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# **WHITE MINDFULNESS IN THE US AND UK: THE IMPACT OF RACIAL NEOLIBERALISM**

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## **DEDICATION**

*For Ché and Ruth*

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates mindfulness' trajectory in the US and UK over the past four decades with attention to the particular adaptation of mindfulness rendered by Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme (MBSR). I explore the context into which mindfulness arrives from its Buddhist origins in Southeast Asia, arguing that its subsequent arc is inextricable from the socio-political and economic fabric common to the US and UK. Orientalism, secularisation and Buddhist modernisation coalesce, here, with ideologies of neoliberalism, postracialism, whiteness and individualism to constitute new products and formations.

My thesis examines mindfulness organisations arising from the development of secular Buddhism in racialised neoliberal US and UK contexts. I consider whether Kabat-Zinn's 'second Renaissance' universalised mindfulness is a sufficient basis to transform social injustices in these postracial capitalist societies. Further, I investigate the pedagogical architectures and technologies through which the sector sustains itself. I adopt a multi-modal inquiry into three leading organisations interviewing thirty-two staff members and consulting archival and current sources. Thematic coding of semi-structured interviews generated an analysis of the impact of 'neoliberal postraciality' (Goldberg 2015: 27) on: organisational demographics, philosophies and diversity strategies; mindfulness' reformulation, authorisation and edicts of universalism and neutrality; the whitewashing and corporatisation of education.

My research shows that the mindfulness sector is governed by asymmetrical power structures prevalent in the US and UK: institutional decision-making and leadership roles are racialised and gendered; neo-colonial re-interpretations of mindfulness that re-enchanted the world for privileged groups are universalised; research paradigms repeat dominant discourses of individualism, healthism and whiteness which dislocate distress from its structural causes and place the burden of wellness

on the precariat regardless of social conditions. On this basis, adjunctive diversity strategies reproduce hegemonic models and discourses that emphasise 'sameness' and 'common humanity' and disregard the exploitation of differences to create vulnerabilities. Similarly, educational pathways adopt ideologies and frameworks that reinforce exclusions based on select interpretations of competence and experiential learning. My investigation finds that what constitutes a 'white mindfulness' is divested of social justice aspirations. To function in the service of social transformation, white mindfulness requires decolonisation.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAMBA	British Association of Mindfulness-Based Applications
BME	Black Minority Ethnic / Black Asian Minority Ethnic
CEDAR	Clinical Education Development and Research (Exeter University)
CMRP	Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice (Bangor University)
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit (currently: Advance Higher Education)
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
IAPT	Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Services
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
MAPPG	Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group
MBCT	Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy
MBI:TAC	Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Teaching Assessment Criteria
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
MNUK	Mindfulness Nation United Kingdom
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NSUN	National Survivor User Network
POC	People of Colour
UKN	UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations
WRES	Workforce Race Equality Strategy



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## Introduction: Evolving White Mindfulness

The evolution of mindfulness in the US and UK reveals rapid expansion of the field in politically fraught, unequal societies which, although distinct, we can think of hereafter as the US/UK. An explosion of research literature and growing discursive analysis of the Western reorientation of mindfulness is beginning to engage this setting. An emergent body of critical mindfulness literature, notably captured by Purser, Forbes and Burke's (2016) *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context and Social Engagement*, addresses its location in US/UK neoliberalism. Ron Purser's (2019) *McMindfulness* advances this discussion while Jamie Kucinkas' (2019) *Mindful Elite* explores mindfulness' mainstreaming through elite networks. Increasingly, attention is paid to mindfulness' navigation of these fractured societies and its potential role in social transformation. This focus sheds light on the sector's predominantly white, middle-class demographic (Wylie 2015; Kucinkas 2019). Yet, aside from Magee (2016; 2018), Hsu (2014; 2016), Sylvia (2016), Williams, Owens and Syedullah (2015), and Black (2017), few mindfulness authors consider the racialised nature of neoliberalism and its impact on mindfulness. It is in this context that I hypothesise that mindfulness has developed from Buddhism to serve the needs of neoliberal capitalism in a postracial society. As a Black feminist mindfulness teacher, my examination of the intersection of mindfulness and racial neoliberalism, which continues to shape its trajectory, contributes to an understanding of the sector's racialised profile and its lack in diversity.

To qualify as a mindfulness teacher, I followed the Centre for Mindfulness' (CfM) Teacher Training Pathway (TTP) between 2008 and 2015 attaining CfM Certified Teacher status in 2015. Alongside this, I became an MBCT trainer in 2010. In addition, I attended annual, teacher-led silent retreats fulfilling CfM's teaching requirements. Immersing myself in the field, I also undertook training in the supervision and assessment of secular mindfulness teachers. These participatory actions aided my understanding of the US/UK mindfulness project and sensitised me to the sector's inclusionary efforts and exclusionary patterns in both societies. These experiences influence and are, in turn, affected by my positionality as a Black

feminist researcher which is pivotal to my perspectives and the voice I bring to my thesis.

Factors that set the stage for my investigation include CfM's 2015 Spring Conference, *Meeting the World: Exploring the Ethics, Values and Responsibility of Bringing Mindfulness into Society*. This gathering included a panel of MBSR Teachers of Colour<sup>1</sup> which discussed the white spaces of mindfulness. It also included a presentation by law professor Rhonda Magee titled *Breathing together through "I can't breathe": The Ethics and Efficacy of Mindfulness in Working Toward Justice for All*. Magee showed a recording of the murder of Eric Garner on 17 July 2017 at the hands of the New York Police Department. Her talk drew attention to the ironic assumption in mindfulness that the breath is a refuge, universally accessible to all. Encouraged by Magee and the panel, my inquiry into mindfulness' evolving role given the sector's white, middle-class orientation (Wylie 2015; Purser, Forbes and Burke 2016: v) took shape.

As part of this process, I produced an *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* (EDI) concept paper presented at a UKN Strategic Planning Meeting, March 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> 2017. This in-house research afforded the opportunity to further explore the obscuration of racial difference within the sector and its absorption in postracialism. At this gathering, a UKN EDI Working Party was formed for which I co-authored an April 2018 Report. The latter addresses diversification strategies for the sector. These developments shaped my understandings.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

My critical study of secular mindfulness' trajectory in the US and UK over the past four decades, with an interest in how it is forged, generated the following research questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Terminology used in critical race theory differs between the US and UK. In the US, the term 'People of Colour' (POC) is sometimes used, in addition to Black, to incorporate multiple groups marginalised by whiteness. POC is critiqued by some as a pejorative term that homologises experiences that are not white (Lamuye 2017).

1. Why do particular organisations in the mindfulness movement arise from the development of secular Buddhism in white neoliberal societies?
2. Can the 'second Renaissance' claims of universalism to transform social inequalities and injustices be realised in a postracial capitalist society?
3. What are the pedagogical technologies and mechanisms through which the white mindfulness sector reproduces itself?

As I set the context into which mindfulness arrives from its Buddhist origins in Southeast Asia, it becomes clear that its arc is inextricable from the socio-political and economic fabric of the US and UK. Orientalism, secularisation and Buddhist modernisation coalesce with ideologies of neoliberalism, postracialism and individualism to constitute new products and formations. These ideologies work collaboratively within the US/UK which, although they are entirely different social formations, share commonalities in the secularisation project.

By 'secular mindfulness', I refer to the particular adaptation of mindfulness rendered by scientist-mediator<sup>2</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Programme (MBSR). Kabat-Zinn (2011) resists the term 'secular'—commonly used to distinguish his programme and its offshoots from Buddhist programmes—and prefers the use of 'universal dharma'. He says that secular denies the 'sacred' aspects of mindfulness that he embraces in his work (2011: 301). Yet, it is problematic to use the concept 'modern' mindfulness which must encompass a broader range of interventions including the socially focused Buddhist Peace Fellowship and Radical Dharma movements. Such an all-encompassing term discounts their radically different purposes from MBSR and its derivatives. My use of the term secular is not to suggest a mindfulness devoid of Buddhism. In using the term secular mindfulness, I denote mindfulness as political doctrine, as opposed to a non-Buddhist mindfulness. I underscore the political

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<sup>2</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn graduated from Harvard with a PhD in molecular biology in 1971. He was introduced to meditation as a student and studied mindfulness meditation with Asian meditation teachers including Thich Nhat Hanh, Soeng Sanh (Wilson 2014: 35). He combined his scientific and meditation influences to pioneer secular mindfulness in the US. I coin the term scientist-mediator to acknowledge both these streams in his work.



nature of secularism and its inherent power structures. In the case of mindfulness, secularisation—I argue in Chapter One—colonises aspects of Buddhist doctrine and re-presents these to transcend all divisions, in the process serving neoliberal, universalist interests. As my thesis develops, I present an argument that the term ‘white mindfulness’ might better depict the emergent sector informed by the political doctrines of whiteness, postracial neoliberalism, individualism and universality, which are now embedded in the US/UK project.

### **An Overview of the Field**

The burgeoning field of secular mindfulness has received growing attention in recent years not least due to its clinical applications and reported therapeutic efficacy (Dermazo et al. 2015: 579). Published research doubled between 2013 and 2016 and trebled from 2011-2016 (AMRA 2018). Testified clinical success culminated in the inclusion of mindfulness in UK health policy: the UK’s National Health Service (NHS) regards it as a treatment of choice for certain conditions (Halliwell 2010).<sup>3</sup> Mindfulness has also spread beyond the health sector to governments, the education sector, the workplace (Sun 2014: 394; Woods-Giscombé 2014: 147; Drabble 2013; Chapman-Clarke 2016: 28), and prisons (Booth 2017; Adarves-Yorno and Mahdon 2017). Proliferation of mindfulness literature includes increased critical scrutiny regarding its Buddhist provenance and ethics, partly encapsulated in the ‘McMindfulness backlash’, coined by Miles Neale<sup>4</sup> (Fisher 2010; Purser and Loy 2013; Sun 2014: 406). In reflecting on his 2010 critique, Neale (2016) elaborates on the dilution and dislocation of mindfulness from its Buddhist

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<sup>3</sup> The NICE Guideline included mindfulness as a protocol first in 2004, and most recently in 2009 (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2009; Halliwell, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> The now-famous term *McMindfulness* was coined by Buddhist psychotherapist Miles Neale in a 2010 conversation with Danny Fisher titled: *Frozen Yoga and McMindfulness: Miles Neale on the mainstreaming of contemplative religious practices*. The term was popularised in a 2013 Huffington Post article by Ron Purser and David Loy titled *Beyond McMindfulness* in which the authors draw upon Neale’s insight: “I see a kind of compartmentalized, secularized, watered-down version of mindfulness being offered, which I call ‘McMindfulness’ in a forthcoming article of mine. Meditation for the masses, drive-through style, stripped of its essential ingredients, pre-packaged and neatly stocked on the shelves of the commercial self-help supermarkets. From my perspective, McMindfulness lacks the integrity of the tradition and lineage from which it originates” (Fisher 2010; Purser and Loy 2013).

provenance. He questions its value and integrity as an ‘Amerocentric fad’ and encourages its return to ethics and ‘higher Buddhist teachings’ (2016).

With its roots in Buddhist traditions (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 290; 2017) mindfulness is enmeshed with the goal of transcending the wheel of suffering (Skt: *saṃsāra*) and attaining freedom. It is regarded as the “direct path ... for the realisation of *Nibbāna*”.<sup>5</sup> Accomplishment of wisdom relies upon transmission<sup>6</sup> of the teachings by a teacher consummate in the practices they are imparting (Lutz 2008: 501). Historically, mindfulness training took place in monasteries primarily through liturgical recitation (Sharf 1995: 258).<sup>7</sup> Its twentieth century revival, particularly in Sri Lanka and Burma, emphasised meditative experience (McMahan 2012: 161). Its recent US/UK transmission individualises secular mindfulness but still underscores meditative practice and experience.<sup>8</sup> Its secularisation implies a social shift or decline in ‘religious authority’ (Chaves 1994). I explore this further to understand organisational incentives to popularise mindfulness beyond institutional settings such as the Buddhist Peace Fellowship and Insight Meditation Society. Kabat-Zinn, for instance, says: “The intention and approach behind MBSR were never meant to exploit, fragment, or decontextualize the *dharma*, but rather to re-contextualise it within the frameworks of science, medicine (including psychiatry and psychology), and healthcare so that it would be maximally useful to people who could not hear it or enter into it through the more traditional dharma gates, whether they were doctors or medical patients, hospital administrators, or insurance companies”

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<sup>5</sup> *Nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*; Pali: *nibbāna*) describes the Buddhist path that leads to the cessation of suffering. The opening section of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*—a doctrinal Buddhist text used in certain modern mindfulness programmes—states: “Monks, this is the direct path ... for the realization of *Nibbāna*, namely, the four *satipaṭṭhānas*” which are mindfulness of body, sensations, mind and mental objects (Anālayo 2006: 27).

<sup>6</sup> Transmission is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “the action or process of transmitting something or the state of being transmitted” or as “the mechanism by which power is transmitted”.

<sup>7</sup> Sharf maps the course of Buddhist meditation to show that emphasis on first-person experience and ‘states of meditation’ as indicators of progress is recent: “‘Meditation’ had traditionally comprised the reenactment of the Buddha’s spiritual exertions through the ritual recitation of meditation liturgies. Such exercises were typically performed in order to acquire merit and attain a more fortunate rebirth” (Sharf 1995: 258).

<sup>8</sup> The rationalization of meditation in the twentieth century shifted from a scripture and ethics-based culture of practice, to first-hand experience of meditation. In most countries in South Asia, the tradition of meditation “was evidently moribund by the end of the nineteenth century” (Sharf 1995: 253).

(2011: 288). The sector thus acknowledges its Buddhist orientation (Valerio 206; Sun 2014; Mitra and Greenberg 2016) signalling a re-articulation with, rather than a departure from Buddhism. Consequently, a continuum of Buddhist influences ranging from complete 'disembeddedness' (Valerio 2016: 157) to Buddhist-infused mindfulness programmes are evident. This spectrum differentiates individualised and prosocial mindfulness models.

In the main, secular mindfulness models individualise teachings. In contrast, socially-engaged Buddhists<sup>9</sup> and the authors of *Radical Dharma* propose that suffering is concomitantly individual and social (Williams, Owens and Syedullah 2016: xxvi; Henry 2013: 106; McMahan 2012: 172). These movements 'agitate' for Buddhists and those who align with its ethics and values, to generate and effect social change, not merely to support it. They highlight agency on the path to end suffering of all beings and emphasise the creation of conditions for 'human flourishing' (Williams, Owens and Syedullah 2016: xxiii; Nhat Hanh 2000: 39). Rooted in the relationality of Buddhist doctrine and political justice, the Radical Dharma movement sees mindfulness and social justice as inseparable (Williams, Owens and Syedullah 2016: xxiv).

Leading on from these developments, the secular mindfulness community increasingly faces questions of its socially-engaged purpose (Thompson 2017; Duerr 2015; Forbes 2016). Arguments for an explicit prosocial, community-engaged function (Bodhi 2016: 5; Leonard 2016: 261) challenge individualised mindfulness models that emphasise inner liberation as a necessary and sufficient first step towards social justice (Davis - Kabat-Zinn dialogue 2015). Engaged mindfulness juxtaposes inner and outer practice and adopts engaged Buddhism's 'trialectic'

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<sup>9</sup> Socially-engaged Buddhism has been well documented. There is discrepancy as to its origins, commonly ascribed to the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (Yarnell 2003: 286). Batchelor, for instance, argues that it emerged among Vietnamese monks in the 1930s in resistance to colonial oppression (1994: 360). It is not my intention to explore this movement in this work. It is cited to acknowledge and highlight the actively engaged aspect of Buddhism regarded by many practitioners a natural part of Buddhism and mindfulness. These practitioners denounce the need for the concept 'engaged' in the first instance, insisting that Buddhist practice necessarily spans inner and outer worlds (Bell 2000: 413).

model of “scholarly enquiry, spiritual practice and social activism” as a foundation (Ng 2014: 373). This unfolding debate underscores the politicised nature of mindfulness and its potential role and re-contextualisation in accordance with social justice values (Davis - Kabat-Zinn dialogue: 2015).

The proliferation of mindfulness in the US and UK maps a trajectory that is politically, conceptually and contextually contentious. First, discord relates, in part, to ethical disputes surrounding its commodification, inaccessibility and elitism (Eaton 2014), not to mention its deployment in the military (Myers 2015; Purser 2014) and Fortune 500 corporations (Caring-Lobel 2016: 195; Chaskalson 2011). Second, mindfulness’ reconceptualization to reduce stress, is seen simultaneously as skilful in entering popular discourses (Monteiro, Musten and Compson 2015) and opportunistic in performing as ‘attention policing’ (Ng 2015; Forbes 2016: 360). Third, recontextualisation, a necessary feature of Buddhism’s adaptation to local conditions (Batchelor 2012a; McMahan 2012: 3), is contested for the approach to, and outcome of, secularisation and assimilation (McMahan 2012: 161; Purser 2015: 12; Sun 2014: 406).

Fourth, its wellbeing orientation, claimed to reduce stress and promote human flourishing, bolsters behavioural medicine (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 281-285). Yet, this positioning toward medicalisation, healthism and individualism is viewed as a neoliberal strategy that adds to the burden of the dispossessed (Skrabanek 1994: 15; Crawford 1980: 365). Medicalisation is a term coined in the 1970s by sociologists like Irving Zola (1972). It denotes the expansion of medical social control and the categorisation of social disorders, such as stress, as medical conditions. Within mindfulness, the medicalisation of stress and depression justifies therapeutic intervention and emphasises healing as a perennial pursuit locking the individual into a ‘disease-therapy cycle’ (Barker 2014: 174). Additionally, mindfulness training fosters self-management and the ‘moral responsibility’ for wellbeing in young people which can be seen to serve neoliberal purposes (Reveley 2016: 497). Healthism, coined by Crawford (1980) is associated with medicalisation. It locates the moral responsibility for wellness in the individual as part of neoliberal

strategies to privatise health. Petr Skrabanek's *The Death of Human Medicine and the Rise of Coercive Healthism* (1994), also uses the term pejoratively.

Mindfulness's deployment of the term aims to override the derogatory association with healthism and wellbeing (Barker 2014: 174).

Fifth, its scientification (Faure 2012; McMahan 2012: 163) and uncritical psychologisation (Arthington 2016: 87), considered fundamental to endorsement of the burgeoning sector, is critiqued for its lack of research rigour and limited foci (Purser and Cooper 2014; Thompson 2016). The scientification of religion is accepted as part of its secularisation in 'modern' society. It refers to the process whereby religions are professionalised and given new meanings to make them acceptable to science. The scientification of mindfulness fulfils these requirements, even suggesting that Buddhism is a science rather than a religion (Faure 2012; Lopez 2012). The uncritical therapization of mindfulness, not unlike healthism and other devices, emphasises personal responsibility for mental wellbeing. Through self-regulation—the constant monitoring of attention—it also fosters technologies of the neoliberal self (Honey 2014). In contrast, community and critical psychologists emphasise socio-political awareness and transformation (Arthington 2016: 100).

Sixth, regulation and professionalisation claim to protect the public through gold-standard trainings and testing (McCown 2011; Crane et al. 2016). Yet, privatisation and training audits generate exclusivity, perpetuate hegemonic power, and reproduce hyper-individualised models consistent with neoliberal ideologies (Purser and Ng 2016; Thompson 2016).

Recent focus on the sociological and political dimensions of mindfulness expanded debate within the sector beyond Buddhist concerns and psycho-physiological impact studies (Valerio 2016: 157). Forbes' (2016) taxonomy of mindfulness modalities, for instance, outlines its wide-ranging societal influences and politics. Similarly, Sun (2014) and Walsh's (2016) research into the nature and scope of mindfulness, underscore a growing critical approach to the sector and the prospect

of commoning (Doran 2017).<sup>10</sup> In addition, a 2018 Leverhulme-funded sociological study, *Mapping Mindfulness* ([www.mappingmindfulness.net](http://www.mappingmindfulness.net)) sets out to map wide-ranging interventions across the UK. Alongside inquiry into purpose and value, critique of the psychological foundations of the dominant mindfulness models (Fisher 2010; Arthington 2016: 88-91; Stanley 2012: 633-4) and the sector's relation to neoliberalism are gaining traction (Hsu 2016: 371; Arthington, 2016: 93-95; Ng 2014: 360; Ng 2016: 137; Walsh 2016: 156; Thompson 2017).

Growing concern with the sector's white, middle-class demographic (UKN 2017 Survey; Wylie 2015; Kucinkas 2019) has spurred key organisations to update policies, form committees, and launch identity-based teaching courses. However, academic inquiry into the sector's whiteness, exclusivism and social justice potential remain rare (Magee 2016: 432; Hsu 2017a; Cannon 2016: 404).

Contributions generally lack engagement with the broader critical diversity and decolonisation literature (Ahmed 2004; 2012; 2014; Crenshaw 1989; 2015; 2016; Mirza 2006; 2015; Armstrong and Wildman 2007; Wildman, Armstrong and Moran 2012; DiAngelo 2011; 2015; Picower 2009; Arday and Mirza 2018; Bhabra, Gebrial and Nişancioğlu 2018). As a result, efforts that aim to redress the sector's inherent inequities tend to re-emphasise contexts in which whiteness thrives.

In order to undertake this inquiry, I focus on three leading organisations anonymised as Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha.<sup>11</sup> Consideration of these institutions brings to light both mindfulness' secularisation and its negotiation of asymmetrical power structures. My thesis examines the organisations and their programmes as

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<sup>10</sup> The Mindful Commons is part of a series of actions of resistance towards the advances of 'neoliberal capitalism' (Doran 2018). Doran acknowledges that mindfulness sometimes evolves antagonistically to efforts to reclaim ecology and economy as areas of collective interest. He identifies the 'attention economy' and the commodification of subjectivity as phases in individualisation. Engaged Buddhism, for him, offers a movement towards collective commoning as a strategy that 'shatters dualisms' in working towards social transformation (*ibid.*).

<sup>11</sup> Maitri (active good will towards others), karuna (identifying the suffering of others as one's own) and upeksha (even-mindedness and serenity) are three of four 'immeasurables', considered divine abodes which, when cultivated, are said to make the mind illimitable. These *brahmavihārās* (abodes of Brahma), considered pre-Buddhist, appear in both Buddhist and Hindu texts, (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmavihara>).

portals through which to consider secular mindfulness in racialised<sup>12</sup> neoliberal contexts. Within this setting, I build an argument that explores the sector's whiteness and pave the way for an inquiry into its own prospects for transformation and its potential contribution to social justice.

### **Thesis Outline**

The study comprises five chapters. Each addresses distinct components of the emergence of mindfulness in the US and UK over the last four decades. In order to frame its US/UK arrival, Chapter One includes a review of literature and theory concerning social forces such as postracialism and neoliberalism that shape mindfulness in the US/UK context. To locate this frame of influences, I adopt Edward Said's postcolonial thesis of Orientalism to contextualise secularisation and Buddhist modernisation arguing that secularisation is always a political process enacted through power relations. At the core of these processes, I identify an underlying discourse of Othering which informs the appropriation/appreciation debate. This allows me to sketch the political overtones that flavour Buddhism's advent in the West and mindfulness' popularisation, and to argue how neoliberal postraciality shapes the secularised product. Through tracking the secularisation of mindfulness, I explore its ambiguous relationship to Buddhism and its implication in Orientalism and racial neoliberalism.

Chapter Two outlines the methodologies I use to address the research questions. I problematise insider-outsider theories and explore my positionality as an 'outsider-within'. I establish a Black feminist standpoint approach to research emphasising reflexivity and purposefulness. A mixed methods strategy includes interviews, review of archival and organisational documentation and the use of thematic coding. I discuss the ethical basis of my research, including the anonymisation of

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<sup>12</sup> I draw here on the work of John Powell (2008). Racialisation, for him, encapsulates the multiple technologies, cultural norms and institutional functions that generate racialised outcomes in society (2008: 785). This shifts away from discourses that isolate race and racism and portray the multiple mechanisms that secure relational power.

respondents and organisations. I outline limitations of the study and reflect on preliminary findings by way of conclusion.

Chapter Three discusses the first research question regarding the particular organisations that emerge in the racialised US/UK contexts of neoliberalism. I examine the three selected formations as mindfulness took root in the early eighties in concert with the rise of neoliberalism. The chapter begins with a discussion of each of the three organisations and considers them in relation to expansion strategies and underpinning ideologies. I locate the racialised profiles of the organisations in histories of coloniality, whiteness and social divides. In addition, I explore mechanisms (such as research agendas and expansion strategies) that echo rather than transform these divisions. Above all, I consider how cultures of racialisation are reinforced through the composition of organisational boards and leaders alongside values that de-prioritise engagement with marginalised communities. Specifically, I show how leadership navigates the agenda of widening participation and how these actions came to construe a dominant culture of uncritical mindfulness.

Chapter Four considers whether ‘second Renaissance’ universalist claims that mindfulness can transform social inequalities and injustices can be realised in a postracial capitalist society. It probes recontextualization or decontextualization and the implicit politics of mindfulness. Here, the focus shifts from organisational frameworks to the formulation of mindfulness in the context of hegemonic interests. Underpinning societal agendas that shape the project show mindfulness’ articulation with and interpretation through dominant socio-political ideologies. I examine Kabat-Zinn’s ‘second Renaissance thought’ to understand its transformative potential and consider secularist claims of neutrality and universality. These claims project an ‘apolitical’<sup>13</sup> stance that conceals an inherent

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Apolitical’ is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “not interested or involved in politics”. The concept is linked to political neutrality. I place the word in single quotation marks to highlight it as a problematic concept. I argue that all constructions, including that of an ‘apolitical’ stance, are by their nature political. Contrary to its claim, the concept ‘apolitical’ is commonly a reinforcement of hegemonic power.



politics and ethos consistent with neoliberal postraciality. The sector's multiple hyper-individualised models, for instance, are replete with self-regulation and responsabilisation which amplifies discourses of individualisation, healthism, self-discipline and perpetual self-improvement. These underlying doctrines detract from a social ethic of communal enhancement, agency and transformation. Temporality, likewise, embedded in mindfulness' US-Eurocentric recontextualisation, appears to be a construct of exclusion. Similarly, a discussion of the politics of suffering interrogates edicts of neutrality and assumptions surrounding the equivalences of pain.

Chapter Five considers the postracial pedagogical technologies and mechanisms through which the white mindfulness sector reproduces itself and its underlying ethos. This third research question highlights educational patterns that conform to market-driven corporate agendas. Consequently, I explore the sector's professionalisation and expansion through pedagogies and teacher training programmes (TTPs) as part of an audit culture that serves capitalist imperatives. Rather than open pathways for diversification, TTPs promulgate discourses that reveal themselves to be consistent with uncritical pedagogies. 'Apolitical', ahistorical educational approaches and massification strategies reproduce rather than transform the social fabric of inequalities. They proliferate particular social norms and values disguised by a lexicon of neutrality and universality. I consider, in particular, organisational collaboration geared to improve standardisation in efforts to protect the field from unregulated training. Within cultures of efficiency and measurement, competency-based educational strategies that frame teacher assessment, have come to engulf UK-based TTPs. This leads me to assess the implications of skills-orientated training which conflicts with irreducible teacher qualities such as embodiment. To further challenge TTP rhetorical devices that elide difference, I discuss experiential learning and embodiment that have become synonymous with the field. My findings here echo earlier discussions of a secular mindfulness project in the grip of coloniality.

In the concluding section, I attend to the broader issue of the implications of mindfulness' racial neoliberal imprint and the cultural products this engenders. I conclude that emergent popular discourses and models constitutes a white mindfulness that conforms to hegemonic social forces that shape, both explicitly and implicitly, its internal and external agendas. In the course of this argument, I highlight the absence of social justice values and norms from the social fabric in which secular mindfulness evolves and suggest that questions of diversification of the sector are better addressed through decolonisation. In the penultimate section, I draw attention to the limitations of my study. These include the problem of scale: a small number of organisations and limited coverage. The current study could have benefited from a survey of organisational teacher trainees and course participants. This would have allowed me to understand the extent to which they challenge the sector's ideologies. In addition, engagement with 'outsider' identity groups and individuals would have offered further insight into exclusions. Finally, I consider future research projects that spring from my study.

### **Rider**

My appraisal of the sector is not intended to detract from the value and benefit of models of mindfulness that foster agency, relieve suffering, and broaden perspective (Sun 2014: 410; Lewis and Rozelle 2016: 263). Nor does it insinuate devious, exclusivist strategies among those who formulate secular mindfulness approaches. I attempt to map sector-wide epistemic foundations that hinder rather than promote racial and social justice.

## Chapter One: Orientalism, Secularisation and White Mindfulness

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the literatures and theories surrounding mindfulness' mushrooming in the US/UK. My framing discusses the influences of neoliberalism, postracialism and whiteness on mindfulness. To place these in a broader theoretical and historical context, I draw on the work of Edward Said who problematises the migration of knowledges from the Orient to the Occident in the light of colonisation and Empire. Said's philosophy of Orientalism, I suggest, underpins the recontextualisation and secularisation of mindfulness. His study of the Other helps to explain the racialised underpinnings of Buddhism's steady propagation in the West. It also provides a lens through which to examine Funie Hsu's model of appropriation as the perpetuation of whiteness (2014; 2017b). Her work frames an exploration of mindfulness' recontextualization as part of a postcolonial trend.

In light of Said's critique, I consider the 'politics of secularisation'. Talal Asad argues that secularisation is always a politicised process framed by dominant ideologies. Said and Asad's theories allow me to examine the appropriation of mindfulness and its re-positioning in terms of neoliberal postraciality. In practical terms, I establish mindfulness' trajectory in whiteness by mapping Buddhism's navigation to the US. This allows me to formulate a more nuanced understanding of the setting in which Jon Kabat-Zinn recontextualises mindfulness.

My literature review shows that the rapid spread of secular mindfulness in the West associates it with the self-help industry, individualisation and commodification (Payne 2016: 125). It is also aligned with 'non-religiosity', modern Buddhism and science (Faure 2012: 72-75; Loy 2016: 19; King 2016: 36). Secularisation is portrayed to relieve mindfulness of its Buddhist connection (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 183) and to present its 'essence' through the rational discourse of science: "There is a swath of our culture who is not going to listen to someone in monks' robes, but they are paying attention to scientific evidence" (Richard Davidson quoted in Pickert 2014). Yet, secularisation is a political process imbued with hegemonic and epistemic contestation.

## **1.2 Social Forces: Neoliberalism, Postracialism and Failures of Diversity**

To help understand the setting in which mindfulness is secularised, I discuss key social forces that shape the sector including the rise of neoliberalism, postracialism and allied ideologies. These effect strategies of marginalisation across race,<sup>14</sup> class, gender, sexuality, disability and age. I suggest that this milieu, especially in the absence of critique and vigilance, shapes, informs and comprises mindfulness.

### **1.2.1 Neoliberalism's Individualised Wellbeing Culture**

The term neoliberalism was defined by Frederich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises in 1938 (Monbiot 2016). In opposition to Keynesian economics that prioritised 'the common good' over profitability, neoliberalism's monetary strategy emphasised the freedom of markets. Rooted in classic liberal economics and political theory (Hall 2011: 708), the new locus of power favoured privatisation, wealth accumulation, and de-regulation. Collective bargaining and trade unions gave way to the freedom to suppress wages, increase interest rates, introduce tax havens for the wealthy and tax credit cuts for the working classes. Neoliberalism became entrenched in the US and UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Goldberg 2009: 331). Although not one thing, it always promotes individualism, encouraging competition and inequality.

Marked by a discourse of individualism (DiAngelo 2010: 4) neoliberalism replaces community or society with the individual as the social unit of organisation and measurement. Values of "possessive individualism and self-interest" replaced social organisations enabling the powerful to dominate and profit in stratified societies (Hall 2011: 709). Privatisation of publicly owned assets such as land, transport and health gave way to individual ownership. Higher education, for instance, shifted from a social right to a personal responsibility (Holmwood 2018: 38). In the absence of social equality, individualism and consumerism rose together to fuel growing inequalities domestically and globally (Asad

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<sup>14</sup> Because I use the term 'race' so often, I do not use inverted commas. However, I recognise race as a construct and expose its expression in the secular mindfulness field as an instrument of power: "'Race' is a social construct. Its changing manifestations reflect ideological attempts to legitimate domination in different social and historical contexts. Racism is therefore not about objective measurable physical and social characteristics, but about relationships of domination and subordination" (Bhavnani, Mirza and Meetoo 2005: 15).

2003: 153). Models of care promoted self-reliance, self-interest, and the self-sufficient individual (Hall 2011: 707-23).

Mounting socio-economic and political inequalities, consequences of the freedom of markets, feature in both the US and the UK (Dorling 2010; The Equality Trust 2016). A growing hegemony of strategies that privatise health and educational services underpin neoliberalism; dispossession restores class power to ruling elites and a loss of rights for others (Harvey 2005: 156, 178). Individual isolation, loneliness and social atomisation prevail (Monbiot 2016). Here, whiteness, postracialism, healthism and individualism impact secular mindfulness. I am particularly interested in the manner in which race cuts across these strategies. Whiteness, invisible to those who inhabit it, is explicit for those excluded from the power and privileges it preserves (Ahmed 2004a). As an active component of racial neoliberalism, it exploits difference to (re)produce privilege and marginalisation across society. Healthism is one such area.

Neoliberalism's wellbeing culture emphasises inner-being and psychological constructs of self-governance. "Yet this interiority and self-reference is not an expression of independence, but rather the crucial element in the pastoral relationship of obedience" (Lorey 2015: 3). Healthism, which places the moral burden for wellness in the individual, is a form of atomisation. In contrast to Buddhist doctrine, shaped by the discourse of individualism, mindfulness fortifies the psychological 'self' (Ng 2016:142). Terms commonly touted, particularly in corporate settings, include 'self-regulation,' 'self-reliance,' 'self-compassion' and 'self-responsibility' (Bristow 2016: 10-18; Lewis and Rozelle 2016: 260). Self-governance defines neoliberal culture in which individuals monitor, police and soothe themselves to relieve the state and their workplaces of such responsibility. It constitutes the commodification of subjectivity and the responsabilisation<sup>15</sup> of the individual (Doran 2017: 63).

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<sup>15</sup> Responsibilisation is part of Foucault's governmentality literature which Ng (2016: 135-152) applies to mindfulness' Western trajectory. I adopt Foucauldian concepts at points in my thesis to help articulate the neoliberal project of subjectification. I refrain, however, from entering a Foucauldian analysis which must explore differences with alternative views of neoliberalism such as Harvey's (2005).

Isabell Lorey suggests that self-regulation is an essential feature of a new “form of labour that is currently becoming hegemonic, one that demands the *whole person*, [and] is primarily based on communication, knowledge and affect” (2015: 5, emphasis added). ‘Domestication’ reproduces a culture of individualism in which the corporate employee is ‘enslaved’ at a premium, while the zero-hour-contract worker is dispossessed (ibid.). Individualisation, in turn, enforces healthism: wellbeing becomes the individual’s responsibility—inability to endure pressure shows weakness, laziness and low resilience.<sup>16</sup> The ubiquity of healthism (Crawford 1980) relies upon and supports strategies that isolate citizens and atomise communities.

The emphasis on ‘good health’ in which “each individual is held responsible for his or her own actions and well-being” (Harvey 2005: 65), coupled with growing privatisation of health services, is tied to racism:

The pursuit of health is a symptom of unhealth. When this pursuit is no longer a personal yearning but part of state ideology, healthism for short, it becomes a symptom of political sickness. Extreme versions of healthism provide a justification for racism, segregation, and eugenic control since ‘healthy’ means patriotic, pure, while ‘unhealthy’ equals foreign, polluted (Skrabanek 1994: 15).

Race and ill-health are in turn linked to work. Dispossession—a key neoliberal strategy which entails a ‘loss of rights’, including the right to work (Harvey 2005: 178)—leads to a malaise of ill-health (Zeilig 2014: 203). Intersectional studies attest to this: Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)<sup>17</sup> women suffer extreme poor health and are less likely to secure jobs

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<sup>16</sup> The individualised culture of wellbeing is not limited to the world of work. It has a foothold in the higher education sector. Students in a growing number of higher education institutions are co-opted into contractual relationships that appear to protect their freedom to choose a healthy lifestyle: “To shape their lives in an image of wellbeing, thousands of students across the United States are encouraged to sign ‘wellness contracts’. You agree to a lifestyle aimed at enhancing body, mind and soul. ... You will then get a taste of what such contracts call a ‘holistic approach to living’. But then you have to give something back. You have to contribute ‘positively to the community’, respect ‘different motivations for choosing this living option’ ... and you need to abide by the philosophy of the wellness community” (Cederström & Spicer 2015: 2). The ‘sanitised’ student is prepared for the disciplined life whereby their whole body and being are available to capital (Lorey 2015; Koltai 2015). This speaks both to the higher education culture which fuels atomisation and competition, and to the broader society.

<sup>17</sup> In the UK, the inclusive term ‘Black and minority ethnic’—BME—and ‘Black, Asian and minority ethnic’—BAME—are commonly used. The UK Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) discuss the shortcomings of these terms. Like them, I acknowledge race as a construct (Gilroy 1990: 72) and use BME as an overarching category inclusive of multiple racial and ethnic identities that are politically and historically contingent. When reflecting voices from the US, I repeat their use of the term People of Colour (POC).

even if they were well enough to work (EHRC 2016; Butt et al. 2015; Bécares 2011; Stevenson and Rao 2014; Barnard and Turner 2011). Despite structural causes, this level of disease is met with misapprehension, profiling and, at best, symptomatic relief (Zeilig 2014: 204). To compound matters, Western forms of psychotherapy<sup>18</sup> (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) reinforce isolationism and particular forms of separated individualism that coincide with neoliberal interests (Hall 2011: 709).

Contrary to the ethos of medicine, healthism commercialises health and burdens the individual with cost. Individualisation endorses the privatisation of health which becomes a rarefied, exclusive commodity accessible to 'elite' consumers. As part of this strategy, Skrabanek (1994) cites coercion as an invisible set of actions. He identifies a sophisticated 'state ideology' used to 'domesticate' or 'control' citizens:

[...] the state goes beyond education and information on matters of health and uses propaganda and various forms of coercion to establish norms of a 'healthy lifestyle' for all. Human activities are divided into approved and disapproved, healthy and unhealthy, prescribed and proscribed, responsible and irresponsible ... it can be extended to not going for regular medical check-ups, eating 'unhealthy' food, or not participating in sport (1994: 15).

Skranbanek clarifies the ideological sway of healthism which can be spun in favourable terms, as he says to depict the good, fit, healthy, pure citizen. Neoliberalism's shrinking state connects wellbeing ideologies to privatisation strategies which render healthcare inaccessible to working classes and a growing precariat who, in racialised societies, intersect with race. As Martinez and Garcia (1996) argue, such a discourse eliminates:

[...] the concept of 'the public good' or 'community' and replaces it with 'individual responsibility', ... pressuring the poorest people in a society to find solutions to their lack of health care, education and social security all by themselves, then blaming them, if they fail, as 'lazy' (1996).

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<sup>18</sup> The generalization of psychotherapies acknowledges the multitude, contradictory and complementary forms of therapy practiced in the West. Whether as first, second or third wave typologies, they are all noted for their uncritical alignment with the ethos of individualism and their juxtaposition to liberation psychology which correlates socio-economic conditions with mental health to treat the root of the problem rather than its manifestation (Martin-Baro 1996; Arthington 2016).

In the context of healthism, secular mindfulness obscures socio-economic and political forces, and amplifies personalised resilience (Cederström & Spicer 2015: 23-5; Purser and Ng 2015). It is against this backdrop that Žižek (2001) states:

The 'Western Buddhist' meditative stance is arguably the most efficient way for us to fully participate in capitalist dynamics while retaining the appearance of mental sanity. It enables you to fully participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist game while sustaining the perception that you are not really in it (2001).

Meditation, in Žižek's appraisal, serves to extricate the individual from the realities of dystopia. Such choices contribute, as Martinez and Garcia explain, to growing inequalities, as well as cultures of personalised blame and shame. It also performs, I argue below, as a technology that camouflages difference.

Mainstream psychology and mindfulness further underpin the ideology of an autonomous, responsible, free, moral self-governing citizen: "Psychologists and psychotherapists can be viewed as participating in the production, circulation and management of subjectivity ... and mindfulness is currently one of the most common methods by which this is being employed" (Arthington 2016: 93). Hussein Bulhan extends this view: "ascendancy and globalization of Euro-American psychology ... correlates with the ascendancy of Euro-American military, economic, and political might" (1985: 64).<sup>19</sup> Mindfulness is thus, ironically, allied with social forces and modalities that promote personal and social distress on a global scale. To add to this complexity, Frantz Fanon posits psychotherapy's racism:

Freud may be able to explain disorders that pertain to some individuals, but he cannot explain those that pertain to people whose lives are shaped by racism. And he cannot do so because he ignores the role played by social relations (sociogeny) in the constitution of selfhood (Hubis 2015: 35).<sup>20</sup>

In the absence of naming race a factor in wellness, according to Fanon, Freud—himself labelled a "Black Jew" (Stoute 2017)—reinforces a culture of postracialism which ignores

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<sup>19</sup> Bulhan's full quote reads: "The ascendancy and globalisation of Euro-American psychology indeed correlates with the ascendancy and globalisation of Euro-American military, economic and political might. Viewed from this perspective, the organised discipline of psychology reveals itself as yet another form of alien intrusion and cultural imposition for the non-white majority of the world" (1985: 64).

<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Freud, Fanon's phenomenologically-informed psychological theories and methods emphasised community. He sought to develop a human psychology determined by "socio-historic coordinates" (Bulhan 1985: 73).



the inequalities, divisions, legislations, and lived histories that spring from racial exclusion and exploitation.

### 1.2.2 Strategies of Postracialism and Whiteness<sup>21</sup>

Postracialism emerged as an ideology in the 2000s as an instrument of power relieving the state of the need to attend to the systemic exploitation of race (Goldberg 2015: 1). Post-racial logic called for a material, socio-cultural and political retreat from race (Cho 2008: 1589). Race was no longer a defining feature of society. Replacing prior strategies of colour-blindness and multiculturalism, postracialism conceals white supremacy and systems of marginalisation (Armstrong and Wildman 2007: 644). It advances social norms, institutional arrangements and practices that sustain racialised societies (Powell 2008: 785). Working together with individualism and neoliberalism, systemic racism privatises race. In the ‘absence of race’, racist incidences are no longer systemically derived, but episodic and individualised. The racialised become the problem for perceiving race (Ahmed 2018: 342).

Numerous signifiers of difference such as race are used to differentiate and marginalise communities and isolate individuals. These include gender, sexual orientation, age, income and religion (Ramsden 2016) all of which, under political liberalism, are collapsed under a rubric of ‘equality’ and the ‘freedom to choose’ (Hall 2011: 709). New concepts such as ‘neoliberal postraciality’ emerge to explain the coherence of strategies that exploit differences to create vulnerabilities and advance power (Goldberg 2015: 27). To quote Theo Goldberg at length:

“[...] a postracial society embeds the insistence that key conditions of social life are less and less now predicated on racial preferences, choices and resources. These include residential location, educational possibility and institutional access, employment opportunities, social networks and integration ... Postraciality amounts to the claim that we are, or are close to, or ought to be living outside of debilitating racial reference. In particular, it

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<sup>21</sup> Whiteness comprises an arrangement of structural conditions related to racial power and privilege (Ahmed 2004b). It is an ideology—an invisibilised mode of social power (Ng and Purser 2015)—that preserves social norms that sustain white supremacy and privilege. It functions to racialise Others and to reproduce the economic and political power and interests of dominant groups. The study of whiteness makes it visible so as to deconstruct and redistribute power. Yet, Ahmed (2004a) cautions that such investigation can become a narcissistic exercise that serves to reinforce rather than dismantle power. Unless critical whiteness studies can guarantee an undoing of the power relations that protect whiteness, it amounts to a ‘politics of declaration’ and inaction (2004a).

presumes that people (ought to) have similar life chances irrespective of their assigned race in societies ... It insists that the legacy of racial discrimination and disadvantage has been waning over time, reaching a point today where, if existing at all, such discrimination is anomalous and individually expressed. It is not structural or socially mandated ... Postraciality, it could be said, then, is the end of race as we have known it” (2015: 2-5).

As my work indicates, Goldberg makes the point that ‘postracial’ may as well read as ‘white privilege’ which is to say that it is not only about ‘race’.

The rise of mindfulness in the US and UK, interacts with social forces such as postracialism. My focus on race does not deny socio-economic and political strategies that work across difference to produce intersectional social vulnerabilities; race intersects with other signifiers to generate exclusion. In my analysis I use race to determine exclusion based on Goldberg’s epistemic argument that race is knotted with ideologies to produce racialised systems (ibid.: 7, 61). Whiteness represents the forging of such systems. Indicating more than race, it includes generational wealth, legal and cultural privileging, access to schooling, finance, housing, and is tied up with cis-normativity, ableism, income and faith (DiAngelo 2010: 7-11). In other words, exclusions on the basis of difference are historic, complex and deeply rooted in societies. Postracialism and individualism buttress neoliberalism; ideologies intersect to produce intersectional discriminations (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016: 25).

Postracialism effectively erases race. Crafted over centuries in the interests of Empire and conquest, the construct is ubiquitous in today’s society (Goldberg 2015: 35). Goldberg traces the materialisation of race to the formation of modern Europe. As an expression of ‘dehumanisation’:

[race] established the lines of belonging and estrangement for modern European social life ... Race was invoked to delineate a European ‘we’ in defining contrast with those considered its constitutive outsiders. ... Differentiating origins, kinship, and lineage from the outset tied colour to culture, bodies to behavioural projection, incipient biology to ascribed mentalities ... *Race, in short, is the secularisation of the religious.* ... From the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, slavery framed much if not all the thinking concerning race. Slavery was fuelled by ideas of inherent inferiority and superiority and reinforced them (ibid.: 7-8, 29-30, emphasis added).

Wrought by economic conquest, race is thus engrained in the fabric of Europe and the formation of US society. It infiltrates and presides in all social sectors, including secularisation processes as a default technology of white supremacy.

‘Colour-blindness’, individualisation of racial ‘incidents’, austerity, dispossession, and exclusion are formations of race (Lentin & Titley 2011; Davis 2016; Giroux 2003). Such neoliberal racialisation is tied to dispossession. The carceral state, joblessness, stringent immigration controls, the war on terror, Islamophobia and the tendency to impute crime to colour, constitute modern forms of slavery (Davis 2016: 33; Davis 2012: 167). In light of growing inequalities, the undoing of race and intersecting categories of marginalisation, has spawned numerous acts of resistance and transformation. A number of crucial studies and activities have emerged out of the decolonisation focus. In the global North, this has culminated in publications such as *Decolonising the University* (Bhambhra, Gebrial and Nixancıoglu 2018) and *Dismantling Race in Higher Education* (Arday and Mirza 2018). The Fallist movements include campaigns in South Africa (Ngcaweni 2016) and the UK (Gebrial 2018: 20), as well as *BlackLivesMatter* (Day 2015) and decolonisation movements that span the US and UK (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu 2018).<sup>22</sup> These forms of disruption are significant for mindfulness to appreciate the contested spaces in which it emerges and evolves.

Coterminous with structural racism, white prejudice—itsself learnt and cultivated (Hubis 2015: 35)—is an ‘unconscious habit’ that is conditioned and socio-politically embedded in the psyche (Du Bois 1984: 194). Du Bois expands:

I now began to realise that in the fight against race prejudice, we were not facing simply the rational, conscious determination of white folk to oppress us; we were facing age-long complexes sunk now largely to unconscious habit and irrational urge (1984: 296).

This leads Shannon Sullivan (2006) to argue:

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<sup>22</sup> More specifically, it has engendered campaigns in the US and UK, such as Georgetown University’s plans to redress its ties with slavery (Swarns 2016), the UK National Union of Students’ campaigns *Why is My Curriculum White?* (Mariya 2015), and *LiberateMyDegree*. These developments align with campaigns in the global South including South Africa’s 2015 *Rhodes Must Fall* movement which galvanised global action, and Indian University initiatives in defiance of caste prejudice (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nixancıoglu 2018: 1).

[...] a significant part of the constitution of unconscious habits involves active mechanisms and strategies for blocking access to them by conscious inquiry ... antiracist struggle ultimately will not be successful if the unconscious operations of white privilege are ignored. White unconscious resistance to understanding racism as a problem must be tackled if inroads are to be made against specific problems of racism (2006: 22).

Race is thus structurally embedded and facilitated through internalised social values and norms. Structural racism is compounded by unconscious bias and resistance to recognising race as a signifier of white privilege. In other words, the construct of race perpetuates systemically through explicit and implicit unquestioned technologies that function as social defaults. White supremacy continues to rely on discourses of Othering, intrinsically and invisibly interwoven into social reality (DiAngelo 2010: 5). As a normative default, 'white,' for instance, escapes racialisation. When challenged, 'white fragility' reacts through: "ahistorical universalizing claims; selective appeals to individualism; and deflective, defensive indignation" (Purser and Ng 2015). These constitute built-in mechanisms of systemic reinforcement.

