based on this study's findings,

particularly the case study of the FWBO and its LBC, as well as the literature reviewed for this project, I would argue that Western convert Buddhism is seen largely as a white middle-class enterprise by most of its adherents and is often unwittingly defined as such by them and their investigators. Within such movements, the constituency is largely seen as white and middle-class. This can be observed through the cultural terms in which Buddhism is being interpreted within Britain, and of these movements' general perspective on the social problems facing their potential membership. These cultural terms rarely make reference to racialised minorities (except to point out how 'white' Buddhists differ from Diaspora Buddhists) or their concerns. Nor do they consider the contribution of communities of colour to the life and 'achievements' of the West, or the social processes of racisms and racialisation. Thus, although processes of cultural hybridisation are ongoing within Western Buddhism, these hegemonise and essentialise whiteness and being middle-class and marginalise racialised minorities and working-class people. In this way, they reiterate the predominant discourse within the wider UK, one which is increasingly jettisoning multiculturalism in favour of assimilationism (see for example Back, Keith, Khan, Shukra, & Solomos, 2002) and pathologises working-class people (see for example Skeggs, 1997, 2004, 2005). However, as we have seen in the case of SGI-UK, this tendency can be overcome and a cosmopolitan identity (the 'global citizen') that decentres whiteness can become the norm in a Western convert Buddhist movement, and as a result attract more people of colour. Perhaps the fact that the major part of SGI's development occurred in a non-Western and less colonial context, i.e. post-war Japan, accounts for its more cosmopolitan approach that de-emphasises 'race' while challenging racism. In post-war Japan many people were facing a crisis about their place in the world and difficult social circumstances that led many of them to feel the need for a religion that could ameliorate these. In contrast, convert Buddhism in the UK initially developed at a time when the British Empire was in its heyday within the white upper- and middle-classes. At this time of its life, Buddhism was seen an exotic 'Eastern' tradition (e.g. by Theosophists) within an Orientalist and colonialist frame. Overall therefore, in line with studies of 'racial' segregation in US churches (see for example Emerson & Smith, 2000), the conclusions of this study suggest that processes of racialisation and class designation of space, not just individuals' preferences, are a major cause of the

lack of engagement by people of colour and working class people in most convert Buddhist movements.

The second aim was to explore: *How are people of colour/working class people's processes of identification, particularly in terms of 'race' and class and their quotidian experience of racialisation, affected by their employment of the techniques of the self offered by Western convert Buddhist movements?* My study suggests that Buddhists of colour are finding, through their engagement with the anti-essentialist teachings of Buddhism, a tendency to move away from 'race-thinking'. However, unlike white middle-class convert Buddhists, this is not in a way that allows whiteness to remain as a hegemonic norm, i.e. not a discourse of 'racelessness'. Their ongoing encounter with the Buddhist teaching of *anattā*, the lack of a fixed essential self, leads to their sense of identity shifting so that it becomes more fluid, provisional and realised as contingent, as, for example, Diana from FWBO (see Chapter Four p.147), Philip from FWBO (see Chapter Four p. 148) and Sophie from SGI-UK (see Chapter Six p.198) suggested in their interviews. Also they often engage creatively with each respective movement's techniques of the self, as, for example, Sophie suggested in her interview when she spoke of transforming what she saw as her *karma* of being subject to discrimination into 'mission', i.e. promoting multiculturalism and challenging discrimination. I consider this a significant set of findings in that it goes against the hegemonic norm of whiteness that exists in so many Western convert Buddhist movements, thus my description of this aspect of Buddhists of colour's experiences as a set of what Foucault refers to as 'subjugated knowledges'. In their ongoing personal struggles against racism, Buddhists of colour often found themselves able to relate to racism with greater equanimity and compassion for themselves, and for those engaged in discriminatory practices. Furthermore, while it should be appreciated that not all white majority-ethnic members of SGI-UK might respond, the specific commitment of their movement to affirming the equality of all often challenged participants of all ethnicities to counteract forces of oppression.

7.3 CRITIQUE OF PROJECT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

As far as I am aware, this project is the first academic exploration of how Western convert Buddhism in the UK is itself racialised. As most studies of convert Buddhism have tended to bypass these aspects, the effect has been an

almost exclusive focus on how Buddhism is adapting to a white and middle class constituency who are unwittingly and uncritically constructed as the norm for whom Buddhism is being translated in the West. This project suggests that the processes of translation and cultural hybridisation that form Western convert Buddhism need further critique of the hegemonic processes of identity construction and exclusion that are involved in their development. Such a critique could enable the (lack of) engagement with the majority in the West (those who are not white and middle-class) by Western convert Buddhist movements to be better understood, and question the construction of whiteness that is involved in most Western convert Buddhist enterprises that is not unlike the construction of whiteness within the wider society. At the same time, this study contributes to the literature on ethnic diversity within religious movements, especially those in multicultural urban areas. In comparison with theistic religions such as the Abrahamic faiths that have a considerably larger following within the West, and whose engagements with 'race' are better documented, Buddhism presents an interesting case that has implications for the study of transnationalism, 'race' and racism generally. Those involved in Western convert Buddhist movements are themselves examples of the various tendencies within processes of cultural hybridity in a post-colonial context. For the majority in Western convert Buddhist movements, the ways in which such movements are established reinforce their whiteness and being middle-class along with a liberal detachment from questions of racism. However, for racialised minorities in these movements, Buddhist practices facilitate processes of detachment from 'race' that are counter-hegemonic and that enable their resistance to quotidian racism.

I found the data used in this project to be very rich, allowing participants for the most part to 'sing their own songs' in their interview narratives. This allowed a perspective of Buddhists of colour to be given rare expression in an academic study, and allowed other Buddhists to comment more broadly upon issues of 'race' and racism. Furthermore the use of ethnographic material allowed issues of organisational culture to come to light in terms of 'race' and class, through the use of direct observation of movements' activities and close reading of their texts. The validation of interview material and of reports of interim findings by participants, as well as the use of self-defined ethnicity, gave participants a further opportunity for their voices to be heard.