The racialised dispossessed, held individually responsible for their health, now become individualised targets and perpetrators of racism:

Exploitative racisms marginalise the racially othered *within* society. Eliminationist racisms ... distance or alienate ... the racially differentiated ... the historically dispossessed [are] the now principal perpetrators of racism, while dismissing as inconsequential and trivial the racisms experienced by the historical targets of racism ... racial dismissal renders opaque the structures making possible and silently perpetuating racially ordered power and privilege. It reduces responsibility for degradation and dis-privilege to individuated inexperience, lack of effort and incapacity, bad judgement, and ill fortune (Goldberg 2015: 29-30).

Not only are racist incidents individualised and regarded as anomalies (DiAngelo 2010), racism becomes the responsibility of the racialized (Gordon 2015; Goldberg 2015; DiAngelo 2010). 'Racial experiences', individually categorised to detract from structural racism, re-enforce social atomisation and 'lock in' structural privilege (Roithmayr 2014). As Angela Davis explains:

[...] expressions of attitudinal racism ... treated as anachronistic expressions that were once articulated with state sponsored racisms ... are now relegated to the private sphere ... they are now treated as individual and

private irregularities, to be solved by punishing and re-educating the individual by teaching them colour-blindness, by teaching them not to notice the phenomenon of race (2012: 170).

Implicit in these strategies is the ‘discourse of individualism’ as a ‘primary barrier’ that entrenches white privilege and “hides generational wealth” (DiAngelo 2010).<sup>23</sup> Access to mortgages, education, justice and health continue to be racialised. Yet, these are now accompanied by a denial that racism has any impact. Instead, there is an insistence that “one is fully responsible individually for one’s social situation” (Goldberg 2015: 126-7).

In the current postracial, neoliberal era, ‘equality of opportunity’ claims override realities of racialised inequalities (Goldberg 2015: 70). Entrenched in the US/UK since the late 1970s, postracial hegemonies assert social homogeneity. They deploy universality to exclude, often violently, those who are critical and/or different (ibid.: 122; Hall 2011: 707). Social norms and cultures—invisible to those who occupy whiteness—underpin these new forms of racialisation. Since the 1980s, to make whiteness visible, studies investigating the changing nature of race and its covert operations have soared (Lewis 2004: 1; Leonardo 2004). However, when not discussed from a BME or Black feminist perspective for which whiteness is always visible, Ahmed suggests these studies do little to alter power arrangements (2004a).

Through empirical research, Hughey illustrates the tenacity of race as a social construct in relation to class and gender. Faced with the choice between an alliance with Black workers to support gender pay parity or her white identity, race constitutes a ‘natural’ default for white, working-class women (Hughey 2010: 1297, 1306). Seen in this light, white privilege could be conceptually reduced to disregard social stratification by class or gender.

Whiteness, however, includes hegemonies of patriarchy, masculinity, heteronormativity, ableism and, often, Christianity (hooks 2000: 106; DiAngelo 2010; Lewis 2004; McIntosh

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<sup>23</sup> DiAngelo (2010) says the “Discourse of Individualism functions to: deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white; hide the accumulation of wealth over generations; deny social and historical context; prevent a macro analysis of the institutional and structural dimensions of social life; deny collective socialization and the power of dominant culture (media, education, religion, etc.) to shape our perspectives and ideology; function as neo-colorblindness and reproduce the myth of meritocracy; and make collective action difficult. Further, being viewed as an individual is a privilege only available to the dominant group” (2010).

1988). As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) emphasises, these technologies mutually coalesce to create complex, intersectional discriminations (1989: 150). Regardless of context, white privilege retains historic, epistemic precedence (Hughey 2010).

In the mindfulness sector, “‘white privilege’ [includes] exclusionary, evasive habits and oversights” (Ng and Purser 2015). Though no studies into the sector’s whiteness exist, numerous authors acknowledge and allude to it (ibid.; Magee 2016; Black 2017; Williams, Owens and Syedullah 2015). Postracialism and unconscious bias cohere to reproduce ‘white spaces’ (Anderson 2015).

Scholars who play down the significance of race in the face of the historical and contemporary evidence to the contrary, while often receiving the lion’s share of the funding and institutional recognition for their work, have to take epistemic responsibility for their role in participating in the perpetuation of ‘postracial silences’, a silence which is arguably all the more deafening in our times (Lentin 2017).

Whiteness studies show that power and privilege that come with being white go largely unnoticed (Bailey 2014; Sullivan 2006). In other words, whiteness confers invisible rights and is synonymous with normativity (McIntosh 1988; Leonardo 2004; DiAngelo 2015).<sup>24</sup> ‘White’ is the norm from which Others are gauged as ‘oppositionally’ (rather than compatibly) different and defined as ‘not us’ (DiAngelo 2010). Yet, as noted before, “‘whiteness’ is not merely a racial marker, but an invisibilised mode of social power” (Ng and Purser 2015). It protects those who inhabit and benefit from its intersectional technologies ranking privilege in accordance with compliance: as a crude descriptor, white men rank higher than white women.

The unconscious habit of white privilege functions at the levels of the soma, psyche and the world (Sullivan 2006: 3-4). Whiteness races black and brown bodies and casts these in inferior and/or exotic ways that continue to place them beyond the borders of privilege (Goldberg 2015: 31). It demarcates the space from which ‘blackness’ is excluded even when

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<sup>24</sup> Bailey (2014) adds that “the whiteness of white talk lies not only in its having emerged from white mouths, but also in its evasiveness—in its attempt to suppress fear and anxiety, and its consequential (if unintended) re-inscription and legitimation of racist oppression ... white talk is designated, indeed scripted, for the purposes of evading, rejecting, and remaining ignorant about the injustices that flow from whiteness and its attendant privileges” (2014: 35).

blackness invades such spaces (Mirza 2015; Puwar 2004). Drawing upon its own history, whiteness licenses and reproduces itself. Subjects are formed through and within the dynamics of this discourse and, in the absence of self-reflection and disruption, reposition themselves in relation to power (Ahmed 2004a). Personal power becomes institutionally invested; systems become narcissistic and self-generating:

[with] strong resistance to the conscious recognition of racism that characterises habits of white privilege. As unconscious, habits of white privilege do not merely go unnoticed. They actively thwart the process of conscious reflection on them, which allows them to seem non-existent even as they continue to function (Sullivan 2006: 5-6).

I have described whiteness as a collection of hegemonic, self-perpetuating power structures that govern through schooling, health, housing, legislation and criminal justice systems. Disruption of whiteness requires intersectional appraisals of race's articulation with class, gender and other categories of discrimination (Davis 2016: 33; Crenshaw 1989). For the purposes of this thesis, race offers a critical lens through which to investigate and problematise the composition of the mindfulness sector. It provides a premise from which to consider the complexities of exclusion and the possibilities for transformation. My focus on race, as noted before, does not preclude the importance of intersectional strategies to undermine whiteness and marginalisation. As Audre Lorde reminds us: "there is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (2007: 138). Potentially, precisely due to the intersectional nature of discriminations, my investigation paves the way for comprehensive approaches to transformation. When race is identified as a social marker of discrimination, intersectional markers become more easily visible. This leads me to the final contextual matter of diversity, itself a contested arena. I draw on Sara Ahmed's body of work, especially her seminal *On Being Included: Racism and diversity in institutional life* (2012).

### **1.2.3 The Trouble with Diversity and Inclusion**

Diversity commands the potential to fundamentally transform society. Earl Lewis, previous Mellon Foundation President and diversity champion explains:

It is one thing to define diversity, but quite another to leverage diversity and value it. Too often we find ourselves in reactive and defensive postures.

We still find ourselves dealing with demographic and structural inequities. Why is economic prosperity determined by various kinds of exclusions? Can we ignore all variety of talents for future? How can we think anew about cohesion in the 21st century (Lewis, quoted in Mirza 2017: 6)?

Lewis links diversity to exclusions. He asks whether it might be put to work to 'leverage' difference to imagine new futures. To Lewis, diversity is imperative not only for social cohesion but for advancement that benefits from difference. Futures can only be inclusive of the people who create them. In a rapidly changing world:

[...] diversity is necessary for human learning, understanding and wisdom ... [it creates] the intellectual energy and robustness that lead to greater knowledge. Diversity enriches the educational experience in that students learn from those whose experiences, beliefs and perspectives are different to their own and these lessons can be taught best in a richly diverse intellectual and social environment. Conversely, the quality of education is diminished by an absence of diversity and educational opportunities are drastically limited without diversity, and that compromises an institution's ability to maintain its own mission and goals (Badat 2016: 9).

Diversity carries great weight in societies that are increasingly heterogeneous. For Badat and Lewis, it is epistemically enriching and expansive. Diversity for them is fundamental to growth and development. Yet, the language of diversity can be problematic. Frequent use of the term can make institutions and communities believe that they are diverse without displaying foundational change (Ahmed 2012: 51-55).

Vertovec notes that the term is used normatively and instrumentally by institutions (2015: 1-2). Ahmed argues that the word acquires meaning through its association with other concepts. When placed alongside words like equality and inclusion, diversity assumes a different tone to an alignment with words like elite, as commonly deployed in academia (Ahmed 2012: 109). She suggests that diversity needs to be placed in its historical context of social justice struggles, through which terms like equality and racism were abandoned due to their disruptive nature. "We might want to ask what the replacements are doing. A replacement can also be understood as a way of forgetting the histories of struggle that surround these terms" (ibid.: 201). Diversity is therefore a contested term that can be used governmentally to monitor inclusion and bypass transformation.



Social justice too is contentious in policy settings. Theorists can deploy it as a theoretical construct, to diminish prevalent injustices. Its meanings and uses are being stretched in different directions, to meet policy goals that are not always about shaping a fair and democratically-enabling society (Singh 2011: 482). In the same way that diversity is problematic, social justice has become part of the co-opted transformation lexicon (Gorski 2013). It too can be empty of meaning and appropriated in the interests of whiteness.

Neither words nor policies and mission statements act, or effect change, on their own. They only acquire potency when used collectively by people who hold or are seen to hold power (Ahmed et al. 2006). Senior management endorsement and enactment of diversity strategies are foundational to transformation. Plans must translate into actionable statements accompanied by accountability and reporting mechanisms. When formulated by predominantly white institutions that dictate the strategies for, and terms of inclusion, diversity commonly constitutes non-performative, 'happy' declarations that serve to engender change without disrupting whiteness (Ahmed 2004; 2007; 2012: 71). It evokes "feel-good politics" (Ahmed 2012: 69); "few words," it is said, "are as ubiquitous and uplifting as diversity" (Bell and Hartmann 2007: 895). Empty notions of diversity—Ahmed's non-performatives—are then used to not disrupt. While it can be employed to effect change, diversity frequently features in mission statements, without impact (Ahmed 2007), as a technology for whiteness (Ahmed 2012: 151).

Diversity commonly also "enters institutional discourse as a language of reparation; as a way of imagining that those who are divided can work together" (ibid.: 164). As reparation, diversity is expected to generate collegiality. It serves to promote multiculturalism, assuage white guilt, censure objections to 'plastering the cracks', and re-write Empire as a 'melting pot' exercise and a celebration of difference (ibid.: 166). These non-performative applications fail to achieve anything; they are a far cry from meaningful diversity that seeks systemic transformation (Ahmed et al. 2006).

Clearly, the uses of diversity are contextually determined. It can simultaneously accessorise and camouflage institutional power not for lack of will, but poverty of understanding difference and leveraging it towards justice:

A commitment to diversity does not automatically translate into genuine respect on the part of institutions, social groups, and individuals for difference. ... Nor does it imply commitment to tackling differences based on class and wealth/income inequality, which hugely constrain equity of access, opportunities, and outcomes for significant numbers of people, and impact negatively on social inclusion (Badat 2016: 10).

In other words, diversity necessarily interrupts power premised on whiteness. The motivation to alter such arrangements relies on commitments to innovation and justice. Those in positions to effect transformation in the interests of wider social advancement, effectively disrupt their own power. Within the mindfulness sector, current uses of diversity such as ‘widening participation’ detract from systemic change. They lean towards representational increases of minorities which can be “a way of managing the demands for equality while keeping racial hierarchies intact” (Saha 2017). For these reasons, some view diversity as an ideological failure—as a non-performative—that reinforces and perpetuates existing power structures (Gray 2016).

Non-performative diversity strategies that incorporate minorities into extant structures are deemed assimilationist. They serve:

[...] to pull individuals from once excluded groups into the ‘melting pot’ of prevailing political arrangements and structures ... and ... to acculturate by melting into and operating on the common logics defined by dominant—namely white—interests, ... [the subordinate and not white] could become white-like by adopting their values, habits, cultural expressions, aspirations and ways of being (Goldberg 2015: 19).

In this light, assimilation is antithetical to diversity since it entrenches social injustices and cements relations of domination. As Davis (2017) says: “assimilationism integrates black people and people of colour into white supremacist society without transforming that society” (2017). Ahmed calls these strategies “the lip-service model of diversity” used to endorse the status quo (2012: 58). Raising the headcount of previously excluded constituents is a common method to bring black and brown bodies into white spaces (Anderson 2015: 13). Invariably, such strategies cement “the set of norms and code of

behaviour, the values and structures determining privilege and power already established self-servingly by whites, firmly in place” (Biko 1978: 19). Assimilationist strategies can, however, produce sites of contestation to counter hegemonic discourses. As bell hooks (1991) argues:

Marginality is a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse—it is found in the words, habits and the way one lives ... It is a site one clings to even when moving to the centre ... it nourishes our capacity to resist ... It is an inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category coloniser/colonised (1991: 149-150).

In centring the margins to effect disruption from within, hooks encourages strategic border-crossing that does not collapse the borders. She emphasises the margins as a place of refuge for the diversity worker.

Ahmed (2012) uses the analogy of a brick wall to explain the strategies that keep disruptive politics at bay. The wall symbolises a protectionist, impenetrable construct against which the diversity worker bangs their head (2012: 51). It serves to guard and preserve social norms that keep whiteness in and keep disruptive elements out. In her example, as a technology of whiteness, the wall becomes a social norm, an institutional habit, a fortress preserving whiteness (ibid.: 129). Implicit herein is the assumption that the quality of what is guarded is at risk of diffusion, alteration, reduction, and corruption.

Cosmetic diversity, paraded as change, supports the wall. Systemic diversity strategies that challenge normativity and power, encounter the wall. Such instances expose the reinforcement of institutional privileges, the hardening of histories of exclusions, and can intimate the futility of diversity work. Yet, institutions remain sites of contestation. Given that, as Lorde (2007) famously said, “the Master’s tools will never dismantle the Master’s house”, the challenges for diversity work include, but are not limited by, dismantling the walls of hegemonic power built on exclusions.

Growing inequalities and failed diversity strategies have led to calls for decolonisation over diversification (Bhanot 2015; Samudzi 2016). Decolonisation proponents advocate institutional and systemic transformation of whiteness. The Fall and decolonisation

campaigns<sup>25</sup> now rooted in the US and UK, emphasise the role of movements rather than isolated institutional struggles to transform systems and imagine new arrangements of power (Peters 2018: 263-266). The *BlackLivesMatter* movement, for instance, emphasises collective leadership (Davis 2017). These 'calls to action' understand decolonisation not merely as headcounts and spatial rearrangements but demand pedagogical and systemic changes that involve marginalised groups and leaders.

Mindfulness' contextual underpinnings disclose a composite social fabric in which it proliferates. Such complexity contains opportunities for 'reimagining postcolonial futures' as the above campaigns show, alongside the historic intransigence of hegemonic power that requires appropriate tools to parachute or dismantle the walls that Ahmed and Lorde reference. A 2018 Berlin Conference titled *Planetary Utopias—Hope, Desire, Imaginaries in a Postcolonial World*, curated by Nikita Dhawan, addressed this need to move beyond colonialism to create new visions of a postcolonial world (<https://www.adk.de/en/projects/2018/colonial-repercussions/symposium-III/index.htm>). One approach is to use intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016: 33-45). This investigation critically considers racialisation of the mindfulness sector in the interests of social justice.

Current arrangements of socio-political and economic power that shape the US/UK mindfulness project are themselves socio-historically located. Given mindfulness' Buddhist provenance, in the following section I discuss Said's critique of Orientalism. From a postcolonial perspective, Said identifies the roots of Othering in histories of colony and Empire which constructed race for purposes of exploitation and capital accumulation.

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<sup>25</sup> Included in these interventions are South Africa's Rhodes Must Fall Campaign launched in 2014/2015, India's anti-caste University initiatives, University of Central London's *Why is my Curriculum so White*, Oriel College Oxford's Rhodes Must Fall, the *BlackLivesMatter* campaigns, and Georgetown University's intervention to address its history in slavery (Arday and Mirza 2018; Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancioğlu 2018).

### 1.3 Said's Orientalism

Said (2003) argues that the idea of the Orient<sup>26</sup> was cast by the West/Occident and perpetuated by a range of scholars, including eugenicists, novelists, benevolent missionaries and colonial officials set to 'save' the inhabitants of heathen lands (2003: 205). He identifies a latent Orientalism which coincides with the ideological doctrine of secularism. This presents an unconscious impression of the (imagined) exoticism and backwardness of the Orient (ibid.: 204-5) which has to be 'saved' by the 'civilised' West.<sup>27</sup>

Said's concept of Orientalism is not intended to promote an East/West binary but to dispel the ease with which such discourse fails to acknowledge their inter-dependence and heterogeneity. As King explains:

I wish to highlight the sense in which the existence of such constructs as 'Europe' and 'India' are relational, interdependent, unstable and crucially unrepresentative. The instability of binary oppositions—and the slippage between them—consistently draws attention to their failure to contain the heterogeneities they are claimed to represent. This indeed is the highly nuanced stance taken by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. By refusing to offer an alternative account of an 'authentic' or 'real' Orient, Said argued for a displacement of the 'East-West' dichotomy itself as well as the tendency to speak of the 'Orient' as if it were a unitary and homogeneous entity (King 1999: 209-210).

Said's postcolonial concept of the Other denotes the power relations embedded in interconnected processes of cultural repression and appropriation (1978: 9). As testament, Snodgrass (2007) argues that the work of Thomas and Caroline Rhys Davids comprise "unquestionably an orientalist construct" (2007: 186). Their extensive exegeses of the Pali Canon on which the modern interpretation of mindfulness commonly rests, both contributes to Western philology, and attests to Orientalism (2007: 186-8). "The features of Buddhism they documented and validated through their meticulous and dedicated study of Pāli texts remain the basis not only of Western understandings of Buddhism but of many

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<sup>26</sup> As Said explains "... the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either" (2003: 4).

<sup>27</sup> Said cites the late eighteenth century as the general start of Orientalism in which the Orient is deciphered, written about and taught (2003: 3).

modern Buddhist movements in Asia” (ibid.: 186).<sup>28</sup> White mindfulness’ uncritical reversion to these texts and its projection of secularism as a natural progression towards a universal ethic and doctrine, depicts latent Orientalism.

Orientalism, in Snodgrass’ example, can appear benign, yet it captures precisely what Said explains in *Latent Orientalism*: views are cast through a Western gaze that come to assume prominence in both the West and the East (2003: 204-7).<sup>29</sup> Works such as the Rhys Davids’ appear progressive but are generated through a colonial machinery that projects the West as rational, scientific and reasonable, and the East as idolatrous, superstitious and backward. For instance, the West’s deliverance of the Orient (through documentation, exposition, education and colonisation) is oblivious to the colonial gaze of scholarly productions. As Lopez (2002) attests:

It had become commonplace of European colonial discourse that the West was more advanced than the East because Europeans were extroverted, active and curious about the external world, while Asians were introverted, passive and obsessed with the mystical. It was therefore the task of Europeans to bring Asians into the modern world. In modern Buddhism this apparent shortcoming is transformed into a virtue, with Asia ... endowed with a peace, a contentment and an insight that the acquisitive and distracted Western mind sorely needs (2002: xxxiv).

Subtle shifts in emphasis, according to Lopez, expedite ongoing forms of coloniality and Othering.

Snodgrass, like Said, argues that the West’s ‘thirst’ for knowledge is tied to colonialism, a crisis of Christianity, and quest for reason, which together generated a public interest in Buddhism (2007: 189). Van der Veer (1993:39) corroborates the political underpinnings of

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<sup>28</sup> Snodgrass further elaborates the Rhys Davids’ contribution: “their unquestionable dedication, impeccable scholarship, and immense contribution to Buddhist studies and the ongoing esteem in which they are held directs one away from simplistic notions of orientalism as error or colonial denigration of subject cultures. Extending the focus to the Pāli Text Society enables a consideration of Asian agency and participation in the process. It also offers an alternative lineage for modern Buddhism, one equally enmeshed in the East-West encounters of colonialism and modernity but that recognizes the complicity of academic philology and the institutional practices of scholarship in the process” (2007: 188).

<sup>29</sup> Said records that between 1800 and 1950, about 60,000 books were written about the Orient in the West of which there is no “remotely comparable figure for Oriental books about the West. ... beefing up the Western scholar’s work, there were numerous agencies and institutions with no parallels in Oriental society” (2003: 204).

this shift. Buddhism became “a mirror which allowed Christians to see themselves more clearly” (Rhys Davids 1881: 233); Orientalism allowed Westerners to compare a humanised Buddha<sup>30</sup> to philosophies prevalent in Europe (Snodgrass 2007: 181, 192). Interest in the East and in Buddhism were thus driven by the West through academic intrigue or an existential quest for meaning in the context of Empire. Western interest, rather than Asian Buddhists’ religious aspirations, dictated the course of this relation (ibid.: 195).

Asian participation in the production of English texts, which involved disagreements over interpretations and exposed the limitations of Western methodologies, demonstrates the distribution of power (ibid.: 196). As Burmese scholar Shwe Zan Aung—translator of the *Abhidhammattha-sangaha*—explained: the philological method was inadequate; the literal translation of terms often “have for us Buddhists no meaning whatever” (1910 246).<sup>31</sup> Aung’s testimony captures Orientalism’s craft and illuminates the Westerner’s power in framing knowledge from the Orient. Snodgrass reports, for instance, that Caroline Rhys Davids—with whom Aung collaborated—excised certain of his translations on the basis that they were “*Mahāyāna* contamination” (2007: 197). This display of authority extends to the analytical apparatus used in numerous US and UK libraries and museums to categorise and curate Eastern experiences. Such systems condition the Western psyche and superimpose a European schema in which the Orient is cast and Othered. Western epistemologies and engagement with Eastern traditions and people became the basis of superiority, stereotyping, racism and distortions of difference. In other words, “The Orient existed for the West, or so it seemed to countless Orientalists, whose attitude to what they worked on was either paternalistic or candidly condescending” (Said 2003: 204).

In developing Said’s thesis, Snodgrass explores ‘Asian agency in the formation of modern Buddhism’ to suggest the subtle nature of knowledge/power relations (2007: 201). In Burma, for example, Asian interest in a Buddhist-based anti-colonialism led to rising

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<sup>30</sup> Snodgrass identifies the ‘Christian need’ to cast the life of the Buddha in terms that were personified and humanised. In efforts to humanise the Buddha, Hardy pieced together a hagiography in order to create something saint-like that could comport with the image of Jesus (Snodgrass 2007: 189; Ng 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Aung’s contribution is found in the Compendium of the work: C. A. F. Rhys Davids, preface to *Compendium of Philosophy: Being a Translation Now Made for the First Time from the Original Pāli of the Abhidhammattha-Sangaha*, translation and with introductory essay and notes by Shwe Zan Aung, revised and edited by C. A. F. Rhys Davids (1910: xvii).

nationalism. In her appraisal of Orientalism, Snodgrass appears congruent with Homi Bhabha's (1985; 1994) 'hybridity' thesis which foregrounds resistance. Each argues for nuanced postcolonial appraisals of Orientalism rather than dominant/oppressed (Occident/Orient) power relations in which sovereignty resides only with the coloniser. Burmese contestation of British colonialism through Buddhist nationalism (Braun 2013: 77) exemplifies Bhabha's hybridisation. His concept of hybridity<sup>32</sup> takes issue with what he calls *Orientalism's* insufficient regard of ambivalence. The 'native' is cast in passive terms which underplays the defiance of 'authority' and the conditions for subversion:

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention (Bhabha 1985: 154).

In Bhabha's thesis, the process of secularisation and cultural appropriation reinforces dominant power structures. Yet, the secular space lends itself to subversion and interruption. For Bhabha, it represents an 'agonistic' space in which 'the colonised' can actively protest colonisation (ibid.: 152-5).<sup>33</sup> Power can be exercised by the 'subjugated' to re-assert authority and voice.

Snodgrass' thesis differs from Bhabha's hybridisation. She too rejects the dominant/subjugated binary that characterises colonialism and posits instead the negotiation and articulation of cultures (2007: 201). But she refers less to political disruption than to Asian agency in processes of secularisation. To make her argument, although she

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<sup>32</sup> Bhabha describes hybridity as: "... the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects ... It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but re-implicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (1985: 154).

<sup>33</sup> Bhabha expands: "The discriminatory effects of the discourse of cultural colonialism, for instance, do not simply or singly refer to a 'person', or to a dialectical power struggle between self and Other, or to a discrimination between mother culture and alien cultures. Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the reference of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*—a mutation, a hybrid" (1985: 154).



identifies the Rhys-Davids' as Orientalists, she cites the Pali Text Society<sup>34</sup> as an example of cultural articulation that embraced:

[...] Asian agency and participation ... It also offers an alternative lineage for modern Buddhism, one equally enmeshed in the East-West encounters of colonialism and modernity but that recognises the complicity of academic philology and the institutional practices of scholarship in the process (2007: 188).

However, she refrains here from differentiating which groups had agency within Asia, and whose interests they served. Nonetheless, for her, Asian interests in Buddhism's modernisation to derail colonialism and present a rational belief system and a modern Asia (ibid.: 198), help complicate processes of secularisation. Asian modernity though, was framed in Western terms. It improved Buddhism's appeal within Asia and the West (Braun 2013: 80). With roots in mid-nineteenth century resistance to Christian missionary efforts to 'disestablish Buddhism', protestant Buddhism<sup>35</sup>—partly a European invention—emerged, seeding Buddhism's revival (Malalgoda 1976: 191). Resistance movements were typically spearheaded by Asian elites and middle-classes to resist colonialism and reclaim pride in indigeneity (Braun 2013: 79). These anticolonial efforts of elite indigenous groups are themselves critiqued from a postcolonial perspective. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, argues that anticolonial movements constituted gendered, middle-class nationalisms cast in the light of European historicity (1992: 11-2).

Bhabha's hybridity thesis pertains to challenges against racialised patterns of secularisation within the US and UK. Hsu, for example, critiques secular mindfulness' neoliberal bent and imagines its role in social justice (2016: 370). Magee (2016) and Cannon (2016) similarly reconceptualise mindfulness beyond its dominant Western paradigm. They foreground the strengths and experiences of marginalised groups rather than mindfulness trainers. William, Owens and Syedullah (2016) expose Buddhism and mindfulness' systemic whiteness. Yet, Radical Dharma is not defined by the epistemic limitations of white mindfulness. Just as

<sup>34</sup> TW Rhys Davids established the Pāli Text Society in 1881 which "institutionalised the study of Buddhism" and set out to publish the entire Sutta and *Abhidhamma Pitakas* (Snodgrass 2007: 188).

<sup>35</sup> Protestant Buddhism is noted as a protest against colonialism, which both defied and mimicked Protestant missions and their colonial power (Ng 2016: 61-2). The concept is contested as a European invention—one that demands conformity with European/Christian conceptuality (Rajapakse 1990: 145; Johnson 2004: 92). This challenge underscores acts of latent Orientalism.

Bhabha identifies the ‘ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority’ and the possibility of subversion, Radical Dharma advocates a third space<sup>36</sup> that transcends the polemic of self/Other, colonised/coloniser:

When we seek the embodiment of truths, giving ourselves permission to be honest, more healed, more whole, more complete ... neither the path of solely inward-looking liberation, nor the pursuit of an externalised social liberation prevails; rather a third space, as-yet-unknown, emerges (2016: xxi-ii).

Contrary to Buddhist non-essentialism and secularist nationalism, Radical Dharma neither denies identity nor claims universality. Instead, it harnesses difference to challenge secular mindfulness formations and hegemonies, in the pursuit of social justice.

These emergent projects defy racialised formations of mindfulness to de-centre whiteness. More specifically, Radical Dharma advocates a social mindfulness cognisant of the structural forces that deplete and politically repress marginalised communities. It promotes agency that interrupts political arrangements of subjugation. Such agency, as noted before, is itself complicated by questions of power. Resistance and disruption can remain framed by dominant discourses (Asad 2003: 73-9). On the contrary, hybridization and a “mutually generative power/knowledge nexus” in the interests of marginalised groups (Snodgrass 2007: 201) can potentially unseat hegemonic power. This is particularly so where visions are unconstrained by given power structures.

Prakash argues that *Orientalism* is not reduced to the binaries Bhabha and Snodgrass fault. It invites us: “... to rethink the modern West from the position of the Other, to go beyond Orientalism itself in exploring the implications of its demonstration that the East-West opposition is an externalization of an internal division in the modern West” (1995: 199). The seeds of contemporary Othering, says Prakash, rooted in systems of coloniality and Orientalism, are active and reinforced in US/UK histories of slavery, servitude and white supremacy. Versions of modern mindfulness captured in Sylvia’s (2016) account, that claim

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<sup>36</sup> Bhabha’s ‘hybridity’ challenges Orientalist binaries of civilised/savage, enlightened/ignorant as reinforcement of polarities (1994: 218-9). He describes instead a ‘third space’ in which difference is negotiated as “neither one nor the other but something else besides, in-between” (ibid.).

secularity, reinforces systemic whiteness already socially established. Exclusions, hyper-individualised models, research choices, organisational policies and demographics reflect and reproduce systems of inequality and injustice premised on identity. Here Prakash acknowledges secularism's 'control' of marginalised groups. His appeal, like Bhabha's, de-centres coloniality and centres marginalised voices in re-fashioning the secular and imagining new formations.

The challenge Prakash poses to emergent movements is the integration of a politics from the vantage points of the marginalised, sufficient to unseat current power arrangements. In support, Bhabha's hybridity invites an engagement with political movements beyond the borders of white mindfulness and its intellectual critique.

Aside from the critique of postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha, Said's *Orientalism* sustains reproval from Orientalist apologists. Bernard Lewis (1982) and Bayly Winder (1981) accuse Said of 'word pollution' and declare that the term Orientalism was abandoned in the 1970s as outdated and unrepresentative of the interests and concerns of scholars (Lewis 1982, 49; Winder 1981, 617). Malcolm Kerr (1980) adds:

Said seems to be stuck with the residual argument that whatever the individual goodwill of the scholars, they are all prisoners of the establishment—the old-boy network of government, business, the foundations—which, in turn, depends on propagating the old racist myths of European Orientalism in order to further the Western imperial domination of the East (1980: 546-7).

Despite Said's assertion that colonialism and Orientalism inform all intellectual thought (1978: 18),<sup>37</sup> Lewis, Winder and Kerr oppose his conflation of scholarship and politics and reject the notion of the individual scholar as unobjective. Kerr sees scholarship as independent thought that functions outside the confines of political and cultural conditions. For him, scholars are capable of universal authority and truth. However, such a stance seems precisely to exemplify Said's critique of Orientalism as a 'discourse of power' that

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<sup>37</sup> On the construct of knowledge, Said observes: "No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society" (1978: 18).

posits knowledge as universal and neutral (Prakash 2003: 204). It denies the positionality or standpoint of the scholar. In response to Kerr's objection, Said distinguishes:

[...] knowledge of other people and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency and outright war. There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion (2003: xiv).

Secular mindfulness leaders appeal to Said's benign category of knowledge acquisition as a strategy to tackle global stress and depression collaboratively. Ironically, their re-presentation of mindfulness as a universal, professionalised discourse enables its re-sale in Asia as part of this 'collaboration'. The dominant narrative of 'common humanity' and 'human flourishing', white-washes appropriation, paternalism and Western professionalisation of non-US/UK knowledge. In contexts of inequality, Smith problematises secularisation's implication in:

[...] research which from indigenous perspectives 'steals' knowledge from others and then uses it to benefit the people who 'stole' it. Some indigenous and minority group researchers would call this approach simply racist. It is research which is imbued with an 'attitude' and a 'spirit' which assumes a certain ownership of the entire world, and which has established systems and forms of governance which embed that attitude in institutional practices" (1999: 56).

In these ways, mindfulness' presentation as a benevolent force camouflages hegemonic power. Through the re-sale of MBSR and MBCT, Asian collaborators adopt Westernised versions of their own cultures. In the absence of the co-production of inclusive models, what amounts to a mindfulness of whiteness establishes dominion over marginalised experiences.

Smith, like Said, argues that it is this Orientalist, colonialist framework that shapes and overrides cultural exchanges, unless, through hybridity, marginalised groups dictate the terms and uses of their involvement. Smith's position resonates with Hsu and Sylvia who also support the possibilities that hybridity presents for disruption. However, unequal power arrangements between Asian collaborators and Orientalists, or marginalised groups and hegemonic forces, commonly favour those with decision-making authority, access to

funding, and cultural capital. It is for this reason that subversion requires Bhabha's 'third space'.

Said's *Orientalism* refers not simply to a geographical system of colonialism and Empire but to power exercised through epistemological conquest: the coloniser assumed power, superiority and supremacy through inferiority, infantilization and paternalism (Said 1978: 50). Snodgrass's challenge that Said's thesis does not apply to the transmigration of Japanese Zen to the West—since Japan was never colonised (2007: 200-1)—reduces Orientalism to geography. Though not physically colonised, Japan endured subjugation through its military history with the US, a chief protagonist of whiteness globally.<sup>38</sup> Postcolonialism addresses the aftermath of the mental imprint and infrastructural devastation left in the wake of Empire. It reveals ideologies and distributions of power such as whiteness, to better inform subversion. The framework of latent Orientalism and postcolonialism helps disclose the underlying Othering present at national and global levels evident institutionally in racialised formations. I address these in Chapter Three.

The trajectory of Buddhist<sup>39</sup> secularisation and its middle-class orientation forms the backdrop for secular mindfulness. I explore these developments next.

#### **1.4 The Secular, Secularism and Secularisation**

Asad distinguishes the secular from secularism and secularisation: 'the secular' constitutes an 'epistemic category', secularism a political doctrine and secularisation a historical process (Asad 2003: 1, 192). The secular is analytically distinct from, and conceptually precedes secularism (ibid.: 16). Casanova similarly categorises "'the secular' as a central modern epistemic category, 'secularisation' as an analytical conceptualisation of modern world-historical processes, and 'secularism' as a worldview and ideology ... 'the religious' and 'the secular' are always and everywhere mutually constituted" (2011: 54). Secularism, for Asad, denotes a process of ideological negotiation in which diverse groups can have different religious or secular reasons for subscribing to a secular ethic (2003: 6). Secularisation

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<sup>38</sup> As Minear (1980) argues, Orientalism persisted in Japan the view of the Occident epitomised as desirable and successful (1980: 508-10).

<sup>39</sup> Brown recalls: "Europeans invented the term Buddhism in the nineteenth century" (2016: 76).

involves the political and judicial protection of unequal power relations and suggests that violence, whether physical or intellectual domination, is commonly part of maintaining such power (ibid.: 26).

In Asad's appraisal, the secular and religious cannot easily be polarised nor is the secular merely a replacement of the religious. They are, as Casanova (2006) also suggests, "inextricably bound together and mutually condition each other" (2006: 10). Religious-secular differentiation can be traced to eighteenth century Europe:

The very distinction between religious and secular is a product of the [European] Enlightenment that was used in Orientalism to draw a sharp opposition between irrational, religious behaviour of the Oriental and rational secularism, which enabled the Westerner to rule the Oriental (Van der Veer 1993: 39).

From van der Veer's perspective, secularism is interwoven with power asserted through Western scientific dominance. He invokes Said's *Orientalism* (1978)<sup>40</sup> which investigates the streams of power embedded in acts of secularisation. Said argues that Orientalism, like secularism, is a political doctrine that cuts across discourses and disciplines including religion (1978: 2).

As a colonial technology of governmentality, Asad says: "... over time a variety of concepts, practices, and sensibilities have come together to form 'the secular'" (2003: 16). 'The secular' is projected as a universal, neutral representation of non-religious performance

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<sup>40</sup> Said describes Orientalism in various ways: "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (1978: 10). He elaborates: "Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Oriental' world. It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of 'interests' which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world ... Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (1978: 20).

based on textual reductionism—religions are reduced to sacred textual sources (Casanova 2011: 55):

Through this process the secular is privileged as the objective common ground upon which the various religions or faiths meet, rather than as one of a number of divergent cultural models of what it is to be ‘modern’ ... the Orientalist paradigm continues to be replicated for as long as one of its central presuppositions is left uninterrogated— namely the postulation of a rigid dichotomy between the secular and the religious and the privileging of the former as constitutive of the real world out there (King 2004: 279).

“‘The secular’ as a Western norm is [thus] made to operate naturally and therefore namelessly” (Radhakrishnan 1993: 754). As common parlance, it is associated with improvement and progress. Secular mindfulness’ emphasis on ‘universal dharma’ as the birth-right of all humanity, and its assimilation of mindfulness through popular discourse, underscores such privileging of the secular. Those who question secularised, modern-day versions of mindfulness, are criticised for lack of a universal outlook. In other words, proponents of secular mindfulness are protected by the guise and rhetoric of ‘natural progress’ and ‘universality’ (Ng and Purser 2015).<sup>41</sup>

Asad (2003) explains that:

Secularism as a political doctrine arose in modern Euro-America. It is easy to think of it simply as requiring the separation of religious from secular institution in government, but that is not all it is. ... What is distinctive about secularism is that it presupposes new concepts of ‘religion,’ ‘ethics’ and ‘politics’ (ibid.: 1-2).

Braun (2013), for instance, identifies Buddhism’s anti-colonial resurgence in Burma as a politically motivated act distinct from monastic Buddhism (2013: 95). Such strategies “make citizenship the primary principle of identity [that] must transcend the different identities built on class, gender and religion, replacing conflicting perspectives by unifying experience. In an important sense, this transcendent mediation is secularism” (Asad 2003: 5).<sup>42</sup> It is this role that Asad says connects secularism to the rise of the nation-state and to nationalism

<sup>41</sup> According to Ng, “our secular age is experienced within an ‘immanent frame’, a natural order without necessary reference to anything outside itself” (2016b: 4).

<sup>42</sup> Asad is careful to distinguish different arrangements of religion in the US and UK: “... in Britain the state is linked to the Established Church and its inhabitants are largely nonreligious, and in America the population is largely religious, but the federal state is secular” (2003: 5).

which could, perhaps, constitute a secularised religion even though the nation is notoriously diverse (ibid.: 7, 186-7).

Through processes of secularisation, says Asad, transcendence of 'identity' embeds a politics of marginalisation alongside a rhetoric of equality. The media and education "are not simply the means through which individuals simultaneously imagine their national community; they 'mediate' the national imagination [and] construct the sensibilities that underpin it" (ibid.: 5). Negotiation of meaning and direction favours the bearers of educational, political and judicial power who espouse new concepts of spirituality while sustaining ideologies of Othering. Jamie Kuncinskas (2019), for instance, reports on the white mindful elite who dominate the field (2019: 180). When secularism emphasises universality, exclusions function globally as instruments of power. Secularism and universalisation thus cooperate to elide a politics of identity at the same time as they foster Othering which reverberates at micro and macro levels. The mindful individual, for instance, transcends identities of difference such as race and gender. Though eclipsing difference reinforces inequalities, it explains why nationalism itself, as a mediated construct, is contestable by those for whom it is a non-unifying principle. Islam, Buddhism, blackness, transgenderism and disability are among the identities that threaten the image of the model citizen which is usually cast according to social norms and hegemonic power.

Asad (2003) further asserts that as a 'statecraft' of 'self-discipline', the secular is politically- and economically-laden (ibid.: 3). It enhances self-governance and discourses of perpetual individualised self-improvement. In order to emphasise egalitarian self-regulation to improve wellbeing, secular mindfulness does more than evade difference and deny identity. It also acts to propel postracialism. This allows it, through institutionalised power, to universalise models, pedagogies, and regulations. But as a site of contestation secular mindfulness can lead to both prosocial activism and commercialisation. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Buddhist Global Relief, and the emergent Radical Dharma movement encapsulate the former. Commodification illustrates the way the religious-secular works conjunctively rather than oppositionally: "... on the one hand, the selling of Buddhist meditation practice through the use of secular images and rhetoric; on the other hand, the selling of secular products through the use of Buddhist images and rhetoric" (Wilson 2016:



110).<sup>43</sup> Articulation of the ‘religious’ and secular is thus concurrently vulnerable to market forces, and open to political agency.

Funie Hsu challenges the hegemonies built by organs of secular mindfulness (2014; 2016; 2017b). Her critique evidences Asad’s thesis of secularisation and Said’s Othering. She exposes secular mindfulness’ disavowal of groups that remain racially Othered and marks its cultural appropriation as a cornerstone of modern colonialism (2016: 374). She identifies enactments of whiteness and Othering in the sector’s disengagement with traditional Buddhist Centres and Asian mindfulness practitioners (2017a; 2016: 372-4). In this way, Hsu proposes that mindfulness not only conforms to, but feeds systems premised on inequality nationally and globally. Aside from commercialisation of mindfulness, she notes that knowledge/power relations are fixed in acts of professionalisation and universalisation of Buddhist teachings. She disrupts mindfulness through citing the work of Sri Lankan-American Buddhist activist, Dedunu Sylvia. Sylvia (2016) lists the ways in which secular mindfulness colonises cultures and generates racial alterity:

Countless ‘mindfulness’ books and workshops and trainings at heavy costs. Glorified retreats for White, able-bodied, thin, cis, straight, and class-privileged peoples. Images and films focused almost exclusively on the attainment of nirvana by the White man. Histories of generational attachment to colonialism, slavery, genocide, and conquest, all unapologetically glossed over through exotified ventures to the ‘third world.’ All I can see is Buddhist practice—particularly ‘mindfulness’ and ‘loving-kindness’ ideals—used to placate resistance from marginalized populations. Upheld to weaponize model minority myths of Asian passivity in contrast to Black liberation. Exercised in the service of corporate, capitalist, and militarized agendas (2016).

In Sylvia’s testament, everyday expressions of culture and ritual, that may not be regarded as religious by the bearers of such traditions, are removed from what comes to constitute ‘the secular’. She evidences the ideological control levelled through the marketisation of mindfulness questioning the ‘mindfulness’ her list constitutes. Such processes, as Sylvia maps, commonly entail histories of torture, pain and appropriation that denude cultural practices and heritages of their traditions in conquests for knowledge, experience, and

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<sup>43</sup> Wilson notes a commercial incentive to secularise Buddhism: Mindful magazine’s “decoupling of mindfulness from its traditional constituency allows meditation to be marketed to a far larger audience” (2016: 118).

meaning-making (Smith 1999: 19, 146). Orientalism's 'inaugural heroes', explains Said, select aspects of cultures deemed useful through their 'gaze' (1978: 122).<sup>44</sup> King (2009) elaborates:

Philosophy, as a pre-eminent discipline associated with 'rationality' and the pursuit of wisdom in the West, has had a key role to play as a kind of intellectual border police or 'Homeland Security' office, making sure that any foreigners crossing the border are properly classified as 'religious' rather than 'philosophical' (that is, in the 'proper' western sense of the term). In effect, indigenous wisdom traditions of the non-western world are separated from their western counterparts at customs and forced to travel down the red channel. This is because, unlike western philosophies, they are believed to have 'something to declare'—namely, their 'religious', dogmatic or 'tradition-bound' features which mark them out as culturally particular rather than universal. Before being allowed to enter the public space of western intellectual discourse, such systems of thought must either give up much of their foreign goods (that is, render themselves amenable to assimilation according to western intellectual paradigms), or enter as an object of rather than as a subject engaged in debate (2009: 44-45).

In King's terms, secular mindfulness is implicated in cultural policing and appropriation. These acts reposition Western dominion as accommodating, rational, and superior. Hsu highlights the irony of these injustices committed within the mindfulness sector in the quest to 'reduce human suffering'. She describes a sector built on a colonial ethic that is yet to acknowledge its past (Hsu 2016: 373). Secular mindfulness thus embodies and sustains social fractures. Erasure of identity, as a function of secularism and the creation of the modern citizen, is aimed to eradicate or overshadow such histories and contemporary practices as Hsu names. It is clear how, in this postracial culture in which identity is 'non-existent' and racism is 'episodic' and 'individualised', the complainer becomes the problem (Ahmed 2012: 63).

The frame of Orientalism, neoliberalism, postracialism and whiteness, allows a more critical and nuanced reflection on Western mindfulness' precursor, the rise of modern Buddhism.

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<sup>44</sup> Said's 'inaugural heroes' were "builders of the field, creators of a tradition, progenitors of the Orientalist brotherhood; people who established a central authority, created a vocabulary, and set rules that could be used by others" (1978: 122).

## 1.5 Modern Buddhism: A Precursor to Mindfulness

Here I wish to show the rise of modern Buddhism and secular mindfulness as politically-infused processes, informed by an articulation of cultures and interests (McMahan 2008: 20). I consider two phases that influenced the secularisation of mindfulness in the US/UK. First, Southeast Asian Buddhist reform, and second, the establishment of Buddhist organisations in the US by Western teachers. I focus on the US as Kabat-Zinn's locus and influence.

Modern Buddhism is complicated by Said's *Orientalism* in which the colonial gaze informs the process of modernisation. Commensurate with Morrison's 'white gaze',<sup>45</sup> it depicts the assumed authority of travellers to Asia, translators of texts,<sup>46</sup> and bearers of teachings, who narrate the secular. Their right to select what is regarded as consequential, and to elide that considered futile, is what generates an Orientalist outlook (Smith 1999: 80).<sup>47</sup>

Lopez (2002) argues similarly that the trajectory of modern Buddhism<sup>48</sup> is influenced by the Western gaze:

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<sup>45</sup> Morrison's 'white gaze' explains how black minorities tend to live in the shadow of society, consumed by the lens of social whiteness in which whiteness is a default. She speaks of the liberation of stepping outside of the racialised gaze and to write freely. When black authors assume that their readers are white, they slip into narrative that distorts their own experience (Wagner-Martin 2014: 22). In a similar fashion, Orientalists write for white audiences, black and brown bodies are absent in their frame. "Every statement made by Orientalists or White Men (who are usually interchangeable) conveyed a sense of the irreducible distance separating white from coloured, or Occidental from Oriental" (Said 1978: 228). King adds: "... in a cross-cultural and postcolonial context the provinciality of European ways of understanding the world, is increasingly being highlighted with reference to the historical specificity of its origins and provenance" (2004: 272).

<sup>46</sup> "A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual ... is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most important, such texts can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it ... Once we begin to think of Orientalism as a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient, we will encounter few surprises" (Said 2003: 94).

<sup>47</sup> Smith proposes that a new language of imperialism has emerged but explains that the patterns of colonialism have not altered: "The economic, cultural and scientific forms of imperialism associated with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been reformulated. The geography of empire has been redrawn. The North-South divide has become a more meaningful way of distinguishing between what was once referred to as First, Second, Third and Fourth worlds. Territories are called markets, interesting little backwaters are untapped potentials and tribal variations of culture and language are examples of diversity" (1999: 98).

<sup>48</sup> The printing press, expansion of travel and the growth of the middle class in the early-twentieth and globalisation in the latter-twentieth century, spurred the modernisation project (Lopez 2002: xxxix).

Modern Buddhism seeks to distance itself most from those forms of Buddhism that immediately precede it, that are even contemporary with it. It is ancient Buddhism, and especially the enlightenment of the Buddha 2,500 years ago, that is seen as most modern, as most compatible with the ideas of the European Enlightenment that occurred so many centuries later, ideals embodied in such concepts as reason, empiricism, science, universalism, individualism, tolerance, freedom and the rejection of religious orthodoxy. Indeed, for modern Buddhists, the Buddha knew long ago what Europe would only discover much later. Yet what we regard as Buddhism today, especially the common portrayal of the Buddhism of the Buddha, is in fact a creation of modern Buddhism (2002: ix-x).

Lopez reinforces Western interests and discourses in the formulation of modern Buddhism. The ‘Buddhism of the Buddha’ is narrated unreflexively through a latent Orientalist European Enlightenment lens.<sup>49</sup> Yet, like Snodgrass before, he asserts that the modernisation project occurred as much in Asia as it did in the West. Ng (2014) agrees that “Buddhist modernism is a co-creation of Asians, Europeans and Americans and is not just a Western construct” (2014). Lopez adds that it is nonhomologous, including reversion to the Pali Canon on the one hand, and socially-engaged Buddhism, itself diverse, on the other. Moreover, the grip of colonialism—as Said argued before—extended beyond physical occupation, to education, depictions of iconography and, significantly, a calibration of personal awakening with Western notions of individualisation (Lopez 2002: xxxvii; Hamilton 1992: 21). Organised political resistance which coupled laicisation and Buddhist revival in Burma and Sri Lanka (Braun 2013: 95-97; McMahan 2012: 162), fuelled modernisation in the same measure as Dharmapala’s scientification of Buddhism (Lopez 2002: xxxix; McMahan 2012: 33-5; Johnson 2004: 80).<sup>50</sup>

### 1.5.1 Southeast Asian Buddhist Reform

In response to British colonialism, Burmese laicisation of meditation was led by Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His mission was to re-establish

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<sup>49</sup> Hamilton explains that ‘Enlightenment’ framing permits acts of universalisation, individualisation, secularisation of ‘primitive’ cultures through the ‘civilising’ and ‘superior’ lens of ‘science and reason’: “Reason and science could be applied to any and every situation ... their principles were the same in every situation. Science in particular produces general laws which govern the entire universe, without exception” (1992: 21).

<sup>50</sup> Aside from the thirst for ‘meaning’ and the quest for colonising knowledge “modern Buddhism seems to have begun, at least in part, as a response to the threat of modernity, as perceived by certain Asian Buddhists, especially those who had encountered colonialism. Yet these modern Buddhists were very much products of modernity, with the rise of the middle class, the power of the printing press, the ease of international travel” (Lopez 2002: xxxix).

Buddhism and to challenge colonialism through regaining institutional power (McMahan 2017: 119).

When the British took over all of Burma, [Ledi] ... began to promote meditation for all, even to the laity—even to women—as a means to preserve Buddhism. This was the start of the mass practice of meditation among the laity—previously the domain of a minority of specialist monks. Meditation for large groups of lay people began in Burma before anywhere else in the world, then spread to other countries and eventually around the world. Thus, we begin with the history of insight or mindfulness practice in *Theravāda* Buddhism (McMahan and Braun 2017: 5).

Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1982) extended laicisation to foster the anti-colonial agenda of Buddhist nationalism. He placed emphasis on *sati*<sup>51</sup> (mindfulness) for which his German-born student, Nyanaponika Thera (1901-1984), coined the term ‘bare attention’ (Sharf 2017: 201). S.N. Goenka (1924-2013) played an equally influential role in streamlining Buddhist secularisation (Hwang and Kearney 2015: 10). These figures informed Kabat-Zinn’s reconceptualisation of mindfulness. Mahasi and Goenka navigated colonial landscapes of economic hegemony to reformulate “their traditions sorting that which could be interpreted along the lines of scientific rationalism and spirituality from what the colonists considered superstitious, idolatrous, and primitive” (McMahan 2017: 117). In this way, they reformed Buddhism not only for national purposes but also for Western audiences.

Mahasi is considered a prominent leader of the global vipassanā movement. He de-emphasised ritual and elevated meditation (McMahan 2012: 170-1).

Designed to be accessible to laypeople, [the Mahasi method] did not require familiarity with Buddhist philosophy or literature. It could be taught in a relatively short period of time in a retreat format. All this made it easy to export ... ‘living in the now’ cuts across geographical, cultural, sectarian and social boundaries (Sharf 2017: 200).

His methods were radical for their time: laypeople could pursue daily life and attain liberating insight without prior knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. His compact method was taught in an exportable retreat format which made it popular and accessible (ibid.: 201-2). Mahasi’s approach underpins much of the work of Western vipassanā which I discuss below.

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<sup>51</sup> The Pali term for mindfulness (*sati*) derives from Sanskrit: *smṛti*.

In a vein similar to Mahasi Sayadaw, S.N. Goenka developed a system of vipassanā as “technique rather than doctrine” (McMahan 2017: 117). He reduced practice to a refined set of instructions and described Vipassanā<sup>52</sup> as a universal, scientific system suitable for anyone irrespective of faith. Transmigration of Goenka’s vipassanā from India to the US required cultural navigation that led to further separation from its Buddhist roots. Ledi and Mahasi’s laicisation in Burma—a predominantly Buddhist country—escaped the scientific reframe that Goenka implemented.

Goenka and Mahasi both globalised their teachings through appeals to scientific Buddhism (ibid.: 117). Mahasi dispensed with ritual<sup>53</sup> while Goenka’s conception retains aspects of Buddhism, such as the three marks of existence, the four noble truths and wisdom and compassion teachings (ibid.: 117-8). Still, he expressed vipassanā in scientific, neutral and universal terms:

Some people take [Vipassanā] as a religion, a cult, or a dogma, so naturally there is resentment and opposition. But Vipassanā should only be taken as pure science, the science of mind and matter, and a pure exercise for the mind to keep it healthy. What could be the objection? And it is so result-oriented, because it starts giving results here and now. People will start accepting this (Goenka 2002: 28).

As he forecast, vipassanā gained popularity through science. Goenka-style Vipassanā is taught worldwide and translated into thirty languages (Dhamma Sumeru 2018). His influence on secular mindfulness is unquestionable. At times, Kabat-Zinn, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha repeat his words verbatim. Instances include: the Buddha taught the dhamma (Goenka 2002: 82; Kabat-Zinn 2005: 136); the dhamma is universal truth, not Buddhism (Goenka 2002: 34, 104; Kabat-Zinn 2017:1130; 2010); and, universalism is consistent with the secular and scientific (Goenka 2002: 42, 101, 108; Kabat-Zinn 2013: 289; 2017: 1126).

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<sup>52</sup> Whereas Goenka capitalises Vipassanā, Fronsdaal does not. When referring to these authors, I retain their preference, but use the decapitalised version in discussion.

<sup>53</sup> Fronsdaal explains: “Mahasi deemphasized many common elements of *Theravāda* Buddhism. Rituals, chanting, devotional and merit-making activities, and doctrinal studies were down-played to the point of being virtually absent from the program of meditation offered at the many meditation centres he founded or inspired” (1998: 164). This allowed vipassanā to be associated with psychological wellbeing. In contrast, Braun argues that there remained for ... Goenka, [who] acknowledged the practical benefits of meditation, a refrain from teaching meditation ‘only for the purpose of healing’ (2013: 165), although Goenka states that it helped him cure himself of migraines (2002: 9).

Furthermore, his ‘mental exercise’ model saying that the mind requires fitness in the same way as the body endures.

Mahasi and Goenka’s programmes weighted certain elements. Emphasis on meditation and direct experience—later entrenched in secular mindfulness—evolved also through modernisation in Zen traditions (Sharf 1998: 272; Lopez 2002: xxix; King 2004: 276). These holy grails assumed prominence through the articulation of Western individualism with select Asian intellectual interpretations of Buddhism. Here, D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966) played a key role (Sharf 1998: 272).<sup>54</sup> Suzuki attended Christian missionary schools and reacted against cultural imperialism. He emphasised experience to present his traditions as “‘purer’ than the discursive faiths of the West” (ibid.: 275).<sup>55</sup> As Sharf explains, experience provided a ‘cross-cultural encounter’ out of which grew:

[...] a veritable academic industry, complete with its own professional societies, its own journals, and its own conferences and symposia, all devoted to the comparative study of ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ thought. The striking confluence of Western and Asian interests prevented those on both sides from noticing the tenuous ground on which the exchange had been built (ibid.: 276).

Sharf’s depiction of meditation’s Western arc, captures also the trajectory of secular mindfulness. Professionalisation and academicization through mindfulness Teacher Training Pathways accompanies the reification of direct experience in mindfulness as Sharf explains. It also fosters an uncritical scholarship and elitism.

The combination of Buddhism and science shapes a secularisation faithful to enlightenment ideals. Smith (1999) explains:

The development of scientific thought, the exploration and ‘discovery’ by Europeans of other worlds, the expansion of trade, the establishment of colonies, and the systematic colonisation of indigenous peoples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are all facets of the modernist project ... ‘Discoveries’ about and from the ‘new’ world expanded and challenged

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<sup>54</sup> Sharf asserts: “Meditation was first and foremost a means of eliminating defilement, accumulating merit and supernatural power, invoking apotropaic deities, and so forth ... The valorization of experience in Asian thought can be traced to a handful of twentieth-century Asian religious leaders and apologists, all of whom were in sustained dialogue with their intellectual counterparts in the West” (1998: 272).

<sup>55</sup> Sharf says: “Few Western scholars were in a position to question the romanticized image of Asian mysticism proffered forth by these intelligent and articulate ‘representatives’ of living Asian faiths” (1998: 276).

ideas the West held about itself. The production of knowledge, new knowledge and transformed 'old' knowledge, ideas about the nature of knowledge and the validity of specific forms of knowledge, became as much commodities of colonial exploitation as other natural resources (1999: 59).

The participation of Asian reformers in Buddhist modernisation can obscure Western interests in the re-presentation of knowledge in the name of science. Ng (2016b), like King (2009), outlines controls on processes of secularisation. Science and reason hide the political function of governance:

[...] systems of understanding of non-Western heritages are admitted into the public space of Western intellectual discourse after they have been screened of their 'foreign goods', their difference assimilated under Western intellectual paradigms, entering as objects of study rather than subjects engaged in debate. The detraditionalising and demythologising processes of Buddhist modernism have arguably been shaped by epistemic 'border control' (Ng 2016b: 72).

Ng's 'border control' underscores Said's latent Orientalist thesis. It exposes the selective reframing of knowledge to establish and reinforce dominant discourses. Western authority is "masked by the material and intellectual history of colonial domination" and presented as "the loving pursuit of wisdom" (King 2009: 35). In the process of Americanising Buddhism, Western vipassanā illuminate Smith and Ng's 'selectivity' in their mediation of knowledge. I turn to this next.

### **1.5.2 Rise of the Western Vipassanā Movement**

The second phase in Buddhism's trajectory that bore directly on Kabat-Zinn and secular mindfulness, is its transmission by Western teachers in the US. Here I map the formation of the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) which, alongside Goenka's programme, contributed to the rise of the Western vipassanā movement (Fronsdal 1995). I argue that IMS teachers who returned from Buddhist studies in Southeast Asia in the late twentieth century to establish an independent vipassanā movement (Fronsdal 1998: 165), were selective in their teachings.

In 1975, Jack Kornfield (born 1945), Joseph Goldstein (born 1944) and Sharon Salzberg (born 1952) established IMS (Fronsdal 1998: 8; Braun 2013: 162-3). Their teachings mostly derive from Ledi Sayadaw and Mahasi Sayadaw:



On the one hand, they were explicit about their grounding in the *Theravāda* tradition and retained many elements of the retreat-oriented training they received in Asia. ... On the other hand, a conscious attempt was made to downplay chanting, ceremony and many aspects of Buddhist cosmology and belief (Wilson 2014: 33).

Wilson identifies here a chosen ambivalent relationship to Buddhism, reflective of power. IMS and Goenka, says Fronsdal, replaced the word *Theravāda* with *vipassanā* to indicate an Americanised teaching (1998: 165).

Outside of a *Theravāda* culture and without direct links to traditional *Theravāda* practices, they dispensed with almost all rituals and activities other than meditation. Although Goenka claims not to teach Buddhism but only pure dhamma, he assumes a traditional cosmological worldview that includes rebirth. Such assumptions—indeed, practically any serious engagement with *Theravāda* doctrine—are eschewed in the IMS approach. The intention was to leave behind ‘cultural baggage’ in favour of forms of practice understood as the authentic teaching of the Buddha. Goldstein explained: *I’m not so concerned with any labels or the cultural forms of the tradition ... Instead, what inspires me is the connection with the original teachings of the Buddha – with what, as far as we know, he actually taught during his lifetime.* Above all, meditation was presented (and still is) as the heart of those original teachings (Braun 2013: 163).

Goldstein’s explanation above captures Lopez’s earlier comment: Western teachers claim direct access to the Buddha’s authentic teachings (2002: x). Lopez suggests these comprise acts of latent Orientalism, especially where Asian Buddhists are bypassed in the process. In the early years, Western *vipassanā* advocates obtained distance from Buddhist organisations such as Asian Buddhist centres and the Buddhist Churches of America. These, they believed, perpetuated traditional practices (Fronsdal 1998: 167):

The early American *vipassanā* teachers went even further than most of their own Asian teachers in presenting *vipassanā* practice independent of the *Theravāda* tradition. Teaching as laypeople to an almost exclusively lay audience, they were thus free to package the *vipassanā* practice in American cultural forms and language (ibid.: 165).

IMS’s erasure of ‘cultural baggage’ and distillation of Buddhism brings to light the interests, gaze and authority of Western teachers as arbiters. Their elevation of meditation<sup>56</sup> as Buddhism’s essence, privileges the individual above the community and fosters individual

<sup>56</sup> Caring-Lobel (2016) complicates this act by arguing that the Buddha had not considered meditation suitable for someone who had “not renounced worldly desire” (2016: 195).

responsibility and ‘spiritual egalitarianism’ (McMahan 2012: 161; Lopez 2002: ix). The latter ignores social conditions. Seen in this light, Americanisation of Buddhism constitutes a secularist nationalism built on tenuous political grounds. These tenets are familiar in Kabat-Zinn’s portrayal of mindfulness (Hickey 2010: 172; Lopez 2008: 208). Reification of meditation skirts its original confinement to a small set of elite monks (McMahan and Braun 2017: 4), and, moreover, sets the stage for an essentialist ideology (Snodgrass 2007; King 1999: 69). As King explains: “The universalistic claims ... occlude the cultural and historical peculiarity of such movements. ... such claims suppress the fact that they derive from a particular community with a particular agenda at a particular time in a particular cultural space” (ibid.). In the following chapters I argue that the omission of King’s factors from the teachings of the IMS and Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha serves to reassert invisibilised<sup>57</sup> privileges and norms.

In his appraisal of the Western vipassanā movement, Wilson (2014) argues that deracination constitutes appropriation performed through psychologisation and mystification (2014: 44). These methods, he argues, are “not shared by most other religious practices in America” such as Christianity and Judaism (ibid.: 44-6).<sup>58</sup> As foreign goods alien to the ‘nation’, Buddhism, like Islam, is objectified and Othered (Asad 2003: 7).

Read in conjunction with Goenka’s (2002) *Meditation Now*, Fronsdal’s (1998) account of Western vipassanā accentuates its resonance with the arc and vocabulary of secular mindfulness. IMS and its sister organisation Spirit Rock’s<sup>59</sup> disaffiliation from *Theravāda* lineages spurred their growth (McMahan and Braun 2017: 163-4):

Insight Meditation, or vipassanā, has been, since the early 1980s, one of the fastest growing in popularity. To a great extent this can be attributed to the practice being offered independent of much of its traditional *Theravāda*

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<sup>57</sup> Invisibilisation works bi-directionally to obscure those marginalised and excluded (Armstrong and Wildman 2007: 639) while concealing privileges of those who command power and do the obscuring. Armstrong and Wildman explain that “two central reasons foster that invisibility: (1) the conflation of white privilege with white supremacy and (2) the societal insistence upon colour-blindness”, today is displaced by postracialism (ibid.).

<sup>58</sup> Wilson uses the example of extracting a rosary practice from Christianity, “stressing that Christianity merely embraces the teachings found in any given religious tradition, that the early Catholic teachings are free of doctrine, that the Virgin Mary is not an object of religious devotion, that saying the rosary does not conflict with Hindu or agnostic belief” and that it enhances one’s own faith as a Muslim, Hindu or Jew (2014: 44).

<sup>59</sup> Spirit Rock was formed by Jack Kornfield within a few years of his move to California in 1990.

Buddhist religious context. This autonomy has allowed the American vipassanā teachers and students to adapt and present the meditation practice in forms and language that are much more thoroughly Westernized than most other forms of Buddhism in America. As the number of people participating in the mindfulness practices of Insight Meditation has increased, a loose-knit lay Buddhist movement, uniquely Western ... has evolved (Fronsdal 1998: 163).

The cost of secularisation—the excision of traditional practices—is critiqued by Asian Buddhists (Hsu 2014; 2016; 2017b; Sylvia 2016). In *We've Been Here All Along*, Hsu (2017a) narrates the pain caused by convert Buddhist erasure of Asian Buddhist teachers and initiatives.<sup>60</sup> Even though it caused divisions, the IMS pursued its independence with the aim to 'Americanise' its teachings.

Decisions, borne of a desire to Americanise Buddhism, denuded it not only of cultural context, but also of any political associations found in, for instance, Ledi's anti-colonial mission (Braun 2013: 87, 95-7). This depoliticization occurred also in relation to political realities in the US with the result that teachings occurred in a political vacuum. The teachers' social realities, experiences and interests shaped their programmes whether 'latently' or consciously (King 2004: 272), dictating content as well as audiences.<sup>61</sup>

Bikkhu Bodhi (2016) argues that the frame of the teacher reflects vested interests and interpretations:

[...] several Burmese meditation masters—most prominent among them Ledi Sayadaw and Mahasi Sayadaw—opened up the gates of meditation practice to laypeople, and it was through these gates that itinerant young Westerners, curious about 'the wisdom of the East,' stepped when they arrived in Asia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was only natural that in their encounter with the Dhamma they would bring along the *questions and*

<sup>60</sup> As many as half a million Asian migrants settled in the US between 1977 and 2000 (Cadge 2005: 19-20) although the largely white convert Buddhist communities remained separate from native-Buddhists. On occasion, IMS founders acknowledge their teachers and 'lineage'. In 1979, for example, Mahasi Sayadaw accepted an IMS invitation to visit the Barre centre, while attending Asian Buddhist Centres to "establish an ethnic Burmese Buddhist organisation in the San Francisco Bay Area" (Braun 2013: 229).

<sup>61</sup> Western Buddhism is problematized by McMahan: "What many Americans and Europeans often understand by the term "Buddhism" however, is actually a modern hybrid tradition with roots in the European Enlightenment no less than the Buddha's enlightenment, in Romanticism and transcendentalism as much as the Pāli Canon, and in the clash of Asian cultures and colonial powers as much as in mindfulness and meditation. ... What scholars have often meant by 'western Buddhism,' ... is a facet of a more global network of movements that are not the exclusive product of one geographic or cultural setting" (2008: 5-6).

*problems that reflected their cultural backgrounds and personal needs.* Inevitably, they took away from Buddhism answers that corresponded to these needs, and when they began to teach, their own understanding of the Dhamma shaped the way they would communicate the teachings to others. This became the legacy they would transmit to their own students and down the line to future generations (Bodhi 2016: 8, emphasis added).

In pinpointing the chief concerns, perspectives and positionalities of IMS teachers, Bodhi's comment inexplicitly frames a politics of identity. He infers from his experiences of their teachings, certain commonalities such as their privilege to travel and study abroad. Within their teachings, he underscores a disjuncture between their psychological appraisal of individualised suffering, and a socially-engaged reading of Buddhism.

Writing in a more explicitly political frame, Magee (2016) unpacks identity and political persuasions buried in secularism. She argues that social justice is distant and 'optional' to the arrangements of secular mindfulness; that the founders of secular mindfulness give special meaning to personal wellbeing and individual freedoms. Magee explains that their identities and white, upper-class privileges inform the arc of mindfulness and that this emphasis on inner healing and inner freedom alienate practices from marginalised communities. In its secularised form, mindfulness seems irrelevant to those interested in changing systems that cause disharmony, division and inequality in the first instance (2016: 427-8). Magee ties privilege to personalised models and practices distant from social transformation. Moreover, she suggests that these products appear unuseful or alien to marginalised communities. Their social locations and interests distanced the vipassanā teachers from societal oppressions and struggles against inequalities, underscoring their interlocutor privileges. Invisibilisation of power—the work of secularism—is thus common in organisations like the IMS that evolves in racialised societies. In this light, secularism not only represses difference, it camouflages the mechanisms of control that reproduce hegemonies.

As a subsequent phase to Buddhist secularisation in the US, Kabat-Zinn secularises mindfulness to mainstream *Buddhadharma* which he re-presents as 'universal dharma' (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 281). His move constitutes mutual global and national goals. He adopts science and rationality, cornerstones of Orientalism, as secularist strategies. Once

mindfulness gains scientific endorsement and public appeal, he begins to “articulate its origins and its essence ... not so much to patients” but to teachers (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 282-3). Mindfulness’ modernisation thus resembles the cornerstones of Buddhist modernisation. Decrees of universality, delivery of ‘the original teachings’ of the Buddha, scientification, individualisation and the invisibilisation of power govern secularisation. But there is a further dimension to the modernisation of mindfulness. It develops in particular contexts for specific purposes producing particular subjects and worlds (Wallis 2016: 496). While mindfulness involves the training of the mind through particular practices, none of these are ahistorical nor apolitical. Each setting is contextual, reinforcing secularism as a political doctrine. Secular mindfulness is not secular in the sense of being non-Buddhist—its secularity produces an ambivalent relationship to Buddhism. What remains hidden in this process is its ideological functionalities. As mindfulness is modernised, secularism blends with neoliberal postraciality to produce popular products. The term secular relates therefore not merely to Buddhism; it represents a particular politics congruent with hegemonies of control. I consider these developments within the frame of Buddhist modernisation and its shadow of neoliberal whiteness in Chapter Three.

## 1.6 Concluding Remarks

I have proposed that the secularisation of mindfulness, a political process, is framed by a history of Orientalism and informed by current forces of postracial neoliberalism and whiteness. These forces come to bear on two acts of Buddhist modernisation: Southeast Asian reforms led by Asian reformers, and Americanisation of Buddhism, led by white Western teachers. The container in which mindfulness thrived in the US disengaged traditional practitioners and centres. It provided the conditions for what Kabat-Zinn would initially name an ‘American mindfulness’: “why not develop an American vocabulary that spoke to the heart of the matter, and didn’t focus on the cultural aspects of the traditions out of which the dharma emerged” (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 288).<sup>62</sup> What remained invisible in

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<sup>62</sup> Kabat-Zinn footnotes this idea of an ‘American vocabulary’ as follows: “I thought of it in those terms at the time. Now I am not quite sure what adjective to use. Secular might do, except that it feels dualistic, in the sense of separating itself from the sacred; I see the work of MBSR as sacred as well as secular, in the sense of both the Hippocratic Oath and the Bodhisattva Vow being sacred, and the doctor/patient relationship and the teacher/student relationship as well. Perhaps we need new ways of ‘linguaging’ our vision, our aspirations, and our common work. Certainly, it is only a matter of ‘American’ in the US” (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 301).

these steps to 'Americanise the dharma' is the overarching architecture of latent Orientalism and the underpinning ideologies of individualism, consumerism and postracialism prevalent in the US. Secularism harmonised its universalism and suppression of identity with these forces to produce a political mindfulness that claims political neutrality.

These developments have produced a white mindfulness worthy of interrogation. Reinterpretation of Buddhist teachings stripped of cultural baggage and their representation 'in their essence' present modern versions of coloniality and claimed authority when seen through an Orientalist lens. Asad's secularism presents this white mindfulness as a political doctrine which proclaims universality and establishes itself as part of a global apparatus of power and hegemony. These factors lead me to investigate the particular forms that mindfulness assumes in racialised contexts of dispossession and inequalities. They encourage an examination of mindfulness as a universal change agent regardless of context and the causes of illness and spur an inquiry into the pedagogical mechanisms that reproduce, reinforce and popularise white mindfulness. To support this study, in the next chapter I consider the methodological tenets of my investigation.

## Chapter Two: Methodology: Researching White Mindfulness

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I revisit my research questions, explain my methodological approach as an outsider-within, and emphasise the need for reliable, purposeful research. Concerned with respectful research that protects both individual and organisational respondents, I discuss practices of anonymisation within the frame of ethical considerations. Research limitations of the study are briefly outlined.

Researching mindfulness in neoliberal, postracial contexts requires methodologies that take account of power differentials. As a Black feminist, the sector's race-gender profile is unavoidable. Researching a predominantly white field requires that I build a case transparently and report responsibly. This is especially important as my research questions are by their nature disruptive. I ask:

1. Why do particular organisations in the mindfulness movement arise from the development of secular Buddhism in white neoliberal societies?
2. Can the 'second Renaissance' claims of universalism to transform social inequalities and injustices be realised in a postracial capitalist society?
3. What are the pedagogical technologies and mechanisms through which the white mindfulness sector reproduces itself?

To address these questions, I draw upon Said's (1978) knowledge-power inter-relation, Smith's (1999) decolonising methodologies, and Patricia Hill-Collins' (1997) 'outsider-within'. I discuss research challenges these controversial questions generate and because race and gender are tied to questions of whiteness, inequalities, diversity and justice, to avoid misreporting, I prioritise ethics and reflexivity.

My interest in this project is informed by a desire to examine and unpack the creation of white mindfulness in the image of its social contexts. This requires sufficient reflexivity and an ethical approach both to data collection and reporting. I am explicit about decolonising my methodology through black feminist standpoint theory, consider my privileges as an insider-researcher as well as my constraints as an 'outsider-within'.

## 2.2 Black Feminist Outsider-Within Positionality

The rise of the social sciences legitimised observation through which “lesser beings became subject to interventions by practitioners of the emerging disciplines of economics, sociology, anthropology, psychiatry, pedagogy, and sexology” (Michelson 2015: 47). Put differently, social science “tends to assume the positions of privileged groups, helping to naturalise and sustain their privilege” (Sprague 2016: 2). Such unaccountable research “has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other” (Smith 1999: 39).

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* questioned this premise of Western scholarship and its claim to “grasp the objective truth of non-Western societies” (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009: 2). In a similar vein, Smith (1999), writing in the context of indigenous societies, challenges the construct of knowledge. Drawing on Said, she interrogates power in research design and the generation of new knowledges:

Edward Said also asks the following questions: ‘who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These it seems to me are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients making a politics of interpretation’. These questions are important ones which are being asked in a variety of ways within our communities. They are asked, for example, about research, policy making and curriculum development. Said’s comments, however, point to the problems of interpretation, in this case of academic writing. ‘Who’ is doing the writing is important in the politics of the Third World and African America, and indeed for indigenous peoples; it is even more important in the politics of how these worlds are being represented ‘back to’ the West (1999: 37; Said 1982: 1).<sup>63</sup>

Smith’s indigenous communities are analogous to marginalised groups in the US/UK or other postcolonial contexts. She ‘questions the questions’ as well as the power and knowledge relations contained in research methods. Both she and Said inquire into the

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<sup>63</sup> Smith explains: “[the] imaginary line between ‘east’ and ‘west’ drawn in 1493 by a Papal Bull, allowed for the political division of the world and the struggle by competing Western states to establish what Said has referred to as a ‘flexible positional superiority’ over the known, and yet to become known, world. This positional superiority was contested at several levels by European powers. These imaginary boundaries were drawn again in Berlin in 1934 when European powers sat around the table once more to carve up Africa and other parts of ‘their’ empires. They continue to be redrawn. Imperialism and colonialism are the specific formations through which the West came to ‘see’, to ‘name’ and to ‘know’” (1999: 60).



nature of the research enterprise. They encourage transparent methodologies and approaches that ground research in reflexivity and accountability and emphasise purposeful research projects. They also discuss commodified 'imports' (such as mindfulness) as appropriated cultural artefacts. Decolonisation theories provide an ethical framework which I adopt in my research: respect for people and the traditions from which mindfulness emerges as well as generosity in sharing perspectives, and restraint in claiming knowledges (Smith 1999: 120).

Standpoint theory asserts that: "All knowers are located in time and place, and all knowledge is partial ... The best research is multivocal with researchers owning their own positions" (Neitz 2014: 56). Compatible with Neitz, Dorothy Smith's (2005) 'method of inquiry' encourages an interrogation of the 'relations of ruling' in order to produce research that serves marginalised groups. To advance a decolonisation agenda, Chandra Mohanty (2003) applies Smith's concept to investigate intersectional oppressions. Mohanty's work, in turn, alongside that of Patricia Hill Collins (1997), develops standpoint theory to take account of 'intersectionality' from a Black feminist perspective. In this regard, I depart from mindful inquiry to position myself within the research process.

Standpoint methodology encompasses the commitments to co-produce knowledge in the interest of the dispossessed and 'maintain a ... discourse' that honours minority perspectives (Neitz 2014: 55). Hill Collins adds an important qualifier: she recognises the fluidity of identity and the porosity of boundaries as a means to understanding the intransigence of institutional power:

What we have now is increasing sophistication about how to discuss group location, not in the singular class framework proposed by Marx, not in the early feminist frameworks arguing the primacy of gender, but within constructs of multiplicity residing in social structures themselves, and not individual women. Fluidity does not mean that groups disappear, to be replaced by an accumulation of decontextualized, unique women whose complexity erases politics. Instead, the fluidity of boundaries operates as a new lens that potentially deepens understanding of how the actual mechanisms of institutional power can change dramatically while continuing to reproduce long standing inequalities of race and gender and class that result in group stability (1997: 377).

For this study I embrace her ‘outsider-within’ approach through which she encourages a Black feminist perspective derived from a position of marginality within the academy, and in my instance, within the mindfulness sector. This encouragement to bring multiple, intersecting identities to bear in interpretation, without having to capitulate one’s standpoint, fosters simultaneous reflection and action. My research is thus not an end in itself but part of a process of agency cultivation through which I shed light from a particular standpoint as a Black woman, to inform action in the interests of marginalised groups.

My role as a scholar-practitioner afforded me a distinctive location as a researcher in the field (Dowling 2010: 30; Harvey 2014: 220-1). In a conventional ‘insider-outsider’ framework, I would be categorised as an insider through my secular mindfulness training and participation in the sector. My insiderness eased access to organisations and individuals while my outsiderness as a researcher granted an investigative stance in which the ethical considerations of ‘informed consent’ and anonymisation protects respondents. According to the standard anthropological dichotomy, insiders are regarded as ‘native’ to the field (DeLyser 2001: 442) and are urged to become ‘observationalist’—‘distance’ is encouraged to improve a ‘rational’ view (Labaree 2002: 101). This repositions the researcher as an observer. It aligns with the emergent “nineteenth century ... social [science] practices that allow the authorised knower to observe others unobserved” (Michelson 2015: 47).

Simplistic insider-outsider notions are thus implicated in traditional methods:

Most research methodologies assume that the researcher is an outsider able to observe without being implicated in the scene. This is related to positivism and notions of objectivity and neutrality. Feminist research and other more critical approaches have made the insider methodology much more acceptable in qualitative research ... The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity (Smith 1999: 137).

Others also challenge the simplicity of the insider-outsider dichotomy to suggest instead a fluid continuum through which the researcher’s position shifts (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Merriam et al. 2010). As Dowling says: “[one] is never simply an insider or an outsider” (2010: 30). O’Connor concurs: “insider and outsiderhood ... could simultaneously co-exist and alternate within the same interactional event” (2004: 175).

Fluid binaries allow for a process of inquiry in which conversationalists (researcher and respondent) collectively and collaboratively explore the field unaffected by asymmetrical power relations. The reflexive researcher enters a shared investigation with the 'interviewee'. This is analogous with Paulo Freire's (1993/1970) liberation pedagogy in which teachers and students engage in a dialogical partnership intended to generate new knowledge. In other words, researchers and interviewees, cognisant of one another's positions, build a rapport that allows for creative exchanges. Yet, research comprises terrains of power and contestation. Power is ever-present in research encounters: "Power is expressed at both the explicit and implicit level. Dissent, or challenges to the rules, is manageable because it also conforms to these rules, particularly at the implicit level" (Smith 1999: 43). The research process is thus infused with power from its inception. New knowledge holds the potential to disrupt and contradict the interests of interviewees and researchers alike (Hill Collins 1986; Mohanty 2003; Ahmed 2009; Mirza 2009). In this light, Smith (1999) adds that communities can estrange 'native' researchers, placing them at a distance, unable to access knowledge easily (1999: 173).

Equal partnerships, privileges and co-production cannot therefore be presumed for insider researchers. My research required conversations with people and organisations in positions of power and privilege. I draw on their perspectives to understand the sector and adopt a critical approach to its embedded power structures (see DiAngelo 2010 and Sullivan 2006 above) in the interests of transformation. My research questions disrupt the preservation of power within the field. Navigating this controversial inquiry as an insider participant-observer produced what Laberee (2002) calls "hidden ethical and methodological dilemmas" (2002: 109). Upon 'entering the field'—one of Laberee's potential dilemmas—I was aware of what Mullings (1999) calls 'positional spaces' through which I shared a sense of 'trust and cooperation' with my respondents (1999: 340). From that vantage point, I was entering spaces able to pose critical questions regarding marginalisation. This allowed me to explore the exclusion of BME constituents. Since the majority of my respondents (97%) were non-BME, although they all acknowledged the importance of diversity at least intellectually, only a minority resonated with my questions. How far these conversations could venture were governed by what Allum (1991) calls 'relationships of ongoing

renegotiation' (1991: 5). I constantly had to remain aware of my own perspectives, and open to different and evolving representations and viewpoints from my respondents.

Researcher disruption poses a further flaw in the insider-outsider dichotomy when applied as a simple binary. As Lorde (2007) says, our lives are complex and therefore we embody multiple identities simultaneously. In my case, as a BME woman, I am a minority participant in the sector. Hill Collins (1986) names this an 'outsider-within' who supposedly fits but does not belong (1986: S14). hooks' (1994) description of marginality in her childhood pertains: "We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out ... we understood both" (1984: vii). This 'outsider-within' location naturally generates a critical lens, and an interest in the redistribution of power. As Hill Collins explains, it affords an epistemic advantage, a 'standpoint' of 'objectivity' that insiders, too close to the situation, may not perceive (1986: S15). To counteract misperception, feminist standpoint theorist Sandra Harding (1993) argues that researchers should have 'strong objectivity' to appreciate their culturally and socially construed viewpoints. She suggests that when communities monopolise and universalise knowledge, they reinforce obscurations and biases and become disinclined to investigate alternative perspectives (1993: 51).<sup>64</sup> In this respect, the outsider-within is more attuned to bias and the repetitive norms through which power is reinstated. They commonly also expend extra energy to abide by the rules and social norms designed to keep them out, in order to fit in (Lorde 1982: 41).<sup>65</sup>

Some feminist theorists reject standpoint theory on the grounds of a 'bias paradox' and argue instead for empiricism. Tuana (2001) cites Louise Antony: "if we don't think it's good to be impartial then how can we object to men being partial" (2001: 13). She asks how, if all viewpoints are biased, we might discern the good from the bad biases. Michelson (2015) argues that the empiricist-standpoint dichotomy, which Tuana identifies, has generated more rigorous, nuanced accounts of feminist standpoint theory: "As currently understood,

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<sup>64</sup> Donna Haraway (1997) expands this argument: "working uncritically from the viewpoint of the 'standard' groups is the best way to come up with a particularly parochial and limited analysis ... which then masks as a general account that stands a good chance of reinforcing unequal privilege" (1997: 197).

<sup>65</sup> As Lorde (1982) explains: "My poetry, my life, my work, my energies for struggle were not acceptable unless I pretended to match somebody else's norm. I learned that not only couldn't I succeed at that game, but the energy needed for that masquerade would be lost to my work" (1982: 41).

standpoint theory focuses less on how things look from a given social location and more on the impact of inequitable social arrangements on how problems are understood, priorities determined, research methods chosen, and interpretations made” (2015: 68-9). This call for conscious positionality honed my interest in revealing the underlying social norms that perpetuate the sector’s whiteness.

Cognisant of Black feminist theory and positionality, I found myself slightly reticent in my line of questioning. Given the non-diverse composition of the sector, I did not wish to cause discomfort to my non-Black interviewees. In this regard, my ‘outsider-within’ positionality at times suffered ‘internalised oppression’ in protecting my white respondents from unease (ibid.: 68).

This situation relates to what England (1994) calls supplication. Here she:

[...] researcher-as-suppliant is predicated upon an unequivocal acceptance that the knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher. Essentially, the appeal of supplication lies in its potential for dealing with asymmetrical and potentially exploitative power relations by shifting a lot of power over to the researched (1994: 82).

This relation emphasises the researcher’s acquiescence of power and, to some extent, accounts for the reluctance to cause discomfort, in order to avoid conflict. England comes close to the internalised whiteness problem. She states that “fieldwork is personal ... A researcher is positioned by her/his gender, age, ‘race’/ethnicity, sexual identity, and so on, as well as by her/his biography, all of which may inhibit or enable certain research method insights in the field” (1994: 85). Thus, contrary to the perception that the researcher holds more power than the researched, the distribution of power may favour the researched.

Positionality and disclosure constitute complex research relations that can play out in multiple ways, including research compromise. Hsiung (1996) highlights instances in which researchers are compromised through their positionality as insider-outsiders in which they depend upon respondents for information, yet, simultaneously are compromised as insiders or outsiders-within in their historic relationships (1996: 127). My reluctance to cause discomfort to my respondents meant that certain conversations did not unfold to the full. In

other instances, respondents were not sufficiently 'identity-literate' (McIntosh 1998; DiAngelo 2015) and were unable to address diversity and social justice issues. These relationships often called for sensitive negotiation or renegotiation (Allum 1991: 5).

Given these conditions, my challenges were to interrogate my positionality, technologies of knowing, and the questions I posed. O'Connor (2004) believes that "the researcher needs to engage in critical reflexivity throughout the project so that positionality is made apparent" (2004: 169).<sup>66</sup> Dowling adds:

Interactions between two or more individuals always occur in a societal context. Societal norms, expectations of individuals, and structures of power influence the nature of these interactions. ... Critical reflexivity does not necessarily mean altering your research design, but it does imply that you reflect constantly on the research process and modify it where appropriate ... You should also think about how you communicate the results. Have you reflected as faithfully as possible what you have been told and/or observed without reproducing stereotypical representations (2010: 24, 30)?

My personal inquiry crystallised the fluidity of my own identities and roles as both an 'outsider-within' and a researcher. I had to consider how race, class, gender, age and educational experience influence my positionality and reporting (Nieves 2012; Rocha 2008; O'Connor 2004: 175). Here again, I was guided by extant research and reminded that sensitive findings which could alienate the researcher from the community can lead to under-reporting (Labaree 2002: 115). To avoid a situation of under- or misreporting, I deployed Labaree's three ethical measures to ensure that: (i) the findings improve understanding and motivate action more than they cause harm; (ii) "no less harmful way [of reporting] exists" to protect the integrity of the report; and (iii) the "means used to achieve the value [did] not undermine it" (2002: 115).

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<sup>66</sup> England (1994) also emphasises the value of reflexivity: "reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher. Indeed, reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions" (1994: 82). Okely (1992) adds: "those who protect the self from scrutiny could as well be labelled as self-satisfied and arrogant in presuming their presence and relations with others to be unproblematic" (1992: 2).

These methodological considerations guided and informed my research. They provided an ethical and political framework for the project and lend a considered approach to reporting.

### **2.3 A Qualitative, Multi-method Strategy**

To address the sensitive questions posed, I selected three organisations prominent in the US/UK mindfulness sector as primary informants. One of these delivers the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme in the US. The second, formed in the UK, mainly teaches Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) which is based on MBSR. The third, also in the UK, fashions its mindfulness programmes on MBSR. Two of the three organisations are aligned with higher education institutions. By contrast, the third organisation operates outside of academia and aligns itself with Buddhism. It offers a different perspective to the other two organisations and allows me to verify racialised trends in the sector across educational locations and two countries. The UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations (UKN), renamed the British Association of Mindfulness-Based Associations (BAMBA) in July 2019, also falls within the purview of my study. For my purposes I adopt BAMBA's former name, the UKN, which was used throughout the period of my fieldwork. The UK based organisations I examine were instrumental in its formation. While not itself a locus of my research, the UKN's standardisation of secular mindfulness teacher training pathways (TTPs), policies and instruments, form part of my investigation.

The three organisations have singly and collectively been instrumental in the direction of the Western mindfulness project. Their mutual collaboration shaped the mindfulness sector and informed what it did and meant. Together they yielded reconceptualisations of mindfulness, courses, research, publications, and cross-sectoral interactions with health, education, criminal justice, and the military. The MBSR programme formulated by Jon Kabat-Zinn is thus foundational to my thesis, as discussed in Chapter Three. As the sector evolved, corporate interest piqued in the US aided by a 1993 Bill Moyers PBS Special,<sup>67</sup> while

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<sup>67</sup> The Bill Moyers interview, *Healing the Mind*, "seen by over 40 million viewers" was one of a five-part series on mind-body medicine (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 54). All interviewees were responsible for innovation in fields ranging from cardiovascular disease, to overcoming addiction, to stress reduction with research grants and publications to support their ongoing work. The Kabat-Zinn interview is found at:

UK developments led to a 2014 Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group (MAPPG) (Cook 2016: 143). Their core business remains delivery and refinement of secular mindfulness courses, teacher training programmes, sectoral leadership and research. Over the past decade, the organisations expanded their reach globally and cross-sectorally through policy formulation and regulation.

To address my research questions, I investigated their structures, leadership, philosophies, strategies of expansion, policies and pedagogies. I obtained research data primarily through conversational interviews conducted between 2015 and 2018 with current staff and key ex-personnel. Initially, I identified executive members and teacher trainers as respondents. During our conversations, they in turn suggested that I also interview certain past employees or board members. In this way, I came to conduct thirty-two interviews.

In addition, I consulted organisational documents to which I gained access, either via the public domain such as Companies House Reports,<sup>68</sup> or through my position as an insider-researcher.

### **2.3.1 Data Collection: Fieldwork Design, Instruments and Sources**

This study draws on data collated at three fieldwork sites. Fieldwork, as I deploy it, includes a range of first-hand data gathering activities such as interviews, archival research and participation in the field (Pole and Hillyard 2015: 3; England 1994: 81).

At the early stages of my research, I familiarised myself with extant publications on the organisations and their programmes. This included public domain concept papers and research studies. *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on Its Meaning, Origins and Applications* (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2013) provided context for the field. The compendium conceptualises mindfulness, its relationship to Buddhism, and explores the underpinnings of

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<https://vimeo.com/39767361>. Footage from this video of the early classes Kabat-Zinn taught is still used in MBSR Teacher Training programmes to emphasise personal care and intimate attention to participants (Centre for Mindfulness TDI 2015). The qualities Kabat-Zinn displayed are cited as the bedrock of mindfulness teaching—embodiment, authenticity and kindness (McCown, Reibel and Macozzi 2011: 92; Jane Maitri WSF; Crane et. al. 2012: 80).

<sup>68</sup> In order to maintain anonymisation of the organisations, I do not cite the reports.



MBSR and MBCT. I also consulted material mapping the societal context in which secular mindfulness took root to consider its broader socio-political-economic frame. This led me to discuss the expansion of secular mindfulness' in relation to US/UK racial neoliberal ideologies and discourses. These sources constitute my literature review and theory chapter.

As part of resource collection, I conducted archival research of organisational materials where these were available including, for instance, UK Companies House records. Documents of this nature provided organisational histories, Board Member records, and changes in leadership. This served to verify information provided through interviews and on organisational websites.

In total, I conducted thirty-two interviews with current and former organisational staff and board members. The number of respondents per organisation were determined by organisation size. My respondent pool was drawn from personnel involved in the early days of organisations, and teacher trainers. Twelve were male and only one was a BME woman. This is due to the racialised staff composition and the predominance of white teacher trainers and senior staff in the three organisations. After attaining ethical approval to undertake fieldwork in the US and UK, I approached the organisations to obtain permission to undertake my work with them and received consent from all three, enabling me to approach interviewees directly. Nineteen interviews were held in person; twelve conversations took place using Skype where distance prohibited in-person contact. Out of the sample of thirty-two, six of my respondents, whom I had not met previously, were recommended to me as key informants by interviewees. Sixteen respondents are/were teacher trainers, three administrative staff, three ex-Board members, six executive decision-makers, two were diversity specialists associated with one of the organisations, and two were in receipt of organisational grants. I did not interview current board members.

I carried out semi-structured interviews with key organisational personnel using an interview guide that identified major themes (see Appendix One: Semi-structured Interview Guide). The guide covers four areas of investigation: (i) organisational structure and leadership, (ii) philosophy, ethics and conceptualisations of mindfulness, (iii) policies,

pedagogies, student representation, (iv) organisational demographics, diversity, social justice and exclusions. Examples of questions include: What is the institution's conceptualisation of mindfulness? Do agency and political power feature in the concept? Can you comment on poor racial diversity within the field?

The semi-structured guide allowed me to pursue areas of interest to the respondent. This meant that, within reason and the parameters of my study, interviews were conversational rather than rigidly confined to the guide. By this I mean that some of my questions resonated more with the interests and experiences of my interviewees. That said, I asked each of the respondents about organisational diversity, even though most of their responses were truncated since, as noted before, many of my respondents were unfamiliar with issues of diversity.

Since "interviewing ... is essentially a conversation, albeit one contrived for research purposes" (Dowling 2010: 24), the conversational nature of interviews enabled respondents to discuss questions they felt equipped to answer, and to elaborate on areas they regarded as pertinent. For instance, three white senior women in one of the organisations spoke about the gendered nature of the organisation, which none of the other respondents commented on, even when prompted. By contrast, most respondents spoke comfortably about the importance of mindfulness' recontextualisation and secularisation and the significance of standardising teacher training albeit without any reference to underlying cultures and social norms.

I verified interviewee information by holding second interviews with eight persons. In one case the interview was split into two parts due to time constraints. In another, the first interview introduced me to the organisation as a whole with the second focusing on my respondent's perspectives. In three instances, secondary interviews were held to clarify staff composition and the organisation's approach to diversity. Second interviews were held with three respondents to clarify their understanding of the evolving reconceptualisation of mindfulness and the shifting nature of the field. To further verify information, I also consulted website or organisational materials such as training manuals and strategic

planning documents, including unpublished institutional sources to identify personnel, especially the formation and changing composition of Boards.

Although I did not ask all interviewees to identify their 'race/ethnicity', I made assumptions about white respondents based on phenotypical features. I also found indirect ways of discussing race and the racial composition of the organisations. For example, I asked about reasons for the lack of diversity. This allowed people to talk about racial demographics and to self-identify as white in the process, or to comment on the white composition of the organisation without being asked about their race directly.

In my categorisation of race, I distinguish white from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)<sup>69</sup>—the UK descriptor—in preference to the Persons of Colour (POC) category more common in the US, on the understanding that BME is not a variegated category. I also utilise a normative gender binary cognisant of the failings of male/female categorisation and its accompanying limitations. Utilisation of the categorisation prescribes staff to either of two categories which I use for purposes of revealing the gendered nature of power. However, the crude binary does not accommodate non-binary or gender non-conforming personnel and suggests only two possibilities of gender. This erases those that fall outside the male-female binary. I regard this as a shortcoming in a thesis that emphasises diversity and defend it only on the grounds that none of the persons in my research declared a preference for non-binary pronouns. Admittedly though, my respondents were not asked for their pronoun preferences. My research into board members and advisors whom I do not know, slips into normativity with regard to both race and gender.

I also discerned age even though I did not always ask people to disclose their ages. I distinguish between middle-age (M) and seniority (S) and use the ages of thirty-five and sixty-five as boundaries.<sup>70</sup> Public domain information helped me confirm my respondents' ages in all but two cases one of whom I was easily able to identify as 'middle-aged' and the

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<sup>69</sup> Although my BME categorisation is not further delineated in this study, it lends itself to future disaggregation and acknowledges ethnicity among black teachers.

<sup>70</sup> I depart from the Oxford English Dictionary defines middle-aged as 45 to 65 distinguishing it from early adulthood (younger than 40) and 'aging' (older than 65) (oxforddictionaries.com).

other, given her length of service and the way she dated her past activities in our interview, I categorised as 'senior'. For a list of anonymised interviews, see Appendix Two.

### **2.3.2 Data Analysis: Thematic Coding**

Guided by the work of Gibbs (2007) I manually coded interview transcripts to ascertain dominant themes. This process revealed broad themes such as mindfulness' recontextualisation and authorisation, its proclaimed universal appeal and organisational ethics, lack of diversity, research prioritisation, curriculum standardisation, and teacher regulation. Although few respondents elaborated on matters of diversity and social justice, which constitutes a significant part of my analysis, this absence of response was itself revealing. I drilled down into the themes that emerge in interviews to improve my understanding of respondents' interpretations of secularisation, neutrality and tendencies to bypass difference, especially racial differences. Few of my interviewees were cognisant of 'race' as a problem within the sector. Only three of my respondents, a BME woman, a white middle-aged woman and a white, senior woman were conscious of the concept of post-racism. Several respondents, ten in total, inquired into how to shift the sector rather than providing answers. As a result, the absence of discussions of race became significant. The default to whiteness, and the invisibility of power within the sector thus became prominent, drawing my attention to the hidden social norms that govern the field.

In reporting, when more than two respondents report the same information, I use the statistical device of clustering developed by Driver and Kroeber (1932) in anthropology, to present their collective views. In this event, I use the descriptor 'staff members' (SMs). I take on board Bailey's (1975) caution that in the process of grouping responses, I homologise them (1975: 59).

## **2.4 Ethical Considerations and Anonymisation**

I observed SOAS' *Research Ethics Policy* and obtained institutional clearance to conduct research for this project in the US and UK. SOAS policy requires that respondents are clear about their role in the research process. To fulfil this requirement, each of my interviewees signed Consent Forms (see Appendix Three) allowing me to use their information

anonymously. For this reason, I have anonymised interviewees and organisations to protect identities and allow for a freer discussion of my findings.