My positioning as an African-Caribbean Buddhist with longstanding experience of the F/WBO presented both strengths and difficulties to this project. Being an insider in the F/WBO gave me access to a wider range of material and people that I had encountered over the years, as well as an extensive understanding of that movement's culture that was useful for this study. At the same time I am sure that it made me unaware of factors in that movement that, as a deep insider (Edwards, 2002), I simply took for granted without being more aware of them, especially as an established member. For example, it was difficult for me to develop a sense of how it might feel to be a newcomer at certain events, because of my position. Also, the fact that I had been very much involved in the ongoing dialogue about how to better promote diversity within that movement, became a member of the WBO in 2003, and my previous work experience, presented me with responsibilities and perspectives that did affect my functioning in the field and analysis of the research problem. I had to be vigilant to maintain my academic voice, as this was not an action research project, while maintaining what I felt to be my obligations to the movement of which I was a member. Looking back, in the FWBO case study, rather than just emphasise the voices of participants of colour as I do here, I could have invited more white participants to narrate their biographies of 'race' and 'racialisation'. However, I consider that the comments made, particularly by LBC Council members in their interviews, do go some way towards marking out these areas.

In terms of my positioning in SGI-UK, this presented opportunities in my encounters with participants of colour, because of being a Buddhist of colour myself. However, the fact that I was not part of that movement, nor intending to be, did cause some potential participants' concern about how I was seeking to represent the movement in this study, and towards the end, apart from a few participants, my fieldwork relations did become more strained. I did not therefore feel able to ask for information about people of colour who were former members of this movement, or who felt themselves to be more on the fringes of it, as I had done for the F/WBO. Thus participants in this movement were largely members in good standing, and it is possible that more critical perspectives were not captured in this study. I also consider, on reflection, that my use of my Order name when communicating with SGI-UK participants presented a barrier in terms of my fieldwork with this Movement, which started

shortly after I had become a member of the WBO. I must confess as my ordination process had lasted over twelve years, I was quite keen to use my new name as much as possible and did not initially consider how my developing identity as a practitioner in the F/WBO might impact upon my identity as a fieldworker in another Buddhist movement in terms of participants' possible perceptions of me.

With regard to questions of gender, it might have strengthened the project to have more exploration of participants' views on gender, particularly by people of colour in their interviews. Nonetheless, some interesting findings around gender and sexuality emerged in both case studies that had not been anticipated at the outset.¹ The use of a feminist methodology, in particular that of 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1991), has however made this project sensitive to issues of power involved in my research role, and aspects of gender, 'race'/whiteness and class formation. I would argue, therefore, that this has contributed to the development of an accountable and valid study overall.

7.4 POSSIBLE FUTURE AVENUES OF INQUIRY

Towards the end of this project I became aware of a developing literature on religion and spatiality, and given the study's focus on East London, it could have been interesting to have incorporated these theorisations into an analysis of the data I obtained. Given that the FWBO has developed a 'Buddhist village' in Bethnal Green consisting of the LBC, associated TBRLs and residential communities, such an analysis might have considered how these spaces had been and were being racialised and demarcated by class, especially given that one of the TBRLs, a Buddhist vegetarian restaurant, has been associated with the gentrification of the locality ("A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 11: Stepney, Bethnal Green - Bethnal Green Building and Social Conditions after 1945 Social and Cultural Activities " 1998). SGI-UK also emphasise the importance of members being involved in their localities, and it might have been interesting to further explore how they related to the local space in East London generally, especially as it is the last remaining sector of London to be without an

¹ For instance, in the case of the FWBO, it was interesting to note the heteronormativity of its previously hegemonic gender discourse working alongside a longstanding acceptance of its lesbian, gay and bisexual members in a way that queered the pitch so to speak. For SGI-UK, the level of gender demarcation of its divisions, and to some extent allocation of roles, was surprising on account of the rhetoric of gender equality within that movement.

SGI-UK centre, unlike North, Central, West and South London. Perhaps a geographer of religion might be better able to develop inquiries into these areas.

It might have been useful to conduct a case study of the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT – one of the three largest convert Buddhist movements in the UK along with FWBO and SGI-UK), especially as it could have been a representative of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that is not represented here in this thesis. NKT now organises classes in Shoreditch and Stoke Newington that are based in more gentrified areas of East London. Given this, it might be interesting to explore the functioning of these classes in the case study area in terms of who tends to be attracted to them and why. In general, exploring different traditions, apart from the two represented here, could be very rewarding, especially in the case of movements that have monastic communities as part of their membership. It could be illuminating to understand the ways in which monastic communities might be racialised and classified compared to lay communities and movements. Further investigations could also clarify whether, in terms of Jan Nattier's (1998) typology of Buddhist movements referred to in Chapter One, *import* traditions tend to be racialised and classified as white and middle-class, and *evangelical* traditions tend to have a broader appeal. The relationship between Diaspora and convert Buddhist movements in the case study area could also be explored in a future project.

It is important to realise that this study is a snapshot in time of a particular locality which has already experienced considerable change in its ethnic population profile because of the fast pace of political and economic changes often associated with globalisation. East London has undergone 'white flight' partly as a result of the breakdown of particular industries, e.g. the closure of the docks and manufacturing industries. It is also experiencing gentrification (see for example T. Butler, 1996; T. Butler & Robson, 2003) that often has an adverse impact on black and working-class communities. Also the implications of the development that will come with the London Olympics in 2012 are yet to be seen, and this has not been lost on local multi-faith groups as we saw in Chapter Four in the discussion of the campaigning work of *Citizens' Organising*, who have mobilised around the bid and its aftermath. Greg Smith (1996; 2000) has also suggested that, within such developments, religion has remained on the agenda in East London, proliferating rather than retreating as was anticipated by theories of secularisation. Clearly, religion has

also continued to be a means of mobilising minority ethnic communities and, throughout the history of East London, has had a socially engaged character (see for example Leech, 2001). Individual, collective and academic understandings of ethnic and religious identities also shift. A future study of Western convert Buddhism in the case study area a few years from now might yield interesting findings.

Moving back to my review of Western Buddhism in the US in Chapter Two, I am aware that this study has not considered the issues facing First Nation peoples (e.g. Native Americans, Australian Aborigines and Maori People) wishing to be involved in Buddhism. Although there may be some similarities, the 'racial' histories of these peoples, which involve colonialism, segregation and ethnic cleansing by white settler populations, may give rise to significant differences between them and other people of colour.

7.5 CONCLUSION

I propose that this study makes key contributions to the areas of sociology of religion, sociology of 'race', sociology of identity formation (particularly in terms of 'race', ethnicity and religion and their inter-relationships) and diaspora/transnationalism studies. In offering this study, I suggest that we also have the beginnings of a stream of inquiry into how people of colour are engaging with the processes of translation that form 'Western Buddhism'. I consider that this adds to the knowledge developed in studies of diasporic communities and of transnationalism which, where they explore religion, tend to focus on theistic religious traditions. Although often marginalised, my findings suggest that Buddhists of colour are engaging creatively with Western Buddhist teachings, in ways that empower them and challenge them to move beyond narrower modes of identification, particularly when they are in more cosmopolitan and anti-racist settings that support such endeavours. I am also arguing that the areas covered by this thesis link into the wider issue about how people of colour 'fit' into 'the West'. I would contend that people of colour, although often constructed as 'outside the West', are as much part of the West as those included in the official history told of the West and its achievements, and are a key element of its construction. As such, I consider that, if more explicitly considered, people of colour's engagements with the *Dharma* can greatly enrich research into the processes of developing a 'Western Buddhism'

and can contribute towards a fuller understanding about what living a Buddhist life in the postmodern West might actually involve.

APPENDIX 1: DATES AND VENUES OF INTERVIEWS**LBC COUNCIL MEMBERS****INTERVIEWEE ROLE AT LBC AT TIME OF INTERVIEW**

INTERVIEWEE ROLE AT LBC AT TIME OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW	VENUE OF INTERVIEW
Centre Manager (CM)	27/08/2001	LBC
Men's <i>Mitra</i> convenor (MMC)	27/08/2001	LBC
LBC link with <i>Tiratanaloka</i> (Trl)	11/06/2002	LBC
Centre Chairman (CC)	07/05/2001	LBC
Centre President (CP)	01/06/2002	His home
Wednesday class co-leader (WCCL)	23/05/2002	Her workplace
Outreach worker (OW)	19/04/2001	LBC
Women's <i>Mitra</i> convenor (WMC)	20/11/2000	Her home
Centre Treasurer (CT)	26/10/2000	LBC

OTHER LBC INTERVIEWEES**INTERVIEWEE PSEUDONYM**

INTERVIEWEE PSEUDONYM	DATE OF INTERVIEW	VENUE OF INTERVIEW
<i>Dharmacharini</i> B: (Alison)	08/06/2004	My home
<i>Dharmacharini</i> C: (Antonia)	04/04/2001	Her home
Sheila	05/06/2001	Her home
Mike	23/08/2001	His home
Mary	05/05/2001	Her workplace
Diana	26/04/2001	Her home
Naomi	04/07/2001	Her home
Barry	10/05/2001	His home
Philip	01/06/2004	My home
Steven	19/04/2002	LBC
James	02/04/2001	LBC
Beth	21/11/2000	LBC
<i>Dharmacharini</i> D: (Susie)	19/11/2000	Her home
Jane	20/11/2000	My home

SGI-UK MEMBERS ASSOCIATED WITH MALCOTT DISTRICT

INTERVIEWEE PSEUDONYM	DATE OF INTERVIEW	VENUE OF INTERVIEW
Anita	20/09/2004	Her home
Esther	03/12/2003	Her home
Fiona	05/10/2004	Her home
Sophie	08/07/2004	Her home
Luke	09/07/2004 and 16/07/2004	His workplace on both occasions

John	19/02/2004	My home
Amanda	03/11/2004	My home
Donna	19/03/2005	My home
Abby	20/03/2005	My home
Peter	25/07/2004	His home
Charles	01/08/2004 and 18/08/2004	Chapter meeting hall (01/08/2004) and his workplace (18/08/2004)
Patrick	14/02/2005	His home
Jack	04/06/2004	His home
Barry	28/05/2004	His home
Tim	25/05/2004	His home
Marina	04/10/2004	Her home
Matthew	17/08/2004	His home

APPENDIX 2a: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO FWBO PARTICIPANTS

1. FAMILY OF ORIGIN

This is to establish whether respondent is first or second generation immigrant

- Can you tell me where you were born?
- Can you tell me where your parents were born?
- Where were you brought up? Was it urban or rural?
- Was it a very multicultural setting or not?
- How long have you lived in the UK?

2. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN

- Were you brought up in any particular faith or religion? If so, what was it? How involved were you? Why? How do you feel about it now? Why?
- When growing up, what did you know about meditation? What did you think about it? Why?
- When growing up, what did you know about Buddhism? What did you think about it? Why?

3. VIEWS OF RELIGION

- What do you understand by the word *religion*?
- What would you say is your personal approach to *religion*?
- How does Buddhism affect what you have said about your own approach to *religion*?
- Do you think your approach to religion is different in any way from that of a white/black person? If so, why?

4. VIEWS OF SPIRITUALITY

- What do you understand by the term *spirituality*?
- What would you say is your personal approach to *spirituality*?
- How does Buddhism fit into your own approach to *spirituality*?
- Do you think your approach to spirituality is different in any way from that of a white/black person? If so, why?
- Which term *religion* or *spirituality* do you prefer to apply to yourself?