Anonymisation is itself a complex area and while every effort is made to conceal individual and organisational identities, I have had to balance this with maintaining integrity of the data (Saunders 2015: 617). This has meant that I sometimes omit quotations that make the respondent or the organisation's identity explicit. While this protects identity, it has limited my use of the information obtained. At times, this creates general, non-specific reporting, or statements that appear unreferenced. I have had to balance my need to build a case with data integrity and protection. Despite these constraints, I have been able to report on organisational demographics and build a case based on the sector's demonstrated non-diversity, without compromising anonymity.

Respondents have been given pseudonyms while organisations are now named Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha. Specificities of their organisational histories are omitted so as not to reveal their identities. In my reporting, interviewee information is indicated by referencing their pseudonym followed by their organisational location and their race-age-gender designation, for example, John Karuna WSM.

In keeping with anonymisation of the organisations, I do not cite their documentation directly, so as not to identify the organisations. Instead, I simply acknowledge Companies House sources, for instance. Similarly, where archival materials would distinguish the organisations, I cite them as organisational materials according to the pseudonyms.

## **2.5 Research Limitations**

Among the limitations of this research is that of interviewing only organisational staff and board members. These leaders, decision-makers and teacher trainers offer institutional perspectives on organisational visions, discourses and strategies. Their views are largely consensual and acquiesce to institutional cultures. Where they are critical, respondents' perspectives are generally circumspect. The study did not elicit the views of mindfulness users to help verify or counterbalance perspectives offered by organisational staff. More specifically, the investigation would have gained from the input of BME mindfulness

practitioners and teachers who operate under the auspices of the organisations. It would be particularly insightful to learn from BME trainees' experiences of training spaces and programme content. This would allow for a more thorough investigation of 'white space' and its potential transformation. This is not to say that additional BME views did not inform my thinking. They did so through informal conversations with teacher trainees from Maitri, Upeksha and Karuna as well as other organisations. These could have been formalised.

The current study employed conversational interview techniques which usually entail a number of conversations with each respondent. Time pressures meant that conversations were not always in-depth. Many of my respondents were also unfamiliar with the field of diversity which limited the scope of our conversations. I interviewed eight respondents twice allowing for a cultivation of rapport and a revisiting of material. A second round of interviews with all respondents which allowed for longer periods of reflection would, potentially, have brought richer conversation and insight.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Research into relational power of any sector is by its nature sensitive and potentially threatens the privileges it exposes. Yet such research is worthwhile in advancing knowledge in the interests of justice, the transformation of dominant ideologies, and greater belonging for marginalised groups. To remain transparent about my interests in transforming the mindfulness sector, the research strategy I embraced foregrounds my positionality within the sector. My research design to review multiple organisations emphasises systemic trends as opposed to individual organisational peculiarities. At the same time, it is through individual voices that the evolution of mindfulness is understood. In other words, the multi method strategy to examine organisational demographics, policies and procedures by consulting documentation that was then given voice through personnel, animates my research. Thus, while I interviewed individuals as part of my data gathering process, this formed part of a larger strategy to unveil and understand institutional dynamics, politics and performance. Individual interviews made it possible for me to undertake a systemic appraisal of mindfulness in the US/UK.

In this larger context, respondents provided insight into the (re-)enactment of social norms and cultures. It was their inputs that brought organisational practices to life allowing me to investigate my primary questions and appreciate the extent to which power and privilege are embedded in the mindfulness project. At the same time, I am struck by the discomfort of raising questions regarding power, privilege and inequalities. These topics, although central to my research questions and always raised, were sometimes skimmed to avoid discomfort and disconnect with my respondents.

The silence of two of the organisations when asked multiple times to verify their demographic data, could be read as a reluctance to expose their race-gender profile. This 'non-collaboration' pressed me to use additional sources (such as archival, organisational and public domain materials) to verify information. It suggests organisational vulnerability and perhaps a reluctance to address the sector's racialisation despite respondents' expressed concerns with correcting these imbalances.

Upon reflection, one of the primary lessons for me in this research project is the wide racialised gap within the mindfulness sector and the different ways of seeing the sector. For all my respondents, the value of mindfulness as an intervention that reduces suffering inspires their work. Within organisational frameworks that invisibilise power and neglect questions of race and difference, the social norms that undergird the sector are naturally reproduced. While these features seem blatant to me as a Black researcher located as an outsider-within, I am struck by the dissonance between myself as a researcher and my interviewees who, bar three, by and large did not question social norms. For most of them, the white nature of mindfulness was of less concern than researching mindfulness' efficacy. At the same time, I am aware of a vision I share with respondents of seeing mindfulness as potentially collectively transformative. While dissonance in our experiences of the sector such as my experience of 'white space'—shared by my BMI respondent and acknowledged by two other white respondents—raises questions for further research, for my study, these were left largely unresolved and at times unspoken and hence personalised. For me this is an interesting finding which all too easily renders discomfort within mindfulness spaces episodic and individualised. It raises questions regarding not only the possibilities of transformation but organisational will.

On the basis of my methodological strategy, each of the next three chapters explores a research question.



## Chapter Three: Mindfulness Organisations in Postracial Neoliberal Societies

### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter One set out that secularism works alongside ideologies of neoliberalism, postracialism and individualism to generate models premised on Othering. I suggest here that secularisation comprises these ideologies now intrinsically embodied in the mindfulness project. To illustrate this point, I advance an inquiry into mindfulness' whiteness and make a case for what becomes invisibilised in the universalisation of MBSR.

This chapter addresses why particular organisations in the mindfulness movement arise from the development of secular Buddhism in white neoliberal societies. I discuss the emergence of three mindfulness organisations in the neoliberal US and UK which I have anonymised as Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha. Instrumental in the US/UK expansion of secular mindfulness, these organisations are also central to its globalisation. Following neoliberalism's 'commodification of everything' (Harvey 2005: 165) their Western models permeate global markets. As mindfulness takes root and crosses borders, questions of power, control and privilege obtain. This chapter aims to address these issues with respect to the three organisations.

I concur with Walsh (2016) that "neither secular mindfulness nor critiques of mindfulness are value-free" (2016: 153). I add to this body of critique to argue that organisations and communities generated by mindfulness' secularisation are shaped by historic socio-economic and political inequalities prevalent in the US and UK. Taking a step back from their expressed intentions to 'reduce suffering', I probe their secularisation strategies. This leads me to explore their dominant interests, agendas, programmes and audiences. I argue that Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's race-gender demographics produce political standpoints oppositional to diversity. Their postracial, 'post-identity' cultures, consistent with secularist ideology (Asad 2003: 5), embed white privilege and conflict with pledges to make mindfulness accessible to all. My argument of a racialised secularisation process leads me to question the organisations' authoritative claims of universality.

The proliferation of mindfulness programmes generated a critical mindfulness scholarship. This outlines an ambivalent relationship with Buddhism, claimed on the one hand as the doctrinal provenance of secular mindfulness, yet dismissed for its religiosity. The absence of an explicit Buddhist frame is replaced by a proclaimed innate ethics that guides a self-regulation and wellbeing agenda. Emergent discourses reveal the socio-political influences that shape secular mindfulness and underpin its implication in neoliberal individualisation—as argued in Chapter One (Purser and Loy 2013; Payne 2016; Davies 2016: 56). A growing body of work problematises cultural appropriation enacted through systemic whiteness (Hsu 2017a; Ng and Purser 2015; Cannon 2016: 404) and critiques the commercialisation and corporatisation of mindfulness (Wilson 2016: 118; Titmuss 2016: 181; Brazier 2016: 71; Payne 2016: 125). I aim to investigate the diversification prospects and strategies of the organisations.

As I set out to explore these questions, I wish to add the following: the explosion of mindfulness in the US and UK has meant that the organisations researched have delivered mindfulness to untold numbers of individuals primarily through wide-ranging clinical, schools, corporate, and military programmes (Purser 2014; Forbes 2016: 355; Titmuss 2013; Brewer 2014: 803). Interventions in prisons are less advanced (Adarves-Yorno and Mahdon 2017; Samuelson et al. 2007: 254) but plans for specialised training of prison staff are underway (Jeff Upeksha WMM). Bristow (2018) reports that since mindfulness programmes first launched in parliaments in Sweden in 2012 and Britain in 2013, five further European Parliaments are following the MAPPG lead (Bristow 2018). My critique does not detract from the value of secular mindfulness to specific audiences. I aim to investigate the diversification prospects and strategies of Maitri, Upeksha and Karuna.

### **3.2 Maitri**

Maitri which delivers and trains teachers in MBSR, was informed by Kabat-Zinn's work. Kabat-Zinn (1991) explains that popularisation of mindfulness was at the heart of his vision:

Hospitals and medical centers in this society are dukkha magnets ... People are drawn to hospitals primarily when they're suffering, so it's very natural

to introduce programs to help them deal with the enormity of their suffering in a systematic way—as a complement to medical efforts (1991).

His initial aim to medicalise mindfulness in order to work alongside clinical interventions (Harrington and Dunne 2015: 627; Brown 2016: 78),<sup>71</sup> informed a strategy that considered suffering in relation to physical and mental pain. Early emphasis on personal stress devoid of structural causes, produced a model inconsistent with prosocial or community-led mindfulness programmes. Stress was pathologized and individualised.

Five factors frame the establishment of Maitri which adopted the MBSR programme. Given their close associations, these factors also shape the emergence of Karuna and Upeksha. First, Maitri's formation coincided with a burgeoning 'spiritual marketplace' (Carrette and King 2005: 29) that emphasised 'personal power' (Roof 1999: 82) and individualised wellbeing (Eagleton 2016; Carrette and King 2005: 26). These developments are regarded as tenets of advanced capitalism and the rise of neoliberalism (Cederström and Spicer 2015). Wellbeing trends attract attention for their resonance with social atomisation (Heffernan 2015) and the privatisation of health (Crawford 1980: 365; Henderson 2012; Wiest et al. 2015: 22). Kabat-Zinn's 'second Renaissance',<sup>72</sup> influenced by the Italian Renaissance—and which I discuss at length in Chapter Four—conforms to this thought (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 64). It places the isolated individual rather than communities and movements at the centre of social change (Gilroy 1990: 71). These trends thwart social justice and the distribution of health services to marginalised groups.

Second, the advent of behavioural medicine encouraged patient-centred care which shifted focus away from pharmaceutical drugs, towards an innate human capacity for healing (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 19-20, 39). Behavioural medicine and secular mindfulness are mutually

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<sup>71</sup> 'Initial' because Kabat-Zinn held a much loftier vision of a 'second Renaissance'. He saw MBSR as a skilful way (means) of mainstreaming mindfulness and *Buddhadharma* and claimed mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) as "secular Dharma-based portals ... [replacing] ... more traditional Buddhist framework or vocabulary" (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2011: 12-14).

<sup>72</sup> Kabat-Zinn defines the 'second Renaissance' as a "flourishing on this planet akin to a second, and this time global Renaissance, for the benefit of all sentient beings and our world" and sees "the current interest in mindfulness and its applications as signalling a multi-dimensional emergence of great transformative and liberative promise" (2013: 281). He perceives his organisation, the Centre for Mindfulness, as "the epicenter of a world-wide—sometimes people use the word 'revolution,' or a world-wide Renaissance, if you will, in mindfulness, in clinical medicine, in clinical research as well as in neuroscience" (2014: 64).

individualising despite concepts of interconnectedness and common humanity. Both emphasise ‘inner resourcefulness’ (ibid.: 14)—a feature of personalised healing—that gained traction through their cooperation. This ideological underpinning again underplays socio-economic and political causes of and solutions to ill-health and establishes MBSR as an individualised, palliative intervention.

Third, MBSR emerges amidst unfolding interactions between the psy-disciplines (McAvoy 2014: 1527),<sup>73</sup> the migration of Buddhist influences to the West, and scientific endorsement of Buddhist practices (Moloney 2016: 284; Harrington and Dunne 2015: 621). Within this context, Harrington and Dunne (2015) recall historic precursors that pave the way for mindfulness’ popularisation. They include Suzuki’s<sup>74</sup> 1950s popularisation of Zen among Western psychoanalysts, the 1960s’ psychedelic culture that fostered interest in Eastern philosophy and research into the physiological effects of Transcendental Meditation, and Herbert Benson’s 1970s popularisation of the relaxation response framed as self-care technologies and patient empowerment (2015: 622-7). Nathoo (2016) adds: “therapeutic relaxation instruction was aimed mainly at an upper-middle class audience” and suppressed symptoms rather than addressed cause (2016: 76). These developments spawned psychologisation and scientification of mindfulness. Such ‘apolitical’ framing of secularisation says Ng (2016b: 4;<sup>75</sup> Ng and Purser 2015), allows Harrington and Dunne to dismiss race and Orientalism in their trajectory, and thereby, buttress whiteness.

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<sup>73</sup> Rose explains that the psy-disciplines and psy-sciences are a historical project that emerged in concert with crises of capitalism as technologies that claim authority on understandings of ‘mental health’ and impose these on individuals and society: “The modern self is impelled to make life meaningful through the search for happiness and self-realization in his or her individual biography: the ethics of subjectivity are inextricably locked into the procedures of power” (Rose 1998: 79).

<sup>74</sup> Sharf (1998) notes suspicion cast on Suzuki’s Buddhist credentials: “Suzuki’s qualifications as an exponent of Zen are somewhat dubious. Suzuki did engage in Zen practice at Engakuji during his student days at Tokyo Imperial University, and he enjoyed a close relationship with the abbot Shaku Soen (1859–1919). But by traditional standards Suzuki’s training was relatively modest: he was never ordained, his formal monastic education was desultory at best, and he never received institutional sanction as a Zen teacher. This is not to impugn Suzuki’s academic competence; he was a gifted philologist who made a lasting contribution to the study of Buddhist texts. In the end, however, his approach to Zen, with its unrelenting emphasis on an unmediated inner experience, is not derived from Buddhist sources so much as from his broad familiarity with European and American philosophical and religious writings” (1998: 274).

<sup>75</sup> According to Ng: “our secular age is experienced within an ‘immanent frame’, a natural order without necessary reference to anything outside itself” (2016b: 4).

Internal organisational decisions and cultures—the fourth and fifth factors—sit alongside these external influences. Fourth, state and foundation grants funded outreach programmes. These initiatives traversed MBSR’s original borders and led to an engagement with new and different audiences. The programmes highlighted socio-cultural and political-economic underpinnings of stress and brought into question MBSR’s universal suitability. When funding for these programmes ceased, this ‘alternative’ work ended.

Fifth, Maitri’s formation imitates patterns of systemic white privilege: organisational leaders and decision-makers were often academically-appointed white males, while contract workers in non-academic posts were mainly white females (Kat Maitri WSF; Col Maitri WMF; Pip Maitri WSF). Maitri’s efforts to popularise secular mindfulness neglected this gender-race profile. This uncritical approach could be read as institutionalised racism and sexism, the ramifications of which undermine inclusion.

To gain an understanding of Maitri, I review MBSR’s relation to behavioural medicine, the outreach programmes, and Maitri demographics.

### **3.2.1 Behavioural Medicine and Mindfulness’ Mutuality**

Behavioural medicine intersects with secular mindfulness to produce an individualised healing model that is consistent with privatised wellbeing and commercialisation. The language of patient-centeredness underpinning both projects, is portrayed to be in the interests of service users.

As doctors failed to attain patient recovery targets, MBSR increasingly presented an attractive, low-cost alternative (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 36). This emboldened mindfulness’ mission to reduce suffering through a medicalised intervention. Kabat-Zinn offered to:

[...] challenge [patients] to do something for themselves. We’d create a clinic in the form of a course that was designed to teach people how to *take better care of themselves, and particularly designed for the people falling through the cracks of the healthcare system* ... And the idea was that we’ll train them in fairly intensive Buddhist meditation without the Buddhism, and mindful Hatha yoga (2014: 14-15, emphasis added).

MBSR was accordingly designed to encourage patients to relate to their illnesses differently, through a combination of mind and body training that recognised the whole patient. As a Maitri respondent suggests, Kabat-Zinn was offering “an approach around developing a different relationship to physical illness that was not responding well to traditional forms of medical intervention ... to allow people to change their relationship to their illness, whatever their illness was” (Tina Maitri WMF). His approach accorded with shifts underway in Behavioural medicine<sup>76</sup> which marked a departure from Cartesian thought.<sup>77</sup> The latter produced a mind/body split in biomedicine; Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness emphasised instead individual integrity, contributing to the advent of holistic medicine (Ross 2009: 13).

Kabat-Zinn’s contribution to behavioural medicine placed MBSR in the realm of integrative medicine.<sup>78</sup> He joined the nascent Board of the Division of Preventive and Behavioural Medicine in 1983, saying the opportunity gave rise to a “whole new field in medicine and science” (2014: 30). MBSR’s suitability to different clinical populations and its original hospital location (ibid.: 16; Wylie 2015) led to its medical endorsement.

Positioned within the overlay between Buddhism and integral medicine, MBSR encouraged participants:

[...] to do something for themselves that no one on the planet could do for them, that you can’t do for them, that their spouse can’t do for them, that their parents can’t do for them, that their clergy can’t do for them, that no one can do for them, namely that your patients have to sort of *take some degree of responsibility for their own health and wellbeing*. This was quite radical thinking in those days! (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 14, emphasis added).

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<sup>76</sup> The first Behavioural Medicine Conference was held at Yale University, 4-6 February 1977, supported by Departments of Psychology, Psychiatry, the School of Medicine and the National Institute of Health (Shwartz and Weiss 1978: 3). It defined behavioural medicine as: “the field concerned with the development of behavioural science knowledge and techniques relevant to the understanding of physical health and illness and the application of this knowledge and techniques to prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation. Psychosis, neurosis, and substance abuse are included only insofar as they contribute to physical disorders as an end point” (ibid.).

<sup>77</sup> Descartes’ paradigm of ‘rationality’ split mind and body to create a false dichotomy between thought and affect in which the body became an ‘after-thought’ (Grosfoguel 2013: 75).

<sup>78</sup> Kabat-Zinn was the instigator and founder of the Consortium of Academic Health Centers for Integrative Medicine, a University of Massachusetts initiative which has evolved into a 60+ strong Consortium of medical schools concerned with integrative medicine (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 39). This Consortium, despite its size, incurs critique similar to that of mindfulness for its clinical research base (Bellamy 2014).

The seeds of responsabilisation<sup>79</sup> thus took root as self-reliance and freedom from medical and pharmaceutical authority. Patients' inner resourcefulness—a view Maitri staff echo (Jane Maitri WSF; Kat Maitri WSF; Pip Maitri WSF)—foregrounded interior healing processes and personal capacities for wellbeing as traits of the independent citizen. In concert with growing ideologies of individualism and neoliberalism, responsabilisation facilitated the self-care industry.

Sociology critics suggest that innate healing capacities are empowering for individuals yet feed precarity (Lorey 2015: 3; Jørgensen 2015: 7) and individualisation (Cederström and Spicer 2015: 25). They critique the individualised model in social contexts of dispossession and poor health provision. To them, secular mindfulness is at risk of making individuals responsible for their own wellbeing regardless of their socio-economic conditions. As Lorey (2015) argues, this presents a far greater intersectional burden for the precariat<sup>80</sup> who endure multiple oppressions in contrast to middle classes who have better access to healthcare (2015: 19). In an age in which elevated stress levels, disease, and mental illness are increasingly linked to socio-economic status and political power (EHRC 2015; 2017), the burden of ill-health is borne most heavily by the most marginalised (Kaplan 2009; Dodd and Munck 2005). Instead of recognising these factors, mindfulness—in keeping with secularism (Asad 2003: 5)—remains aloof to structural conditions that construct race and identity. Universality and inclusion demand that the same programme is delivered to participants regardless of their disposition to power.

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<sup>79</sup> “‘Responsibilization’ is a term developed in the governmentality literature to refer to the process whereby subjects are rendered individually responsible for a task which previously would have been the duty of another—usually a state agency—or would not have been recognized as a responsibility at all. The process is strongly associated with neoliberal political discourses, where it takes on the implication that the subject being responsabilized has avoided this duty or the responsibility has been taken away from them in the welfare state era and managed by an expert or government agency” (Wakefield and Flemming 2009).

<sup>80</sup> The precariat is a social class that suffers the uncertainty of employment, job security, emotional and psychological poor health (Standing 2011). In her analysis of precarity, Lorey adopts a Foucauldian understanding of modern governmentality as “an art of governing people, not things or territories. With the pastoral form of power, specific modes of individualisation, including becoming a Western-modern subject, are both condition and effect at the same time. Individualisation means isolation, and this kind of separation is primarily a matter of constituting oneself by way of imaginary relationships, constituting one’s own inner being, and only secondly and to a lesser extent by way of connections with others. Yet this interiority and self-references is not an expression of independence, but rather the crucial element in the pastoral relation of obedience” (2015: 3).

Arthington (2016) and others query the absence of socio-economic and political determinants of suffering in the strategies of mindfulness organisations (Arthington 2016: 88; Hyland 2017: 15; Stanley 2012: 639). Kirmayer (2015), for instance, argues that clinical interventions which are dislocated from causes and conditions of ill-health, burden the individual with recovery. Healthism, precarity and responsabilisation, he says, encourage individual resilience and coping (2015: 451) in the absence of community support. Individual agency, confined to living with or tolerating oppression, is inequivalent to systemic change.

Amidst escalating stress and social discord, theorists explain processes of health privatisation (Skrabanek 1998; Crawford 1980; Henderson 2010; 2012). Skrabanek speaks of medicalisation (1998: 15) and Crawford coins ‘healthism’<sup>81</sup> (1980: 365) to describe the state’s withdrawal of duty to citizens who are increasingly and exclusively responsible for their own health. Ironically, behavioural medicine and secular mindfulness approaches, designed to empower patients, reinforce social atomisation, the rise of the self-help industry and the privatisation of health care (Henderson 2010; Lau 2000: 4). This picture is further complicated by Hsu and Ng’s critiques of whiteness. Gendered, racialised societies rank exclusions. They create greatest intersectional discriminations against black and brown women (Crenshaw 1989). These groups are most marginalised in universalised models formulated by heteronormative white men. In the confluence of neoliberal dispossession, whiteness and healthism, illness is seen as weakness. When black and brown people are ill, they are further racialised as weak and lazy. Because individuals are theorised as autonomous, the ill are morally impelled to work harder at self-improvement (Payne 2016: 130). Without engaging these complexities of exclusion through white privilege, organisations pursued patient-focused, self-care models. They used science and research—practices that reinforce individualism—to strengthen their cause (Lavelle 2016: 240).

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<sup>81</sup> Rose (1999) expands on healthism in his consideration of the psy-sciences and responsabilisation: it connects “public objectives for the good health and good order of the social body with the desire of individuals for health and well-being ... individuals are addressed on the assumption that they want to be healthy and enjoined to freely seek out the ways of living [such as mindfulness] most likely to promote their own health” (1999: 74, 86-87).



### 3.2.2 Endorsing MBSR through the Gateway of Science

In 1982, an uncontrolled mindfulness study trained 51 chronic pain patients who had become unresponsive to traditional medical care, in self-regulation (Kabat-Zinn 1982: 33). It revealed a ‘significant reduction’ in stress symptoms: 65% reported in excess of a 33% reduction on the Pain Rating Index and 50% reported more than a 50% reduction (ibid.: 40-1):

[...] the chronic pain wasn’t necessarily going away but people were learning to be in a wiser relationship to it and it wasn’t impeding or undermining their quality of life to the same degree ... People are tapping into their own deep interior resources for learning, for growing, and for healing. My working definition for healing is ‘coming to terms with things as they are’ (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 19-21).

This early study reaffirmed Kabat-Zinn’s belief in mindfulness’ capacity to unleash a patient’s healing capabilities and their appreciation of life (ibid.: 19). Further research then set out to investigate MBSR’s impact on chronic pain and psoriasis (ibid.; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth and Burney 1985; Kabat-Zinn et al. 1986; Kabat-Zinn and Chapman-Waldrop 1988), as well as secondary diagnoses of anxiety and panic (Kabat-Zinn et al. 1992; Miller et al. 1995). Research continued to favour mindfulness over conventional medicine: “here were these people in MBSR [programmes] who were not doing anything medically, pharmacologically, and they were getting dramatically better, to the point where their lifestyle was improving” (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 19).

Positive findings, a source of encouragement to the medical field and to Kabat-Zinn, further enhanced mindfulness’ stature among medical staff and psy-professionals (ibid.: 20; Carrette and King 2005: 54; Ng 2016b: 20). Yet, these studies also brought into focus secular mindfulness’ pathologized,<sup>82</sup> psychologised<sup>83</sup> perspectives of stress (Goto-Jones 2013;

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<sup>82</sup> Pathology, it is argued, remains “the most enduring model of disease causation and progression” (Gritti 2017: 37). Biological factors are identified as singular contributories to disease pathology; socio-economic factors are disregarded.

<sup>83</sup> The “psy-disciplines’, as Nikolas Rose (1999; 1998) termed them, paved the way for a therapeutic culture of the self, within which the teachings of religion or wisdom traditions are being ‘rebranded’ as individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality” (Ng 2016b: 20).

Grossman 2015: 17). Mindfulness research concentrated on the bio-physiology of stress at the cost of its politicisation.<sup>84</sup>

Recent investigations query the validity of mindfulness research. They comment on methodological flaws, small sample sizes and positive reporting (Coronado-Montoya et. al. 2016; Goyal et al. 2014: 357; Samuel 2014: 571; Khoury et al. 2013: 763; Buchholz, 2015: 1328). For example, a 2014 meta-analysis which set out to determine mindfulness meditation efficacy “screened 18,753 unique citations, and 1,651 full-text articles,” yet only forty-seven of these met their inclusion criteria (Goyal et al. 2014: 361). The study found “no evidence that meditation programs were better than any other active treatment (i.e. drugs, exercise, and other behavioural therapies)” (ibid.: 358). These critiques, as is evident from their publication dates, emerged decades after the early mindfulness studies. They pertain to MBSR and MBCT alike and highlight scientific reductionism, positivism and inattention to critique (Lavelle 2016: 233; Dimidjian and Segal 2015: 593). These concerns are important in societies that rely on science and research for validation.

Maitri and Upeksha have used “the gateway of science” precisely for their popularisation and mediation of secular mindfulness (Braun 2017: 184). Yet, like neoliberal ideologies, science universalises and individualises stress. It eschews its causes and homologises difference. In this role, claims of mindfulness’ global reach propagate cultures that blame individuals who remain unwell. Given where the greatest burden of ill-health resides in highly stratified societies, mindfulness adds to systemic inequality, postracialism and whiteness. Yet the sector refuses critique of political framing, faulty research and troublesome paradigms.

Although mindfulness retains precedence as a healthier treatment route to pharmaceuticals, as an intervention that quashes differential identities and inequalities

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<sup>84</sup> In this respect, secular mindfulness differs from behavioural medicine’s biopsychosocial perspective which presents a bi-directional relationship between biological and psychosocial events (McLaren 1998: 86). Gritti suggests that this is not always achieved in practice due to an inability to contest the entrenched Cartesian paradigm that governs pathology (Gritti 2017: 37).

generally, questions arise as to its proclaimed universality. Premised on uncritical research, Maitri extended secular mindfulness to marginalised communities.

### 3.2.3 Widening Participation: Outreach Programmes<sup>85</sup>

From 1992–1999, confident in its research findings, Maitri attempted to ‘widen participation’—bringing secular mindfulness to marginalised groups—through the delivery of MBSR programmes at prisons and an inner-city clinic. Universality underpins the strategy (Lavelle 2016: 239; Walsh 2016: 156). Specially constituted teams of Maitri teachers delivered standardised MBSR to racially-diverse, incarcerated, low income and unemployed groups. These populations were new to Maitri.

The purpose of these programmes was to mitigate poverty, crime, and violence and demonstrate MBSR’s universality (Kabat-Zinn et al. 2016). Maitri assumed that the medicalised model would prove beneficial for all clinical populations, and for non-clinical groups regardless of race, income, and further structural determinants of ill-health.

Secularism functions here in two ways. First, it advocates the ‘natural’ migration of mindfulness to constitute a Western, medicalised, non-Buddhist intervention. Second, it advances the universalisation of MBSR from an individualised endeavour to a community health intervention (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 282), and from a predominantly white, middle-class clinic to settings differentiated by race/ethnicity, income, gender, faith and other signifiers of difference. Neutrality works alongside universality to reinforce an ‘apolitical’, ahistorical mindfulness. The refusal of a politics that identifies structural underpinnings of poverty and its link to ill-health, individualises both. Described as a ‘mitigator of poverty, crime and violence,’ secular mindfulness individualises and pathologises structural discrimination. Using a language of ‘common humanity, inner-resourcefulness and self-care’, these secular mindfulness interventions train individuals to better cope with poverty. Secular mindfulness here assumes a palliative, pastoral role. At the same time, poverty and joblessness are equated with instances of pain and stress unrelated to dispossession and discrimination. Ahmed (2014) argues that the assemblage of pain as a universal category devoid of power is

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<sup>85</sup> There is scant material available for this section. Discussion is based on a single inner-city clinic study of an MBSR intervention (Kabat-Zinn et al. 2016), and a single prison project study which is generic in its reporting (Samuelson et al. 2007).

used to create equivalences that serve to ‘flatten’ disparate experiences (2014: 31). When secularism bypasses difference, it denies identity as well as its determinants. Histories and politics are erased as discourses of depoliticisation of inequalities emerge.

The deployment of MBSR as mitigatory and palliative, encourages a non-reactive, calm relationship to structurally induced violence and pain. In a 2015 dialogue with Angela Davis, Kabat-Zinn—taken with Davis’ decarceration project (Davis 2003; 2016)—underscores the links between crime, poverty and systemic injustices (Davis – Kabat-Zinn Dialogue 2015). Yet, as a mitigator, MBSR trains individuals to be in a ‘different relationship’ with the causes and results of their structurally-induced distress, in the same way that it trains people to relate to physical pain differently. Pain is replaced by poverty, crime and violence. The participant is coaxed to ‘be with’ these forms of suffering more spaciously in order to respond ‘more skilfully’ (Brown 2016: 79). If indeed this underlies MBSR’s expansion project, it burdens the individual with transcending epistemic violence through altering their perspective on experiences of discrimination. This introduces an intersectional responsabilisation: individuals are held accountable not only for their health, but also for their poverty.

### **3.2.3.1 An example of MBSR in an Inner-City Programme**

A single 2016 publication reports on MBSR delivered to a “multicultural, multi-ethnic population of [an] economically impoverished inner city” (Kabat-Zinn n.d.: 2). Maitri’s intention was, according to multiple respondents: “to bring mindfulness to those who would otherwise not have access to it” (Chris Maitri WSF). Kabat-Zinn et al. (2016) recognise the established links between race, income, poverty and stress or socio-economic status and ill-health (Adler et al. 1994: 15), noting that few stress reduction interventions serve dispossessed, racially disparaged communities (Kabat-Zinn et al. 2016: 3). The acknowledgement of structural poverty introduces a new politicised discourse of stress. This marks a juncture at which mindfulness organisations could enhance the medicalised model of stress and ill-health with contextually contingent understandings. Yet the standard MBSR, hyper-individualised model was implemented. Maitri altered the conditions under which the programme was offered but made no changes to the model itself.

MBSR was offered to 828 individuals out of 1,898 medical referrals, 538 (65%) of whom completed the programme and 86 of whom took it numerous times. Delivery was split into Spanish- and English-speaking groups, each offering nineteen cycles of eight-week courses. More than 60% of participants, mostly in the Latinx group, were in receipt of governmental assistance. About 20% of participants were employed, more so among the English-speakers. 80% of Spanish- and 72% of English-speaking completers earned less than \$15,000 per annum. The Spanish-speaking classes were representative of the diversity of Caribbean, Central and South American societies. The English-speaking cohorts included white, African American, and English-speaking Latinx. Participants commonly signed up to “learn to cope more effectively with stress, pain, anxiety and depression” (ibid.). Most participants had complex personal histories of family, psychosocial and economic stress. Pre- and post-intervention interviews were conducted by the class instructor to offer personalised attention. In Cycle 3, introductory group meetings replaced pre-interviews due to low (20%) attendance (ibid.: 5-6). To improve programme accessibility, classes, bilingual day-care and transportation were free. Standard materials were translated into Spanish, although the workbook was only available from Cycle 13 (ibid.). These changes show a sensitivity to improving access via acknowledgement of participants’ structural limitations imposed through systemic marginalisation. In other words, Maitri acts here to correct exclusions. However, it delivers the same ‘apolitical’ MBSR programme without linking the causes of stress to those of dispossession, and so only looks for alleviation in the existing model.

Findings across the 19 cycles, based on self-report measures, show an 11.7% increase in self-esteem; a 35.8% decrease in anxiety; 23.94% reduction in medical symptoms. The report also states that a follow-up of 35 participants shows that mindfulness has enduring benefit (ibid.: 10). However, of the 1,898 original referrals, only 28.3% completed the programme; 48% were non-compliant compared to 25% at the ‘parent’ clinic (ibid.: 9). The 65% completion rate among the 828 who started the programme is significantly lower than the 84% average completion rate at the parent clinic.

Research did not report on whether the intervention mitigated crime, poverty and violence. Since MBSR was also delivered to test secular mindfulness’ universality (ibid.: 11), the authors conclude that MBSR can successfully reduce stress and improve mental health

among a poorer, racially-diverse demographic “in spite of significant psychosocial pressures that make compliance with the completion of any extended behavioural intervention difficult” (ibid.: 10). In a different reflection, Kabat-Zinn says: “our work there did show very clearly that people at the lowest socioeconomic level, including homeless people, could actually benefit from mindfulness practice in a number of ways” (2014: 64).

A respondent explains that the programme ceased for fiscal reasons as part of Maitri’s strategic plan to prioritise research, professionalise teacher training, and generate revenue streams:

We continued the programme for a lot more years than it was funded for and managed to scrape together funds that paid for it but basically exhausted any reserves at the centre doing so. Basically, it was a hard decision but either you had to make the case to say we were going to find funds to support this programme or you were going to cut the programme (Jeff Maitri WSM).

Termination of the MBSR programme in July 2000 (Kabat-Zinn et al. 2016: 11) aborted Maitri’s vision of further community mindfulness which was subsequently neglected.

### **3.2.3.2 A Study of MBSR in Prisons**

Maitri also delivered MBSR in prisons to a combination of inmates and staff. MBSR was again put to work as a mitigator of crime and violence (Kabat-Zinn n.d.: 2). The programme was funded by a grant secured by a state governor who supported Penal System reformation (Be Maitri BMF; Chris Maitri WSF). A single study reports that MBSR was taught in six Massachusetts Department of Corrections prison drug units to 1,350 inmates over 113 courses (Samuelson et al 2007: 254). Eighty-six courses took place in men’s units: 66 at four medium-security facilities and 20 at a minimum-security, pre-release facility. Inmates at the latter facility experienced greater improvements than the former. Twenty-seven courses were delivered at a women’s facility. Originally, 1,953 participants enrolled with a 69% completion rate, not significantly different to the city’s clinic’s 65%.

Overall, the study reports greater improvements for women than men, and for minimum security inmates (ibid.).<sup>86</sup> Outcomes show that hostility decreased by 9.2% among women and 6.4% among men.<sup>87</sup> Distress reduced by 38.5% for women and 28.4% for men.<sup>88</sup> Women's self-esteem improved by 8.3% and men's by 3.8%<sup>89</sup> (ibid.: 260-2). The study does not report on inmate racial demographics nor on recidivism rates or drug relapse (ibid.: 265). It speculates that inmates may have elevated their self-report scores to secure early release (ibid.: 264).

My respondents brought further perspective to the prison programme. Sensitive to the predominantly BME demographic of prison participants, Maitri contracted a black male MBSR teacher to lead the programme. It was their task to present a 'more accessible' organisational face. Only one other BME teacher was on the team (Chris Maitri WSF). A white respondent reports feeling ill-equipped to teach a prison population. They felt that this required further specialised training additional to MBSR training. This need, they say, was neither recognised nor required by Maitri. In their view, the organisation was moving into new spaces without improving teacher training nor providing succession plans (Chris Maitri WSF).

Although it is not possible to establish that it was specifically MBSR interventions that impacted participants favourably, Kabat-Zinn reports confidently that the findings confirm the suitability of this intervention for prison populations, and marginalised communities generally (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 64).

### **3.2.3.3 Discussion of the Inner-City and Prison Programmes**

The MBSR model, studied in clinical contexts amongst a white, middle-class audiences (Pip Maitri WSF), underpins outreach programmes. The prison and inner-city projects demarcate

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<sup>86</sup> MBSR was deployed as a psychological intervention geared towards life-style and behavioural change; the programme encouraged better coping with the stress of incarceration, the cultivation of "life-long inner resources to decrease the likelihood of continuing criminal behaviour and recidivism [so that] inmates can grow to be less reactive to intense emotional states without resorting to the use of drugs or other chemical substances" (Samuelson et al 2007: 255).

<sup>87</sup> The Cook and Medley Hostility Scale (Barefoot, Dodge, Peterson, Dahlstrom and Williams 1989).

<sup>88</sup> Profile of Mood States Scale (McNair, Lorr and Droppelman 1992).

<sup>89</sup> Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1979).

diverse settings for Maitri. An appraisal of these programmes uncovers attempts to introduce mindfulness across society to demonstrate its universality. In the inner-city programme, adaptations to new contexts included free services and sensitivity to language. The teaching team was constituted in both inner-city and prison instances with some sensitivity to race/ethnicity. This takes into account research on minority groups in secondary education that correlates student-teacher race/ethnicity 'sameness' with improved student performance for black students, especially in high poverty areas (Goldhaber, Theobald and Tien 2015: 1). Maitri's adaptations indicate some flexibility.

However, universality is taken to mean MBSR's applicability across diverse constituencies. The standardised MBSR model tested in clinical contexts is deemed suitable to any population. Yet, outcomes show that conditions make it difficult for people in marginalised settings to complete an eight-week course. The prison and inner-city completion rates of 69 and 65% respectively, are 15-19% below the parent clinic average. The inner-city clinic also showed a 48% non-uptake of referrals (23% greater than at the parent clinic). Furthermore, the one-size-fits-all approach uses common self-report measures that homologise stress and disengage structural conditions. In secularist fashion, difference is buried in efforts to showcase sameness. MBSR teacher skills are considered transferable. Training in the political underpinnings of poverty, incarceration and stress and in critical theories of teacher-student engagement are not prioritised. As a result, the MBSR model and teacher training pathway (TTP) remains intact and unaffected by these experiences of difference. In secularist contexts in which difference is buried, the standard model disengages questions of power.

The flattening of difference as a function of secularism is reinforced by research geared towards 'sameness'. Researchers expressed interest in proving rather than querying universality. Building on Said (1978) and Smith's (1999) appraisals of knowledge and expertise creation, research is used to authorise and authenticate MBSR. On the basis of positive reporting (Khoury et al. 2013), organisations re-establish authority and dominion over the needs of, and solutions for Others. Conclusions that mindfulness benefits all populations, reinforces universalisation.



The result is the belief that medicalised mindfulness mitigates violence, crime and poverty. MBSR designers, teachers and recipients are presumed ‘commonly human’. Lavelle details the functions of universality:

[...] the underlying assumption—that there is a universal method that can be applied skillfully and effectively in a variety of particular contexts—raises a number of challenges. First, such a perspective assumes there is a universal model of ‘health’ or ‘well-being.’ Second, it also assumes that there is a universal cause of stress or suffering that can be overcome through the application of a singular method. Third, ... such universal rhetoric tends to privilege highly individualized descriptions of suffering and health, thereby eschewing social and systemic causes of suffering (2016: 233).

Lavelle underlines multiple flaws embedded in the secularisation of mindfulness. Her appraisal accentuates homologising of difference and ‘equalisation’ of pain. Secular mindfulness is the ‘umbrella, uniform solution.’ She echoes Said’s critique of paternalism and expertise derived from ‘distilled’ knowledges (1978: 205). As a precursor to Lavelle’s argument, Smith says: “Real power lies with those who design the tools—it always has” (1999: 38). Power arrangements privilege MBSR architects at the expense of participants. In interviews, teachers screen prospective course participants for risk, not for strengths.

Commitments to diversity, to learn from difference, are inconsistent with secularist ideologies that seek to re-establish uniformity. Rather than inform policy, outreach strategies comprise ‘diversity non-performatives’ (Ahmed’s 2004a). Dislodged from the project’s integrity, ‘widening participation’ is non-essential and extraneous to organisational operations (Ahmed 2004b). They evidence Ahmed’s argument that “names come to stand in for the effects” (2012: 117). Such programmes effect little if any change but are portrayed as efforts towards social integration, demonstrating that the organisation is active in the area of diversity. In effect, programmes did not widen participation nor was diversity integrated into MBSR’s design.

Divestment from the inner-city and prisons projects, coupled with teacher training commodification meant a loss of contact with diverse audiences. In the Davis dialogue, Kabat-Zinn acknowledges that because socio-economic factors differentiate audiences, those who suffer intersectional discriminations may be better served by other community-

engaged interventions (Kabat-Zinn n.d.: 2; Davis – Kabat-Zinn Dialogue 2015). Yet, the opportunities presented by the outreach programmes did not test MBSR as such an intervention.

Following the 1990s, Maitri neglected 'diversity' work. A respondent explained that demand exceeded capacity: "we are doing all we can to spread mindfulness responsibly backed up by the science" (Jane Maitri WSF). They also indicated that Maitri trained others to do this 'outreach' work<sup>90</sup> implying that Maitri does this work by proxy. This reinforces the one-size-fits-all, universalist ideology. Neglect of the structural causes of ill-health together with positive reporting of the outreach programmes cements a belief in secular mindfulness' universality.

An adjunctive diversity approach encourages an attitude towards diversity as extramural and expendable. It cultivates an institutional model resistant or averse to diversity in practice. Such a culture can permeate the organisation informing its policies and plans. The demographics of Maitri provide insight into its non-diversity.

### **3.2.4 Race-Gender Demographics**

Race and gender profiles of the organisations I investigated concur with Kucinska's (2019) findings of a preponderance of white men in decision-making positions. This reflects the sector's whiteness, gender disparities and lack of diversity.

Inattention to race accords with secularism's erasure of identity (Asad 2003: 7), and is performed through Buddhist non-essentialism, and postracialism—the claim that social conditions are premised less and less on race (Goldberg 2015: 2). Although racial difference was acknowledged in the outreach programmes, it is absent in the organisations' daily operations. Revelation of a predominantly white, middle-class user group is unusual in the organisation's literature.

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<sup>90</sup>"There's a huge amount of work that is being done to meet communities and to reach out to communities that are not met due to financial issues or whatever those issues are. It feels like a small attempt here because we don't have an endowment or big scholarship funds that we could say we freely would take people. We have extended with what we can with every programme, we have tried to meet those requirements. But it's minimal, there's so much more work to be done" (Jane Maitri WSF).

Mindfulness' lexicon serves a secularist, postracial frame. Phrases such as: 'common humanity', 'we have more in common than not', 'there is more that unites us than divides us,' are prevalent in Kabat-Zinn's books and interviews (Kabat-Zinn 1990; 2005; 2014; 2017). They are repeated across respondent transcripts (SMs Maitri) and are inherent in trainings I attended (CfM Practicum 2009; Oxford Mindfulness Centre MBCT Training 2010; CfM TDI 2015). Only three of my respondents linked Maitri's culture of postracialism to whiteness and the leadership's "inability to see what they are not looking for" (Kay Maitri WMF) "their personal histories don't prompt these questions" (Be Maitri BMF) "the organisation thinks race is not relevant" (Chris Maitri WSF). While the organisation gathered data on gender and income (Tom Maitri WSM) they disregarded information on race/ethnicity.

In an effort to improve their organisational profile and engagement with difference, in 2015, Maitri invited a group of individuals to consider the organisation's response to diversity and inclusion (Jo Maitri WSF). This group acknowledged Maitri's intention "to begin to systematically address and heal the profound sufferings of racism, sexism, genderism, ageism, classism, and ableism that are currently a part of everyday life in America and the world" (Maitri Report 2015).

Our recommendations aim to support Maitri in its intention, within its sphere of influence, (Maitri documentation).<sup>91</sup>

They encouraged the appointment of a Diversity Chair to influence policy, programmes and plans. On the basis of their recommendations, Maitri implemented identity-based MBSR groups organised along lines of race and sexuality, inviting donations and offering a sliding scale of payments to make classes accessible. Although these groups followed the established MBSR programme, they introduced new poetry and music, invited participant narratives and deviated from the curriculum in discussing racism, economic justice and human rights. Maitri also appointed external consultants to run 'internal and explicit bias', and 'difference' training (Be Maitri BMF).

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<sup>91</sup> The group identified the following actions: Establish understanding of diversity, inclusion and equity principles and create the vision and intentions for transformational change; Pay attention to how this is communicated within the organization and to the broader public; Engage affected populations and stakeholders; Collect and analyse data; Identify strategies and target resources to address root causes (Be Maitri BMF).

Table 1 provides a race-gender categorisation of Maitri staff up until April 2018 when my period of active research ended. These breakdown as follows:

	Tutors <sup>92</sup>	Teacher Trainers <sup>93</sup>	Administrative Staff	Board	Directors
White M	2	8	2	6	3
White F	14	8	10	2	0
BME M	0	0	0	1	0
BME F	2	0	0	1	0

*Table 1: Maitri's profile by race and gender*

The overall staff complement reveals poor racial diversity and a predominance of white men in leadership and decision-making positions. Two of the eighteen tutors are BME women (11.1%). There are no BME men. The sixteen teacher trainers are all white (0% BME). There are no BME administrative staff and out of twelve persons, 83% are white women. 20% of ten Advisory Board members are BME, equally split between 1 BME women and 1 BME man. In contrast to the equal split of white teacher trainers (50% white women and men), white men (60%) predominate on the Board with only a 20% count of white women. Up until April 2018, Maitri had only ever had white male directors (100%).

The lack of diversity across Maitri's structures and its postracial culture suggest an institutional framework of whiteness despite the 1998 US Secretary of Education appeal: "Our teachers should look like America" (Riley 1998: 20). A US Census Bureau reports that African Americans comprise 13.4% of the population, Hispanic and Latinx 18.3%, Asians 5.9%, whites excluding white Hispanics, 60.4% (U.S. Census Bureau).<sup>94</sup> Against these US demographics, 100% white male directors, 80% white board decision-makers, and 100% white teacher trainers are markedly out of sync. Decision-making powers reside in white, largely male leadership. Ahmed argues that in settings of whiteness, neglect of race and other signifiers of difference have epistemic implications (2004b; 2007: 157). Programmes, strategies and training spaces—especially where identity is erased and whiteness invisibilised—reflect the perspectives of decision-makers. Non-diversity at decision-making

<sup>92</sup> These are teachers who deliver MBSR programmes.

<sup>93</sup> These teacher trainers train MBSR teachers and also teach MBSR programmes for the Centre.

<sup>94</sup> The remaining percentages comprise 'American Indians', Pacific Islanders, and multiple or mixed ethnicities.

and pedagogical levels, manifests in exclusive policies and programmes. This may explain Maitri's 'adjunctive' diversity approach, enthusiasm for universality, positive reporting, and de-escalation of diversity concerns following its 'widening participation' phase.

Maitri's history of relative racial homogeneity is further complicated by gender. Over the course of its lifespan, the organisation has consistently been led by white men, employed, according to a respondent: "on the basis of meritocracy" (Paul Maitri WMM). Some respondents involved in Maitri's early years faulted its gendered roles and responsibilities (SMs Maitri: WSFs and WMFs). These respondents stated that Maitri was historically led by males yet "carried by the work and dedication of women who were structurally subordinate to them" (Pip Maitri WSF). They challenged paternalism and a hegemony of 'male superiority' in both the MBSR and MBCT worlds and considered gender disparities an organisational failure. The academic distinction between male leaders' PhDs and female teachers' Masters' degrees led to, as reported by these respondents, an unfortunate gender divide within the organisation reflected in gendered pay gaps.<sup>95</sup>

Next, I review Upeksha.

### **3.3 Upeksha**

MBCT replicates the individualised therapization of mindfulness and shares MBSR's neoliberal wellbeing framework. I expand on this and consider Upeksha's mainstreaming strategies through its UK policy engagement and outreach approach. Review of these policies from a diversity perspective, leads to my appraisal of the organisation's demographic profile.

I start with MBCT's development in the early 2000s which preceded the establishment of Upeksha later in the same decade.

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<sup>95</sup> "Studies have already made it clear that women in academia generally earn less and command fewer resources such as research space on the job. They are less likely to be promoted than men to the rank of full professor, even after controlling for productivity and human capital ... service work ... can disadvantage women ... by side-tracking their path to success" (Guarino 2017).