5. INITIAL INTEREST IN BUDDHIST MEDITATION/BUDDHIST GROUP

- Why did you decide to learn about meditation? About Buddhist meditation in particular? About Buddhism?
- Can you tell us about any groups you got involved in that taught you meditation? What were they? How did you find them?
- Can you tell us about any groups you got involved in that taught you Buddhism? What were they? How did you find them?
- How did you find out about the classes at the London Buddhist Centre?
- Why at first did you decide to go to classes at the London Buddhist Centre? If the LBC was not your first FWBO centre, why did you decide to go to classes run by the FWBO?
- Did you have any concerns about taking up Buddhism because of your religious background/previous (lack of a) religion? If so, how have you dealt with them?

6. LEVEL OF ATTENDANCE AT CLASSES

- Which classes do you go to at the London Buddhist Centre (LBC)? Why that/those ones? Are there any others you have thought of attending? If not, why not?

- How long have you been coming to these London Buddhist Centre/classes run by the FWBO?
 - How often do you attend these classes at the LBC? Why?
7. ATTENDANCE OF RETREATS/FESTIVALS
- Do you attend other events like retreats or festivals? Can you tell me more about them?
 - Would you like to attend more often? If so, what are the things that get in the way?
8. LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN BUDDHISM/FWBO
- How would you describe your current level of involvement with the FWBO?
 - How did you decide about your current level of involvement?
 - Would you like to alter your level of involvement in the FWBO? Why?
 - What kind of things have prevented you becoming more deeply involved in the past?
 - Have you ever had second thoughts about being involved in the FWBO? If so, what have they been about? How have you dealt with them?
 - Are there any other spiritual activities that you attend that are not organised by the FWBO? If so, could you tell us some more about these? Can you tell us why you attend these activities and what they provide that is not provided by the FWBO?
 - What would you say would make you a Buddhist?
9. IMPACT OF FWBO ON RESPONDENTS' LIVES
- What difference would you say being involved in the FWBO has made in your life?
 - Why did Buddhism appeal to you at first? Why did meditation appeal to you at first?
 - Why does Buddhism appeal to you now? Why does meditation appeal to you now?
 - In your experience with the FWBO, have you ever felt there has been anything different from that of a white/black person? If you do, what things come to mind? How have you felt about this?
 - On the other hand, have you ever felt that the FWBO has ignored your different experience as a black/white person? If so, what things come to mind? How have you felt about this?
 - What do you understand by the term racism? Do you think it's a serious problem in your local area? If so, why?
 - What would you say your awareness/experience of racism was before you joined the Movement?
 - Has your awareness/experience of racism changed since you joined the Movement? If so, please tell us how it has.
 - ◆ Do you think your practice of Buddhism as taught by the FWBO helps you to deal with this issue? If not, why not? If so, please describe how it has.
 - Have you ever felt the need to express criticism of how someone in the Movement has dealt with racial/cultural issues? If so, please tell us about this? What effect did you feel it had? How did you feel afterwards?
 - Have you ever felt like criticising someone in the Movement about racial/cultural issues but not done so? If so, please tell us why you did not? How do you feel about this now?
 - How have family and friends responded to your interest in Buddhism and/or meditation?
 - Do you feel the FWBO has any particular approaches to offer practitioners in exploring/looking at culture and heritage?
 - ◆ If so, how have these approaches affected your practice as a Buddhist?

- Have you ever felt any conflicts between your cultural or ethnic identity and Buddhism as practised in the FWBO? If you have, what have these been about? How have you felt about these conflicts? How have you resolved them?

10. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Sex
- Social class – current/for family of origin (i.e. that of parents)– self-classification
- Level of educational attainment
- Sexuality – heterosexual/lesbian/gay/bisexual/celebrate
Have you ever felt any concerns about the approach different religions take towards sexuality? If so, can you tell us more about these?
- *Family structure* – are any other members of your family Buddhist? (family being as respondent chooses to define it)
- Disability
- How do you feel about giving this demographic information?

11. MISCELLANEOUS

- How do you think the FWBO could increase its appeal to black people?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX 2b: QUESTIONS FOR LBC COUNCIL MEMBERS &

ASSOCIATED SENIOR ORDER MEMBERS

MITRA CONVENORS

Tell me about role and what it involves

Thoughts about black events at the LBC

Recollections of meeting with President

How many *Mitras* are there?

How many *Mitras* have asked for ordination?

How many of these *Mitras* are black?

How many black *Mitras* have asked for ordination?

Thoughts on encouraging more black people to move beyond introductory level, especially in terms of becoming *Mitras* and eventually entering the Order.

Thoughts on relative difference between number of black male and black female *Mitras* (black female *Mitras* predominating) – why this is and how more black men can be encouraged to become *Mitras*.

Hearsay – black men tend to come to classes initially but then leave without getting further involved, possible causes for this

What do you think the level of awareness of race issues is around the Movement, in particular the LBC?

What are the sort of things that you think will be helpful in increasing awareness? That would be unhelpful?

*black = people of African, Asian and Caribbean descent

CENTRE MANAGER

Tell me about your role and what it involves

Perspective on black events at the LBC

Recollections of meeting with President (This was a meeting held with the LBC President with some of the members of the LBC Council and with black *Dharmacharinis* based around the LBC in November 1999)

Publicity

Thoughts on encouraging further involvement of black people, particularly black men

What do you think the level of awareness of race issues is around the Movement, in particular the LBC?

What are the sort of things that you think will be helpful in increasing awareness? That would be unhelpful?

CHAIRMAN

Tell me about your role and what it involves

Perspective on black events at the LBC

Recollections of meeting with President

Suggestions for encouraging further involvement of black people, particularly black men

Thoughts on encouraging more black people to move beyond introductory level, especially in terms of becoming *Mitras* and eventually entering the Order.

Thoughts on relative difference between number of black male and black female *Mitras* (black female *Mitras* predominating) – why this is and how more black men can be encouraged to become *Mitras*.

Hearsay – black men tend to come to classes initially but then leave without getting further involved, possible causes for this.

What do you think the level of awareness of race issues is around the Movement, in particular the LBC?

What are the sort of things that you think will be helpful in increasing awareness? That would be unhelpful?

OUTREACH WORKER

Tell me about your role and what it involves

Perspective on black events at the LBC

Recollections of meeting with President

Suggestions for encouraging further involvement of black people, particularly black men

What do you think the level of awareness of race issues is around the Movement, in particular the LBC?

What are the sort of things that you think will be helpful in increasing awareness? That would be unhelpful?

WEDNESDAY CLASS CO-LEADER

Tell me about your role in the class and what it involves

How is the class publicised?

Thoughts for encouraging further involvement of black people

What has been tried for encouraging black people's involvement and how this has worked out

Mary's contribution in encouraging black people to come to Wednesday class.

Thoughts on what would help in increasing black people's take-up of the class.

Thoughts as a Council member on increasing black involvement in the LBC generally.

PRESIDENT

- * recollections of the LBC building project, the connection of the LBC with the local area then and now, and awareness of the LBC's reputation for racism and fascism as well as resistance to these;
- * the FWBO's work in India – does TBSMG¹ appeal mainly to Mahars or is the appeal more widespread (check with Ghokale article)? What attempts have been made to reach out to groups that are less represented and how have these fared so far?
- * President's views on current work to attract black people to the LBC and how this could be further developed;
- * other measures that could be taken to further attract black people, in particular black men to the LBC
- * There have been reports of problems with getting men to come into the FWBO. Can you tell me your thoughts on what the issues are around this?
- * President's views on 'race' and 'class' as issues for the FWBO, current initiatives to address issues of racial and cultural diversity at the LBC, how these have progressed, how these should be further developed and what he sees as potential pitfalls that should be guarded against.

¹ Trailokya Bauddha Mahāsaṅgha Sahayaka Gana – the Indian Wing of the FWBO

- * Is Bhante's view of 'the true individual' a recasting of the Buddhist teaching of *anātman*?² What are the links between them? To what extent does the 'true individual' correlate with liberal humanist notions of the human subject?

LINK WITH *TIRATANALOKA* AND LBC

- * Can you tell me what your role is in relation to the LBC and what it involves?
- * Can you tell me exactly how many women at the LBC have asked for ordination and of these how many are African, Asian or Caribbean? It would help to have the exact numbers so I can work out the percentages myself.
- * Your thoughts on encouraging greater involvement by black people/black women in the FWBO.
- * Your thoughts on any particular issues there may be for black women who are seeking to get involved in Buddhism.
- * Why do you think that the number of black women who've been attracted to and have become involved in the FWBO is currently greater than that of black men?
- * What do you think is the level of awareness of black women's/black people's issues within the LBC/*Tiratanaloka*/wider Movement? Do you see any issues around racial diversity that you feel need to be considered by the FWBO/*Tiratanaloka* in order to further develop involvement by black women? If so what are these? What strategies would you suggest to develop such awareness? What strategies do you feel might be unhelpful and why?
- * What do you understand by the term 'racism'?

□ *Anātman* is Pali for 'non-self'

APPENDIX 2c: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO SGI-UK PARTICIPANTS

1. FAMILY OF ORIGIN

This is to establish whether respondent is first or second generation immigrant

- Can you tell me where you were born?
- Can you tell me where your parents were born?
- Where were you brought up? Was it urban or rural?
- Was it a very multicultural setting or not?
- How long have you lived in the UK?

2. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN

- Were you brought up in any particular faith or religion? If so, what was it? How involved were you? Why? How do you feel about it now? Why?
- When growing up, what did you know about Buddhism? What did you think about it? Why?

3. VIEWS OF RELIGION

- What do you understand by the word *religion*?
- What would you say is your personal approach to *religion*?
- How does Buddhism affect what you have said about your own approach to *religion*?
- Do you think your approach to religion is different in any way from that of a white/black person? If so, why?

4. VIEWS OF SPIRITUALITY

- What do you understand by the term *spirituality*?
- What would you say is your personal approach to *spirituality*?
- How does Buddhism fit into your own approach to *spirituality*?
- Do you think your approach to spirituality is different in any way from that of a white/black person? If so, why?
- Which term *religion* or *spirituality* do you prefer to apply to yourself?

5. INITIAL INTEREST IN SGI

- Why did you decide to take up Buddhist chanting?
- Can you tell us about any other groups you got involved in that taught you Buddhism or any other spiritual/religious activity? What were they? How did you find them?
- How did you find out about SGI?
- Why at first did you decide to go to the Malcott group? If the Malcott group was not your first one, why did you decide to go to classes run by SGI?
- Did you have any concerns about taking up Buddhism because of your religious background/previous (lack of a) religion? If so, how have you dealt with them?

6. LEVEL OF ATTENDANCE AT SGI ACTIVITIES

- Which activities do you go to at the local SGI? Why that/those ones? Are there any others you have thought of attending? If not, why not?

- How long have you been going to these activities?
- How often do you attend SGI activities? Why?
- Would you like to attend more often? If so, what are the things that get in the way?

7. LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN SGI

- How would you describe your current level of involvement with SGI?
- How did you decide about your current level of involvement?
- Would you like to alter your level of involvement in SGI? Why?
- What kinds of things have prevented you getting more deeply involved in the past?
- Have you ever had second thoughts about being involved in SGI? If so, what have they been about? How have you dealt with them?
- Are there any other spiritual activities that you attend that are not organised by SGI? If so, could you tell us some more about these? Can you tell us why you attend these activities and what they provide that is not provided by SGI?
- What would you say (would) makes you a Buddhist?
- Do you hold or have you ever held any particular position/responsibility within SGI? If you do or have, could you tell me how you got into that position and what it involves(d)? How do you think holding that position has affected you?
- Can you tell me more about your feelings about President Ikeda/Sensei?