### 3.3.1 MBCT: A Secular Buddhist Response to Mental Ill-Health

In April 1992, John Teasdale, Mark Williams and Zindel Segal, who were in conversation about the treatment of depression since 1989, collaborated on a maintenance cognitive therapy protocol (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002: 6). Their research revealed a growing burden of mental health worldwide<sup>96</sup> and low use of mental health services by depressed people (ibid.: 10-11). As their understanding of depression as a chronic recurring disorder grew, they added ‘attentional training’ to their therapy framework. In 1993 the Williams, Teasdale, Segal team approached The Centre for Mindfulness (CfM)—the home of MBSR founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the US—for guidance in integrating mindfulness with cognitive therapies (Drage 2018: 122). They sought to integrate mindfulness practices that aimed to hold sensations, emotions and thoughts in awareness, instead of attempting to change them (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002: 6).<sup>97</sup> In keeping with CfM’s insistence on the primacy of personal mindfulness practice, they were each asked to cultivate their own and to attend Gaia House for retreats (Drage 2018: 122). It was following this that the team augmented MBSR with Cognitive Therapy Maintenance and Linehan’s de-centring models (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002: xi-x).<sup>98</sup> This resulted in MBCT and the subsequent emergence of Upeksha as a leader in the mindfulness field. Congruent with its CBT and psychocomplex legacy, MBCT emulated MBSR’s basis in individualisation and further psychologised

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<sup>96</sup> In 2008, The World Health Organisation (WHO) forecast depression as a primary cause of ill-health across income and gender: “While depression is the leading cause of disability for both males and females, the burden of depression is 50% higher for females than males (WHO, 2008). In fact, depression is the leading cause of disease burden for women in both high-income and low- and middle-income countries” (WHO 2008, quoted in Marcus et al. 2012: 6). In 2017, WHO reported that 322 million people worldwide were affected by depression. 50% of those receive treatment in the global North, while as many as 80% go untreated in the global South. Depression also increasingly affects younger age groups and causes 800,000 suicides annually (WHO 2017: 5).

<sup>97</sup> Teasdale discusses thought as follows: “The crucial thing is to learn a new relationship to thoughts—to relate to them as thoughts, mental events that arise and pass away in the mind—rather than as the truth of ‘how it really is’ (Teasdale et al. 2014: 152). This trained relationship to disease, as noted before, may be critiqued on the grounds of responsabilisation: “stress, anxiety and depression are reframed as personal, not political, problems” (Cook 2016: 148).

<sup>98</sup> The MBCT programme underwent a second iteration in 2013 in response to research findings that noted the unsuitability of certain practices contained in the primary version (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2013). As a respondent reported: “In MBCT for depression, we don’t explicitly do any loving kindness meditation, but we implicitly weave it in as it were ... for people who’ve been depressed and depressed many times, one of the features is the negative thinking and the self-critical thinking. That can stir this up ... but it can also just become another thing you fail at: ‘I can’t do being kind’. When we teach it implicitly, I think it is the very language we use like ‘as best you can’, ‘seeing if it’s possible’, noticing’. I think a large part of what we do in the MBCT course is that we invite people to become curious and I think when you’re curious, when you develop and cultivate your curiosity, alongside it comes a kinder voice. I think it’s quite hard to be curious and critical and harsh” (Lu Upeksha WMF).

mindfulness (Arthington 2016).<sup>99</sup> Again, the model denied the structural roots of poor mental health.

### 3.3.2 Early Prioritisation of Science and Research

In 2017, Upeksha pledged to widen participation referring explicitly to the UK 2010 Equality Act. It identified five of nine protected categories giving consideration to ‘ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age and ability’ and also to socio-economic indicators. Its vision of a world free of the devastating effects of depression prefaces its mission to reduce suffering and promote resilience through scientific research and public engagement (Companies House Report 2017).

Upeksha commits itself to inclusion and accessibility to all socio-economic groups and people from all cultural backgrounds (ibid.). This commits the organisation to an egalitarian path that extends its service to marginalised groups. Whereas MBSR highlights ‘sameness’, Upeksha promises attention to difference and the politics of depression. This, of course, competes with postracialism and a refusal of identity. Upeksha’s expansion strategies afford an opportunity to assess its pledge.

Upeksha retained a Buddhist orientation—Buddhist psychology underpins the MBCT model (Sal Upeksha WMF). Another respondent states: “The Buddhist module is a third of the taught Master’s Course—a major component: (Sid Upeksha WSM). Upeksha thus aligns itself with a secularised mindfulness programme rooted in Buddhist training. Like Maitri, its secular public courses contrast with its Buddhist-informed Teacher Training (Wilks 2015). Yet, MBSR and MBCT target stress reduction and depressive relapse prevention, says a respondent, “they are not designed for Buddhist awakening” (Dawn Upeksha WSFS).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Individualisation and therapization of wellbeing ignore structural inequalities and injustices: “If a certain physical context (such as work or poverty) is causing pain, one progressive route would involve changing that context. But another equivalent would be to focus on changing the way in which it is experienced ... If lifting weights becomes too painful, you’re faced with a choice: reduce the size of the weight or pay less attention to the pain. In the early twenty-first century, there is a growing body of experts in ‘resilience’ training, mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy whose advice is to opt for the latter strategy” (Davies 2016: 35).

<sup>100</sup> This respondent expands: “You have to look at the agenda behind secular approaches to mindfulness. If you go back to Jon Kabat-Zinn it was chronic pain; if you look at the development of MBCT by Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Seagal in context, it was depression—their specialisation was particularly in depressive

Teachers are required to secularise public programmes and convey Buddhist ethics and underpinnings “without the Buddhism,” to quote Kabat-Zinn (2014: 45). This highlights a fundamental contradiction: ‘secular’ to Maitri and Upeksha means ‘not Buddhist’. Yet both organisations train teachers in Buddhist underpinnings.

As an initial strategy to normalise mental health provision, Upeksha popularised MBCT through public figures (Stu Upeksha WSM; Bob Upeksha WMM).<sup>101</sup> Rather than attend to difference, this enforced a model disconnected from structural causes of suffering (Purser and Loy 2013; Maloney 2016: 286; Hsu 2016: 369).<sup>102</sup> Despite its mission, the MBCT model extricates depression from its social context. Upeksha thus disregards intersectional inequalities and, like Maitri, advances MBCT as an adequate, one-size-fits-all treatment. As a result, BME women who are seven times more likely to endure mental-health related detention, are expected to respond to MBCT in the same way as white, middle-class women and men.<sup>103</sup> This suggests an organisational contradiction—a disconnect between Upeksha’s public statement and its practice.

Non-diverse thinking and postracialism are embedded in Upeksha’s inter-related activities of research, training, and ‘improving access’. The following respondent comments on the triadic interplay of research, teaching and training within the normative frame of MBCT’s universality:

Upeksha’s vision is to have a world free of the suffering that depression brings. Our mission is to create the opportunity for teachings that begin to

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relapse. If you look at the Buddhist tradition, and particularly, where mindfulness fits into that tradition, mindfulness is part of the toolbox of things that are required for waking up—it’s a bigger project in a sense and you have to be aware that what you have is a smaller-centred project in terms of the secular approaches” (Sid Upeksha WSM).

<sup>101</sup> Ruby Wax is a well-known comedian who has co-authored a mindfulness book and tours with a mindfulness-based show to promote awareness of mental health.

<sup>102</sup> Purser and Loy’s full quote from the famous *McMindfulness* paper, contextualises the link between personal and collective transformation: “There is a dissociation between one’s own personal transformation and the kind of social and organisational transformation that takes into account the causes and conditions of suffering in the broader environment. Such a colonization of mindfulness also has an instrumentalizing effect, reorienting the practice to the needs of the market, rather than to a critical reflection on the cause of our collective suffering” (Purser and Loy 2013).

<sup>103</sup> A 2016 EHRC study of mental health in the UK shows that BME women are at greater risk of poor mental health and receive inappropriate treatment: “Black British women are four times more likely to be detained under the mental health legislation than White British women, and mixed ethnicity women seven times more likely” (EHRC 2016: 8). Yet, this constituency is absent in Upeksha’s planning.



achieve that, and we achieve that by research, as teachers who disseminate that research—we teach people (whether they are patients within our own health trust or whether they are general people) and then we train new teachers and do more research. I see that as a circle so that the research informs the teaching, the teaching informs the training we offer and what arises from the teaching further influences the research. ... I think overriding all of that is the ambassadorship, the holding, the bringing it out into the public domain, influencing policies, and government policies (Lu Upeksha WMF).<sup>104</sup>

Ongoing improvement via this three-way partnership has not yet addressed diversity. The emissarial role this respondent foregrounds, is premised on a universalised MBCT.

MBCT research boosted the mindfulness publication rate producing over 500 peer-reviewed studies in 2017 (AMRA 2018). However, the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination cautions that this figure “may be over-stated, given the poor quality and wide variation between studies” (Moloney 2016: 276). For instance, a 2014 multi-treatment trial found that MBCT is no more effective than CBT. Yet the study reports that findings “add to the growing body of evidence that psychological interventions, delivered during remission, may have particular beneficial effects in preventing future episodes of major depression, but may be especially relevant for those at highest risk of relapse” (Williams et al. 2015: 285).

Williams and his co-researchers neglect socio-economic participant data: only 5% of 255 participants who completed the study identified as BME, what the paper calls “non-Caucasian” (ibid.: 279). The claim that MBCT helps prevent relapse among those who experienced childhood trauma is also queried because the study does not control for extraneous factors such as improved family support for this group (ibid.: 278). This report resembles claims of over-reporting levelled at MBSR research.

A 2016 meta-analysis of MBCT interventions covering nine studies and 1,258 patients showed: (i) a reduced chance of depressive relapse especially among patients at greater

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<sup>104</sup> As an example of how research has impacted teaching, the same respondent explained: “we knew that research had been done for people who had suffered three or more episodes of current depression. What we have since come to know is that it is particularly helpful for people who had suffered early trauma, whereas before we would have been cautious about including these people in the programme, we would be less cautious about that now” (Lu Upeksha WMF).

risk; and (ii) MBCT's efficacy on par with cognitive therapy and interpersonal therapy (Kuyken et al. 2016: 565). The report made claims of equality of outcomes across age, gender and socio-economic variables but could not report on race/ethnicity (ibid.: 572). Two of its authors state: "it is not clear whether the benefits of MBCT would be similar in samples with greater ethnic and racial diversity" (Crane and Segal 2016). Comments such as these expose universalist claims as unfounded. Although numerous sociological studies link poor mental health to poverty, deprivation and growing precarity (Pickett and Wilkinson 2010; EHRC 2015; 2016; Caring-Lobel 2016: 212; Hsu 2016: 377), and despite Upeksha's pledge, like Maitri, it does not attend to these factors. Its commitment to the Equality Act categories and socio-economic factors, are not yet supported by research. Yet, research is still upheld as the foundation upon which Upeksha universalises MBCT.

Crane and Segal (2016) believe that the 2016 meta-analysis has only shown a:

[...] small but significant benefit of MBCT when delivered alongside or as an alternative to antidepressants, in terms of reduced rates of relapse ... there is no convincing evidence that MBCT is superior to plausible alternative psychological interventions for individuals with a history of recurrent depression as a whole (2016).<sup>105</sup>

In other words, although research poses questions about MBCT's categorical efficacy, like MBSR, it is still presented as a panacea with little attention to the cautions and questions raised by researchers themselves. As a result, calls for further investment in "high quality research ... to strengthen the evidence base" (Mindful Nation Report 2015: 24), focus on sample size and methodological rigour, not on political concerns.

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<sup>105</sup> Reflecting on the meta-analysis, Crane and Segal caution against claims such as MBCT's superiority to anti-depressant medication: "the relative efficacy of MBCT (and hence its likely benefit over alternative treatments) may depend in part on patient preferences and the risk of relapse at the point of entry to the trial (in terms of residual symptoms and/or the presence of other vulnerability factors such as childhood trauma). Such a trial would be so large and difficult to carry out it is unlikely to ever take place. Instead, what is needed is careful reading of the trials in the context of the broader research, both quantitative and qualitative, consideration of patient views, preferences and needs and clinical consensus ... They are all about as effective (or ineffective) as each other" (2016).

### 3.3.3 Widening Participation: Health and Policy

The 2009 inclusion of mindfulness in the NICE Guidelines<sup>106</sup> as a therapy of choice for depressive relapse was considered a feat (Upeksha SMs). In 2016 a working group developed an MBCT teacher training curriculum to fully integrate MBCT within NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Services (IAPT). The intention was to train more than 400 MBCT teachers in the NHS (Companies House Report). However, Cook (2016) reports: “Despite the findings of [three] RCTs and the NICE recommendation, MBCT remained widely inaccessible across the NHS” (2016: 145). Furthermore, in a 2017 briefing addressed to the Chair of NICE, psy-professionals and service users challenged the NICE depression guideline as methodologically flawed, unrepresentative, and poorly formulated (NSUN Guideline 2017).<sup>107</sup> They questioned the roll-out of MBCT via the NHS without full consultation of stakeholders, including service-users. This directly impacts MBCT implementation strategies that utilise NHS psychology services to widen delivery. Also in 2017, the ASPIRE Project which investigates NHS MBCT provision stated: “Although access to MBCT across the UK is improving, it remains very patchy” (Rycroft-Malone et al. 2017: viii). It called on MBCT champions to drive implementation. A 2018 review of IAPT<sup>108</sup> services, verified poor uptake, and high dropout rates especially among BME constituents (Lyford 2018). This is striking for a strategy aimed to improve access across race/ethnicity.

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<sup>106</sup> The 2009 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Depression Guideline identified MBCT as a “cost-effective psychosocial prevention programme that helps people with recurrent depression stay well in the long term ... as a key priority for implementation” (Kuyken and Rycroft-Malone 2013: 1). Furthermore, randomised control trials (RCTs) demonstrated MBCT’s reduction in depressive relapse for persons who had suffered three or more episodes of depression but were well at the time of the interventions (Kuyken et al. 2008; Ma and Teasdale 2004; Teasdale et al. 2000). On this basis, MBCT was included in the 2009 NICE Guidelines as a treatment of choice.

<sup>107</sup> The guidelines are contested by organisations such as the British Psychoanalytic Council, Society for Psychological Research and the National Survivor User Network who challenge the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (NSUN Briefing Guideline 2017).

<sup>108</sup> A 2018 BME Manifesto developed by black British service-users critiques service provision on racial grounds. Among the arguments levelled is a lack of empathy with black users and their experiences of social racism which is repeated in the NHS and compounds their conditions (Griffiths 2018). Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) was set up by Richard Layard and David Clarke to address rising levels of depression that at 2005 was reported to cost the UK nine billion pounds (Lyford 2018). It aimed to: “expand mental health care to as many people who needed it as possible, through evidence-based methods like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) [but] reports released in 2015 by the National Health Service (NHS) revealed that only 37 percent of those who’d entered the IAPT program—after going through the required referrals from their general practitioners completed the allotted 12-session treatment, while those providing treatment have been criticized as unprepared” (ibid.).

<sup>108</sup> A 2016 NHS statement “acknowledged its low recovery rate and promised to investigate specific problems in low retention, particularly among black and ethnic minorities” (Lyford 2018).

In parallel to the NHS expansion strategy, in 2012 Upeksha helped form the Mindfulness Initiative to convince parliamentarians of the benefits of mindfulness (Bob Upeksha WMM; Cook 2016, 145) in order to improve MBCT's society-wide reach. By 2015, 115 parliamentarians and staff had completed the *Finding Peace in a Frantic World (FP)* programme<sup>109</sup> (Bob Upeksha WMM).<sup>110</sup> In 2018, this figure grew to 150 parliamentarians and 500 staff.

The MAPPG placed mindfulness on the policy map across four key sectors: health, education, the workplace, and criminal justice (Loughton and Morden 2015). Whereas the emergence of mindfulness through Maitri was first and foremost a health intervention, Cook argues that its cross-sectoral uptake in the UK elevates it from a therapeutic to a political concern (2016: 143).<sup>111</sup> This implies an engagement with structural determinants of mental illness. However, despite Upeksha's explicit reference to inequalities, as with Maitri, 'suffering' remained a personalised physical or mental condition without reference to structural causes (Moloney 2016: 279). In both MBSR and MBCT, agency to transform the causes of marginalisation in the first instance, are at best, underplayed. Secular mindfulness' entrenchment in a neoliberal wellbeing framework more likely blunts such political agency (Hsu 2016: 370; Harvey 2005: 2).

In 2016/2017, Upeksha took measures to further widen access to MBCT. It introduced a workplace programme, and an Accessibility Fund. These target opposite ends of the social divide.

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<sup>109</sup> This programme reduces MBCT's 2.5-hour sessions to 75-minute classes spanning 8 weeks for 'busier lives' participants such as parliamentarians, corporate clients, and low-income, multiple-job employees.

<sup>110</sup> This amounted to less than a tenth of MPs given that the combined figure for the House of Commons and the House of Lords is 1,488 (British Political Facts, 10<sup>th</sup> edition; House of Lords Annual Reports). In 2016, Cook upgraded these figures: "130 parliamentarians and 220 staff have completed an adapted MBCT course in Westminster" (2016: 145).

<sup>111</sup> As Cook notes: "Mindfulness...is being interpreted as a positive intervention for societal problems as wide ranging as depressive relapse, criminal recidivism, children's academic performance, and worker burnout. It is believed to help practitioners cope with life (from stress, anxiety, and depression to impulse control, emotional regulation, and intellectual flexibility) and is now taught in major civil society institutions in the United Kingdom, including hospitals, prisons, schools, and private businesses (2016: 143).

### 3.3.3.1 Workplace Outreach

In 2017, Upeksha launched a training programme in support of the MAPPG recommendation that workplace mindfulness can enhance: corporate culture, well-being and performance.<sup>112</sup> One of my respondents noted that Upeksha Board Members resisted this direction in the past, considering it unethical for the organisation to enter terrain for which its staff were unqualified (Lisa Upeksha WMF). This respondent argued that, at the time, Upeksha had psychology expertise but lacked industrial knowledge to understand how to intervene in the workplace. Half a decade later, the organisation appears confident in its eligibility to promote workplace mindfulness, even though the topic remains contentious.

Corporate mindfulness protagonists argue that it improves workplace wellbeing, relations, and performance (Bristow 2016: 9-17). Critics contend that it functions in the interests of business to alleviate stress costs and increase productivity. They say it reproduces workplace atomisation and responsabilisation (Honey 2014; Davies 2015).<sup>113</sup> Further contentions include its complicity in advanced capitalism and neoliberalism (Purser and Ng 2015; Caring-Lobel 2016: 196; Walsh 2016: 157; Titmuss 2016: 189) as a biopower in which employees are regulated and assessed as an economic resource (Davies 2015: 65; Cederström and Spicer 2015: 4). From a Foucauldian perspective mindfulness can be considered a technology “that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply [life], subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations (Foucault 1998: 137). For such critics, the biopolitics of mindfulness marks “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations ... to ensure a healthy workforce” (ibid.: 40). Corporate mindfulness, Walsh says, “is in part supported by its capacity to enable and extend biopower” (2018: 1). It promises to enhance

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<sup>112</sup> The UK Health and Safety Executive reports that in 2016/2017 work-related stress, depression and/or anxiety lost the UK economy 12.5 million workdays (HSE website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/>).

<sup>113</sup> Davies expands: “... it is the way in which these problems manifest themselves in the workplace, threatening productivity as they do so, that has placed them among the greatest problems confronting capitalism today. It is the principal reason that the World Economic Forum is now so concerned about our health, the happiness industry, and happiness. The murky grey area separating workplace disaffection from a clinical disorder has required managers, and the human-resources profession especially, to equip themselves with various new ways of intervening in the minds, bodies, and behaviours of their workforce. The term most commonly used to describe the goal of these new interventions is ‘well-being,’ which encompasses the happiness and health experienced by employees” (Davies 2015).

resilience, capacity and performance. These qualities—presented as end goals—target individuals to improve profit (Maloney 2016: 286).<sup>114</sup>

Biopolitics extends corporatism beyond the workplace to include the prison complex, schooling system and military as organs that involve and govern individuals (Davis 2015: 56). Mindfulness workplace programmes are, therefore, even where outcomes appear favourable, ensnared in improved control of human bodies under the guise of self-regulation. As Davis argues, this problem pertains to schooling. Forbes (2015) and Hsu (2016) explain, for instance, that in school contexts, attentional regulation links to enhanced performance, and resilience to compliance (Forbes 2015; 2016: 360; Hsu 2016: 370). The Myriad Programme,<sup>115</sup> for instance, aims precisely to “improve resilience in young adolescents” in order to prevent the onset of depression.<sup>116</sup> While the programme may achieve this goal, Forbes and Hsu argue that it simultaneously subdues critical thinking and resistance to systems of inequality. Secular mindfulness thus becomes complicit in a biopolitics of assimilation and co-option which pre-empts its deployment for prosocial purposes (Mitra and Greenberg 2016: 421; Leonard 2016: 261). Cannon (2016) presents an alternative: “By shifting accountability, we remove the focus on behavior management of ‘problem kids’ to critically examine the social conditions that create suffering for our children and youth” (2016: 397). When mindfulness is used to regulate and blame students rather than address the causes of their behaviours, as Cannon suggests, it fulfils a biopolitical function.

Neither Upeksha nor the other organisations have engaged this critique. Instead, their outreach programmes reinforce behavioural change implying that as workplace decision-

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<sup>114</sup> As Maloney argues: “In its relentless focus upon the internal world of the individual as the main answer to all personal and communal ills, mindfulness turns each practitioner into the neoliberal subject incarnate; their personal freedom in the marketplace guaranteed, together with full responsibility and accountability—not merely for their own conduct, but for their health and well-being, too” (2016: 286).

<sup>115</sup> The *My Resilience in Adolescence* (MYRIAD) programme is funded by the Wellcome Trust.

<sup>116</sup> As Forbes (2016) argues: “Yet mindfulness is employed in a number of impoverished inner-city schools attended by many disaffected, indignant, and at times disruptive students of color. Without a critical understanding of the neoliberal education agenda, mindfulness practices geared toward stress reduction, conflict resolution, emotion regulation, anger management, and focus and concentration serve as functions of social control and reinforce emotional self-regulation that puts the onus back on the individual student” (2016: 360).

makers become mindful, via a cascading effect, organisations and society at large will become more 'caring'. This trickle-down theory (Purser 2019: 20) accords with Kabat-Zinn's 'second Renaissance' idea. Lavelle (2016) opposes this view:

[...] it is assumed that individuals within systems, including the military, corporations, schools, and so on, who 'wake up' through contemplative practice will be effective in engendering major institutional transformations. *Not only is there no evidence for the effectiveness for this strategy*, there is evidence which suggests that programs that focus solely on transformation at the individual level are *not* effective in engendering systems-wide change (2016: 241, emphasis added).

Lavelle challenges the 'Buddha-nature' argument to which mindfulness appeals: the notion that the goodness of our nature will be revealed with sufficient practice. Titmuss (2016) furthermore argues that these strategies ignore the values and ethos of large corporations and advanced capitalist society. These, he says, are antithetical to kindness and caring (2016: 185). Workplace (and schools) programmes might help individuals cope better with adversity. However, they neglect the cultures in which courses are delivered and disregard corporate and neoliberal interests.

### **3.3.3.2 Improved Access**

As of 2016, Upeksha extended mindfulness to minority groups via small grants (Ali Upeksha WMF; Jack Upeksha WMM). In 2016, several MBCT-inspired projects were activated. In the language of the grant holders, they operated across 'areas of deprivation', 'improved mental health care', and 'supported housing'. Further programmes offered mindfulness for refugee populations, prison staff and inmates, and parents in vulnerable and dispossessed families. Small though the grants are,<sup>117</sup> they allow MBCT teachers to work with groups who might otherwise not have access to mindfulness courses. These teachers draw upon their own expertise to serve the communities with whom they work. Upeksha does not provide any training other than its MBCT pathway which is devoid of any political contextualisation. Grantee reports are shared with the organisation at an annual gather.

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<sup>117</sup> Applicants bid for funding for their projects and are allowed to govern and manage these in accordance with challenges and conditions. The process is not micro-managed and facilitates the seeds of possibilities for larger programmes to evolve (Ali Upeksha WMF).

Two grantees interviewed, each delivering their second round of projects, identified the extensive logistical arrangements and support required to facilitate groups. They signalled the importance for tutors to learn the language and culture of the group and to adapt mindfulness to suit participant requirements. They also emphasised tutor restraint in being presumptive about communities and their needs. Participants across groups, they said, expressed interest in training as mindfulness teachers to serve their communities directly. Participants also requested being taught by co-tutors who shared and could relate to their experience. Both grantees deployed their own non-mindfulness training to navigate the terrain of adaptation, creativity, and engagement with participant experience—this commonly required transgression of the curriculum which transformed the learning space. One of the grantees commented on how participants themselves transform the classroom from an MBCT space to one of communal engagement. They added: “I am uncertain how much actual MBCT was imparted, but participants expressed feeling better able to cope and support one another” (Ali Upeksha WMF). In these instances, mindfulness teaching interwove with participant agendas and was guided by participant interests rather than the MBCT curriculum.

Like Maitri, Upeksha has adopted an adjunctive diversity model: ‘extra’ participants are ‘included’ in an established, individualised, exclusive setting. The trickle-down, one-size-fits-all strategies contain assumptions of universality, and as Cannon and Lavelle argue, neo-coloniality. Adjunctive diversity draws attention to the models, structures and spaces into which Others are being included.

### **3.3.4 Race-Gender Demographics**

Upeksha’s location at a non-diverse higher education institution in the UK (Bush 2017)—both expedites its leadership of the UK mindfulness sector and embeds the organisation in cultures and vestiges of power devoid of diversity. This is not to say that Upeksha endorses such exclusivism. It is to acknowledge that its chosen setting connects it to elitism and power.

Upeksha emulates not only its institutional white, middle/upper-class student and staff composition but that of the mindfulness community (Wylie 2015; Kucinkas 2019: 143). In



his Snowy Peaks Report, Kline (2014) identifies the same profile in the NHS, one of Upeksha's strategic partners (Kline 2014: 3-4).<sup>118</sup> Bush and Kline respectively argue that such concentrations of white, middle-class decision-making power reinforce political whiteness.

The following table attests to Upeksha's organisational non-diversity:

	Staff	Associates	Trustees	International Advisors	Directors
White M	3	7	8	7	2
White F	11	18	3	2	0
BME M	0	1	0	1	0
BME F	1	4 <sup>119</sup>	0	0	0

Table 2: Upeksha's profile by race and gender

Upeksha's fifteen staff members includes six teacher trainers 0% of whom are BME. The remaining nine staff positions include administrators and research leads, 6.7% of whom are one BME woman. There are no BME men in these posts. 13.3% of Associates invited to their positions as supporters of Upeksha's mission are BME women (positioned outside the UK) with 3.3% BME men. There are 0% BME Trustees or Directors. 10% of international advisors is one BME man with no BME women; 70% are white men and 20% are white women. When grouped together, out of twenty-three Directors, International Advisors and Trustees—Upeksha's chief decision makers—4.3% represents a single BME man. There are no BME women. In other words, leadership of the organisation on all matters including diversity rests with 95.6% white men and women, 73.9% of whom are men.

Since its inception, Upeksha's leadership and staff have been predominantly white. In ten years, it has had two directors, both white men. This profile is discordant in a sector where poor mental health is more prevalent among BME groups (EHRC 2015). Decision-making power and direction are held by a select group furthest removed from the black and brown women who suffer the highest rates of mental health-related arrests in the UK (EHRC 2016: 3).

<sup>118</sup> Kline's *Snowy White Peaks Report* (2014) has contributed to redress within the NHS. It includes a *Workforce Race Equality Strategy* (WRES) that monitors services and Trusts in areas such as race and disability. To shift from a culture of policy formulation that fails to translate into practical meaningful change, the WRES emphasises: (i) location of strategies within governance structures; (ii) NHS Boards and senior leadership good practice models; (iii) integration of WRES into mainstream business "considered as part of the 'well led' domain in the Care Quality Commission's inspection programme" (Naqvi, Razak, and Piper 2016: 73).

<sup>119</sup> The four BME female associates are not resident in the UK.

The most recent 2011 UK Census reports an 80% white population in England and Wales compared to 45% white people in London (Owen 2012). Upeksha's 95.6% white leadership is out of sync with these figures. In contrast to Upeksha, *Race on the Agenda* (ROTA), a UK social policy organisation, says: "All ROTA's work is based on the principle that those with direct experience of inequality should be central to solutions to address it. Our work is actively informed by the lived experience of BME communities and their organisations" (2017: 7). The 2018 BME Manifesto on Mental Health also emphasises the need for BME participation and representation in the design and delivery of mental health services (Griffiths 2018). The remarkable absence of race and ethnicity in Upeksha's planning and MBCT research (Crane and Segal 2016), is not unrelated to its racial profile. Unlike ROTA, Upeksha's strategies to widen participation are ill-informed by the lived experiences of racial, gender, sexual and disability injustices. The BME Mental Health Manifesto sets out the devastating impact of this oversight in mental health provision on black service users. In this light, Upeksha's commitment to the eradication of suffering 'for all' and its intention to reach marginalised communities has not yet translated into meaningful actions that inform research, policy and strategies.

I turn next to Karuna.

### 3.4 Karuna

Inspired by MBSR, Karuna is distinctive in its non-academic location. Its explicit allegiance to the Buddhist tradition, generated its right-livelihood<sup>120</sup> ethos, which includes an emphasis on community, and a commitment to co-authored course development (Sam Karuna WMF). I examine these factors alongside Karuna's race-gender profile to understand whether its Buddhist alignment better positions it to tackle diversity.

It should be noted that despite Karuna's reach into twenty-two countries, it is a significantly smaller operation than Maitri and Upeksha which dominate the sector by virtue of their research budgets and output. With limited research coverage, Karuna positions itself at the

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<sup>120</sup> (Pali: *sammā-ājīva*; Sanskrit: *samyag-ājīva*).

national level as a leader in building the field. For instance, it plays a significant role in the work of the UKN.

A respondent notes that Karuna emerged in the UK in the wake of MBCT and its mental health focus:

What's interesting about mindfulness is it coming through the three psychologists of MBCT who also went to the US, trained with Jon Kabat-Zinn and then put together MBCT. The three are very prominent in their field and did lots of research with good results. What that has meant is that mindfulness has come into this country through the mental health route. Whereas Maitri were dealing very much with the kind of people who we are dealing with in Karuna, MBCT was focused on mental health and this flavoured the influences and direction that mindfulness has taken in this country (John Karuna WMM).

Despite a similar audience to Maitri, Karuna thus developed in MBCT's wake. Its initial chronic pain focus produced a distinct model that cemented its role as an influential training organisation and founding partner of the UK Network.

Formed in the early 2000s, its founders are also its Board Members. Incorporated as a Private Limited Company in 2004, it presently functions as a Community Interest Company (CIC) with two offices in the UK. Its choice of structure springs from its Buddhist ethos:

[...] we were a company limited by guarantee and transitioned to become a Community Interest Company which means that we are asset locked but constitutionally we are not able to provide share dividends to shareholders: the money raised by the organisation is dedicated to serving the community. It's there to benefit the community (Jim Karuna WMM).<sup>121</sup>

It conducts research and offers multiple mindfulness programmes to the public to relieve physical suffering.

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<sup>121</sup> Maitri and Upeksha, although university-based companies that are part governed by these institutions, also refrain from shareholder dividends (Maitri Annual Report; Companies House Reports).

In 2015, in accordance with the 2013 Social Value Act,<sup>122</sup> Karuna commissioned an impact assessment of its UK performance.<sup>123</sup> The report found that Karuna's "Social Return on Investment" is 1:5.76—for every £1 it spends, it saves the NHS £5.76 (Dickins 2015: 13). On the basis of this report, and its growing acclaim, the organisation has secured commissions from several NHS Trusts to train their staff (Companies House Report).

For a public-sector CIC, Karuna's global reach is significant: alongside academic programmes, it is a major service provider in the UK (Karuna Strategic Plan 2012: 8). By April 2018, it had trained 400 teachers from eighteen countries and certified 106 trainers from fifteen countries; it has 11 senior teachers in Europe.

Karuna claims to offer secular mindfulness but is explicit about its Buddhist allegiance. The following respondent expresses their simultaneous commitment to secularisation and Buddhism:

I believe without reservation that we need to make the practice of mindfulness available to people who have no interest in Buddhism and we really need to be very clear that *we are not bringing Buddhism by stealth* but we are just making health practices available to people whatever their values and their framework. On the other hand, the values and practices embodied in the mindfulness practice of compassion and development, and the transformative potential of human experience, in a way that's all consistent with Buddhism, it's not something other than Buddhism, so it's a slightly artificial distinction but at the same time it's an important distinction. *It's more an artificial distinction from a Buddhist point of view.* I think from the point of view of the person coming in to practice mindfulness, it's a very important distinction that shouldn't be lost (Jim Karuna WMM).

This respondent suggests that mindfulness becomes secular when stripped of explicit Buddhist references. They consider this a feasible reconciliation of Karuna's Buddhist lineage with a secular approach. Once again, this presents a paradox: programmes are both

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<sup>122</sup> The Social Value Act: "is a requirement for all public sector bodies to consider how social value can be embedded within their future commissioning of services. The act defines social value to be the social, economic and environmental value of an organisation" (Dickins 2015).

<sup>123</sup> The study took account of Karuna's inputs (money, resources and time invested in the provision of services), outputs (the actual activity that takes place), outcomes (change experienced by stakeholders resulting from the output activity), and impacts (the difference change makes to stakeholders actions accessing further services) (Dickins 2015: 7).

implicitly Buddhist and simultaneously secular: As another informant says: “we seem to go to the other extreme and are over-cautious about not teaching Buddhism” (Sam Karuna WMF). However, these views present a false secular-religious dichotomy since the organisation’s Buddhist ethos is embedded in the secular programme. Karuna’s ‘secular’ mindfulness model is Buddhist-infused yet respondents emphasise that their approach is neither ‘stealth-Buddhist’ nor an attempt to teach Buddhism (even though it permeates their entire operation). Underpinning this account of secular mindfulness is the invisibility of the perspectives of the interlocuters.

“Bringing Buddhism in ways that are appropriate today” (Kitty Karuna WMF), as a respondent describes their work, conceals the power of secularists who occupy positions of influence and privilege.<sup>124</sup> For respondents, secular mindfulness is not stealth Buddhism because:

[...] it’s a secular course and we use that language, but we don’t cover up that we are committed Buddhists and people seem to like that. We are Buddhists and the work we are doing is drawn from that tradition. The course is secular, it doesn’t encourage people to become Buddhists (Karen Karuna WMF).

Their refrain from proselytising is for Karuna what constitutes ‘the secular’. Yet, there is little engagement with questions of who determines what is suitable for whom. Another respondent says:

[...] we don’t talk about ethics which is a very important part of Buddhism. We are not explicitly teaching ethics. We are not suggesting to people that by doing Buddhism they will become enlightened. We are trying to help people manage their quality of life. At the same time, we are encouraging people to live a meaningful life. When people come to Karuna they come because they have a chronic condition, illness or pain and they want relief from suffering or pain. So, we are dealing with a desire for people to reduce their suffering brought on by pain. When people come to a Buddhist course, they want to relieve a deeper level of suffering and pose more esoteric questions (John Karuna WMM).

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<sup>124</sup> This understanding of secularisation echoes Batchelor’s (2012a). He deploys ‘secular’ as a derivative of the Latin ‘*saeculum*’ to reference “concerns we have [in this life] about this world, that is everything that has to do with the quality of our personal, social and environmental experiences of living on this planet” (2012: 87). Casanova (2011), writing before Batchelor, says this is an early Christian interpretation (2011: 54).

For this respondent, Karuna's involvement in the wellbeing arena is distinct from teaching Buddhism. They believe it is this distinction that makes the organisation secular. In other words, Karuna's secular mindfulness is stripped of explicit Buddhist texts, and teachings. Its purpose is to relieve people of chronic ailments. This, they say, may lead to an interest in Buddhism beyond the course.

Karuna's social justice tenets derive from its socially-engaged Buddhist orientation drawn from Ambedkar's Navayana movement<sup>125</sup> which emphasised political recognition and freedom of India's Dalit population (Lopez 2002: 91). Navayana informs Karuna's belief in the dialectic of transformation of the individual and the world:

[...] when you change your relationship to pain, you actually change your relationship to the whole of your life; everything changes. Jon Kabat-Zinn says that at that point, you get your life back. Up until that point there's been a sense of avoidance and denial, a sense of running away from. As soon as we learn to 'turn toward', 'embrace', 'be with', our whole life changes; we don't have to expend energy on running away and avoiding (John Karuna WMM).

This view accords with an interpretation of Kabat-Zinn's 'second Renaissance' idea that personal transformation leads, eventually, to social transformation. However, it converts Karuna's orientation to an inner, personal sense of action. The sense of changing one's relation to pain through being engaged in the world, presumably through an interest in others, is lost. The following contribution, however, positions Karuna beyond an individualised model placing greater emphasis on community:

The big thing is the community: so, now we have all these trainers out there in the world doing their work and we want them to feel connected not just to Karuna but to the larger field and to feed into the larger network. So that's what I'm looking at now: how do we use social networks and other platforms; I'm looking at online collaborative tools as well so that

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<sup>125</sup> Ambedkar's radical re-formulation created a political, socially-engaged Buddhism: "The Buddhism upon which he settled and about which he wrote in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was, in many respects, unlike any form of Buddhism that had hitherto arisen within the tradition. Gone, for instance, were the doctrines of karma and rebirth, the traditional emphasis on renunciation of the world, the practice of meditation, and the experience of enlightenment. Gone too were any teachings that implied the existence of a trans-empirical realm ... Most jarring, perhaps, especially among more traditional Buddhists, was the absence of the Four Noble Truths, which Ambedkar regarded as the invention of wrong-headed monks" (Keown and Prebish 2010: 25).

potentially we could be co-authoring curricula across the world to meet different needs in different places (Sam Karuna WMF).

Neither John nor Sam are explicit about the link between mindfulness and social justice. Sam places emphasis on the Karuna community rather than politically-marginalised communities. It is unclear if their thinking leads towards social transformation through emphasis on worldly action. The first respondent is inexplicit about this link. The second respondent's emphasis on community and co-production<sup>126</sup> of knowledge, is less political and does not reference ground-up initiatives nor community-led models. In fact, in 2015, the example used to illustrate collaboration was a 'Mindful Eating' programme (Sam Karuna WMF) rather than a politically transformative or community-driven programme. Yet, informed by Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice, Sam says Karuna prioritises underserved communities: "if we had to choose between a corporate client and a community, we'd opt for the latter" (Sam Karuna WMF). On this understanding, Karuna encourages its Associates to become involved in developing programmes shaped by communities. Again, Smith's (1999) questions of who these communities are and what power relation they share with Karuna, pertain.

### **3.4.1 Right-Livelihood Policy and Outreach**

Karuna's ethos of right-livelihood, which sets it apart from Maitri and Upeksha, potentially supports the work of social justice. As described by a respondent: "Karuna places emphasis on community and the qualities of generosity, cooperation and sharing" (John Karuna WMM). These tenets promise critique of individualisation as a feature of advanced capitalism. They also suggest action towards a society based on different values. It seems though, that these guidelines govern Buddhist communities that members join rather than society at large.

Nonetheless, Karuna is firm in their Buddhist allegiance and commitment to the ethos of right-livelihood:

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<sup>126</sup> "Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change" (Boyle and Harris 2009: 11). Partnership, effective consultation and bi-directional accountability between service providers and users are essential components of co-production.

[...] we're a right-livelihood business ... The idea was to provide a livelihood that was ethical for Buddhists. So, we don't make any profit. Basically, anything that we make—any profit—goes back into the business and running the business ... It is Buddhist in that it is part of the path of Buddhism to consider the implications of the work one does in the world from an ethical point of view. ... it is a way in which practitioners are strongly encouraged to look at: *can you work out a way to work with other Buddhists in an ethical container*. I would say we are right-livelihood to the extent that we were founded by Buddhists and do try to provide fair wages and obviously what we are sending out into the world is meant to alleviate suffering. That's the basic premise of the organisation. But there are some things that are different. For example, some right-livelihood organisations only employ Buddhists. We don't only employ Buddhists; we employ anyone who is aligned with our mission and who understands and believes in mindfulness. So, *we are a secular company—we are not a Buddhist company—and we are set up to do something in the secular world and we're really clear about that* (Sam Karuna WMF).

Again, the secular world, here, is juxtaposed with the Buddhist world. Practical examples of Karuna's right-livelihood culture include: (i) pay parity among staff who earn according to need rather than seniority—those with larger families earn more (Jim Karuna WMM); (ii) a collaborative organisational environment that “breeds a sense of community and compassion. We all look out for one another and share common interests in working toward the same goals” (Rita Karuna WMF); and (iii) a focus on impoverished communities albeit with respect to class at the exclusion of race and gender. For example, in Karuna's outreach programmes it emphasises worklessness but asks no questions about race or gender.

Respondents describe Karuna as an organisation that has consciously chosen to generate a culture that fosters collaboration and a strong sense of community. Yet by 2015 the only instances of prosocial mindfulness involve two government-funded projects (which I discuss below). Like Maitri and Upeksha, Karuna pursues diversity as an addition to their core activities rather than an integral component of their operation. Moreover, respondents only identified Karuna's lack of racial diversity as a problem when prompted. In other words, race only appeared on Karuna's radar post the 2015 Conference as an organisational concern when Maitri and Upeksha embarked on their own diversity programmes.

Karuna's focus on socially-engaged activities led to partnerships with a borough and the Department of Health (DoH) to support people returning to work. These small interventions



of forty-two and twenty-eight participants respectively, each only appear in single reports comprising qualitative feedback from participants. They contain scant statistics and minimal analysis.

#### **3.4.1.1 The Borough Programme**

In 2009, Karuna worked with forty-two participants to improve their community involvement and increase employability (Karuna 2010: 3-4). Courses were planned to target 120 users with a maximum of 20 per group. While course attendance was lower than expected (only 42 participants), qualitative studies showed improvements among participants in increasing their planning and communication skills which helped them transition to work or improve their quality of life (Karuna 2010: 10). Fourteen percent of participants (six people) entered training positions as opposed to an anticipated 6.6%. Twenty-one percent (nine people) moved into the voluntary sector compared to an estimated 10%.

In qualitative evaluations, Karuna reports participants' praise of the teachers' support and guidance as well as the coping skills they acquired. The majority emphasise the invaluable group experience—'meeting people', 'bonding', 'remaining in touch', 'the relief of hearing others' similar stories', 'not feeling isolated' (ibid.: 13-24). These outcomes contradict the individualised model. Instead they illustrate the value of communal experiences. However, group programmes identify the individual as the unit of change without referencing systemic causes of suffering nor sustained communal responses to change such causes. Mindfulness initiatives emphasise the value of groups, yet the movement remains racialised (Kucinkas 2019) both with respect to providers and consumers. If mindfulness interventions led to community organising, that would defy its association with neoliberalism.

Challenges in the Borough programme include the complexities and logistical inefficiencies of working co-productively with community organisations. Efforts to recruit through the NHS and other services proved cumbersome (ibid.).

### 3.4.1.2 The Department of Health

The DoH commissioned Karuna as the mindfulness lead on a work-readiness pilot study that spanned nine months. Karuna provided psycho-education and promoted self-care, wellbeing and prevention of relapse, as part of a larger initiative to prepare vulnerable groups for ‘voluntary, supported and paid employment’<sup>127</sup> while the DoH supplied infrastructural support. Karuna adopted DoH language and guidelines<sup>128</sup> that encourage dignity, respect and community engagement. The target audience was individuals with mental health and mental distress problems. The organisers aimed to form the group from the recovery (drug and alcohol) community as well as from among BME asylum seekers and care communities. Still, participants were mostly white, British, over forty and actively seeking employment. They comprised 5 staff members and 23 service users.

Twenty-one of twenty-eight participants (75%) completed the course delivered over four rather than the customary 8 sessions; the 25% dropout rate is unexplained (ibid. 2011). There is no report on numbers who return to work. Qualitative data indicates reduced anxiety, instilled confidence, and improved overall wellbeing. Because the project was attended by staff and service users, it generated ‘co-production’ in which staff and users jointly devised the intervention to ensure that it met targeted needs.

Karuna’s contracts, like Maitri’s external programmes, ended as a result of funding cuts. In other words, work with deprived communities relies on external grants to facilitate such programmes. As with Maitri and Upeksha, its community-engagement model is adjunctive, and non-integral to the organisation’s operations. Still, Karuna’s right-livelihood ethos and its association with the Navayana movement encouraged these appointments. These beliefs

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<sup>127</sup> The motivation for supporting people to return to work is that: “Fewer than 16 per cent of people with a mental health condition (except depression) are in employment, yet between 86 and 90 per cent of this group want to work. Meaningful work is integral to recovery (NHS Confederation, March 2010) and increasing employment and supporting people into work are key elements of the UK governments’ public health and welfare agendas (DH 2010, DWP 2010)” (Brennan et al. 2011: 14).

<sup>128</sup> The guidelines included the following: “The programme was developed in relation to the principles of Empowerment, Dignity and Respect, ‘No decision about me without me’ and the recovery champion principle that ‘Transformed People Transform People’ (Support Worker). Hence a strong emphasis was placed upon pre-established trust relationships in the third or public sector and nurturing community support networks and principles of ‘only you can do this, but you can’t do it alone’” (Brennan et al. 2011: 19). These tenets complicate hyper-individualism claims but show a gap between intention as seen in the missions of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha, and reality.

on their own though neither transformed the individualised model nor has Karuna, at the time of my research, partnered with community-led, ground-up interventions.

In its outreach work, Karuna identifies class as a social divider but overlooks race. I turn next to its race-gender profile.

### 3.4.2 Race-Gender Demographics

Karuna repeats Maitri and Upeksha's racial profiles.<sup>129</sup> It departs from their gender norm in that it is led by a woman. The organisation's pain focus sensitises it to disability communities, although its classes are generic.

	Trainers	Associate Teachers	Staff <sup>130</sup>	Board Members / Directors
White M	4	7	3	2
White F	12	18	5	1
BME M	1	1	0	0
BME F	1	2	0	0

*Table 3: Karuna's profile by race and gender*

Since 2004, Karuna's three founding members also serve as its Board Members. Its trainers train Karuna teachers. Associate teachers are experienced Karuna teachers who include global figures and who represent Karuna in different parts of the world. Not all Karuna teachers are associates. Staff are office admin and management team members (Jim Karuna WMM).

Out of eighteen trainers, 11.1% are BME (5.6% women and 5.6% men). Of 28 associate teachers, 10.7% are BME (3.6% male and 7.1% female). Of eight staff members, 0% are BME. Karuna has 0% BME Board Members/Directors. Additionally, organisational data indicates that of sixty-three teachers trained in 2017, 7.9% are BME women and 3.1% are BME men.

<sup>129</sup> Karuna only started gathering data on race and ethnicity of teacher training participants in 2014. Because it is an optional category, in 2015, no reliable data was available (Rita Karuna WMF).

<sup>130</sup> There are actually twelve staff members, four of whom overlap with previous categories; of the four, three are White women and one is a White man (BW SM 2018).

Karuna' racial pattern therefore conforms to that of Maitri and Upeksha. In the 2011 UK Census that reported 80% white English and Welsh figures, none of the organisation's categories correspond to social demographics, least of all its 100% white decision-making leadership. By implication, its community-focused ethos and mission have not yet influenced the organisation's composition.

I now summarise the significant features of the three organisations.

### **3.5 Organisational Summaries**

Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha converge in their quests to 'reduce suffering' but diverge in their service-users and programmes. Their efforts have singly and collaboratively contributed to a mindfulness industry popularised through apps, books, social media and online course delivery. They have guided the sector through phases of: (i) clinical testing, scientific endorsement and research publication; (ii) popularisation via parliamentary engagement and media marketing; and (iii) policy formation securing uptake in health, schools, workplaces, and prisons. I provide brief summaries of each organisation, followed by a comparative reflection. In reviewing the manner in which the organisations mediate secular mindfulness in public discourses, I draw on the work of Candice Gunther-Brown (2016).

#### **3.5.1 Maitri**

For Maitri, secularism means non-religious, or non-Buddhist; there is little appreciation of Asad's (2003) political undergirding of the concept, nor of Monteiro et al's challenge that teaching is value-laden (2015). It publicly expunges mindfulness of Buddhist textual references other than a reference to the Pali term for mindfulness, *sati*<sup>131</sup> and presents it as a 'universal dharma' accessible to anyone regardless of their religion or worldview. Its 'secular mindfulness' is held to be the "birth-right of all humanity" (Wilson 2014: 170). The

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<sup>131</sup> King (2016) expands on this notion: "Building upon the rise of Buddhist modernisms in the last century, concepts, ideas and practices associated with Western conceptions of 'Buddhism' have become easily segregated from their cultural, cosmological and institutional origins through homogenizing discourses about 'eastern spirituality' (Carrette and King 2005) and MBSR practices that gain traction and popularity based upon the ancient and exotic cultural capital of 'Buddhism', but have a low level of engagement with Buddhist theories and practices" (2016: 38).

secularist claim of universality,<sup>132</sup> itself a feature of colonialism and whiteness (DiAngelo 2011; Hsu 2016; Armstrong and Wildman 2007), is problematic. First, other traditions, not all faith-based, stake a claim to the ‘spirit’ of mindfulness.<sup>133</sup> This challenges Maitri’s claimed dominion in the field and its distance from communities currently absent from or on the outskirts of ‘the mindfulness sector’ that forms around its operations. Second, ‘common humanity’, mediated through postracialism and Buddhist non-essentialism, simultaneously elides and reinforces inequalities. This rendering of secular mindfulness highlights its Buddhist provenance as well as its ‘politics of neutrality’ which is, in effect, a politics of non-diversity. Third, those who claim authority to de-traditionalise, re-contextualise and universalise mindfulness, reposition coloniality, neoliberalism and whiteness (Smith 1999; King, 1999, 2004; Grosfoguel 2009; 2013).