8. IMPACT OF SGI-UK ON RESPONDENTS' LIVES

- What difference would you say being involved in SGI has made in your life?
- Why did chanting appeal to you at first? Why did Buddhism appeal to you at first?
- Why does chanting appeal to you now? Why does Buddhism appeal to you now?
- In your experience with SGI, have you ever felt there has been anything different from that of a white/black person? If you do, what things come to mind? How have you felt about this?
- On the other hand, have you ever felt that SGI has ignored your different experience as a black/white person? If so, what things come to mind? How have you felt about this?
- What do you understand by the term racism? How much has it been a concern for you? In your local area? Can you explain why?
- What would you say your awareness/experience of racism was before you joined SGI?
- Has your awareness/experience of racism and ethnic/cultural identity changed since you joined SGI? If so, please tell us how it has.
 - ◆ Do you think your practice of Buddhism as taught by SGI helps you to deal with these issues? If not, why not? If so, please describe how it has.
- Have you ever felt the need to express criticism of how someone in SGI has dealt with racial/cultural issues? If so, please tell us about this? What effect did you feel it had? How did you feel afterwards?

- Have you ever felt like criticising someone in SGI about racial/cultural issues but not done so? If so, please tell us why you did not? How do you feel about this now?
- How have family and friends responded to your interest in Buddhism and/or chanting?
- Do you feel SGI has any particular approaches to offer practitioners in exploring/looking at their culture and heritage?
 - ◆ If so, how have these approaches affected your practice as a Buddhist?
- Have you ever felt any conflicts between your cultural or ethnic identity and Buddhism as practised in SGI? If you have, what have these been about? How have you felt about these conflicts? How have you resolved them?

9. MISCELLANEOUS

- Why do you think that more black people seem attracted to Buddhism as taught by SGI?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

10. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- Age
- Ethnicity – self-defined
- Sex
- Social class – current/for family of origin (i.e. that of parents) – self-classification
- Level of educational attainment
- Sexuality – heterosexual/lesbian/gay/bisexual/celebrate
Have you ever felt any concerns about the approach different religions take towards sexuality? If so, can you tell us more about these?
- *Family structure* – are any other members of your family Buddhist? (family being as respondent chooses to define it)
- Disability
- How do you feel about giving this demographic information?

APPENDIX 3: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**ABBREVIATION FULL TERM**

BASE	Buddhist Alliance for Social Engagement – name given to local Buddhist social action programmes organised under the auspices and guidance of BPF (see below)
BPF	Buddhist Peace Fellowship – US body engaged in socially engaged Buddhism.
FWBO	Friends of the Western Buddhist Order
F/WBO	Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and Western Buddhist Order
LBC	London Buddhist Centre
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgendered
NKT	New Kadampa Tradition – the largest Tibetan Buddhist group in the UK
NS-UK	Nichiren Shōshū – United Kingdom, forerunner of SGI-UK
SGI	Sōka Gakkai International
SGI-UK	Sōka Gakkai International – United Kingdom
SGI-USA	Sōka Gakkai International – United States of America
TELCO	The East London Citizens' Organising. A coalition of community groups in East London of which the LBC is a member.
TBRL	Team Based Right Livelihood – name given to community businesses organised within the FWBO (see above)
TBSMG	Trailokya Bauddha Mahāsaṅgha Sahayaka Gana – literal meaning the Great Saṅgha of the Three Worlds (i.e. the First, Second and Third Worlds of geopolitics). It is the Indian wing of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.
WBO	Western Buddhist Order

APPENDIX 4: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A

TERM

anattā

MEANING

Pali term for the Sanskrit term *anātman*. According to Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) this means non-self, the absence of self (*ātman* is Sanskrit for self or soul), and is a key Buddhist doctrine that states that both the individual and objects are devoid of any unchanging, eternal or autonomous substratum. It is one of the three 'marks' or attributes of all compounded phenomena. Keown suggests that some Buddhist schools, such as the tradition associated with the *Nirvāṇa Sutra* (which is cited by SGI as a key text that supports the claims of the Lotus Sutra) accept the existence of some form of transcendent self, often identified with Buddha-nature as the true self.

anātman

See *anattā* above.

B

TERM

Beginner

MEANING

Term formerly used for newcomers to the FWBO and its practices/techniques of the self.

Bodhisattva

Damien Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) defines this as the embodiment of the spiritual ideal of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in contrast to the earlier *Arhat* ideal advocated by the so-called *Hīnayāna*. It literally means 'enlightenment being'. The career of a bodhisattva begins by his/her generation of the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings, from when s/he embarks on the path to enlightenment

Bodhisattvas of the earth

In the *Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism* (2002) these are described as 'An innumerable host of bodhisattvas who emerge from beneath the earth and to whom Shakyamuni Buddha entrusts the propagation of the Mystic Law, or the essence of the *Lotus Sutra*, in the Latter Day of the Law. Nichiren regarded his followers who embrace and propagate the Mystic Law as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.' This term is also used by members of SGI to describe themselves.

Buddha

This is not a personal name but an epithet of those who have achieved enlightenment, the goal of the Buddhist religious life.

Buddhahood

The state of being a Buddha, an enlightened one.

Buddha-nature

Within the context of SGI, this is the inherent

Buddhahood of every sentient being. In this context, the task is not to achieve Buddhahood but to uncover it through practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

Butsudan

Literally 'Buddha-house'. Cabinet used by Nichiren Buddhists to house the *Gohonzon* (see below).

C

TERM

Council of LBC

MEANING

The Council is the Board of Trustees of the charity that is the London Buddhist Centre (LBC). All of its members are Order members with specific responsibilities. Its members include the Centre President, Centre Chairman, Centre Manager, Treasurer, outreach worker and the men and women's mitra convenors as well as representatives of the FWBO community businesses based around the LBC.

D

TERM

Daimoku

MEANING

The invocation of *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (see below), expressing devotion to the title (and according to Nichiren the essence) of the Lotus Sutra. This is a central practice of Nichiren Buddhists.

Dalit

Member of the Indian castes formerly referred to as Untouchables, or member of one of India's Scheduled Castes. The term *Dalit* is a self-chosen one by ex-Untouchables that means 'oppressed'.

Dharma
(Sanskrit)/*Dhamma*
(Pali)

Throughout the thesis *Dharma* is used in its sense of the second main meaning given in Keown (2003: 24) as 'the totality of Buddhist teachings'

Dharmic

Colloquial term used within the FWBO for an approach based on the *Dharma*, i.e. a Buddhist approach

Dharmachari

Male member of the Western Buddhist Order

Dharmacharini

Female member of the Western Buddhist Order

Dharmachari(ni)

Generic title for member of the Western Buddhist Order

Dzogchen

The central teaching of one of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism

E

TERM

Esho funi

MEANING

Oneness of life and its environment

F**TERM**

Friend

MEANING

A Friend is anyone who attends FWBO activities to whatever extent. They have not made a formal commitment to the Movement. Most in this category are *newcomers*, *beginners* or *regulars* attending FWBO activities.

G**TERM***Gohonzon***MEANING**

The *maṇḍala* (see below) to which Nichiren Buddhists chant *daimoku* (see above) and *gongyō*

Gongyō

Twice daily recitation of portions of the *Lotus Sūtra* with prayers performed by Nichiren Buddhists.

Gosho

The individual and collective writings of Nichiren that form part of the scriptural canon of Nichiren Buddhists.

H**TERM***Hīnayāna***MEANING**

Sanskrit for 'small vehicle'. Pejorative term used by proponents of the Mahāyāna schools to describe the teachings of what is now known as the Theravāda school (see below). Because of its negative connotations, the preferred term Theravāda is used in this thesis.

I**TERM***ichinen***MEANING**

Term used in Nichiren Buddhism. *Ichinen* means "one thought" or "one mind," which arises from the ultimate reality or true aspect of life that exists at each moment 'in human (and all) life. Refers to, amongst other things, the practice of observing one's mind and seeing Buddhahood within it by means of faith in the *gohonzon* and practice of *daimoku*

Itai-dōshin

The doctrine of 'many in body, one in mind' that is meant to describe the spirit of unity amongst Nichiren's disciples.

K**TERM***Kalyāṇa mitra***MEANING**

Damien Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) defines this as a 'good friend'; any person who can act as a reliable spiritual friend or adviser. Used within the FWBO as a term for 'spiritual friend'.

Kalyāṇa mitratā

Sanskrit term used within FWBO to describe friendship between spiritual friends.

karma

Sanskrit for action. Damien Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) defines the doctrine of *karma* as stating the implications for ethics of the basic universal law of *Dharma*, one aspect of which is that freely chosen and intended moral acts inevitably entail consequences. It is impossible to escape these consequences, and nobody, not even the Buddha, has the power to absolve evil deeds and short-circuit the consequences that inevitably follow. A wrongful thought, word, or deed is one committed under the influence of the three roots of evil (greed, hatred and delusion), while good deeds stem from the opposites of these, namely the three 'virtuous roots' (non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion). These good or evil roots nourished over the course of many lives become ingrained dispositions which predispose the individual towards virtue or vice. Wrongful deeds lead inevitably to a deeper entanglement in the process of suffering and rebirth (*saṃsāra*). *Karma* determines the conditions into which one is reborn and affects the nature and quality of individual circumstances. According to Buddhist thought the involvement of the individual is not the result of a 'Fall', or due to 'original sin' though which human nature became flawed. Each person, accordingly, has the final responsibility for his/her own salvation and the power of free will with which to choose good or evil.

Kōsen-rufu

According to the Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002), this means: 'Wide proclamation and propagation' of the *Lotus Sutra*. It is believed by SGI Buddhists that spreading this scripture and Nichiren's teachings will bring about peace in society and nature.

L

TERM

Lama

MEANING

According to Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) this is a Tibetan title of respect used to translate the term guru, originally denoting a teacher but now used more widely for any monk.

Lotus Sūtra

Mahāyāna text dating from 1st century CE that is the central canonical text of devotion by Nichiren Buddhists.

M

TERM

MEANING

<i>Mahāyāna</i>	(Sanskrit for 'the great vehicle'). According to Keown's <i>Dictionary of Buddhism</i> (2003) this refers to a major movement in the history of Buddhism embracing many schools in a sweeping reinterpretation of fundamental religious ideals, beliefs and values. Although there is no evidence for the existence of Mahāyāna prior to the 2 nd century CE, it can be assumed that the movement began to crystallise earlier, incorporating teachings of existing schools. Great emphasis is placed on the twin values of compassion and insight. The Bodhisattva who devotes himself to the service of others becomes the new paradigm for religious practice, as opposed to the Arhat who is criticised for leading a cloistered life devoted to the self-interested pursuit of liberation. Schools which embraced the Arhat ideal are henceforth referred to disparagingly as the Hīnayāna (Small Vehicle), or the Śrāvakayāna (Vehicle of the Hearers).
<i>maṇḍala</i>	According to Keown's <i>Dictionary of Buddhism</i> (2003) this is a sacred circle or circular diagram (also occasionally oblong as in Japan – as is the case of the <i>gohonzon</i> that is a focal point of practice in Nichiren Buddhism) having mystical significance.
<i>metta</i>	This is the Pali form of the Sanskrit term <i>maitrī</i> meaning love, goodwill, or benevolence.
<i>metta bhāvāna</i>	A meditation in which one systematically cultivates universal lovingkindness.
Mindfulness	Reflexive awareness and concentration of mind. Damien Keown's <i>Dictionary of Buddhism</i> (2003) describes this as an alert state of mind that should be cultivated constantly as the foundation for understanding and insight.
<i>Mitra</i>	A <i>Mitra</i> (Sanskrit for friend) is someone who wants to practise Buddhism seriously according to the FWBO's approach and intends to do so for the foreseeable future. They have also made a formal commitment to this effect through their participation in a simple ceremony.