To capture Maitri’s ambivalence in relation to Buddhism which is hailed when appropriate and dismissed when inconvenient,<sup>134</sup> Brown (2016) uses the term ‘code-switching’.<sup>135</sup> It

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<sup>132</sup> Asad challenges universalisation: “there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because the definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes” (Asad 1993: 29).

<sup>133</sup> Examples include The Christian Mindfulness Network (<http://christianmindfulness.co.uk>), Smith’s indigenous traditions whose cultures of community and deep listening are being reclaimed (1999: 4), and Grosfoguel’s attention to the elimination of traditional community-based cultures in favour of ‘universalised views’ which he names “epistemic racism” (2013: 75).

<sup>134</sup> As King (2016) asserts, “Kabat-Zinn is able to make a double move whereby the cultural authority provided by the ancient Buddhist origins of ‘mindfulness’ can be deployed to give social capital and credibility to his techniques at the same time as a rapid disavowal of the particularity of those Buddhist roots are asserted through a decontextualized universalization of ‘mindfulness’ as simply the practice of attention (2016: 38). As Kabat-Zinn says: “Mindfulness is actually a practice. It is a way of being, rather than merely a good idea or a clever technique or a passing fad. Indeed, it is thousands of years old and is often spoken of as ‘the heart of Buddhist meditation’, although its essence, being about attention and awareness, is universal” (2011: x).

<sup>135</sup> Code-switching is, according to Brown, a linguistic term that moves “between vocabularies of multiple cultures to achieve complex goals” (2016: 78).

includes skilful means,<sup>136</sup> stealth Buddhism<sup>137</sup>, Trojan horse<sup>138</sup> and scripting<sup>139</sup> strategies that alter language to suit audience and context (Brown 2016: 90). Goleman’s note on MBSR illustrates the point: “the Dharma is so disguised that it could never be proven in court” (Goleman quoted in Fronsdal 1998: 165). MBSR is ambiguous in its deliberate withdrawal from Buddhism on the one hand, and its simultaneous appeal to Buddhist ethics and underpinnings on the other (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2011: 12-14; Kabat-Zinn 2011: 290; Kabat-Zinn 2015). This hesitation feeds a critical debate around meaning, foundations and purpose (Healey 2015, 69; Olendzki 2016; Brown 2016, 79; Wilson 2014, 67; Hsu 2017b). As Thupten Jinpa comments:

If Buddhism is reduced to just meditation, and if meditation is reduced to just mindfulness, then there is a problem. Taking some things out of Buddhist practice and standardizing them for the benefit of the larger secular world, I have no problem with that. But what happens is that sometimes in the process, people then want to make the bigger claim that they have extracted the juice out of the Buddhist practices and what they have got is the essence, and what is left is all these mumbo-jumbo rituals that are useless. And this is where the problem is (2014).

Tupthen Jinpa objects neither to secularisation, nor, indeed, ‘the secular’. He highlights the dangers of Orientalism: the selective extraction of certain aspects of *Buddhadharma*, re-presented as an elixir, accompanied by the denigration of ‘the remains’ (Ng and Purser 2015; Heffernan 2015). He calls into question Kabat-Zinn’s famous remark: “It’s like teaching Buddhism without the Buddhism” (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 45; 2017), suggesting that such acts embed Othering. Declining certain aspects of Buddhism in the name of representing the essence of Buddhist teachings—extracting its juice, Tupthen Jinpa says—asserts authority.

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<sup>136</sup> The concept skilful means or ‘skill in means’ is a *Mahāyāna* concept, used sparingly in the Pali Canon to denote the Buddha’s skill in being able to convey the teachings. It is however noted by the Rhys Davids: “the Buddha and the early Buddhists adapt the Teaching in a skilful manner so that it is effectively transmitted” (Tan 2009: 111). Kabat-Zinn describes MBSR as skilful means: stripping mindfulness of the “unnecessary spiritual and cultural baggage [to preserve] the essentials of the universal dharma that is co-extensive, if not identical, with the teachings of the Buddha, the *Buddhadharma* (Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2011: 14). For Kabat-Zinn, stress presents a modern-day expression of *dukkha*. MBSR offers the Buddhist teachings in an accessible form that could engender transformation and liberation (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 288).

<sup>137</sup> The term ‘stealth Buddhism’ is allotted to Kabat-Zinn and denotes changes in vocabulary to convey Buddhist teachings, again, without the Buddhism (Brown 2016: 84).

<sup>138</sup> Stephen Batchelor, ‘secular Buddhism’ advocate, popularised ‘Trojan horse’ which he explains as follows: “Perhaps the penetration of mindfulness into health care is like that of a Buddhist Trojan Horse. For once mindfulness has been implanted into the mind/brain of a sympathetic host, dharmic memes are able to spread virally, rapidly and unpredictably” (2012b: 89).

<sup>139</sup> As an example of scripting, actress and producer Goldie Hawn’s: “MindUP script replaces the terms ‘Buddhism’ and ‘meditation’ with ‘neuroscience’ and ‘Core Practice’” (Brown 2016: 85).

It proclaims a ‘direct knowing’ and an entitlement to refuse that which is deemed ‘cultural baggage’ or extraneous. In this process, knowledges, cultures, cosmologies and traditions are elided. It is this that breeds Othering.

Maitri thus deploys secularism as the ‘natural’ adaptation of mindfulness without regard to context, teacher and audience.<sup>140</sup> This involves a depoliticised appropriation which one of my respondents defends:

I think one rub that we didn’t quite name is that in this re-contextualisation of the dharma—there’s criticism from the monastic realm of the dharma world freely given and then there are the realities of offering the dharma that is meeting suffering and touching people’s lives that would never go to a dharma centre. And so, it’s living inside a certain tension. Is it possible to put the arguments down so that we can move forward with the work? There is a cry in the world where so much is needed, and it is calling all of us (Jane Maitri WSF).

This respondent reinforces Maitri’s ‘skilful means’ position and appeals to Kabat-Zinn’s statements: “If I’d included the Buddhism, no-one would have come” (Davis – Kabat-Zinn dialogue 2015); and “The Buddha wasn’t a Buddhist. A religion grew around his community. His realizations were universal realizations about suffering, the nature of suffering and the nature of the human mind” (2014: 15; 2015). On this basis, Jane suggests the appropriator’s benevolence—to ‘alleviate humanity of ill-health and distress’. In what Asad calls the mediation of secularism (2003: 7), respondents reinforced their ‘goodness’, with statements like: “the thirst for mindfulness is proportionate to an escalation in social stress levels” (Deb Maitri WMF); “secularisation makes mindfulness not only palatable but useful in a clinical context” (Paul Maitri WMM); and “the Buddha’s teachings are a gift to all of humanity, Maitri bears a responsibility to adapt them to local circumstances to render them accessible” (Pip Maitri WSF). These intentions are acknowledged yet challenged within critical mindfulness discourses (Bodhi 2016: 7; Wylie 2015; Lewis and Rozelle 2016: 243). Inevitably, as Said argues before, a paternalism underpins such claims and reinvigorates supremacy and inequalities (Smith 1999: 86). Here we might paraphrase Hsu and Said: who

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<sup>140</sup> Again, as Said asks: “Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These it seems to me are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients making a politics of interpretation” (1982: 1).

appropriates, who authorises, who gets to save the world, and how is the world involved in its 'saving' (Hsu 2016: 372-5; Said 1982: 1)?

### 3.5.2 Upeksha

Upeksha's reliance on the Pali Canon (Sid Upeksha WSM) exemplifies textual reification and a return to 'pre-sectarian' Buddhism. It sets aside critiques of political and cultural contexts and claims the 'original voice' of the Buddha. Framed as 'more authentic' it decontextualizes Buddhism:

[...] many sought to identify something that had not existed before, a Buddhism that was free of sectarian concerns and historical developments ... what was different ... was the conviction that centuries of cultural and clerical ossification could be stripped from the teachings of the Buddha to reveal a Buddhism that was neither *Theravāda* or *Mahāyāna*, neither monastic or lay, neither Sinhalese, Japanese, Chinese or Thai (Lopez 2002: xxxv-vi).

This approach in Upeksha's case, draws upon the 'power of the scientific narrative' to endorse both pre-sectarian material and science (Braun 2017: 187), even though the scientific community has itself cautioned against scientism (Goyal et al 2014; Britton 2014; Kerr 2014). Given the hype in rationalising mindfulness in (neuro)scientific terms (Faure 2012), Sid cautions refrain:

[...] we can applaud the similarities but we need to look much more carefully because although prima facie there may be similarities, when we look beneath the surface there are often very significant differences that underlay the whole process ... if we're looking at scientific approaches or Buddhist approaches to how mindfulness works, yes there are lots of similarities that appear to map on but you have to go back and look at the differences that underlay those primary, seeming similarities ... we get our students to read the neuroscience because it is so informative about what is happening ... Farb [the neuroscientist] says you can hear some of this Abhidhamma material and how it maps on to a degree of what's going on in the neuroscience ... *this is disinterested, objective scientific investigation* ... you can say that what we have in Abhidhamma is a proto-scientific language because it's 2,500 years old, it's speaking very differently about what's going on. What mind mapping is doing now is telling us a very different story about it (Sid Upeksha WSM).

Sid adopts a measured tone and calls for circumspection to avoid the conflation of science and Buddhism. At the same time, his comment raises concerns with a reification of science as 'objective and neutral' (Snodgrass 2007: 187; Aung 1910: 284-5). Still, science is deployed



by Upeksha to authenticate Buddhism. Brown (2016) identifies this strategy as ‘religious and spiritual effects.’<sup>141</sup> Here, secular mindfulness is conveyed in specific cultural contexts via science, through which Buddhism becomes digestible and decontaminated of cultural effects (2016: 78-90). This strategy facilitates further modernisation and therapization in the interests of individualised secular mindfulness. Scientific reification, albeit measured, and the elevation of ‘direct experience’ within the secularisation project, presents secular mindfulness as a rational, non-traditional, contemporary intervention suitable to a Western audience. Associations with a neuro-normative neuroscience, further buttresses a biophysiological appreciation of stress, and an elimination of difference. In this way, secular mindfulness ideologies work collectively to bypass the politics of Orientalism, marginalisation, and whiteness.

### 3.5.3 Karuna

Rooted in Buddhism, Karuna delivers a secular mindfulness ‘appropriate for our time’. Its ‘dual-identity’ as a non-Buddhist organisation guided by Buddhist codes, highlights the contradictions of secular mindfulness as both Buddhist and secular where secular is understood to mean non-Buddhist. Karuna’s ‘and/both’ approach conforms to religious-secular mutuality. At the same time, it suggests that there is a linearity in their training—first secular mindfulness, then Buddhism:

When I was teaching the courses ... afterwards, I sent a number of interested persons on to the Buddhist centre and a number of our teachers have gone on to training in Buddhism and some have taken ordination. Which is interesting isn’t it? So, it awoke in them a spiritual quest and they’ve gone on to become committed Buddhists (Karen Karuna WMF).

Brown’s category of ‘unintentional indoctrination’<sup>142</sup> explains the unconscious or naïve transmission of Buddhist values. At the same time as Karuna refrains from teaching

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<sup>141</sup> Brown notes that in their desire to secularise: “Promoters of secular mindfulness cite scientific research to support their claim that mindfulness is an empirically validated technique rather than a religious ritual [however] ... Secular mindfulness teachers often attest that secular classes provide a doorway into Buddhism” (2016: 88).

<sup>142</sup> Brown explains that some mindfulness teachers, convinced by the naturalisation of ‘universal dharma’ “rather than recognising ideas as culturally conditioned and potentially conflicting with other worldviews”, remain naïve in their delivery (Brown 2016: 86). Numerous critics expose the “fallacy of value-neutral therapy” and argue that “values are ever-present and exert a subtle influence on actions, speech and thought” (Monteiro, Musten and Compson 2015: 1-2), and “unintended consequences” of opening up a new

Buddhism, its course participants are exposed to the Buddhist spirit their teachers embody. As a respondent says: “At Karuna we try to exemplify ethical values through the way we talk but we don’t talk about morality explicitly” (Rick Karuna WMM). Yet the Buddhist ethos is implicit in courses and explicit in teachers’ Buddhist names.

Like Maitri and Upeksha, for Karuna the colonial and the white gaze remain unexamined.

### **3.6 Comparative Summary and Common denominators**

Mindfulness is advocated as an essential part of twenty-first century life. It is widely hailed for its benefits to multiple pathologies and non-clinical populations alike. However, it is accused of complicity in advanced capitalism as part of the technologies of neoliberal selfhood (Ng 2016: 140; Honey 2014).

In this Chapter, I discuss the distinct paths Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha have forged in secularising mindfulness and propagating their models. I show that their staff compositions demonstrate exclusions. Their racialised profiles detract from accessibility of mindfulness to diverse audiences and hinder promises of ‘mindfulness-for-all’. Factors that obstruct prosocial engagement include adjunctive diversity strategies based on hyper-individualised models, designed for and by white, middle classes. Commitments to reduce suffering from a diversity perspective, in effect, constitute ‘non-performatives’. The organisations collectively, in secularist fashion, reproduce ideologies of postracialism that perpetuate whiteness, even while they advocate diversity. In such instances, Goldberg asks:

What (and who) ... is the postracial for? And again, what racial work is the postracial doing, what racist expression is it enabling, legitimating, rationalising? Is it just, as Lipstiz (2012: 1) argues, that postraciality was ‘created to mask the effects of white privilege’ (2015: 4)?

These questions are pertinent to the white mindfulness project generally. They spotlight an implicit politics that camouflages discriminations, exclusions and white privilege.

Postracialism works alongside other mechanisms as technologies of whiteness. When race

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perspective on how to come to terms with the totality of one’s existence” (Batchelor 2012b: 88), and “religious-spiritual dimensions are always potentially present, even in overtly secular processes” (Stratton 2015: 113).

or identity concerns are foregrounded within the modern Buddhist movement, Raiche (2016) says that they invoke responses such as: “the genderless, colourless, non-conceptual nature of our ‘true self’”, and the private work of eliminating ‘the three poisons’.<sup>143</sup> In a secularist move, Raiche’s opponents utilize Buddhism’s two-truth doctrine,<sup>144</sup> to privilege ultimate over objective reality such that racism is privatized and reduced to episodic encounters (DiAngelo 2010). Goldberg’s questions become all the more urgent in secularist contexts that erase race and privilege. They draw attention to white male decision-makers as the bastions of secular mindfulness, where these authorities repeat the obscuration of race, gender, sexuality and disability, as well as the invisibility of whiteness.

Collectively, the organisations also highlight a conceptual challenge. The term secular mindfulness is used by Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha to suggest a mindfulness devoid of Buddhism when, as Brown (2016) shows, it is not.

To underscore the political nature of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha, Table 4 compresses the organisational figures to produce a snapshot of their collective race-gender demography. Here, each organisation’s counts are re-presented to demonstrate race-gender statistics across the organisations. This confirms a concentration of white decision-makers and teachers across these three key organisations in the US/UK:

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<sup>143</sup> Raiche says that: “An appeal to ‘true self,’ or Buddha-nature, that is blind to race and identity can all too easily redirect attention away from the very real suffering out of which a questioner may have courageously spoken. Answers that stress emptiness and personal practice also downplay our mutual responsibility to deconstruct racial fictions and to help each other heal from the deep wounds left in their wake” (2016).

<sup>144</sup> The two-truth doctrine is present in all Buddhist traditions and differentiates conventional (Sanskrit *saṃvṛti-satya*, Pāli *sammuti sacca*) and absolute (Sanskrit, *paramārtha-satya*, Pāli *paramattha sacca*) truth or reality. Conventional or relative reality pertains to the concrete world of everyday experience, while ultimate reality is said to be ‘empty’ of concrete phenomena that separates ‘observer’ and ‘observed’. Its relevance for my purposes is the association of ‘identity’ such as race with relative reality, and the denunciation of conditional reality by those who argue for the primacy of ultimate reality in which identity is dismissed as a relative construct (Matilal 2002: 203-8). This latter position denies the identity-based nature of inequalities: in all its forms including neoliberalism, capitalism is based on the exploitation of signifiers of difference, especially race, class and gender.

	White M	White F	BME M	BME F	Totals
Maitri	21	34	1	3	59
Upeksha	27	34	2	5	68
Karuna	16	36	2	3	57
TOTALS	64	104	5	11	184

*Table 4: Race-gender profile of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha*

Bearing in mind that US and UK census data report 60.4% and 80% white people respectively, the figures here indicate how the organisations, and possibly the sector, fall short of national averages. Although I make the argument in Chapter Four, that diversity cannot be reduced to representation, I also argue in Chapter Five that a lack of diversity at decision-making level will lead to different agendas. Global figures indicate that 5.9% of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha staff are BME women; 2.7% are BME men. 91.5% are white: 35.3% are white men and 56.2% are white women.

Table 5 considers the race-gender alignment by organisational portfolios. Here I group Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha categories to reveal more clearly the distribution of decision-making power. I bunch decision- and policy-making functions and differentiate these from Directors so as not to lose sight of the race-gender breakdown of directorships. I also distinguish staff members (which includes teacher trainers and admin staff) from associates and teachers who are not teacher trainers.

	White M	White F	BME M	BME F	TOTALS
Board Members / International Advisors	23	8	2	1	34
Directors	7	1	0	0	8
Staff Members (including teacher trainers)	20	46	1	2	69
Associates and teachers	16	50	2	8	76
Totals	66	105	5	11	187

*Table 5: Organisational race-gender profile by portfolio*

BME membership across Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha comprises:

- 0% Directorships
- 4.3% staff members (1.4% are men)
- 8.8% Board Members/International Advisors (2.9% are women)

- 13.15% Associates and Faculty (boosted by Upeksha's International BME Associates—2.6% are men)

When figures for staff members are added to those of associates and teachers, these categories or lower pay grades show a preponderance of women. When race is not factored into these figures, they read as 72.7% female as opposed to 27.3% male. A focus on the upper organisational echelons, that is at the level of boards, advisors and directors, inverts these figures: 67.6% of Boards and International Advisors, and 71.4% of major decision-makers (Boards, International Advisors and Directors) are white men. This raises questions about the gendered hierarchies in the mindfulness sector which, in my study, is overshadowed by its racialised dimension. As seen from the above figures and throughout the organisational demographics, the lack of BME decision-makers correlate with adjunctive diversity models, individualised mindfulness programmes and inattention to race and gender as fundamental factors in inequality and ill-health.

Tables 4 and 5 reaffirm the racialised profiles of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha which, coupled with assumed authority to 'embody and universalise the dharma,' is contentious:

To make claims about what is meant by the term mindfulness is to take up the position of a 'truth-teller' or 'authority' in a scientific language game. I imply that I have the authority to 'speak the truth' about mindfulness, based on my qualifications, my experience, my back-ground. Or my social class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, bodily ability, or culture. This authoritative position is relationally contingent. My ability to be taken seriously (or not), to transparently reflect the reality of mindfulness (or not) is the product of relational practices. My position may be disputed or affirmed. Bolstered or undermined. Authority is a co-construction requiring at least some assent (or subservience) to power (Stanley 2012: 637).

Stanley's observations echo Said (1978), Asad (2003) and Smith (1999) regarding the construction of 'expertise', 'authority' and 'knowledge'. Collectively, these authors underscore intersectional ideologies of Orientalism, secularism, postracial neoliberalism and individualism as instruments of power. In these arrangements, the invisibility and normativity of whiteness constitute anti-blackness technologies. The intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexuality and multiple characteristics of marginalisation, disconnect Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha from communities at greatest risk of ill-health. The contradiction the organisations face is their chosen wellbeing frame and their inaccessibility

to those groups who are most unwell, least cared for, and further dispossessed. The creation and subsequent roll-out of mindfulness premised on current distributions of power, results, says Cannon, in its neo-coloniality (2016: 397).

Epistemically, governed by whiteness, secular mindfulness is devoid of diversity thought. Its presentation as a one-size-fits-all response to stress, pain and mental health, favours decision-makers rather than service users. It reproduces 'expertise' and affords programme designers' sovereignty over the lives of the precariat. Secular mindfulness architects hold sway over those whose lives are framed by systemic whiteness. Secularist ideologies which deny communities the rights to articulate their desires, and be heard (Spivak 1990), reproduce power. As Lavelle (2016) reminds us, "universal rhetoric tends to privilege highly individualized descriptions of suffering and health, thereby eschewing social and systemic causes of suffering" (2016: 233). In this sense, intersectional ideologies work together as secularist strategies to obscure race and difference and sustain hegemonies.

Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha deploy adjunctive diversity models. The premise of 'widening participation' signals an extension from a centre towards a periphery, not unlike a colonial or missionary model. Ideologically therefore, while increased accessibility strives to include marginalised communities, these extramural projects are framed by paternalism rather than hybridity. This highlights epistemic, structural and systemic weaknesses in diversity work. That 'outreach' programmes constitute additional work, exposes diversity's superfluous nature and its disembeddedness from organisational integrity.

This is not to say that secular mindfulness cannot be put to work in marginalised contexts, but that Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's epistemic constitutions are unfavourable to such work. Their processes of secularisation disengage difference and fortify architectures of whiteness. As extension projects show, the design and development of programmes stripped of social context, render hegemonic models incongruous in settings for which they were not designed.

### 3.7 Concluding Remarks

The rise of mindfulness in the US and UK obscures neo-colonial practices of appropriation and the politics of secularisation. It neglects the lens through which mindfulness is mediated as 'secular'. As Asad asks:

How, when and by whom are the categories of religion and the secular defined? What assumptions are presupposed in the acts that define them? Does the shift from a religious political order to one that is governed by a secular state simply involve the setting aside of divine authority in favour of human law? (Asad 2003: 201).

Applied to Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha, Asad's questions confirm power structures embedded in secularisation processes. His inquiry highlights the entrenchment of power through the creation and regulation of secular mindfulness. Presented as the natural navigation of a new context (Batchelor 2012b: 87) devoid of religiosity, ritual and traditions (McMahan 2013: 101), secular mindfulness obscures the politicisation that Asad, Smith and Said reference.

Adopting Said's critique of the ways in which Orientalism engages in both benevolence and exploitation, an argument could be made for secular mindfulness' concern with human welfare. Said discerns appropriation applied toward 'good ends' from that aimed at oppression. He commends "the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons" (2003: xiv). Mission-based commitments of 'stress reduction, relapse prevention, well-being, and community thriving,' could constitute a sound basis from which to promote dignity. However, systemic whiteness and poor engagement with marginalised groups, whether traditional practitioners or those with the gravest incidents of poor (mental) health, forges models that serve select social sectors. Political disengagement works in the interests of neoliberal and neo-colonial operations of biopower that neglect structural causes of domination, oppression, stress and depression.

Drawing upon Asad and Said, it can be said that Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha share three features in the secularisation project. First, organisational leaders are authorised (by one another), to conceptualise and deliver mindfulness 'objectively' and sufficiently to the needs of audiences. Few structures of accountability question the systems that facilitate

‘expertise’ and professionalisation of de-contextualised mindfulness, nor is there recognition of the bearers of mindfulness traditions. Instead, the sector perpetuates white privilege. Second, universalisation of the dharma, delivered as the birth-right of all humanity, bypasses political questions of power, appropriation and exclusion, and re-establishes hegemonies involved in the erasure of difference. Relegation of Asian Buddhist communities (Hsu 2016; 2017a), and the ‘bracketing’ of mindfulness’ origins (Ng 2015), constitute neo-colonialist practices and the marginalisation of Others. The presentation of secular mindfulness as universal dharma constitutes an Orientalist act that positions whites as “objective and representative of reality” (DiAngelo 2011: 59). Third, politically white organisations entrench inequalities:

Secular and scientific communities have largely represented mindfulness as a value-free practice with universal benefit, which disguises how particular ideologies and values shape mindfulness to serve particular interests, as opposed to the general public interest. This guise of universality has allowed mindfulness to be marketed as a panacea, even though it is represented and practiced in ways that satisfy specific interests (Walsh 2016: 154).

This secularist politics also reinforces the white male perspective as “the invisible subject at the centre of the discourse” (ibid.: 156). As a silo, secular mindfulness is unhindered by diversification for its proliferation or endurance. In this light, it “privileges the perspectives of mindfulness promoters, many of whom are white and economically privileged” (Kucinkas 2019: 177; Brown 2017: 65) as “standing outside of culture and as the universal model of humans” (Ng and Purser 2015).

Secularisation is politically contentious. Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha’s racialised organisations and secularisation processes appear antagonistic to diversity. This does not deny the efficaciousness of therapized and medicalised mindfulness for certain constituents, but I question who determines such efficaciousness and to what end. I propose that the racialised nature of the organisations that design and develop secular mindfulness models and research programmes reinforce white privilege, supremacy and blinkeredness—factors damaging for society as a whole, including for those who benefit from such systems.



This chapter makes the case for why Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha arise in the image of whiteness and how they come, unwittingly, to promote a white mindfulness.

## Chapter Four: White Mindfulness, Social Justice and Inequality: The Impossibility of Inclusion

### 4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four, I address the question: can universalised ‘second Renaissance’ claims to transform social inequalities and injustices be realised in a postracial capitalist society? Regardless of context, Payne says: “... mindfulness, and all other practices are not simply value-neutral ... a mental tool for self- improvement. All tools are ideologies—they exercise the values of their makers and instantiate these values in their users” (2014). Building on Payne and Asad (2003), I premise my argument on an understanding that secular mindfulness constitutes a value-laden ‘political doctrine’ (Walsh 2016: 153; Asad 2003: 1).

As I argue in Chapter Three, secular mindfulness models are implicated in whiteness and neoliberalism; they do not extend to marginalised communities. Moreover, internal and external operations of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha neglect to address issues of ‘diversity’ and neither proponents nor consumers are deterred by any critiques of this shortfall. It seems, in fact, to make no difference to advocates or consumers whether the critique comes from a Buddhist (Titmuss 2013: 2016; Purser and Loy 2013), psychological (Arthington 2016; Caring-Lobel 2016: 195), educational (Hsu 2016: 371; Forbes 2016: 360), social justice (Flores 2016: 445; Brazier 2016: 67; Walsh 2016: 163), scientific (Wikholm 2015; Britton 2014) or political-economy (Doran 2017; Ng 2016, 137) perspective.

Kabat-Zinn’s operational definition—“paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn 1994b: 4)<sup>145</sup>—sits within his ‘second Renaissance’ idea. He foresees ‘human flourishing’ first for the global North and later worldwide (ibid.: 3; 2013: 281). Universality underpins his thought which guides the

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<sup>145</sup> Kabat-Zinn says this operational definition presents as a *koan* to raise questions rather than answers (Booth 2017). “This reframing of pain, whether intense or subtle, as meaningful creates a sense of enchantment in naturalised terms” (Braun 2017: 178)

sector. Rather than repeat the extensive literature on his reconceptualisation,<sup>146</sup> I instead question the *inclusivity* of Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness, by considering its politics of individualism, temporality, pain and emotion.

First, I locate what can be named ‘white’ mindfulness as a current phase in the secularisation continuum discussed in Chapter One,<sup>147</sup> considering universality in relation to Buddhism and diversity (Lopez 2002; McMahan 2017: 36; Kabat-Zinn 2005: 137)<sup>148</sup>.

Second, I study Kabat-Zinn’s ‘second Renaissance’ idea as a project that seeks to effect transformation, suggesting that his merger of science, the secular, and the sacred re-enchants American spirituality for a select group. From a ‘diversity perspective,’ I consider the relationship between secularism, individualisation and a US-Eurocentric view of temporality which excludes marginalised frames, in relation to the racialised process of ‘pathologizing’ stress under a neoliberal framework.

Third, I examine pain and suffering as the crux of secular mindfulness, drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2014) ‘sociality of emotion’ to examine normative constructs of bodies, borders and compassion. I look to Ahmed’s exploration of political suffering, thus far unattended in

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<sup>146</sup> Kabat-Zinn’s interpretation of mindfulness has been much discussed. Some re-position it within a Buddhist ethical frame (Monteiro, Musten and Compson 2015; Grossman 2015). Others situate it within traditional, cultural, geopolitical contexts (McMahan 2012; McMahan and Braun 2017; King 1999, 2016; Carrette and King 2005). Still others apply it to research (Bishop et al. 2004; Davidson and Dimidjian 2015; Britten 2014) or critique its politics (Purser and Loy 2013; Forbes 2016; Payne 2015). The 1994 definition stirred up considerable debate regarding: interpretation (Gethin 2013; Sharf 1995; Olendzki 2013), ethics (Monteiro 2015; Purser 2015; Wallis 2016), secularisation (McMahan 2008; McMahan and Braun 2017) and meditation (Sharf 1998; 2015; McMahan 2017), and psychologisation (Arthington 2016; Moloney 2016; Hammack 2017). These discussions are well documented (Sun 2014; Valerio 2016; Husgafvel 2016; Walsh 2016).

<sup>147</sup> I neglect the establishment of the Samye Ling Monastery in Scotland in 1967 ([www.samyeling.org](http://www.samyeling.org)), and Sangarakshita’s FWBO in the same year or any of the US developments such as the Buddhist Peace Fellowship incorporated in 1978 ([www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org](http://www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org)). Instead, I identify Kabat-Zinn’s most immediate influences.

<sup>148</sup> Although Kabat-Zinn proposes that MBSR participants are practicing in the same vein as monks (2014: 51), he simultaneously advocates a secularisation that occludes Buddhism: “One might say that in order for Buddhism to be maximally effective as a dharma vehicle at this stage in the evolution of the planet and for its sorely needed medicine to be effective, it may have to give up being Buddhism in any formal sense, or at least, give up any attachment to it in name or form” (Kabat-Zinn 2005: 137). Batchelor names this “Secular Buddhism” which he contrasts with “Classical Buddhism” that: “largely perpetuates the heritage of Asian Buddhism, be that of the *Theravāda*, Tibetan, Zen, Nichiren or Pure Land schools, while [Secular Buddhism] ‘marks a rupture with Buddhist tradition, a re-visioning of the ancient teachings intended to fit the secular culture of the West’ (Batchelor 2016).

the therapization of secular mindfulness, as a useful model to test psychological and sociological appraisals of emotion.

## 4.2 Secular Mindfulness as a Universal Dharma

Secular mindfulness positions itself outside of history: “mindfulness will not conflict with any beliefs or traditions—religious or for that matter scientific—nor is it trying to sell you anything, especially not a new belief system or ideology” (Kabat-Zinn 1994b: 6).

Marketisation of mindfulness (Wilson 2014: 136) and its Americanisation (Braun 2017: 188) rebut Kabat-Zinn’s statement. However, it is his universalisation that is of interest here. His universal dharma framework states:

Mindfulness and dharma are best thought of as universal descriptions of the functioning of the human mind regarding the quality of one’s attention in relation to the experience of suffering and the potential for happiness. They apply equally wherever there are human minds (Kabat-Zinn 2005: 137).

Claims of universality, common in secularism, obscure underpinning hegemonic interests.

McMahan (2017), following Asad (2003), argues that secularisation is a nuanced, politicised process that defies linearity and religious-secular binaries:

Buddhism in the modern world offers an example of (1) the porousness of the boundary between the secular and religious; (2) the diversity, fluidity, and constructedness of the very categories of religious and secular, since they appear in different ways among different Buddhist cultures in divergent national contexts; and (3) the way these categories nevertheless have very real-world effects and become drivers of substantial change in belief and practice. ... the religious-secular binary has created various new forms of life as different national cultures have taken up this set of categories and adapted it to various indigenous cultural ingredients and different purposes, debates, commitments, and projects (2017: 112-5).

In McMahan’s terms, secular mindfulness takes root in US/UK societies mainly as non-religious practices. Its ‘new forms of life’ reflect medicalisation and therapization as well as spiritual adaptation. It is described, for instance, as: ‘spiritual but not religious’ (Braun 2017: 194; Arat 2017: 172). Additionally, some variants such as its military applications, are contested as ‘mindfulness but no longer Buddhist’ (Bodhi 2016: 6, 13; Sam Karuna WMF).

The naturalisation of mindfulness in the US partly occurs through its secular-religious ambiguity. As discussed in Chapter Two, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha emphasise ‘the secular’ in accordance with ‘Western Christian’ interpretations of ‘to make worldly’ (Casanova 2011: 56). Yet, each of their models contains a Buddhist perspective. Brown (2016) maps original ‘denial’ of Buddhist roots, and gradual reconnection with Buddhism (2016: 79). In keeping with McMahan’s religious-secular dialectic, she explains:

It is important that ‘secularization’ may denote not the disappearance of religion, but the relabelling of religion to scaffold religious perspectives on ultimate reality while addressing practical concerns with health and commerce. Often the *same* individuals oscillate between secular and religious language in talking about the *same* practices depending upon audience or purpose at the time. Mindfulness marketers may employ religious and secular discourses simultaneously: describing religious concepts with language of science and spirituality; through self-censorship, selecting certain concepts or practices to omit disclosing while emphasizing others; and by means of camouflage, or concealing followed by carefully timed, gradual introduction of spiritual nuggets as perceived benefits win over cautious novices (ibid.: 77).

Brown highlights the creative use of language in the popularisation of mindfulness. The term is either secularised or Buddhified—to use Braun’s concept (2017: 175)—depending on context. Asad’s (2003: 201) attention to the authority to fluidly create and cross religious-secular borders pertains.

The deployment of science to endorse MBSR and MBCT as wellbeing applications, appeals to rationalism and renders mindfulness marketable. In this process, one aspect of the ongoing ‘modernisation’ of mindfulness, is its cultural assimilation and depoliticisation.<sup>149</sup> Its proclaimed ‘neutrality’ facilitates its use by different social groups towards different, possibly conflicting ends. A respondent discussed how this supposed ‘impartiality’ allows mindfulness to enter politics as a politically-neutral entity:

MPs haven’t been freaked out by the Buddhist background. We present it in a very secular way ... and that doesn’t seem to have been a concern for them. It feels like it’s a sort of no-brainer really, you know, and the

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<sup>149</sup> As Bhambra (2014) states, ‘modernity’ constitutes a dominant colonial narrative disrupted not by alternatives but by placing oneself in the centre of such histories (2014: 123). She refers to Bhabha (1994) who argues that: “we must not merely change the narratives of our histories but transform our sense of what it means to live” (1994: 256).

education piece has been particularly of interest in the sense that this is something that would be so helpful for children in schools. I think there's an awareness in parliament about the rising levels of mental ill-health among young people and so a sense that mindfulness could be a cost-effective intervention in helping to address that (Bob Upeksha WMM).

For this respondent, speaking from a UK context, secular mindfulness is necessarily depoliticised, comprising interventions free of any political persuasions. However, this rhetoric of depoliticization—or neutrality—camouflages the inherently political nature of social norms and defaults. As Sharf (2017) argues, the ethical and political commitments that undergird the mindfulness sector “so resemble those of mainstream consumer culture that they go largely unnoticed” (2017: 209). By implication, US-Buddhism generally—and mindfulness particularly—are infused with consumerism, scientific rationalism, religious privatisation, psychological individualism, and a disregard of Asian cosmological and metaphysical forces (Brown 2016: 90; Lavelle 2016: 238; Moloney 2016: 279; McMahan 2017: 114). Against this backdrop, the value-free, ‘apolitical’, scientific depiction of mindfulness facilitates its propagation, commercialisation, corporatisation and militarisation. In depoliticised forms, mindfulness constitutes a politics of disengagement in juxtaposition to a growing engaged Buddhist movement (King 2016: 43). As Bodhi (2016) comments: ‘context determines function’ (2016: 12). Secular mindfulness is put to certain purposes (such as wellbeing) that conceal underlying functions (such as responsabilisation).

In the same way that ‘religions’ gain traction as they navigate and adapt to new settings, secularisation processes conform to hegemonic political, economic and cultural interests. This can involve excision of overt cultural practices,<sup>150</sup> as witnessed in mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 287), as well as neglect of structural inequalities in order to ‘fit in’ with social norms. Proclaimed political neutrality renders impossible advocacy for social justice. In their ‘apolitical’ posturing, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha distance themselves from engaged

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<sup>150</sup> As argued in Chapter One, in the lead-up to Kabat-Zinn’s reconceptualisation, European Orientalists and Asian Buddhist reformers, whether in response to British colonialism or incentivised to demonstrate Buddhism’s affinity with science, presented their own interpretations of Buddhism (McMahan 2008: 9). Mahasi Sayadaw, U Bi Khen and Goenka excised external rituals, yet retained Buddhist precepts and philosophies (McMahan 2017: 117; McMahan and Braun 2017: 6; Goenka 2002: 39). Such reforms, exercised mostly by Buddhists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, do not preclude the Western gaze which removes teachings from cultures, traditions and faiths (Sun 2014: 403; Ng 2015).

mindfulness and, instead, use science and therapization as frameworks to create individualised, commercialised programmes.

Although ‘the secular’ is fluid—in that the category is socially constructed—in the US it generally translates into a division between church and state (McMahan 2017: 119). US powers favour Western science and psychology and legislate against federal religious affiliation. As a result, “no state organization is permitted to support, promote, or fund a religious organization” (McMahan 2017: 120). Claims that programmes are secular, as opposed to religious, are therefore often fiscally motivated and can be politically divisive (Wilson 2014: 9). Working within this context, Maitri has elevated science and relegated Buddhism.<sup>151</sup> These tactics of therapization and scientification have expedited the provision of government and state research grants. As Braun (2017) notes, Kabat-Zinn utilises the “dharma gate of science [to explain] the dharma in scientific terms” (2017: 184).<sup>152</sup> King (2016) elaborates:

The roots of the modern mindfulness movement lie in the late colonial and twentieth-century period, where Western fascination with ‘the mystic East’ (King 1999) was consolidated and combined with claims about the scientific and/or humanistic nature of the Buddha and his teaching ... This is not a value-neutral decontextualization of Buddhist ideas, as is often claimed, but rather their recontextualization in terms of a new cultural, political and symbolic order (2016: 38).

The scientification and naturalisation of mindfulness, says King, are in and of themselves political acts. They have further marginalised traditional Buddhist organisations. As Asad (2003) argues: “Modernity is a *project*—or rather, a series of interlinked projects—that certain people in power seek to achieve” (2003: 13). This leads him to question “what

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<sup>151</sup> Kabat-Zinn (1994) expands on this idea of church-state separation: “our vocabulary, our thinking, and our efforts must transcend religion as we know it, with its historically parochial and sometimes evangelical and messianic interests, ideologies and hierarchies, so as to be a truly universal expression of the direct experience of the noumenous, the sacred, the Tao, God, the divine, Nature, silence, in all aspects of life and not conflict with our healthy affirmation of the need to keep Church and State separate, given what both Church and State represent” (Kabat-Zinn 1994: 4).

<sup>152</sup> The marriage between mindfulness and science is strengthened by the Mind and Life Institute’s work and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama’s emphasis on the scientification of Buddhism. As McMahan writes: “He is often acclaimed by the western press for his declared openness to revising Buddhist doctrines in light of scientific truth and is seen as a rational reformer pioneering the fusion of ancient wisdom and modern science. All of this has indirectly helped generate more awareness of Tibetan Buddhism among Europeans and Americans and has brought more people into the fold of sympathy with the cause of Tibetan autonomy” (2017: 124).

practical consequences follow from that hegemony, and what social conditions maintain it” (ibid.). Asad and King provide a political framing that explains, in part, why the sector fences off critiques of positivism (Moses and Choudhry 2016: 454), reductionism (Lavelle 2016: 240; Bazanno 2016: 295) and scientism (Wallis 2016: 500; Forbes 2016: 359). Such a framing also brings into focus vested interests and un/conscious perspectives that shape the trajectory of secular mindfulness.

As a dialectical process, the modernisation of Buddhism in the US/UK is informed by Christian values and norms (Cannon 2016: 400; Brown 2016: 87; Wilson 2016: 112). The articulation of Buddhist soteriology with Western individualism, for example, generates a ‘this-worldly’ notion of freedom (Forbes 2016: 357; Purser 2015b: 33; Nilsson 2013: 191). As Carrette and King (2005) show, Western commercialisation has substituted traditional Asian cosmologies and cultures with discourses of individualised, privatised ‘eastern spirituality’ (2005: 132). This move has been crucial in setting a stage on which mindfulness is able to flourish:

Westerners (mainly American and European) engaged with Buddhism through thought traditions of Enlightenment, Rationalism, Romanticism, Protestant Christianity, Science, Psychology, and Postmodernism. This engagement involved three processes: demythologisation, detraditionalization, and psychologisation (Stanley 2012: 633).

Secular mindfulness is thus interpreted through dominant Western ideologies that are, in the process, rendered invisible. Stanley traces one example of this process: Americanisation of the dharma (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 287). The act of presenting Buddhist concepts, such as dharma, as value-free and scientific necessarily entails a process of reconceptualisation. And so, the very presentation of Buddhist concepts as value-free involves underlying and contradictory value-laden processes of deracination and an excision of cultures.<sup>153</sup> Hsu’s (2016; 2017a) cultural appropriation, Sylvia’s (2016) ‘stripping bare’, and Arthington’s (2016) critique of therapization all bear testimony to the outline Stanley provides. The seed of neo-coloniality, Cannon (2016) argues, is present in mindfulness as it embeds in societies premised on cultures that conceal greed and Othering (2016: 402; Purser 2015b: 42; Loy

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<sup>153</sup> Bodhi (2016) laments that mindfulness “was even championed as a universal Dharma, as the essential message of the Buddha and all great spiritual masters, now freed from the baggage of religion including the Buddhist religion itself” (2016: 7).



2016: 20). Through the forces that underwrite their ‘secularisation’, such mindfulness projects become indiscernible from their host cultures and institutions. Moreover, they contribute to, re-shape and enhance these cultures.

Wilson (2014) suggests that in his formulation of mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn’s interpretation constitutes “what Catherine Albanese (2006) calls ‘metaphysical religion’” (2014: 190; Braun 2017: 188).<sup>154</sup> Her thesis resonates with the elements of MBSR—the focus on mind/heart, inner and outer realms, bodily engagement, and a therapeutic path to personal liberation (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 41; Ng 2016: 139). Classified skilful by Maex (2013: 167), Kabat-Zinn argues that his definition engenders a deeper appreciation of life in its fullness, a deeper appreciation, which Braun (2017) suggests, reintroduces enchantment (2017: 175). An understanding of MBSR as ‘metaphysical religion’ reflects the scale of mindfulness’ socio-cultural permeation and its metaphysical individualisation (Hickey 2010: 175), and allows us to ask: for whom is the world enchanted?

Currently, mindfulness attends to “largely educated middle- and upper-class professionals” (McMahan and Braun 2017: 3) and comprises a sector that is known to be predominantly white (Hickey 2010: 175; Kabat-Zinn et al. 2016: 3; Kucinkas 2019: 143); its *white, middle-class* moniker can be understood as reflecting these demographics (Cannon 2016: 401-3; UKN 2017). It is argued that secular mindfulness caters to the unethical needs of neoliberal capitalism (Doran 2017: 50; Davies 2015: 211). Its refusal of critiques designed to improve access to systemically marginalised communities is read as enabling neoliberal agendas of individualising stress, resilience, improved productivity, and calm in ‘toxic environments’ (Walsh 2016: 156). The sector’s ‘this-worldly’ (Stanley and Longden 2016: 306; Wilson 2014: 4) concerns are criticised as producing a “banal, therapeutic, self-help” technology (Purser and Loy 2013). Bodhi (2013) adds to these cautions: “absent a sharp social critique, Buddhist practices could easily be used to justify and stabilize the status quo, becoming a

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<sup>154</sup> Metaphysical religion, Albanese writes: “is at least as important as evangelicalism in fathoming the shape and scope of American religious history and in identifying what makes it distinctive” (2006: 4). She identifies four components: (1) a focus on the mind and its powers; (2) concern with correspondence between different interrelated spheres of existence, such as inner and outer or macrocosm and microcosm; (3) a preference for concepts and metaphors of movement and energy; and (4) a therapeutic orientation that conceives of salvation in terms of healing (Wilson 2014: 190).

reinforcement of consumer capitalism” (2013). In its present form, secular mindfulness functions as per Bodhi’s warning, by adopting hegemonic cultural norms. As it becomes “domesticated ... members take from Buddhism what they believe will relieve their culture-specific distresses and concerns, in the process spawning new Buddhisms (sometimes, crypto-Buddhisms) that better fit their needs” (Wilson 2014: 3). Secular mindfulness thus works in the socio-cultural interests of its interpreters as in the case of IMS. Those whom these interpretations do not serve, remain disenchanting.

Although Buddhist modernisation is broadly typified by the trends explored above, in recent years, concerns with social justice and political freedoms have become an increasingly prominent aspect of the movement (Lopez 2002: xxxii). The *Navayana* movement,<sup>155</sup> Ledi’s laicisation of meditation, and Bodhi’s Buddhist Global Relief (BGR)<sup>156</sup> attest to this. In a similar fashion, the established Buddhist Peace Fellowship and emergent Radical Dharma movement<sup>157</sup> exemplify mutuality between Buddhism and social justice. These projects function independently of, but not necessarily completely outside the secular mindfulness field. Further models such as Angela Black’s *Mindfulness for the People* (Alton 2017) and Rondha Magee’s *ColourInsight* (2015) constitute new diversity-based, secular mindfulness

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<sup>155</sup> Ambedkar’s Navayana movement which converted Dalits to Buddhism in political defiance of India’s caste system (Lopez 2002: 91). Navayana (new vehicle) Buddhism, a re-interpretation developed by Ambedkar emphasised the eradication of social injustices and liberation and overlooked karma, reincarnation and the four truths (Keown and Prebish 2010: 24-26). Ambedkar’s radical re-formulation created a political, socially-engaged Buddhism: “The Buddhism upon which he settled and about which he wrote in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was, in many respects, unlike any form of Buddhism that had hitherto arisen within the tradition. Gone, for instance, were the doctrines of karma and rebirth, the traditional emphasis on renunciation of the world, the practice of meditation, and the experience of enlightenment. Gone too were any teachings that implied the existence of a trans-empirical realm ... Most jarring, perhaps, especially among more traditional Buddhists, was the absence of the Four Noble Truths, which Ambedkar regarded as the invention of wrong-headed monks” (Keown and Prebish 2010: 25).

<sup>156</sup> BGR started in 2008 and works with local communities to address food shortages. They currently have twenty-nine projects (<https://www.buddhistglobalrelief.org/index.php/en/>). Bodhi, the founder of BGR identifies the inseparability of *Buddhadharma* and social issues: “I also was troubled by the way many Buddhists, while speaking eloquently about compassion, viewed the Dharma essentially as a path to inner peace and treated engagement with social and political matters as tangential to their practice. I came to feel that under the conditions of our time, it was necessary to translate such values as loving-kindness and compassion into concrete action in order to reduce the socially-created suffering that so many people today, less fortunate than ourselves, must face as a daily ordeal” (2013).

<sup>157</sup> Although beyond the remit of my thesis, Radical Dharma engages Audre Lorde’s concept of self-care—“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (Lorde 1988: 130)—to cultivate a politically-infused mindfulness geared towards social justice for all (Owens 2018: Gaia House Retreat, Sunday 8 April).

products. Such innovations do not simply offer alternative spaces for the black and brown bodies absent from Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's courses and structures. They challenge fundamental pillars of secular mindfulness such as power, conceptualisations and constructs of wellbeing (Williams, Owens and Syedullah 2016).

Despite this growing concern with social justice, Kabat-Zinn's Americanisation of mindfulness which continues to dominate the sector, conforms to market interests and the sale of ideas:

There is a progressive process [in mindfulness' acculturation]: first Buddhism is made palatable via mindfulness in order to sell Buddhism, then mindfulness is made palatable via eliminating Buddhism in order to sell mindfulness, then mindfulness is so appealing and denatured that it can be used to sell other products, such as financial services, vacations, clothing, computer software, etc. ... it promises everything: it can allegedly improve any conceivable activity and provide unlimited practical benefits. Perhaps it can even save the world (Wilson 2014: 73).

Wilson maps out marketisation strategies that normalise and commercialise mindfulness. Its commodification, he explains, relies upon the construction of a receptive audience while consumerism catapulted mindfulness into the spiritual marketplace (Carrette and King 1995). Repackaged as a universal dharma, interest grew beyond the US. As Hickey (2010) explains, this process of marketisation is interwoven with the legitimisation of appropriation. Mindfulness becomes "trans-religious, trans-cultural and trans-historic [involving] rhetorical erasure of the past, and the assumption that one's own social, cultural, and historical perspective applies universally" (Hickey 2010: 172-3).<sup>158</sup> The development of mindfulness as a consumer-based product thus assimilates and normalises, while it appropriates, exoticizes and marginalises.