N**TERM***Nam-myoho-renge-kyo***MEANING**

According to the Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism (2002), this is: 'The ultimate Law or truth of the universe, according to Nichiren's teaching. ... It literally means devotion to Myoho-renge-kyo. Myoho-renge-kyo is the Japanese reading of the Chinese title of the Lotus Sutra, which Nichiren regards as the sutra's essence, and appending *nam*

... to that phrase indicates devotion to the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren identifies it with the universal Law or principle implicit in the meaning of the sutra's text.'

Newcomer	Someone initially participating in FWBO activities. This term is preferred to the one formerly used, beginner, because a newcomer may have considerable experience of using techniques of the self such as meditation in different institutions/contexts, and/or may have studied Buddhism within (an)other tradition(s).
<i>Nirvāṇa</i>	According to Damien Keown's <i>Dictionary of Buddhism</i> (2003) this is the goal of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path. The attainment of <i>Nirvāṇa</i> marks the end of cyclic existence in <i>saṃsāra</i> (the cycle of repeated birth and death that individuals undergo), the condition to which it forms the antithesis, and in the context of which <i>nirvāṇa</i> must be understood. <i>Saṃsāra</i> is thus the problem to which <i>nirvāṇa</i> is the solution.
Non-profit	An organisation working in the public or private sector without any monetary or commercial profit. Any profits that are made are put back into the business and/or donated to causes in keeping with the aims and objectives of the business.

O

TERM

Order member

MEANING

Order members have been ordained into the Western Buddhist Order (WBO). Male order members are given the Sanskrit appellation *Dharmachari* and female order members the Sanskrit title of *Dharmacharinis*. The terms *Dharmachari(ni)* means 'Dharma-farer' or 'one who follows the Dharma'.

R

TERM

Regular

MEANING

Regulars are Friends who are more experienced than beginners or newcomers and attend FWBO activities on a regular basis.

S

TERM

śamatha

MEANING

One of two types of meditational technique taught in Buddhism, the other being *vipassana* or insight meditation (see below for separate entry). Damien

Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) explains that through *śamatha* one aims to develop the state of mental absorption known as 'one-pointedness of mind' in which state the mind remains focused unwaveringly on the meditation subject. Once focused in this way, the mind becomes successively able to attain deeper states of absorption. The main technique in *śamatha* is concentration on the breath as it enters and leaves the body, but in the Pali Canon a total of forty traditional meditation subjects is given.

Samāsāra

See *Nirvāṇa* above.

Sangha

Definitions of *Sangha* vary within the Buddhist world. Damien Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) defines it (*Samgha* p.247) as 'The Buddhist community, especially those who have been ordained as monks and nuns but originally referring to the 'fourfold samgha' of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen'. Throughout the thesis I draw on the definition of *Sangha* as the 'fourfold *saṃgha*' of both ordained and lay Buddhists and use it to mean a Buddhist movement.

shakubuku

The *Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism* (2002) describes this as: "A method of expounding Buddhism, the aim of which is to suppress others' illusions and to subdue their attachment to error or evil. This refers to the Buddhist method of leading people, particularly its opponents, to the correct Buddhist teaching by refuting their erroneous views and eliminating their attachment to opinions they have formed. The practice of *shakubuku* thus means to correct another's false views and awaken that person to the truth of Buddhism."

The term is used colloquially within SGI to describe spreading Nichiren Buddhism although the usual methods used are best described as *shōju* (see below).

Shikishin-funi

Oneness of body and mind.

shōju

According to the *Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism* (2002), this "means to lead others to the correct teaching gradually, according to their capacity and without directly refuting their religious misconceptions."

Skilful means

See *Upāya-kauśalya* (below)

Stream Entrant

Damien Keown's *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) defines this in the section called *Stream Winner* '[a] person [who] is securely established on the path to

nirvāṇa and has eliminated the first three of the ten fetters.’ The first of these fetters, according to the Dictionary of Buddhism, is ‘belief in a permanent self’.

T

TERM

Theravāda

MEANING

Damien Keown’s *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) describes this as the only one of the early Buddhist schools of the *Śrāvakayāna* (Vehicle of the Hearers) to have survived down to modern times. The school is characterised by fidelity to the texts of the Pali Canon, the earliest complete set of Buddhist scriptures preserved intact in a single canonical language. Its attitude to doctrine is described as generally conservative.

U

TERM

Upāya-kauśalya

MEANING

Sanskrit term describing the concept of ‘skilful means’ that is of considerable importance in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Damien Keown’s *Dictionary of Buddhism* (2003) suggests that at the root of the idea is the notion that the Buddha’s teaching is essentially a provisional means to bring beings to enlightenment and that the teachings which he may give may vary: what may be appropriate at one time may not be so at another. The concept is used by the Mahāyāna to justify innovations in doctrine, and to portray the Buddha’s early teachings as limited and restricted by the lesser spiritual potential of his early followers. In the Mahāyāna, skilful means comes to be a legitimate method to be employed by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas whenever the benefit of beings warrants it. Spurred on by their great compassion, Bodhisattvas are seen in some sources breaking the precepts and committing actions that would otherwise attract moral censure. The assumption underlying the doctrine is that all teachings are in any case provisional and that once liberation is attained it will be seen that Buddhism as a body of philosophical doctrines and moral precepts was only as use as a means to reach the final goal and that its teachings do not have ultimate validity.

V

TERM

Vipaśyanā (Sanskrit)
Vipassanā (Pali)

MEANING

One of two types of meditational technique taught in Buddhism (see entry under *śamatha* for description)

of techniques in this category) also known as insight meditation. The objectives of these techniques is that through contemplation of the truths of Buddhism one can attain to direct personal apprehension and verification of the truths of Buddhist teachings to the point that one realises *nirvāṇa*. As insight is hard to attain if the mind is distracted, it is advised that these techniques are used with *samatha* techniques that lead to increasing concentration of mind.

Votary of the *Lotus Sūtra*

The *Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism* (2002) defines this as: “One who practises and propagates the Lotus Sutra in exact accordance with its teachings.” In his writings, Nichiren describes himself as the “foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in Japan” and the act of being a disciple of Nichiren means becoming a votary of the *Lotus Sūtra*.

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