In the process of commercialisation, it is not only mindfulness that is consumed. Its political undergirding of whiteness, infused with individualisation, patriarchy and postracialism is imbibed. Consumers—the middle- and upper-classes keen to attain happiness—acquire an

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<sup>158</sup> Stanley and Longden (2016) say this framing constitutes the premise of universality: "In most professional, scientific and Buddhist literatures, 'the mind' tends to be understood as 'universal': trans-social, trans-cultural and trans-historical. The growth in popularity of MBSR can be partly attributed to the recent historical re-interpretation of Buddhism as a universal 'scientific religion' compatible with the principles of rationalism, evolutionary biology, materialism and psychotherapy" (2016: 306).

invisible politics (McMahan and Braun 2017: 3; McMahan 2017: 121). Commenting on his own experiences of Western vipassanā teachings, Bodhi (2016) describes the linkages between mindfulness, happiness and this-worldliness:

[...] practices prescribed for attaining the supreme good, liberation from the round of birth and death, were presented as a means for attaining well-being and happiness here and now. Mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom became not the means for breaking the fetters that bind us to *saṃsāra*, but qualities that “free the heart” so that we can live meaningfully, happily, peacefully in the present, acting on the basis of our perception of the interconnectedness of all life. The aim of the practice was still said to be freedom, but it was an immanent freedom, really more a kind of inner healing than liberation (*vimutti*) in the classical sense of the word. This reconceptualization of the training may have made the practice of mindfulness much more palatable than would have been the case if it were taught in its original context. But the omission may have set in motion a process that, for all its advantages, is actually eviscerating mindfulness from within (2016: 13-4).

As a Buddhist, Bodhi cautions against conflating mindfulness with happiness or inner healing.<sup>159</sup> This, he contends, facilitates a ‘selfing’ and the instant gratification legitimated by therapization.

Yet, in US/UK contexts, therapization of mindfulness has been crucial to its normalisation (Forbes 2016: 363; Lewis and Rozelle 2016: 253). Upeksha testifies to this in its interpretation of mindfulness as practising a set of skills that train a familiarity with mind and body patterns, learning to respond rather than react. A respondent distinguishes the MBCT function from the soteriological goal of *nibbana* as two discrete projects (2015). Yet, in its therapization, they warn against doctrinally decontextualized teachings:

Mindfulness the term, almost appears to be a stand-alone thing and it really isn’t. It really only occurs as a much more nuanced version within the Abhidharma perspective, embedded into a whole core of other things

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<sup>159</sup> Bodhi (2016) challenges secular mindfulness’ temporal emphasis for its encouragement of immanent goals. The latter is of course implicated in neoliberalism’s drive to advance capitalism and measure performance, including wellness. Authority now: “consists simply in measuring, rating, comparing and contrasting the strong and the weak without judgment, showing the weak how much stronger they might be, and confirming to the strong that they are winning, at least for the time being” (Davies 2015: 179).

which, in a sense, come on line when mindfulness is there (Sid Upeksha WSM).<sup>160</sup>

Sid highlights the Abhidharma's sophisticated exposition of mind, commonly lost in secular translations of mindfulness. Wisdom and compassion, for instance, are among fifty-two factors of mind (Bodhi 2012: 1320-4). Without this understanding, mindfulness is easily reduced to attention<sup>161</sup> regulation (ibid.). In commenting on the success of secularisation, a Karuna respondent concurs that deracinated teachings may be suitable in certain contexts but should not be called Buddhist if they are displaced from the broader doctrine:

[...] we know the dangers of just taking one bit and calling it mindfulness. In fact, if you're just taking one bit and teaching people how to be more focused while they're shooting other people then that's not really mindfulness, that's something else. That's concentration training—that's fine, go do that but don't call it mindfulness, call it something else (Sam Karuna WMF).

These responses indicate unease within the mindfulness sector: Buddhist teacher trainers are considered better equipped to secularise the Buddhist underpinnings of mindfulness (2015). Kabat-Zinn concurs: "it can be hugely helpful to have a strong personal grounding in the *Buddhadharma* and its teachings ... In fact, it is virtually essential and indispensable for teachers of MBSR and other mindfulness-based interventions (2013: 299). But, as argued before, foundations in Buddhism and secularisation focus mindfulness' double-duty—its need to be simultaneously secular and Buddhist (Brown 2016: 90).

Kabat-Zinn understands mindfulness as a universal dharma, rather than a simple coping mechanism, or merely the commodity to which it has been reduced:

Mindfulness can only be understood from the inside out. It is not one more cognitive-behavioural technique to be deployed in a behaviour change paradigm, but a way of being and a way of seeing that has profound

<sup>160</sup> The Abhidharma, composed by Vasubandhu, is foundational to the *Mahāyāna* tradition and lists forty-six mental factors, including mindfulness (Pruden 1990). The *Abhidhammattha-sangaha* composed by Acariya Anuruddha, is a foundational text of the *Theravādin* tradition that lists fifty-two mental factors including mindfulness (Bodhi 1999).

<sup>161</sup> As a "universal mental factor," attention (Sanskrit and Pali *manasikāra*), in the *Theravāda* Abhidharma, is accompanied by 'contact, feeling, perception, volition, one-pointedness and life faculty' (Bodhi 2012: Kindle locations 2140-2142). In *Mahāyāna* traditions, it is one of five universal mental factors from which one-pointedness and life faculty are absent (Guenther 1975: Kindle location 409-414).

implications for understanding the nature of our own minds and bodies, and for living life as if it really mattered (2013: 284).

Here we see Kabat-Zinn's blending of the secular, science and sacred which is aimed, as previously discussed, to re-enchant "the world ... to give it a sense of depth and value" (Braun 2017: 175). Although his audience is limited by race and class in the US and UK, Kabat-Zinn has, boldly, moved beyond therapization to frame his mission to relieve suffering with an emphasis on human and universal inter-connectedness (ibid.).<sup>162</sup> He propagates this work of secular mindfulness through his 'second Renaissance' idea.

### 4.3 Kabat-Zinn's 'Second Renaissance': A Universal Social Leveller

Kabat-Zinn's historic contribution to the secularisation of mindfulness is well attested (Mitra and Greenberg 2016: 414; Sun 2014: 399; Wylie 2015). His personal influences are amply documented (Kabat-Zinn 1990; 2005; 2013; 2014; Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2013; Braun 2017; Dunne 2013; Maex 2013) and his operational definition continues to underpin the work of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha, while recent scholarship notes that his influences extend beyond *Theravāda* (Husfvagel 2016: 90). Here, I examine Kabat-Zinn's lesser-explored 'second Renaissance' idea in terms of its political intentions and social impact, as a way into considering whether 'his' mindfulness lends itself to diversity and social justice work.

In 1965, Kabat-Zinn started meditating (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 4)<sup>163</sup> supervised by Asian and Western monastic and lay teachers from different traditions (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 289). His early writings reflect a tapestry of influences:

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<sup>162</sup> Kabat-Zinn used a quote from Albert Einstein in his public lectures to underline his emphasis on inter-connectivity which he saw in cosmological terms: "A human being is a part of the whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such attainment is in itself a part of the liberation, and a foundation for inner security" (Einstein, quoted in Kabat-Zinn 2005: 338).

<sup>163</sup> Kabat-Zinn says he was transformed by a talk he attended while a student at MIT which led to his meditation practice: "I went to this talk, and only five people out of all of MIT were there. I won't go into it at any length, but Kapleau spoke about his own personal experience of Zen meditation, and it just blew my mind. I had the feeling that this is what I've been looking for my whole 21, 22 years of being alive! And I started meditating right then and there. I think it was even before he came out with his book, *The Three Pillars of Zen*; that was the name of the talk" (Kabat-Zinn 2014: 4).

The early papers on MBSR cited not just its *Theravāda* roots (Kornfield 1977; Nyanaponika 1962), but also its *Mahāyāna* roots within both the Soto (Suzuki 1970) and Rinzai (Kapleau 1965) Zen traditions (and by lineage, the earlier Chinese and Korean streams) as well as certain currents from the yogic traditions (Thakar 1977) including Vedanta (Nisargadatta 1973), and the teachings of J Krishnamurti (Krishnamurti 1969, 1979) and Ramana Maharshi (Maharshi 1959). My own primary Zen teacher, Seung Sahn, was Korean, and taught both Soto and Rinzai approaches ... Some works not cited in the early papers but that made a significant impression on my appreciation of the dharma at the time and how it could be articulated in a simple and colloquial vocabulary included *Meditation in Action* (Trungpa 1969), *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Hanh 1976), and *The Experience of Insight* (Goldstein 1976). ... In the early years, I did find great support for the direction I was taking in the writings of Nyanaponika Thera (1962) (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 289-90).

This recollection positions Kabat-Zinn as a scholar, scientist and meditator—he is also recognised, elsewhere, as an anti-war activist (Booth 2017). Given invisibilisation, reflections fail to locate Kabat-Zinn as a white, middle-class man: as a privileged subject within a society defined by inequality—or what bell hooks has called the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy (2000: 41). And yet these dynamics, and Kabat-Zinn's relation to them are foundational to his early conception of mindfulness. He states that in a ten-second vision in 1979, he foresaw global access to mindfulness through clinics and hospitals:

I saw in a flash not only a model that could be put in place, but also the long-term implications of what might happen if the basic idea was sound and could be implemented in one test environment—namely that it would spark new fields of scientific and clinical investigation, and would spread to hospitals and medical centres and clinics across the country and around the world, and provide right-livelihood for thousands of practitioners (2011: 287).

Kabat-Zinn's vision enters a political moment informed by histories of modernity and coloniality. Although his vision predates the Thatcher-Reagan era dominated by factors of social atomisation and isolationism, which encouraged an individualised, privatised self-care industry (Carrette and King 2005: 26; Cederström and Spicer 2015: 24, 39), his model is shaped by neoliberal forces of privatisation and immiseration (Harvey 2005: 52, 60; Davies 2015: 10, 141). And yet his vision fails to calibrate with the fracturing of society and the evisceration of communities and mass organisation. In the wake of this period, behavioural medicine itself collided with healthism.

Entering this conjuncture, Kabat-Zinn clarified his intention behind developing MBSR: that he never wishes “to exploit, fragment, or decontextualize the dharma, but rather to recontextualise it within the frameworks of science, medicine and healthcare” (2011: 288). And yet, although he explained his own understanding of “the word Dharma” as “pointing to something that really is universal” (Kabat-Zinn 1998: 495), he sought to use language to Americanise the dharma (2011.: 287). Although Kabat-Zinn’s reluctance to call his work ‘secular,’ honours a desire to merge it with the sacred (ibid.: 301), his own conception of the sacred does not accommodate “the cultural aspects of the tradition out of which the dharma emerged, however beautiful they might be” (ibid.: 287). We might understand Kabat-Zinn’s desire to honour the sacred as aiming to counteract the disenchantment of modernity and, following Asad, as a desire to reenchant ‘the modern epoch’ (2003: 13). Yet, this process involves, for Kabat-Zinn, selecting what constitutes acceptable dharma for a US audience. The lens through which he makes his selection assumes a homogeneity, suggesting that the US is an ‘integrated totality’ (ibid.). This lens is rendered invisible in the outcome of the selection as models are generated for specific groups, and these particularised models are then universalised.

Although Kabat-Zinn’s early definition of mindfulness did not address social ethics, it did proclaim a desire for an egalitarian society—at least for the global North. Presenting to The Contemplative Mind in Society Working Group, September 29 – October 2, 1994, Kabat-Zinn explained:

As I see it, a profound social/cultural revolution, or what I prefer to think of as a second Renaissance, is possible, at least in first and second world countries, if not globally. It is driven by strong currents of desire for greater meaning and fulfilment, health and well-being, leisure and comfort and the expectation of relative longevity that the past several centuries of technological progress in first-world countries has generated. The power of this strong inward longing in our society for well-being, meaning, and connectedness should not be underestimated ... One might argue that conditions are ripe, at least in the US, for the beginning of a new and more enlightened and broad-based Renaissance (Kabat-Zinn 1994: 3).<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Although there is no consensus among postcolonial scholars, ‘first-third world’ terminology is critiqued for its colonial overtones. I deploy the concepts of global North and South to indicate histories of economic, political and cultural dispossession that generate the bifurcation in the first instance. However, the global



Here, Kabat-Zinn reveals a US-Eurocentric frame that privileges the interests of certain social classes; he reveals too that, from its conception, mindfulness as a strategy to transform society was only intended to work in the global North. That contemporary secular mindfulness has been developed within this frame has implications not only for the global South but also for marginalised communities within the US and UK. Uncritical of the balance of world power that constitutes and privileges the global North and protects elite pockets of society therein, the ‘second Renaissance’ thesis proposes revolution in the social and cultural spheres, without addressing structural inequalities. More recently, Kabat-Zinn restates his thesis as a “flourishing on this planet akin to a second, and this time global Renaissance, for the benefit of all sentient beings and our world” (2011: 281). In critiquing the idea, Payne (2015) explains its mechanism:

(1) as individuals undertake mindfulness practice, they become more sensitive to the needs of others—more compassionate, more respectful, more cooperative, more conscious, more ethical in their behaviour generally, (2) as enough individuals within an institution undertake mindfulness practice and become increasingly ethical, that institution will ‘naturally’ be transformed, itself becoming more ethical, thereby becoming a force promoting human flourishing (2015).

The ‘second Renaissance’ thesis relies on a ripple-effect or trickle-down model of social change. Premised on individualism and invisibilised social norms, it implies that mindfulness is equally accessible to all, that there is a level playing-field and, moreover, that mindfulness can attend to all pain and suffering. Claims of universality re-position the hetero-, cis-normative, white man (Purser and Ng 2015) as “the invisible subject at the centre of discourse” (Walsh 2016: 156). Hickey (2010) takes this further to show that in certain scientific studies, it is the white, right-handed man who constitutes the norm (2010: 173).

Most Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha respondents uphold the ‘second Renaissance’ idea, believing that systemic change will occur one individual at a time. A respondent comments:

[...] everyone comes in for themselves. It’s literally almost in their body posture and somewhere, it could be class five or six, people look up and they start getting something. It starts early where people go: “that’s me! I

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North and South terminology is itself critiqued for the elision of the complexities of societies such as the rise of a global precariat—undefined by national borders and equally present in countries in the global North (Thérien 1999: 723).

know that! Oh, you look that way and you feel the same thing, wow!” So, it quickly starts becoming something really different (Deb Maitri WMF).

This suggests that the MBSR classroom provides a space that fosters a postracial interconnectedness that transcends difference. The assumption is that this ‘awakening’ is sufficient to precipitate social change and will extend to all areas of life—that it will eventually lead to a concern for community, society and the world. Individual mindfulness, it is believed, can generate a personal desire for social justice. Hickey (2010) challenges this premise. She argues that individualised mindfulness models are antagonistic to community and cultivate qualities and values antithetical to ‘commoning’ (2010: 174)—a term used increasingly in emergent, prosocial mindfulness ventures to denote the reclaiming of mindfulness for the betterment of society (Walsh 2018; Doran 2017; 2018).

Hickey suggests that ‘second Renaissance’ thought supersedes community. Dalia Gebrial (2018) locates Hickey’s critique within broader neoliberal strategies of substituting political, collective, resource-based demands with ‘self-help models of change’ (2018: 30). Gebrial substantiates her reasoning with Paul Gilroy’s (1990) explanation of the displacement of mass mobilisation with ‘the individual’ as the essential social unit of change (1990: 71). The discourse of individualism (DiAngelo 2010) foregrounds “self-reliance and economic betterment through thrift hard work and individual discipline” (Gilroy 1990: 71), as social atomisation accompanies privatisation and elevates health and happiness as attributes of the model citizen. As Zola (1972) explains, medicalisation constitutes a process through which: “labels ‘healthy’ and ‘ill’ relevant to an ever-increasing part of human existence [promote] a belief in the omnipresence of disorder ... [and an imperative] to feel, look or function better” (1972: 475-6). Zola’s critique of a perennial quest for perfection opposes Kabat-Zinn’s project of mindfulness as a pathway to become ‘whole,’ transcendent, and more human (Kabat-Zinn 1990: 177). Her argument suggests that secular mindfulness’ claim to ‘the sacred,’ obfuscates its complicity in healthism: through its emphasis on “wholeness and interconnectedness ... seeing that individuality and totality are interwoven” (Kabat-Zinn 1994b: 266), it legitimises individual discipline.

‘Second Renaissance’ thought indirectly sanctions neoliberalism’s disruption of community as an organising category. It also effaces the genesis of ill-health. Universality and

individualism symbiotically produce an ‘apolitical’ subject “as a unique entity—one that appears to have emerged from the ether, untouched by socio-historic conditioning” (DiAngelo 2010). ‘Second Renaissance’ thought places this universalised individual at the centre of their own healing process. This strategy elevates homogeneity, embeds post-racialism and denies identity as a mechanism that organises experience. Such underpinnings enchant secular mindfulness for elite audiences.

Following on from this early period, Kabat-Zinn’s own conceptualisation of mindfulness has become increasingly politicised over the decades. In *Coming to our Senses*, he expects individualised mindfulness to awaken an interest in community (2005: 501): “we cannot be completely healthy or at peace in our own private lives, inhabiting a world that itself is diseased and so much not at peace, in which so much of the suffering is inflicted by human beings upon one another” (2005: 507). Kabat-Zinn states, here, that personal wellbeing is linked to the wellbeing of all (ibid.: 14), and he privileges secular mindfulness as a private strategy, or tool used by the individual, to achieve social peace. In his formulation of this strategy, neglect of structural power reinforces the privatisation of politics and ethical action.

In 2011, Kabat-Zinn again suggested that the individualised mindfulness model would serve prosocial advancement: “as a public health intervention, a vehicle for both individual and societal transformation ... as common-sensical, evidence-based, and ordinary, and ultimately a legitimate element of mainstream medical care” (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 282). Yet, this society-wide health services strategy unfolds in the context of the increasing privatisation of health services in both the US and UK (Riggins 2018; Davies 2016: 228), a trend which undermines public health services as viable channels through which to widen participation in mindfulness. As the NHS experience shows, roll-out of MBCT is erratic (Cook 2016) and services are racialised (Griffiths 2018), thereby exacerbating existing social inequalities.

In 2015, the activist-philosopher-scholar Angela Davis challenged mindfulness’ contribution to social justice. Davis, herself a meditator, questioned mindfulness’ application to rising trends of dispossession and inequalities, which represent urgent and growing social

concerns. Among her specific questions is: “In a racially unjust world, what good is mindfulness?” In response, Kabat-Zinn offered his ‘second Renaissance’ model of societal change, adding that mindfulness offers “transformative practices that are capable of moving the bell curve of the entire society toward a new way of understanding of what it means to be human” (Davis – Kabat-Zinn 2015, 15 Jan). This debate between Davis and Kabat-Zinn captures the ‘apolitical’ stance of secular mindfulness, evident in Kabat-Zinn’s response. His ‘second Renaissance’ default as mindfulness’ contribution to racial and social justice, is revealing. In the same year, in his foreword to the Mindful Nation Report, Kabat-Zinn described mindfulness similarly: as a pathway to personal insight, clarity, discernment, ethical understanding, and awareness (MN Report Foreword 2015). As social justice gained traction in the public domain, the model that Kabat-Zinn espoused in both these instances illustrates the sector’s failure to recalibrate its operational definition in response to social divides and inequalities. The secular guideline ‘for our time’ increasingly exposed choices, interests, privileges and political biases within the sector. Political neutrality continued to threaten a meaningful link to social justice, working to demarcate secular mindfulness audiences from those whose political suffering the model could not accommodate.

Speaking the following year at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2016, Kabat-Zinn’s description of mindfulness remained ‘apolitical’. While he again referenced his concept of a ‘Renaissance’, he dropped the outdated descriptor ‘second’ instead locating it in the context of rapidly developing confluences in physical, digital and biological technologies called the fourth industrial revolution. Kabat-Zinn packaged mindfulness in the rhetoric of this markedly contemporary era. For example:

There is now scientific evidence for the effects of mindfulness on the brain, on the genome, on biological aging; when the mind does know itself then you get the potential for a new Renaissance that restructures itself in terms of our relationship to life, our relationship to the planet, our relationship to work (2016).

Yet Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, cautions that in contexts of growing inequalities, unless post-neoliberal economic systems address the needs of every human on the planet, skewed provision of services exacerbates the problem (Schwab 2016: 13). It is therefore, imperative that strategies of social

transformation take structural and systemic inequalities into account. By neglecting to address such inequalities as causes of suffering, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha models fall into the trap Schwab warns against.

The following year, in *Too Early to Tell*, 2017, seemingly for the first time and perhaps in response to the urgency of rising inequalities and resultant challenges outlined above, Kabat-Zinn began to interlace politics with his 'Renaissance' idea:

This is probably one of those 'key moments,' if not the most critical key moment ever on the planet, auguring a potential Renaissance in all senses of the word, if we can come to grips with our own endemic enmity, fear, and self-centeredness as a species, as nations, and as individuals. Never have we needed the wisdom and freedom of the dharma and our inborn potential to realise it as we do now, for the sake of all beings and for the sake of the planet itself (2017: 1134).

In this instance, although Kabat-Zinn roots inequality in individual emotions rather than social structures, again appealing primarily to individual sovereignty, he recognises the additional need to act also at national and global levels, invoking a collective sense of responsibility. It is unclear, however, who exactly he hails with this communal and vague 'we' and so, in effect, a sense of universality accompanies an ongoing silence around inequalities of race, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, gender and ability. Resultantly, while still rooting systemic change in individual behavioural change, Kabat-Zinn demands actions on a national scale but leaves little room for understanding nations as heterogeneous, often fractured entities that impose injustices upon their own citizens (Asad 2003: 129). Ultimately, this positioning of mindfulness reinforces individualised models and highlights the absence of a social ethics (Walsh 2016: 162).

Later in 2017, Kabat-Zinn reframed the role of mindfulness in fractured societies:

For me, this trajectory has always been one of generating an ever-growing number of hopefully skilful approaches for effectively addressing widespread suffering and its root causes in the human mind. These classically take the form of (1) greed; (2) fear and aversion, and the disdain, enmity, and vilifying that frequently accompany them, including the racial/ethnic dehumanising phenomenon of 'othering'; (3) delusion, namely, mistaking appearance for reality; and (4) the toxicity, ignorance,

and blindness that arise from ignoring intrinsic human values such as kindness and compassion, and the humanity in others (2017: 1126).

In this conceptualisation, Kabat-Zinn paraphrases the ‘three unwholesome roots’<sup>165</sup> in his description of US/UK contexts. He concurs, to some extent, with Loy’s argument regarding the institutionalisation of ‘greed, anger and delusion’ (2006; 2016: 20). However, whereas Loy interprets mindfulness from an engaged Buddhist perspective that acknowledges the role of community, Kabat-Zinn emphasises that the route to change is individualised, following ‘second Renaissance’ ideology that locates the ‘root causes’ of change ‘in the human mind.’ Again, here, Kabat-Zinn individualises Othering and appeals to innate ethics. The ideology of postracialism in which ‘second Renaissance’ thought functions, is evident in the ways Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha models individualise racism. Through a discourse of individualism, perpetrators of racism are encouraged to change their behaviours while targets of racial injustices are made to increase their coping strategies. This is possible because, in contrast to Kabat-Zinn’s vision of social transformation, secular mindfulness was never intended to direct political transformation. If it were to assume this mission, new models would emerge.

Gordon (2015) argues that systemic inequity is implicit in individualised psychology, identifying and challenging widespread obscuration and individualisation of race in the psy-world. In secular mindfulness, individualisation and postracialism project common causes, experiences and solutions to suffering (Lavelle 2016: 241). Gordon’s theory of racial individualism rejects the notion that individuals can overcome systemic racial bias. She highlights that discourses of racial analysis emerging in the US in the mid-twentieth century targeted individuals as units of analysis in change: “Racial individualism brought together three of our most powerful post-war American discourses: psychological individualism, rights-based individualism and assumptions about the socially transformative power of education” (2015: 2-3). This reveals deep-rooted histories of individualised postracial psychologies that predate formalisation of the concept. Gordon shows how twentieth-century psychology, through the rise of which racial individualism gained traction, ignored

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<sup>165</sup> The three unwholesome roots refer to the ‘three poisons’ in *Mahāyāna* (Sanskrit: *triviṣa*; Tibetan: *dug gsum*) and the three unwholesome roots in the *Theravāda* tradition (Sanskrit: *akuśala-mūla*; Pāli: *akusala-mūla*) namely, greed, hatred and delusion (Buswell and Lopez 2014: 546).

the systemic roots of racism. She demonstrates that studies favouring “racial individualism simultaneously created obstacles for advocates of systemic and relational approaches to the race issue” (ibid.: 27, 80). The confluence of mindfulness and psychology, and the camouflaging of race, perpetuates the ideology of racial individualism, by stipulating that behavioural change is the route to systemic change. In this light, it seems inconceivable for the current Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha models to perform a politically-transformative function.

The reconceptualisation of mindfulness can even be considered antithetical to stress reduction for marginalised groups when psychopathologised, structural causes are disregarded and personal resourcefulness to withstand or transcend such causes becomes a primary focus. Through this process, the individual is made either partly or wholly responsible for coping with their experience of structural oppression and discrimination. Through racial and now postracial individualisation, the responsibility to overcome systemic racism is enforced upon individuals rather than power structures.

Universality—the premise of Kabat-Zinn’s ‘second Renaissance’ belief and operational definition—advocates ‘sameness’. As previously noted, Lavelle (2016) shows that secular mindfulness models globalise the causes and solutions of stress. Mindfulness products, including Kabat-Zinn’s materials, use a lexicon of ‘common humanity,’ often promoting interconnectedness by stating that ‘we have more in common than not’ (CfM TDI 2015). The ‘second Renaissance’ thesis thus bypasses structural inequalities and constructs equivalence. A respondent expands:

[...] common humanity is one of the great foundations in MBSR ... a person might come in with a diagnosis but is not defined by their diagnosis. We all suffer and to me what that does is erode and loosen the illusion of a separate self ... we’re unifying experiences of human beings accessed both in pain and the potential for freedom (Jane Maitri WSF).<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Maitri’s ‘common humanity’ ethic derives from Kabat-Zinn’s ‘second Renaissance’ discourse. It invisibilises the teacher’s positionality and the ways in which secular mindfulness is exclusive, not only via Buddhism, but via race and class. For example, at the 2018 Mindfulness on the Margins Un-conference, a Black mindfulness teacher spoke of her exclusion from the sector on the basis of the under-representation of Black mindfulness teachers and leaders, as well as her Christianity. This undermines the ethic of “do no harm” and questions its conceptual inherence (Mindfulness on the Margins, 19 April 2018).

Such universality neglects the unequal contexts in which lives, stresses, illness and wellness are forged. It elevates the sacred above the secular, relying on an understanding of the universal as a pre-sectarian space that unites different spiritual and cultural doctrines and discourses. Kabat-Zinn (1994) explains:

The key to this path, which lies at the root of Buddhism, Taoism and yoga, and which we also find in ... Native American wisdom, is an appreciation of the present moment and the cultivation of an intimate relationship to it through a continual attending with care and discernment (1994: 5).

In this way, mindfulness comes to present, appropriate and homologise multiple traditions. For Kabat-Zinn, the spiritual realm presents universal truths: “spiritual simply means experiencing wholeness and interconnectedness directly” (ibid.: 265). He assumes an authority, here, to collapse traditions and incorporate them into his interpretation of secular mindfulness. Moreover, he proclaims that anyone is capable of practicing mindfulness and has a “core capacity for awareness and meta-awareness” (Kabat-Zinn and Davidson 2011: 8). Braun (2017) suggests that the mindfulness project is about “creating a new individual” (Braun 2017: 196). While this ‘new individual’ is, in Kabat-Zinn’s conception, an evolved human, others describe it as a neoliberal citizen (Honey 2014; Hsu 2016: 369; Cannon 2016: 401; Walsh 2016: 157).

Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha contribute to social atomisation; their collective ideological framework rejects strategies of mass mobilisation, and instead centres the universalised individual. Bhabra (2014) draws on postcolonial scholars to challenge the epistemologies that underpin ideologies of universality (2014: 125), showing that they are cast in European and, increasingly, in US-Eurocentric terms. Bhabra shows that ideologies of universality are not simply equal to the assertion of the ‘white man’ as the universal model of humanity; she highlights that they necessitate the creation of the subaltern, which is excluded from the hierarchy of humanness (2014: 125). In this instance, secular mindfulness causes us to think of stress and its solutions in not only individualised, but white, male, heteronormative terms, while at the same time universalising the biophysical model, and homologising suffering. Drawing on Fanon’s (1967 [1953]) *Black Skin, White Masks*, Bhabha (1994) emphasises that by locating ourselves culturally and historically, we can disrupt the construction of modernity according to the universal gaze. For Bhabha, defying and refusing



the position of the Other is part of the contradictory process of disrupting of the universalist rhetoric (1994: 195). These kinds of challenges to universality and modernity underpin the work of Radical Dharma and Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

Western interpretations of Buddhism accord with certain values, with an emphasis on the self being at the core of Western Buddhism (Stanley and Longden 2016: 306). According to Fronsdal, for example, secular mindfulness emphasises “freedom within the world;” it embraces “the body as part of the wholistic field of practice,” and it stresses “the immediate benefits of mindfulness and untroubled, equanimous presence in the midst of life’s vicissitudes” (Fronsdal 1995). Importantly, it transforms the practitioner’s relationship to their emotions and inner and outer worlds (ibid.). These concerns depict a Western frame in which mindfulness is put to work to fortify the individualised self by producing self-regulating and accepting subjects (Stanley and Longden 2016: 320). Programmes cultivate meta-awareness of patterns of clinging, aversion and impermanence, for example, with training in self-regulation aiming to interrupt such patterns and re-constitute an ‘improved’ self.

#### 4.4 Inherent Ethics or Exclusions?

Secular mindfulness’ psychophysiological model of “stress reactivity and pain regulation” (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 289)<sup>167</sup> disengages socio-economic and political conditions (Hickey 2010: 178; Hammack 2017; Purser and Loy 2013; Walsh 2016: 157): this contextual void underpins Kabat-Zinn’s reconceptualisation. Edicts of neutrality and universality imply a compatibility with all social settings, regardless of circumstances; secular mindfulness is packaged as an ‘apolitical’, ahistorical ‘social leveller,’ available to anyone for the purposes of meeting their ‘suffering’ differently—a view commonly endorsed in the psy-disciplines (Ng 2016: 140). As Ng explains, the psy-complex plays a pivotal role in normalising “the social mechanisms of subjectification and the individual practices of subjectivation enabling the production of neoliberal subjectivity [Rose 1989]. This occurs not by way of coercion but by way of the freedom to choose” (Ng 2016: 140). As a wellbeing technology, secular mindfulness is

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<sup>167</sup> In efforts to bridge the “epistemologies of science and dharma” says Kabat-Zinn, “it felt useful to adopt the already established terminology of self-regulation [Shapiro 1980] and describe meditation operationally, in terms of the self-regulation of attention [Goleman and Schwartz 1976]” (2013: 288).

projected as neutral and as available to those who wish to be well. ‘Apolitical’ branding erases socio-political differences and the causes of suffering (Lavelle 2016: 233).

#### **4.4.1 Universality: Social Integration or Division?**

Universality and neutrality are foundations of secular mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn states that mindfulness and dharma are universal concepts that describe the quality of human attention in relation to suffering and happiness (Kabat-Zinn 2005: 137). Definitions such as this, which constitute the foundations of mindfulness, render invisible mechanisms of exclusion and ownership. Hickey (2010) argues that while she may applaud the strategy to improve access to mindfulness, it:

[...] erases two or three millennia of Hindu and Buddhist history—and the monks, nuns, monarchs, nobles, and ordinary laypeople who preserved and developed it. Kabat-Zinn himself learned mindfulness from Buddhist teachers, in Buddhist communities. I do not actually think there is anything inherently wrong with practicing meditation or yoga or lovingkindness for better wellbeing. It is recognized as a legitimate goal within these traditions, albeit a lesser one than enlightenment or union with Brahman. What I am critiquing here is a rhetorical erasure of the past, and the assumption that one’s own social, cultural, and historical perspective applies universally (2010: 173).

Orientalist practices such as cultural erasure are acts of modernity. Secular mindfulness, says Hickey, embeds these practices of appropriation and dominion in models and courses marketed for therapeutic gain. By casting itself in terms of ‘universal dharma’ and ‘skilful means,’ secular mindfulness conceals dynamics of privilege and access, while exacerbating the inequality which typifies the operations of privilege and access in the US/UK contexts in which secular mindfulness flourishes.

When Monteiro, Musten and Compson (2015) argue that ethics are embodied by the teacher, they also imply that the teacher ‘does no harm’. They render invisible the immorality of appropriation and erasure to which Hickey refers. Purser (2015) foregrounds mindfulness’ ethical ambivalence, understanding ethics as inextricable from the cultural contexts in which programmes are delivered. In the US/UK, he suggests market forces and histories of Othering are primary drivers for the propagation of mindfulness (2015: 37; Hyland 2016: 389). He argues that the adoption of mindfulness and its commercialisation

are commonly viewed as processes of modernity rather than acts of appropriation and that, in this way dominant US norms and values become reinforced through mindfulness. Wilson (2014), on the other hand, suggests that for “ethical mindfulness practitioners ... mindfulness provides an alternative to mainstream American society” (2014: 194)<sup>168</sup>—although he does not clarify whether these ethical practitioners are using mindfulness to change US society, or to live within its borders more peacefully. Bodhi (2013) identifies both as possibilities. Based on his experience of an Engaged Buddhism conference, he distinguishes those seeking to live peacefully within the confines of society from those seeking social change:

[...] the participants could be seen to fall roughly into two camps: a majority camp, made up of those who accepted the present structures of society and sought to use Buddhist teachings to enable people to function more effectively and peacefully within its contours; and a minority camp, made up of those who sought to draw from the Dharma a radical critique of the dominant social ethos and its institutions (2013).

Based on Bodhi’s distinction, Hickey’s reinforcement of values holds for Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha who adopt discourses of postracialism and individualism but seek to foster peaceful societies. Their models are challenged by Black, Magee, Hsu, Sylvia, Ng and Radical Dharma, all of whom spotlight race and like Bodhi’s minority camp, seek radical transformation.

Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha on the other hand, all subscribe to the Trojan horse notion<sup>169</sup> of an implicit universal ethics (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 294) with their consideration of ethics lagging behind the debate outlined above. Discussing MBCT’s implicit ethics, the following respondent limits the debate to whether Buddhist ethics are present in secular mindfulness models:

[Whereas] ethics in the Buddhist context are very explicit, that doesn’t seem to be appropriate in a more therapeutically-based model of what

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<sup>168</sup> Much of the literature from the US refers to ‘American religion’ (Wilson 2014), American Dharma (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 301) and the ‘Buddhification of America’ (Braun 2017: 194). I continue to use the designator US to distinguish North from South America, and the United States from Canada.

<sup>169</sup> In a corporate context, the Trojan horse argument is countered with a ‘corporate quietism’ hypothesis which suggests that: “offering mindfulness to individuals in corporations will, at best, offer stress relief or create what Kevin Healy has described as ‘integrity bubbles’ for select individuals, while systemic corporate dysfunction continues unabated” (Purser and Ng 2015).

mindfulness is doing, and in a way the implicit is allowing people to come to their own realisations. *The question is what is lost in not having an explicit agenda* because it's very clear in the Buddhist model. In the Buddhist sense, ethics are not prescriptions. *The real sense of ethics in Buddhism comes from a heightened awareness, a heightened particularity of being able to look at any given situation and being able to respond to it.* Now I would say some of that is going on in MBCT as well, hence the reason we can call it implicit because you might come to a realisation through the awareness you've developed in the course of an 8-week or a succession of 8-week courses, that actually, this is not good for me, I shouldn't let my mind go in that direction and so on and so forth. So, I don't think we can count it out completely but it's certainly not at the fore-front of the agenda. On a Buddhist programme I could be more explicit with someone when their behaviour is harmful. In mindfulness, that realisation is left to the individual (Sid Upeksha WSM, emphasis added).

An inherent ethics, Sid explains, relies on individuals to come to their own discernment of wholesome and unwholesome behaviours. Another respondent states that "ethics are transmitted implicitly through the teacher" (Tina Maitri WMF). Jane expands:

The key is ethics. So my understanding is when people first came to study and wanted to learn to teach here, the assumption was that you came with a dharma practice so that the *sīla* would be in your practice and then what actually turned out was that it wasn't just people with deep roots in the dharma tradition which many of us did arrive with (Jane Maitri WSF).<sup>170</sup>

These respondents regard Buddhist teachers of secular mindfulness the natural forbearers of ethics, foremost of which is 'do no harm'. As Hickey (2010) argues, this assumes that trainers sit outside political contexts. Their conditioned beliefs, biases and cultures are erased and replaced by Buddhist ethics, transmitted implicitly; their likely embodiment of privilege, whiteness and postracialism are overlooked and unquestioned. A rhetoric of, for example, 'embodiment of ethics' and 'skilful action', avoids inquiry into relational power, by assimilating the individual who conforms to dominant cultures and reproducing them as universalised. By the same token, this lexicon excludes those with divergent norms and minoritised identities.

The emphasis on the 'present moment,' core to mindfulness, demonstrates further exclusionary facets of the operational definition.

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<sup>170</sup> *Sīla* (Pāli) are Buddhist ethics or morality denotes an internal compass that guides action.

#### 4.4.2 Present-Moment Awareness, Temporality and Futurity

The concept 'present-moment awareness,' is central to secular mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn's explanation of the construct endures in Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha:

Mindfulness is developing a conscious awareness that has a particular orientation which is about living in the present moment as best we can and what that means simply is a way to practice, to attend to internal triggers and to be situated in our external environment (Tina Maitri WMF).

The present moment is thus tied to the body, fixed to experience, and reified as the ground of universality; "prior to religious ritual forms or doctrine" (Braun 2017: 184). Bodhi says the construct serves a focus on immediate outcomes:

Lifted from its source, the Dhamma had been reduced to the practice of a particular style of meditation, and the meditation itself had been reduced to the technique of present-moment mindfulness just to win purely 'immanent' goals such as peace of mind and a more stable grounding in immediate experience (2016: 6).

The fixation with outcome, Bodhi says, aside from being anti-Buddhist, reaffirms acclimatisation to outcome and 'selfing'. Yet, the definition endures, involving not only attention regulation but also acceptance:

The emphasis was always on awareness of the present moment and acceptance of things as they are, however they are in actuality, rather than a preoccupation with attaining a particular desired outcome at some future time, no matter how desirable it might be (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 290).

Kabat-Zinn's emphasis encourages practitioners to turn towards and accept. Mindfulness is "as much about acceptance of experience as it is about remaining in the present moment" (Lewis and Rozelle 2016: 257). The acceptance of things 'as they are', encourages pain sufferers to avoid second-arrow reactivity. A respondent says it also encourages an appraisal of thoughts, sensations and emotions as 'not me, not mine', or 'impermanent events in the mind' (Lu Upeksha WMF). Constantly shifting awareness from moment to moment is intended to train a 'letting go,' and acceptance of new moments (Stanley and Longden 2016: 320). Another respondent commented further on the value of acceptance:

I realised that the way I was using meditation was limited. I then came across the works of Jon Kabat-Zinn and also Stephen Levine. What they were communicating was this idea that you turn towards your difficulty. That you embrace your difficulty, that you embrace pain. What I became aware of was that I was using meditation to escape and to generate a pain-

free state. Which of course you can't do so I was just ending up exhausted. But I'd cultivated lots of skills, so I was able to work with awareness. On the basis of that work, I realised that I needed to change my practice, becoming much more receptive. Kabat-Zinn's work is of course revelatory for that and when I read it, I thought this was amazing. But what I found in my own journey meditating is that I hadn't really ever got good advice on how to deal with physical pain. Most of the people were very young and healthy. Kabat-Zinn was addressing this, and I found it very helpful (Karen Karuna WMF).

Karen's comments mark a shift away from resilience and endurance training towards receptivity and 'turning toward' difficulty. Braun (2017) names this the 'enchantment of pain':

Pain, mindfully observed, offers the opportunity to change one's relationship to all experience ... pain evokes meaning ... pain is a form of agency, oriented around the present, the physical, and the therapeutic ... The reframing of pain, whether intense or subtle, as meaningful creates a sense of enchantment in naturalised terms (2017: 175-8).

Acceptance requires the individual to welcome pain, including that which is politically-enforced. In this way, politically-induced pain is equated with that caused by an accident.

In Buddhist terms, the framework of acceptance involves 'taking refuge': "When difficulties come along, we have something in which to take refuge, something that will sustain us through the time of darkness" (Brazier 2016: 73). In taking refuge, turning toward difficulty is accompanied by recollection and non-forgetfulness of the three jewels—both of which disrupt 'present-moment' notions (Tomassini 2016: 222). In a secular setting, these sites of refuge are replaced by the body and breath. As the murder of Eric Garner illustrates, these refuges are not always dependable: they can be inaccessible and/or unsafe. Some are denied the right to breathe, based on their race and socioeconomic positioning. Again, we see that enchantment is not universal.

Some critique 'present moment' because it reinforces the practitioner's attachment to their body (Brazier 2016: 70; Mitra and Greenberg 2016: 416; Doran 2017: 20; Purser 2015: 682). Purser, for instance, suggests that this 'instruction' to return repeatedly to the 'now' encourages a 'selfing':

Therapeutic mindfulness urges us to ‘live in the present moment’ and to try to live mindfully, by ‘being here now.’ However, this heavy emphasis on locatedness subtly reinforces an achievement and self-orientation, as we are constantly in a mode of self-surveillance, checking up on ourselves, gauging our progress and ability (or, more often than not, inability) to ‘be present’ (2015: 682).

He reinforces the critique of mindfulness as a neoliberal technology, constantly monitoring and assuming the control of a free, self-aware agent (Asad 2003: 73).

Furthermore, the ‘present moment’ is meaningless in numerous cultures in which past and future are non-linear. “The term for past and future in many non-European languages like Aymara, Mandarin, Urdu and Hindi is the same” says Nikita Dhawan (Planetary Utopias 2018 Opening Plenary). Within these languages, pasts and futures are commonly understood as intertwined and indistinguishable rather than in terms of linear progressions. “Temporality”, she says, is tied to “hope, desire and imagination for non-dominant futures” (ibid.). It is also linked to the construction of ‘self’. In certain African, North American and Maori traditions, elders and ancestors are generally present in communal spiritual spaces (Smith 1999; Ige 2006; McCabe 2008); in these traditions the self may include relationships with the community and the land (Smith 1999: 51). These factors suggest a dissonance between present-moment awareness and conceptions of ‘self,’ that makes Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha’s models unsuitable in multiple contexts.

Queer theorist Heather Love’s work presents a different yet related challenge to secular mindfulness’ temporal framework. Love, building upon the anti-relational turn in queer studies, emphasises ‘turning backward’ to struggles that have informed queerness—not to liberate them from the darkness of shame, but to recollect depression, pain and regret, to understand the present (Love 2009). For Love, the present necessarily involves the past not as rumination, but as ‘remembering’ which, ironically, is close to the meaning of *sati*. Her work stands in opposition to Linehan’s ‘detachment’ in MBCT in which participants dissociate from pain. For Love, ‘feeling backwards’ into a painful past defines being alive in a way that differs from meeting pain only ever in the present moment with no recollection of the past. She amplifies the power of the past.

We might understand José Muñoz's work on queer utopianism (2009), on the other hand, as part of what Drew Daniel has referred to as the anti-anti-relational turn. Muñoz understands the present moment as premised upon and constituted of inequalities, while also infused with 'queer potentiality', or the possibility of queerness which is 'yet to come', necessarily in the future of 'not yet here'.<sup>171</sup> Instead of secular mindfulness' 'here and nowness', Muñoz advocates for a politics of transformation that emphasises a 'then and there' (Muñoz 2009: 29). In this line of thought, the past is essential to the present in that the present is 'history still', and queerness, as an ideality, is what "tells us that something is missing, or something is not yet here" (Muñoz 2009: 86). It is "a temporal arrangement, one that is a being and a doing for the future" (Warner 2011: 256). This understanding of temporality counters secular mindfulness' 'present moment', revealing it to be devoid of *remembering* or *imagination* to create a different world. As madison moore (2018) puts it: "the present moment is awful for most of us. Why would we want to live in it? We have to create a different moment" (moore 2018: Oxford Book Launch).

Muñoz's 'futurity' emphasises the imperative for marginalised groups to *actively* occupy the present moment; to do rather than be; to alter inequalities by creating an inclusive world. His political sense of agency infuses temporality with understandings of power. Neither Love nor Muñoz are interested in occupying the present moment with compassion for the purposes of attaining calm and happiness. For both, queer life is defined by its defiance of the normative trend to accept the present moment without striving for it to be any different to what it is.

Theorists such as Muñoz (2009), Smith (1999) and Ige (2006) defy normative, 'apolitical' notions of 'time' or 'self', while Ahmed, for example, shows that the present moment is inseparable from the past as it expresses the ways in which bodies and lives are continuously reconstituted in relation to power (Ahmed 2014: 39).<sup>172</sup> Contrary to the

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<sup>171</sup> Muñoz employs a critical idealism to emphasise the importance of concrete utopias which involve collectives and groups. He states: "The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*" (2009: 1).

<sup>172</sup> Dillon explains of the present: "The present is possessed by the logics and protocols of racial capitalism's past—by a perfectly routine massacre that was and is repeated endlessly across space and time in the (post)colony, prison, frontier, torture room, plantation, reservation, riot zone, and on and on. Racial terror



reification of the present-moment and the 'letting go' of the past, these scholars contend that narratives that unearth invisible 'pasts, presents and futures,' transform temporality (Ahmed 2014: 34; Smith 1999: 149).

[...] the past and present are not ontologically discrete categories, but are, rather, complex human constructs. The present is not a quarantined, autonomous thing. What was begun does not end but instead intensifies so that the past and present become indistinguishable (Dillon 2011: 42).

Dillon highlights the constructedness of temporality. He sheds light on secular mindfulness discourse as part of US-European modernity, amplifying the political nature of the present moment and agency.

Finally, philosopher David Scott critiques the present moment for a 'presentness' (2017: 56) that belies it as a 'conjuncture'. In his commemoration of Stuart Hall's work, Scott echoes what queer theorists and critical feminists argue that the present moment cannot conveniently be reduced to a temporality that occurs between the past and future. He asks: when does it begin and end and who decides? Hall's 'conjuncture' encapsulates the political economic and ideological materiality of conditions that lead to action and subversion. The idea of a conjuncture is not merely to denote the present as a political culmination of the past, but to acknowledge the interplay of multiple events and responses that constitute many different 'presents' and realities. Hall adds to conjuncture the notion of contingency through which he argues that futures are not yet known or determined by temporal 'pasts' or 'presents.' His appreciation of possibility, which ties agency to contingency, takes into account the political crises that dominate power and the imperative of political action. For Hall then, the present cannot be differentiated from power. Contingency and the conjuncture are complementary aspects of the same phenomenon (Scott 2017: 60-1).

Secular mindfulness' presumptions about linear temporality<sup>173</sup> and enchantment of the present moment, reveal hegemonic epistemologies and cosmologies that bury difference.

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returns from a past that is not an end to take hold (of bodies, institutions, infrastructure, discourse, and libidinal life) and does not let go" (2011: 42).

<sup>173</sup> As Purser (2015) notes: "The so-called present moment is located in a past-present-future temporal structure. This view takes for granted that time is an abstract container for actual moments, or units of time, which are arranged in a linear progression. This view (and lived experience) of time reduces it to an index and

The multiple perspectives just discussed test Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's notions of universality. The interrogation of discourses of secular mindfulness is important to determine whether Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness is of use to communities in the global South and North.

#### 4.5 Individualisation, Community and Hybridity

Critical discourses expose individualised perspectives of suffering and the related individual responsibility for healing (Stanley and Longden 2016: 306; Lavelle 2016: 235). Such models have previously been critiqued for their complicity in neoliberal strategies of social atomisation. Although I previously acknowledged Karuna's commitment to cultivating their organisational community, here I wish to explore further white mindfulness' individualistic, anti-community function.

Secular mindfulness models emphasise neuro-psychology:

[...] 'mindfulness' is often conceptualised as an internal state or trait within 'the mind', with behavioural and neural correlates; it is very often taken-for-granted by psychologists and cognitive scientists as an inner and private psychological entity—state or trait—existing within the mind/brain of the individual person (Davidson and Dimidjian 2015, quoted in Stanley and Longden 2016: 305).

This mental, neural focus reinforces therapization and invisibilises normative constructs of mood states. It encourages a neuroscientific focus on individuals as social units (Faure 2012: 111). Moreover, mindfulness' evolution in a psychology of individuation and a politics of atomisation distances it from social transformation (Lavelle 2016: 237):<sup>174</sup>

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background factor; objectified time feels like an external, inexorable, and compelling force bearing down on us" (2015: 682).

<sup>174</sup> The following respondent explains the attraction of mindfulness for individuals independent of their social context: "What we do is we plant seeds, so we run a particular programme as a 'treatment programme' because I guess mindfulness is just mindfulness, but we do something specific within that. It's therapeutic and has therapeutic value for people. People come because they're suffering, people come because they are stressed—they are not living the sorts of lives they wish to live. So, I suppose in an eight-week programme there is a sense of waking up to the person's own habits if you like. I think there is a beginning to see what it is that drives me in my life. Somewhere the way they have viewed themselves, other people around the world and their future through a narrow lens of depression or stress or whatever it may be becomes clearer. I think what the picture allows people to do is to widen that lens and see more of the picture and I guess when you see more of the picture there is more available in terms of the choices you make. So, I think initially it's more

The modern frames of individualism and scientific reductionism, combined with certain features of our biomedical paradigm that tend to locate illness within the individual, have implicitly shaped the rhetoric of contemporary programs. In short, MBSR ... [is] ... biopsychosocially decontextualized (ibid.: 240).

Lavelle points out the crux of the wellbeing model. As previously discussed, it not only individualises illness but places a premium on wellness: privatised self-care promotes neoliberal subjectivity, responsabilisation and commercialisation. Within the burgeoning ‘spiritual marketplace’:

[an] ‘exoticism’ narrative contrasts with community building and social support networks; instead, ‘it seeks the source of healing not so much in the caring communities we have lost but in the healing practices of ancient Eastern cultures we have never known’ (Said 1978: 29).

Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha’s models, more than obscure inequalities, bestow upon individuals sovereignty over their health, regardless of structural factors that mitigate their wellbeing. Walsh (2016) argues that privatised mindfulness detracts from its potential to ‘structurally transform society’ (2016: 157).

Sociological interpretations seek to understand mindfulness’ prospects beyond its current demographic (Hammack 2017; Stanley 2012: 639; Walsh 2016: 157; Barker 2014: 171; Stanley and Longden 2016: 206). As I argue in the following section, however, psychological and sociological approaches objectify either individuals or groups and tend to disregard the role of emotion—as explored by Ahmed, for example—in reproducing structural power (Ahmed 2014: 10). Where such approaches move beyond these bounds, they can map interventions that challenge the conventional uses of mindfulness.

Socially-minded mindfulness protagonists seek to diversify the sector and society. Magee (2018), Blum (2014) and Black (2017) identify a politically-fraught context in which mindfulness embeds and in which, as it lacks a politically explicit agenda, it possesses a propensity to reinforce oppressive strictures. While not venturing as far as theorists who

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learning what drives me in my life: ‘ah, here are my habits, here are my patterns that mean that this is what I do, this is how I feel, this is how I think and the consequence of that is this’ (Lu Upeksha WMF).

deconstruct the self, these scholars identify innovative applications of secular mindfulness.

Magee (2018), for instance, argues:

[...] when I look at the western mindfulness scene, I do think a barrier to allowing its rich potential to infuse and enrich the lives of a broader and broader swath of our human population is the way that it's taught in the midst of a society that hasn't reckoned with racism, sexism, and all the other isms, very well. So, a part of the way in which we haven't reckoned with those things is the hyper-focus on individualism. To disconnect, denude our experience from its embeddedness in community and culture. So, that is kind of hand and glove with racism, sexism, homophobia. All of that, is to deny the relevance of culture, of community, of history. Deep in the cultural structures of this society, of western societies, and many societies in the world right now, are hidden ways of perpetuating the status quo, including perpetuating racism, sexism, etcetera. And one of those sorts of subtle ways is to hyper-focus on the individual. It's not about sex or race. It's really about you as an individual and whether or not you can overcome. And, through no intentional fault of its own, I think mindfulness has been taken up in the midst of that culture. ... mindfulness, I think, because it opens up our capacity to see things through multiple lenses at once, has a profound ability to help us, and in that sense lead Western culture forward (2018).

Magee captures the flaws of a behavioural change agenda that personalises systemic injustices and privatises transformation. This approach reduces mindfulness to cultivating patience to await change (ibid.). In their postracial, individualised universalism, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's models are inconsistent with social justice agendas. Magee identifies their limits and subscribes to a mindfulness that can overcome injustices.

Black's (2017) focus on identity politics aims to create spaces in which PoC can practice together and be taught by black teachers. While Black critiques the curriculum for its basis in whiteness, the operational definition of mindfulness holds. Similarly, Magee's (2016; 2018) emphasis on community-engaged mindfulness uses Kabat-Zinn's concept of mindfulness as a foundation upon which to build communication and collaboration. Unlike MBSR though, Magee encourages participant narrative. Blum's (2014) work and Maitri's current PoC and LGBT+ initiatives similarly deploy Kabat-Zinn's original formulation.

Identity-based groups are what Crenshaw calls "coalitions waiting to be formed" (1991: 1299). The politics of identity, invested in shifting concerns from the individual to the

collective, is essentially about transformation. Here, race becomes a principle of organisation or a 'coalition location': identifying the possibilities for transformation occurs within and between groups (Hill Collins and Bilge 2016: 135). The work of Black and Magee for instance, is not simply about separate organising; it has a political agenda of transformation.

Buddhist Global Relief (BGR), although not limited to mindfulness, encapsulates a Buddhist model that redresses social injustices. BGR actively engages community organisations with whom they co-produce programmes, embodying a social ethic that privileges community interests to build different futures. Unlike Bodhi, or Hill Collins and Bilge, a respondent identifies two discrete projects: the cultivation of mindfulness, and the political agenda of social transformation. He underlines their separation rather than their confluence: "first get the mindfulness right, and then turn to the politics" (Sid Upeksha WSM). In contrast to Sid's bifurcation of therapeutic and political mindfulness, for Bodhi as for Hill Collins and Bilge, the personal and political are inseparable (Bodhi 2013).

In recognition of the role mindfulness can play in re-building community, Lavelle (2016) explains:

[...] a context-sensitive approach facilitates a natural expansion of the conceptualization of the causes of suffering and the methods for overcoming suffering, thereby allowing practitioners, programmers, and researchers to draw upon diverse, community-based, and ecologically sensitive approaches for healing that have been over-looked because of a narrowly imposed Buddhist contemplative or modern frame. There is not one vision for a healthy, just society, nor is there one method for achieving health and well-being (2016: 241).

Lavelle's comment challenges the 'second Renaissance' aspiration on the basis of its hyper-individualised, anti-community premise: in her view, the concept is antithetical to stress reduction for marginalised groups. Lavelle also challenges universality and underlines the need for a political appraisal of suffering that invites an expanded, inclusive vision for imagined futures. Her position underscores the Dalai Lama's (1995) emphasis on compassion which, he says, entails: "a sensitivity to the suffering of self and others, with a deep commitment to try to relieve it" (Dalai Lama 1995: 16). He expands: "when

compassion is complemented and reinforced by the faculty of wisdom, the individual has the ability not only to empathize, but also to understand the causes and conditions that lead to ... suffering” (Dalai Lama 2011: 255). Put to work for social justice, secular mindfulness, for Lavelle, cultivates the Dalai Lama’s description of active compassion.

Individualised models are furthermore presumptive in relation to constructs of emotions, bodies and borders. In the following section, I consider how said constructs function within secular mindfulness contexts.

#### **4.6 The Politics of Pain and Emotion**

Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha programmes target pain and aim to reduce stress and depressive relapse. In contrast to the normative, clinical definition of pain that governs the secular literature,<sup>175</sup> I compare mindfulness’ interpretation of pain—an interpretation derived from Buddhist doctrine—with Ahmed’s (2014) ‘sociality of emotion’. I argue that Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha’s ‘apolitical’ models conceal the multiplicities of pain which go unacknowledged in the universalisation of suffering. In a vein similar to those who understand the linearity of temporality as an imposition and seek to disrupt it, Ahmed proposes that the ‘flattening’ of human suffering performs as a denial of the inequivalences of adversity. She rejects the depoliticization of pain and compassion.

Pain, or stress, is “the vehicle for mindfulness ... pain is a form of agency, oriented around the present, the physical, the therapeutic” (Braun 2017: 177). As Braun outlines, pain draws together multiple aspects of secular mindfulness: temporality, agency, the body and the therapeutic. In Buddhist discourses, suffering is understood to comprise three levels (Purser 2015b: 680). First, the suffering of suffering comprises chronic pain, stress and depression. Mindfulness programmes address this kind of ‘unsatisfactoriness’ through the ‘two arrows’

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<sup>175</sup> In Chapman’s (1986) definition, pain is nuanced and subjectified: “(a) pain is subjective; (b) pain is more complex than an elementary sensory event; (c) the experience of pain involves associations between elements of sensory experience and an aversive feeling state; and (d) the attribution of meaning to the unpleasant sensory events is an intrinsic part of the experience of pain” (1986: 153).

doctrine.<sup>176</sup> The aim is to unlearn mental reactivity to unpleasantness: this is the ‘second arrow’, which is believed to exacerbate suffering, and in rejecting it, practitioners learn how to respond more wisely. Second, the suffering of change is associated with ‘clinging’ to the pleasant and denying impermanence. Secular mindfulness models cultivate recognition of unwholesome attachments, using the teaching of impermanence to encourage ‘letting go’. Third, suffering of conditioned existence or all-pervasive suffering constitutes the prior forms and relates to a fixed view of the self. Third-level suffering is considered inaccessible to ordinary experience, comprehensible only through deep meditative insight. Secular mindfulness programmes are not designed to address this final form of hidden suffering. As Dorjee (2014) explains, secular mindfulness aims to achieve “basic enhancement of attentional stability and the development of non-judgmental meta-awareness in order to improve people’s abilities to cope with everyday stresses and anxieties” (2014: 118). Designed for therapeutic purposes to address ‘this-worldly’ suffering and stress reduction, it lacks soteriological aspirations found in Buddhist doctrinal discourses (Drougge 2016: 169). As Dorjee says, it comprises self-regulation and coping strategies.

Based on investigations of diversity and social justice work within UK and Australian higher education systems and among indigenous Australians, Ahmed (2014) challenges this type of categorisation. For Ahmed, thoughts, sensations and emotions are not objectifiable. She explores theories of emotion as bodily sensations building upon Descartes and Hume, and theories of emotion as cognition building upon Aristotle (2014: 5-8). Even perception, regarded in secular mindfulness as pre-subjective, is for Ahmed, pre-conditioned (2014: 6). She argues that emotions drive effect and generate power.

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<sup>176</sup> The *Sallatha Sutta* (Thānissaro Bhikkhu 1997) contains the two arrows doctrine. Lewis and Rozelle (2016) explain the nature of second-arrow suffering: “Three factors contribute to second-arrow suffering. First, we wishfully hope and fantasize, perhaps subconsciously, that the pain will never happen, and once it arrives, it will soon depart (Soeng 2004: 79), and yet are unable to control it in either way. Second, we feel we own the pain; it is such an intimate part of me that when it hurts, it is my pain, so I hurt. Finally, the pain seems real to us, not imaginary; it has substance. The result is more than mere pain; it is resentment, avoidance, fear, anger, anxiety, revulsion, self-pity, and a broad range of other negative emotions. Dukkha thus arises not merely from painful stimuli, but also because of our innate assumptions about the nature of experience and reality. The first arrow can also be emotional pain, such as loss of a loved one, and the same dynamics are at work as with physical pain” (2016: 249).

Asad (2003) argues similarly to Ahmed: “A crucial point about pain is that it enables the secular idea that ‘history-making’ and ‘self-empowerment’ can progressively replace pain by pleasure—or at any rate, by the search for what pleases one” (2003: 68).<sup>177</sup> Asad points indirectly here to agency and individual choice. As he says, the assumption in talking about the body is that all individuals are able to act unfettered (ibid.). Yet, agency is a constantly wielded power, always under threat. Although secular mindfulness works to accommodate difficulty, it also primarily, emphasises peace and happiness thus complying with Asad’s ‘empowerment’ model.

The mindfulness field concurs with Asad’s explanation: pain is associated with unpleasantness and is instinctively avoided. Perception, in the Abhidharma, follows a point of ‘contact’ which generates what is regarded as a pre-subjective ‘feeling tone’. Mindfulness trains the ability to intervene before the feeling tone evolves into sensations, thoughts and emotions: this liminal field is presented as a decisive point at which autonomic reactivity can be interrupted and replaced with ‘wise responses.’ In other words, mindfulness cultivates an awareness of ‘feeling tone’ as part of a strategy to arrest secondary suffering and alleviate further trauma that arises from unconscious reactivity (Peacock and Batchelor 2018: 4-5). It also trains a non-reactive response to pain, regardless of its causes. As a respondent explains:

Mindfulness is there to engage with the process of perception. It’s not a stand-alone thing—I’m not developing mindfulness in isolation of other categories. What empowers one is if I can begin to see more clearly into a situation and that situation might have ethical consequences; it might have other issues such as seeing this turmoil as just part of life—this is what happens—so you get clarity ... In our confusion, perception is skewed by all sorts of things such as the drive to have or not to have. What mindfulness is geared to, is cleaning up that process of perception so that perception becomes more: *what can be changed, what can’t be changed* (Sid Upeksha WSM).

Considered pre-subjective and autonomic, perception is a gateway through which to learn to respond rather than react to pain. Within this frame, this respondent takes as given the

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<sup>177</sup> “Empowerment,” says Asad, is “a legal term referring both to the act of giving power to someone *and* to someone’s power to act” (2003: 79).



notion of pre-subjectivity as well as personal agency to discern—seeming objectively—what can be changed and to effect the desired change.

Ahmed's work presents a challenge to the premise that perception is pre-subjective and to the assumption that perception is unconditioned. She argues:

[...] whether something feels good or bad already involves a process of reading, in the very attribution of significance. Contact involves the subject, as well as histories that come before the subject. If emotions are shaped by contact with objects, rather than being caused by objects, then emotions are not simply 'in' the subject or the object. This does not mean that emotions are not read as being 'resident' in subjects or objects ... I want to suggest that the distinction between sensation and emotion can only be analytic, and as such, is premised on the reification of a concept (2014: 6).

Here Ahmed questions the depoliticised, normative assumptions that 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' perceptions are momentary and pre-subjective. This presumption forms a fundamental premise of Buddhist psychology, from which mindfulness draws the secularised model. And so, while it may be possible, in mindfulness, to discern pleasant from unpleasant and neutral, Ahmed suggests that this type of cognition is inextricably bound up with subjectivity: it privileges certain subjects, histories and perceptions. Ahmed's work demonstrates that such constructions of pain depoliticise bodies and impose normative understandings of suffering and healing. To illustrate how power constitutes 'selves', 'relationships', and 'structures', and considers only certain pain and emotion intelligible, I draw on an example from the writings of Frantz Fanon (Zeilig 2014). I use Fanon's theorisation to disrupt mindfulness' claim to universality, instead arguing for an understanding of pain and emotion as politically constituted.

Fanon narrates the medical examination in France of a man who had migrated from North Africa. He describes clinical interpretations of politically-induced pain. In conventional terms, the pain produced through dispossession is unclassifiable and non-clinical. It is interpreted only as a 'vagueness':

What's wrong my friend?  
I'm dying, *monsieur le docteur*.  
His [the patient's] voice breaks imperceptibly.  
Where do you have pain?

Everywhere, *monsieur le docteur*.

When does it hurt?

All the time.

...

the North African, spontaneously, by the very fact of appearing on the scene, enters into a pre-existing framework (Zeilig 2014: 203-5).

Fanon argues that because such pain does not fit the medic's classification scheme, the patient either articulates pain in terms the doctor understands or relents and remains plagued. In both instances, the patient is neither understood nor attended to. The political roots of the patient's condition are diagnostically ignored. As Clough and Halley (2007) suggest, language reduces affect to what is expressed and what can be heard and leaves behind that which remains unsaid (2007: 8). For Fanon, such disservice is not necessarily due to the ill-will of the doctor, but rather a system that is not designed to accommodate the needs of the patient. Fanon's work highlights, to borrow Ahmed's terms, the insufficiency of both a psychological 'inside-out' view of pain which individualises experience, and a sociological 'outside-in' perspective in which emotion becomes a social article that overrides individual affect (Ahmed 2014: 8-9). Ahmed explains:

Both assume the objectivity of the very distinction between inside and outside, the individual and social, and the 'me' and the 'we' ... emotions create the very effect of surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So, emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and other, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by and even take the shape of, contact with others (ibid.: 9-10).

In this light, sociological perspectives cognisant of the structural causes of suffering are important but ultimately insufficient to account for the complexity of emotion. Ahmed rejects unchecked assumptions that individual and social bodies are defined by distinct borders in the first instance. Such borders, she argues, are constantly construed relationally across all contexts. This applies, of course, in the context of mindfulness programmes.

In Fanon's example, the patient is diagnosed by the Doctor as vaguely ill, with no reference to their structurally-induced illness. As the cause of what we might understand as the patient's wound goes unacknowledged, it is commonly through this wound that the patient is perceived and objectified in social interactions. Although Kabat-Zinn objects to the

biomedical model, Cannon argues that secular mindfulness attends to the patient as needful (2016: 402). This is due not to a refusal of the patient's wholeness, but rather to mindfulness' refusal to attend to the patient's identity as politically constructed by ignoring differences of race, gender and sexuality, for example. It is through their wound that the patient is encouraged to find their wholeness. Although Kabat-Zinn emphasises the whole patient in his conception, pain is the doorway through which they enter mindfulness. As a wounded body, according to Cannon, the patient is normatively classified.

In order to explain how bodies are defined, Ahmed (2014) posits an almost indiscernible distinction between bodily sensation and emotion. Emotions, she says, create borders that are irreducible to the psychic or social:

In suggesting that emotions create the very effect of an inside and an outside, I am not then simply claiming that emotions are psychological and social, individual and collective. My model refuses the abbreviation of the 'and'. Rather, I suggest that *emotions are crucial to the very constitution of the psychic and the social as objects, a process which suggests that the 'objectivity' of the psychic and social is an effect rather than a cause*. In other words, emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects ... even when we feel we have the same feeling, *we don't necessarily have the same relationship to it*. Given that shared feelings are not about feeling the same feeling, or feeling-in-common, I suggest that *it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such* (2014: 10-11, emphasis added).

Ahmed highlights normative tendencies to understand borders as fixed and assume that feelings/emotions are fleeting and common across these borders. Her example is the nationalist fervour enticed by British National Front rhetoric in which inflammatory language is used to describe a 'swarm of illegal immigrants' (ibid.: 1). Such nationalisms do not simply dissolve but continue to circulate and (re)produce borders and structures of power. Her argument illuminates the ways mindfulness defines emotions as mood states, producing the psychic and social that appear to have borders as bodies and nations, for instance. Ahmed suggests that emotions circulate to give the impression of individual or national sameness. This creates the illusion of sameness around fear, sorrow, and anger, which are in fact different experiences, constructed through differential operations of power.

Universality enforces homology: it leaves no room for diversity. Mindfulness desires sameness, not difference. These are the norms upon which mindfulness is based. Discourses of individualism and atomisation make normative assumptions about where boundaries begin and end, and indeed what constitutes entities such as the body. Bodies, Ahmed argues, are curated by power, and relationality dictates the significance allocated to emotions. Mindfulness' normativity, on the other hand, presumes a 'sameness' in how bodies experience and live: this is demonstrated by its universal biophysiological appraisal of stress, its causes and how to cope with it. Ahmed argues that emotions are not equal, that they generate formations and effects, that this explains why bodies are not constituted as equal. I adopt Ahmed's argument to refute secular mindfulness' claims to universality and 'common humanity' and to politicise or reveal the political nature of mindfulness spaces.

Within the context of mindfulness' secularisation, defaults such as universality, sameness and the eradication of difference, reflect the interests and orientations of the creators and teachers of programmes. US/UK cultures of individualisation posit distinctions between the individual and the social. Ahmed does not simply argue for fluid descriptions of the individual and society. She suggests that emotion, rather than being an objective effect, produces bodily borders with conditioned responses to the world. Misrecognition of the role of emotion in generating psychic and social difference, supports an understanding of emotions as 'apolitical'. Ahmed argues that pain—as felt, for example, by the patient in Fanon's example—is discerned as an object to be negotiated independently of its effects. We might, following Ahmed, understand the pain felt in Fanon's example as a historic map of causes and effects (2014: 20-1). The doctor and patient's experiences of and relationships to pain are different. Mindfulness teaches that pain is momentary and impermanent: feelings of pain are objectified; they come, and they go. Some teachers even suggest: 'like clouds passing across the sky'. Such practices are inimical to the recognition that pain is subjective and socio-politically constituted. In mindfulness, alleviation of secondary suffering is expected to alter the pain or our relationship to it. However, as Ahmed argues, pain always represents histories and power. It could be argued therefore that a focus on alleviating secondary suffering overlooks primary suffering, thereby leaving no room for the

recognition of difference in suffering. By denying the causes of pain, mindfulness works to erase socio-political injustice as a said cause. We can see in Fanon's example that the patient is treated by the doctor according to the doctor's script. In the same way, we can see that although all injuries are not equal (ibid. 31), they are treated so by mindfulness.

The present contains the past; memories and histories inform experiences. As David Scott explains, the present cannot but express experiences of slavery, coloniality and the related legacies inscribed on bodies (Planetary Utopias 2018 Keynote). White mindfulness denies such histories. Liberal concepts such as 'common humanity' express the principle of equal treatment of all individuals and refuse to recognise inequalities represented by differences in pain and its effects. Common mindfulness discourse 'flattens' (Ahmed 2014: 31) human experience. The ideals of postracial neoliberalism and secular mindfulness epitomise this 'flattening'.

Secular mindfulness' homogenising function is concealed in its rhetoric: "contemplative practices that are spiritual and/or religious centre us, bring us away from mental dispersal, and connect us with our immediate experience" (Monteiro, Musten and Compson 2015). As theorised by Muñoz, Ahmed and Scott, for example, the present moment is politically and historically contingent. In mindfulness, the guidance to return to the body and breath is based on an understanding of the body and breath as constants, thus implying they are discrete, ahistorical objects rather than effects of the circulation of power. And yet Fanon's patient, for example, has an experience that is different and inequivalent to his doctor's, an experience in which the body may not be a safe refuge and the breath may not be accessible. The patient and the doctor have unequal access to power. Their spiritual-religious worlds would, inevitably, differ. Secular mindfulness' efforts to connect differing experiences would, in this case, privilege the doctor.

Mindfulness relies on concepts of universality and sameness. Instead of recognising the diversity of societies and communities, secularism erases alterity and difference in order to encompass all participants in its frame. This process fails to recognise the potential richness available in leveraging diversity as highlighted, for example, by Earl Lewis (Mirza 2017). As Lorde argues:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference ... is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening (Lorde 2007: 110-2: Comments at Second Sex Conference, New York, September 29, 1979).

Lorde and Lewis identify what is lost in the homologising function of universality. They both emphasise the social value to gain from performative diversity, and its reduction to mere tolerance.

In settings in which teachers homologise unequal experiences, empathy and compassion are complex emotions. Relationality commonly centres those with more privileged identities and decentres experiences and narratives outside the normative frame thereby further marginalising already marginalised identities. Wounds can become fetishized as ahistorical entities so that the histories surrounding pain are erased (Ahmed 2014: 30-3). Pain itself becomes objectified with no regard to its role in producing inequalities. Asad (2003) explains, for instance, that inflictions of torture within 'nations' complicate 'the secular' which is theorised as an 'equal, safe space' (2003: 109).

Ahmed's example of the Australian government's dispossession of indigenous Australians, demonstrates the inequivalence of pain and power. She studies the *Bringing Them Home* Report on the Stolen Generation in Australia to show that initiatives geared at 'healing,' are themselves infused with power; that permission to heal and to empower, and to decide when hurts are resolved, is not granted universally. Ahmed argues that when narratives of pain are heard, they are not necessarily heard justly, explaining how historical oppressions can become 'hijacked' in contexts that seek 'resolution':

[...] some forms of suffering more than others will be repeated, as they can more easily be appropriated as 'our loss'. The differentiation between forms of pain and suffering in stories that are told, and between those that are told and those that are not, is a crucial mechanism for the distribution of power (ibid.: 32).

In Ahmed's example, 'reconciliation' is used as a means of assimilating indigenous Australians into the white nation which cleanses itself through expressions of shame at past actions (ibid.: 35). Ahmed demonstrates that those who cause the pain and benefit from its

effect, also get to decide when and how it will be ‘resolved’, thereby relinquishing further responsibility and maintaining power. The Australian government appropriates the pain as ‘our national identity’ without re-arranging perpetuating structures, thereby consolidating their own power, while casting the process as ‘compassionate and caring’.

Ahmed’s argument illuminates the precarity of mindfulness’ claims to social transformation. Through concepts such as universality, mindfulness invisibilises inequality and fails to interrogate the social norms that perpetuate it, thus continuing to recycle exclusions and Othering. Fanon’s medical model typifies the teacher-student relationship, as well as the sector’s relation to marginalised communities (Caring-Lobel 2016: 210). This is not to suggest that marginalised groups are at the behest of hegemonic power: as Bhabha (1994) clearly demonstrates, subversion and disruption are inevitable. Yet mindfulness, in settings framed by hegemonic postracial, neoliberal discourses, appears to acclimatise participants to their pain.

In an appeal to mindfulness’ commitment to all, respondents emphasise compassion as part of mindfulness—“if it isn’t compassion, it isn’t mindfulness” (John Karuna MWM). Crucially, they regard compassion also as ‘apolitical’. In an explanation of mindfulness ability to transform the lives of dispossessed groups, a respondent says:

Mindfulness is really about ‘clear seeing’, you know that’s obviously very congruent with the Buddhist understanding of mindfulness, that it’s about clear seeing and improving peoples’ agency—I think that’s a lovely word to use for it—really improving peoples’ capacity to make decisions about their own circumstances. For instance, it seems that around mindfulness and unemployment, mental health and depression that so often beset people who are long-term unemployed is a barrier to agency, and a preoccupation with rumination impairs people’s capacity to make good decisions ... so one can make a good psychological as well as a social case for mindfulness being extended to populations of much greater deprivation, and personally I’m really passionate about that ... really wanting to see mindfulness developing in these sorts of ways and it’s very much an issue Upeksha wants to put centre stage in terms of its developing role in its vision and mission (Bob Upeksha WMM).

This respondent reaffirms individualised coping: they believe that the psychology and bio-physiology of depression are constant, regardless of circumstance. Yet, although

mindfulness proclaims neutrality, they imply that mindfulness empowers individuals for political action. Moreover, they assume that Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha models will benefit groups of citizens defined through political dispossession. However, individualised models reiterate the inability of Fanon's doctor to comprehend the problem; they cannot transform systemic injustices. The doctor, in Fanon's example, is trained to perform 'apolitical', ahistorical work on the basis of de-contextualised bio-physiological models. This does not preclude the doctor's compassion, but it limits it to inaction in that the doctor does not address the patient's circumstances. In this sense, the model may appease the doctor more than the patient. Similarly, mindfulness' dislocation from political transformation and community-based programmes, reinforces models that are disengaged from political inequalities. As with Fanon's doctor, the mindfulness teacher may feel compassionate but may be more affected by their compassion than their participants.

In its emphasis on healing, the underlying normativity of mindfulness persists. This is elucidated in the example of a respondent who works therapeutically with trauma clients:

I worked as a trauma therapist and asked: *how do I meet this suffering skilfully?* Then I heard about this programme which is something I knew myself has tremendous value and capacity to bring about healing. So, for me, mindfulness was an extension of my own meditation practice and professional training (Jane Maitri WSF).

Here, mindfulness becomes a generic healing modality that 'empowers' trauma survivors—and yet, mindfulness is isolated from approaches that contextualise transgenerational trauma. The desire to heal detracts from interrogating unequal distributions of power and, as they are unable to accommodate these potential root causes of suffering, outcomes of mindfulness programmes may appease teachers more than participants. In this respect, mindfulness, says Cannon, is more akin to a charity than a transformative model (2016: 406) since established models are not negotiated with participants. Ahmed argues that in doing transformative work, it is insufficient to provide attentive presence and deep listening, that the work of structural transformation falls to all those who bear witness and hear a call to action (Ahmed 2014: 39). Hearing the call to action behoves action. Emphasis on collective agency departs from mindfulness'



individualisation and moves towards social ethics, world-making and ‘commoning’. It links mindfulness with social transformation (Doran 2017; Walsh 2018).

Ahmed’s work helps us understand the power embedded in the ‘depoliticised’ role of the secular mindfulness teacher; that their function to homologise and normalise experience serves to reproduce social norms. I turn to these matters in Chapter Five.

#### **4.7 Concluding Remarks**

Throughout this chapter, I present secular mindfulness’ (re-)conceptualisation as simultaneously decontextualized, ahistorical, individualised and universalised. I argue that the hegemonic lexicon of mindfulness pathologises stress, pain, depression and race; that mindfulness homologises diverse experiences and contexts to conform to abstract, decontextualized concepts. Current models delineate bodies as discrete entities isolated from communal and collective experiences. This presupposes ‘borders’ and edges that establish a normative spatiality and temporality, and project a natural resolution of suffering, thereby (re-)imposing sameness. In this way, mindfulness programmes obscure the role of emotions in the reproduction and recirculation of relational power.

The emphasis mindfulness places on universality and its attendant individualisation of suffering generates politically-laden models which reduce mindfulness to mere behavioural change mechanisms even as the expectation that mindfulness will induce systemic change remains. In neoliberal contexts of dispossession and marginalisation, ‘second Renaissance’ thought supplants political mobilisation while mindfulness’ performance as a ‘social leveller’ erases difference. Mindfulness’ recontextualisation thus entails a political decontextualisation and is complicit in perpetuating social norms and systemic marginalisation. This chapter establishes the political, historical location of mindfulness in neoliberal postraciality.

## Chapter Five: Pedagogy of White Mindfulness and Teacher Training

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women (sic) deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Richard Shaull 1993: 16).

### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I build on the case made for the whiteness and coloniality of mindfulness by addressing the pedagogical technologies and mechanisms through which the mindfulness sector reproduces itself. I discuss TTPs’ political silence as re-enforcement of organisationally exclusive cultures that add to the sector’s inequality and argue that their existing technologies function as a political technology of whiteness. Based on Butler’s thesis that the repetition of social norms constitutes worlds, borders and ‘fixity’ (1993: 9), I examine the (re)appearance of racialised patterns within teacher training (TT) spaces and pedagogies. Butler argues that it is precisely the concealment of social patterns of oppression that generates defaults and unexamined normativity (ibid.). Shore and Wright (1999) agree that “norms constitute an invisible web of power which is insidious because the norms go largely unrecognised and unquestioned” (1999: 561).<sup>178</sup> Wirth (1936) concurs saying: “the most elemental and important facts about a society are those that are seldom debated and generally regarded as settled” (1936: xxii-xxiii).<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Butler (2009) adds to this the politics of perception or the manner in which the problem is framed: “The ‘frames’ that work to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot (or that produce lives across a continuum of life) not only organise visual experience but also generate specific ontologies of the subject. Subjects are constituted through norms which, in their reiteration, produce and shift the terms through which subjects are recognised ... To call the frame into question is to show that the frame never quite contained the scene it was meant to limn, that something was already outside, which made the very sense of the inside possible, recognisable. The frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognise, and apprehend. Something extends the frame that troubles our sense of reality; in other words, something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things” (2009: 3-4).

<sup>179</sup> Applying this notion to Canada’s educational context, Nazemi (2015) argues that the invisible perpetuation of social norms impels scholars to critique and confront the “coherent narrative of Canada’s founding story in order to expose the hidden white hegemony that succeeds in constructing whiteness as dominant and normative, and racialised persons as subordinate” (2015: 362). This situation is analogous to secular mindfulness, although critique of the sector’s whiteness, as argued in Chapter Three, remains limited.

I argue that TTPs reproduce individual sovereignty and governmentality. Through uncritical pedagogies infused with invisible values and norms the institutionalisation and obscuration of whiteness within Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha generates an 'apolitical', postracial pedagogy that professes neutrality, elides difference, and repeats sectoral exclusions. Based on Shaull, I suggest that universalism and neutrality constitute political acts that impose norms on bodies, experiences and educational methodologies (Michelson 2015: 58). My investigation shows that uncritical pedagogy attenuates social justice. However, my thesis moves beyond the obvious replication of whiteness through the function of pedagogy (Bakan 2000). I introduce a discussion of US/UK audit cultures that frame the production, measurement and domestication of mindfulness teachers to reproduce normative values (Arthington 2016: 92-3). As an outcome of audit and corporatized education, I review the *Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Teaching Assessment Criteria* (MBI:TAC). I also examine experiential learning and embodiment.

First, to frame a discussion of pedagogical architecture, I consider the relation between racialised TTPs, the replication of whiteness, and teacher recruitment (Giroux 2012; Berila 2016; Michelson 2015). I then outline Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's TTPs to highlight research prioritisation and curriculum manualisation.<sup>180</sup> I also consider TTP standardisation along with its emergent structures and policies.

Second, I discuss mindfulness' educational policies, instruments and self-regulatory frameworks for their consistency with an audit society (Shore and Wright 2015), new public management (Singh 2011: 488) and competency-based education (Hyland 1994; Crane et al. 2010; 2012; 2016). Here, I consider tensions between social justice and quality assurance agendas and explore their possible amalgamation.

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<sup>180</sup> McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2011) use the term 'curriculum manualisation' to refer to "empirically validated and refined" manuals that lay out the 'ingredients' of curricula (2011:26-28). The manualisation of TT has produced multiple templates. Centre for Mindfulness (CfM) publishes an MBSR Curriculum guide on its website (CfM Website 2017). This lays out the orientation session, eight-week programme and silent retreat day with attendant values and principles. In a similar vein, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy* (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002/2012) outlines the MBCT eight-week programme while *Finding Peace in a Frantic World* (Williams and Penman 2011) presents the digested MBCT course. These step-by-step guides to programme delivery provide a scaffold for the teacher and standardise content. Although the manualised curriculum dictates content and standardises methodology, it does not preclude social justice engagement.

Third, I interrogate experiential learning and ‘embodiment’ (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi, 2011: 92, 27) as rhetorical devices that re-inform marginalisation. Their deployment in marketisation strategies (Wilson 2014: 43, 133) reveals defaults and discourses that refuse difference, diversity and social justice.

Finally, throughout this chapter, I question what mindfulness teachers are trained to do and how they are equipped to perform in isolation of social justice ethics (Cannon 2016) and critical pedagogy (Freire 1993). I argue that edicts of universality and neutrality generate TTPs and teachers who reproduce rather than undermine whiteness. Linking this discussion to standardisation, I show that TTPs pre-empt critique, innovation, and transformation. Without training in a pedagogy of freedom (Shaul 1993), mindfulness teachers become uncritical foot soldiers of neoliberal regimes.

## **5.2 Background: Non-Diversity and Uncritical Pedagogy**

MBSR training established the foundations for the professionalisation of mindfulness. In this process, research fetishization generated curriculum manualisation (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: 26), a process that expedited standardisation. TTPs embraced this shift in efforts to ‘not dilute’ the teachings (Crane et al. 2012: 79). Member organisations of the UKN, for instance, subscribe to various standards as outlined below. However, TTPs remain divested of diversity. This carries implications for the formulation of training programmes, trainers, students and prosocial agendas.

Based on my data collected between 2015 and 2018, which is indicative of the field and correlates with Kucinkas who says: “the [mindfulness] movement also continues to be predominantly white” (2019: 193), Table 6 illustrates the non-diverse nature of educational policy-makers and trainers:

Teacher Trainers	White M	White F	BME M	BME F	TOTALS
Maitri	8	8	0	0	16
Karuna	4	12	1	1	18
Upeksha	2	4	0	0	6
Totals	14	24	1	1	40

*Table 6: Organisational race-gender profile of teacher trainers*

5% of teacher trainers are BME compared to 60% white women and 35% white men. As shown in previous tables, the figures for white men and women are inverted in leadership roles. A larger number of white men are in decision-making positions. Eight white Directors—only one of whom is female—and thirty-four board members—only three of whom are BME—are chief decision-makers. Thirty of the forty-two decision makers (71.4%) are white males. 21.4% are white women, and 7.1% are BME. Consequently, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha’s educational thought leaders are largely unaffected by gender- or race-based discrimination. Their positions are safeguarded by the invisibility of hegemonic whiteness. As such, they are not natural diversity and social justice protagonists, at least not in relation to race and gender. As Michelson (2015) explains, homologous, non-reflexive, white, middle-class collectives are less capable of diversity-thought:

[...] those whose experience does not reflect the social norms are more likely to notice biases and problematic assumptions, so that perspectives available from those social positions are of value to epistemic communities. Similarly, knowledge communities that tend to take their own interests as the interests of the planet generally ... need the engagement of those who have a specific, but different, relationship to that which is under study ... *One does not have to experience the world as a woman to have insight into patriarchy or as a person of colour to investigate racism, but a fuller account is made possible if we start from the point of view of women’s or Black people’s experiences* (2015: 69 emphasis added).

Michelson stresses the deep-rooted nature of power; it seeks to reproduce itself. She emphasises the importance of solidarity and the participation of the marginalised in its redistribution. As the sector’s racial homogeneity comes into the spotlight, it is therefore unsurprising that respondents from different organisations, when asked about diversity, comment: “we need help with the lack of diversity in mindfulness. We are unsure what to do” (Sal Upeksha WMF); “there is a problem in that all our trainers are white and we are

only attracting people who look like us” (Lu Upeksha WMF); “teachers are largely coming from white stock and it’s been challenging not only for us but for most meditation centres around the country to figure out how to improve diversity” (Paul Maitri WMM). Poor diversity reinforces social norms and power structures that govern organisational thought and decision-making. It shapes teacher training (TT) development and delivery.

TTP architects design programmes in their images. When systems are designed by people who are not BME, they misrepresent and fail marginalised groups. In the field of mental health, Linton and Walcott comment on the inaccessibility of services to BME persons and communities in the UK (2018). The poor fit they outline is analogous to TTP processes:

Historically, the mental health system is not designed with us in mind. [It’s] designed in a utilitarian way, for the masses. It serves a purpose, but it means that those who are already marginalised or disadvantaged are disproportionately harmed by it [...] diagnostic criteria are so culture specific ... [they] come from the Western world; they weren’t made by any African or South American countries, for example. The people making decisions in the room don’t look like us ... It shows how important it is for your clinicians to look like people they are trying to help. It seems so obvious. That’s basic, you need to be able to relate to your patients and they need to be able to relate to you. When your patients are overwhelmingly black and brown and your doctors are not, you’re always going to have this disconnect ... there is class as well. Most doctors are middle class and a lot of our patients aren’t ... It has been interesting to see the difference it makes when you see patients interact with someone who understands their experiences as opposed to having just read about them (Linton and Walcott, interviewed by Kankhwende 2018).

Linton and Walcott highlight, here, the consequences of diversity-poor systems. They reflect selective epistemologies and methodologies that perpetuate the exclusion of marginalised groups at every design stage. Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha TTPs reflect the interests of their designers unaffected by race. Yet, their architects are not ‘naturally’ incentivised to transform power (Armstrong and Wildman 2007: 656). Their formulations sustain systemic exclusions and marginalisations. Focusing on individualised models of stress and wellbeing, TTPs are disinterested in a justice-infused pedagogy. This constitutes a barrier to change at the heart of the sector.

Sullivan (2006) argues that habits of white privilege are deeply ingrained in inner worlds and societal structures. This renders them invisible (2006: 2-9). Consequently, TTPs embody a culture of whiteness. Although teachers are encouraged to explore their inner-worlds, unconscious biases and systemic privileges remain invisible and unaddressed. A politically-informed research agenda, 'neutral' models and 'value-free' ethics, coalesce to produce 'white spaces' to which Others are expected to conform (Anderson 2015: 13). Following Michelson (2015) and Bhabha (2004), marginalised non-beneficiaries who typically subvert power, are poorly positioned to shape Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's TTPs. In the following paragraphs, I unpack TTPs' mechanisms of whiteness-making.

### **5.2.1 Pedagogical Blueprints: Implicit Biases**

MBSR's eight-week, ten-session blueprint set the lead for TTPs (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: 140). The curriculum template outlines 2.5-hour sessions of group-based learning. Four formal practices, led by a teacher, comprise a body scan, movement, sitting meditation and mindful walking. Didactic teaching, paired and open discussion, and inquiry into experience are the primary teaching methods (Santorelli et al. 2017). Direct experience, formal practice, reflection and mindful learning are principal learning methodologies. During training programmes, trainees typically deliver course components to their TT cohort, and receive feedback from peers and tutors. For purposes of standardisation, trainee presentations follow pro forma requirements.

MBSR's pedagogical blueprint embeds implicit ideologies and conceals the power of its architects. Although programme adaptation is encouraged, this extends to structural rather than pedagogical or epistemic changes borne out by Maitri's outreach programmes—they did not provide additional staff training to prepare teachers for diverse settings. Instead, training emphasises standardisation.

Flexibility, standardisation and manualisation are commonly in tension. Teaching assessment relies on standardised delivery and research emphasises uniformity. McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2011) were the first to identify a tension between the 'gold standard' research model governing curriculum manualisation, and a TTP focus on teacher qualities. They argue that MBSR provides the pedagogical curriculum framework for MBCT and other

MBIs as the sector has expanded from the US to the UK and beyond. Ongoing collaboration foregrounds:

The ‘gold standard’ research model of randomised control trials [which] holds great sway in Western biomedical culture ... the dominant paradigm assumes that the ingredients of an intervention are significantly more important than the person delivering the ingredients ... All of this allowed the secondary needs of researchers to overshadow the primary needs of teachers and students. The research on MBIs is the sunny side of the mountain. The pedagogy of mindfulness, then, is the shadow side—fobidding, less explored, and spoken of only in small groups and rarely above a whisper (2011: 137, 26).

These authors highlight research prioritisation as a driver for curriculum manualisation and TTP standardisation. Others add that a “positivist outcome-focused research agenda ... could lead to teachers delivering the course who are also primarily focused on outcome, rather than being deeply immersed in the practice of mindfulness on which the whole pedagogy is based” (Crane et al. 2014: 1113). These comments, however, supplant concerns with power. From a diversity perspective, curriculum manualisation reinforces uncritical pedagogy. As Black (2017), founder of Mindfulness for the People testifies:

Mindfulness curricula grounded in Whiteness means that there is an overt assumption that the content presented is universally beneficial to EVERYbody. That the empirical evidence driving the curricula is ‘robust and rigorous’ so of course its application is relevant to EVERYbody. And all of this universality is assumed while never explaining that decades of evidence-based, well-funded, highly visible and industry standard findings that support mindfulness curricula and practices are predominantly normed on the lived experiences of White people. And quite honestly, that lack of inquiry—not having to ask which bodies receive benefit and which ones don’t; which ones were included in research studies and which ones weren’t, all the while garnering major dollars to further the development of this blind spot—is not only an oversight, but a demonstration of how capitalism, White privilege and White supremacy are driving the mindfulness movement (Black, interviewed by Alton 2017).

Experiences of the curriculum and mindfulness spaces as racialised, are most directly felt by those for whom mindfulness is not designed. Curricula and research, here, function in opposition to diversity. The research paradigm also overshadows Kabat-Zinn’s (2000) initial research interests:



[...] if we created a stress reduction programme based on principles and practices, would anybody come? ... Could it be offered and seen as valuable by the people who are under the most stress in our society: the poor, recent immigrants, who do not even speak English, who face economic deprivation, bad living conditions, homelessness, joblessness, very often fragmented families? These are some of the questions we wished to explore in our research and in our attempts to take a degree of responsibility for contributing to the emergent field of what has come to be called mind/body medicine (2000: 234).

Kabat-Zinn envisions here a mindfulness in the service of marginalised groups.

Standardisation, manualisation and research, built on the foundations of whiteness, as Black identifies above, cannot address his concerns. Moreover, research prioritisation detracted from the critical examination of secular mindfulness' pedagogy, curricula and TTPs. At the same time, 'immersion in practice' which Crane et al. (2014) encourage, camouflages critiques of pedagogy. As I argue below, practice performed within the confines of 'the logic of the present system' (Shaul 1993) preserves social norms and structural power, obstructing change.

TTPs seek to train competent teachers to deliver mindfulness effectively (Crane et al. 2012: 83). Ideologies and principles of individualisation, universality and neutrality, however, politicise TTP designs and target select audiences (Eklöf 2016: 328). Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress encourages resilience and coping strategies (1984: 19; Kabat-Zinn 2013: 292-3). Selye's (1936) 'general adaptation syndrome' and 'stress response' re-enforce an individualised stress physiology (Kabat-Zinn 2013: 288-303). Based on these models, TTPs typically instrumentalise secular mindfulness as a learnable skill (Arthington 2016: 88) or set of coping skills (Crane 2010: 85; Woods 2009: 470) that position the individual to navigate adversity.

Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha do not spell out their pedagogical frames. As a result, these remain insufficiently investigated (Crane et al. 2014: 1113), and only partially critiqued (Cannon 2016: 399). In *Teaching Mindfulness*, McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2011) refer to a 'mindfulness pedagogy' that targets teacher qualities, ethics and educational methods, such as experiential learning (2011: 29). Yet they consider mindfulness pedagogy in isolation of

the politically fractious contexts in which it operates.<sup>181</sup> Woods (2009; 2013) likewise focuses on contemplative dialogue within TTPs without examining pedagogical principles that shape its application. Formulators of the MBI:TAC (Crane et al. 2010; Crane et al. 2012; Crane et al. 2013) draw on competency literature but do not discuss its neoliberal frame. In juxtaposition, educational theorists such as Hsu (2014; 2016) and Payne (2016) critique mindfulness for its neoliberal persuasions in school curricula but do not fully extend this to TTPs. Brown (2016) and Cannon (2016) interrogate TTP claims of neutrality and universality. They address its ‘stealth’ nature (Brown 2016: 84) and missionary approach that ‘brings’ mindfulness to ‘needful’ communities (Cannon 2016: 405). Their critiques help frame TTPs relation to social justice.

The ‘apolitical’ stance of TTPs are value-laden and politicised. They augment ideologies that exclude and marginalise. For this reason, Walsh (2016) argues:

Although mindfulness may increase sensitivity and responsiveness to collective suffering, it requires critical reason and social awareness of present injustices to effectively broaden one’s circle of concern ... the mindfulness movement should replace universal, asocial, and ahistorical views of mindfulness with critical, socially aware and engaged forms of mindfulness (2016: 163).

Walsh echoes Bodhi’s (2013) call for a prosocial mindfulness and critical pedagogy. Education in these terms comprises a practice of social rather than individual freedom (Shaul 1993). A critical pedagogy foregrounds communal imagination, agency and shared vision:

The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom (hooks 1994: 207).

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<sup>181</sup> As Kabat-Zinn (2011) writes in the foreword to *Teaching Mindfulness: A practical guide for clinicians and educators*: “To date, no other book has even attempted to synthesize the various elements of the MBSR model into a coherent and explicit teaching pedagogy that could serve as a foundation for the skilful development of new teachers, and the ongoing deepening development of experienced teachers of mindfulness in this wholly secular idiom, yet which is wholly based on the non-dual universal dharma that the Dharma within Buddhism is and has always pointed to.... a basic lawfulness in the universe, and in the nature of what we call ‘the mind’ and its behaviour” (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: xiii, Foreword by Kabat-Zinn).

hooks identifies liberation pedagogy as a space in which any classroom can partake. Critical pedagogy couples communal learning and investigation with the creation of fair and just societies (Freire 1993: 60). Critique is prized as a means through which the oppressed access, challenge and overturn dominant power structures to implement corrective justice.

Archon Fung (2011) explains that the absence of such discourse makes innovation impossible. For Fung, education is foundational to vibrant democracies. Politically-engaged education, separate from corporate interests,<sup>182</sup> challenges inequalities. New public management agendas which advance corporatized, skills-based education (Harvey, 2005: 39-55; Singh 2011: 490)—and which govern secular mindfulness today—are incompatible with a pedagogy of freedom. Disengagement from critique separates the sector from social action:

[...] criticism is not the only public responsibility of the intellectual. Intellectuals can also join citizens—and sometimes governments—to construct a world that is more just and democratic. One such constructive role is aiding popular movements and organisations in their efforts to advance justice and democracy (Fung 2011).

For Fung, critical pedagogy is aligned with political agency. Such activism that orients mindfulness to a social justice purpose, challenges *Maitri*, *Karuna* and *Upeksha*. It re-exposes the tension in addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of stress. Fung points to the role of education in bridging this gap. Toni Morrison (2001) adds:

If the university does not take seriously and rigorously its role as a guardian of wider civic freedoms, as interrogator of more and more complex ethical problems, as servant and preserver of deeper democratic practices, then some other regime or ménage of regimes will do it for us, in spite of us, and without us (2001: 278).

*Maitri* and *Upeksha*'s higher education locales conduce the cultivation of critical discourse. As Morrison indicates, they are positioned for this compulsory role. However, their trainers are functionaries of an uncritical, assimilationist pedagogy. They train participants to “expect change to come about slowly, peacefully, through the established political system. They also rarely call for wholesale shifts to a totally new form of economic organization. A

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<sup>182</sup> Giroux (2012) argues that: “As democratic public spheres, colleges and universities are allegedly dedicated to teaching students to think critically, take imaginative risks, learn how to be moral witnesses, and procure the skills that enable one to connect to others in ways that strengthen the democratic polity” (2014: 30).

mindful America will still be a consumerist, capitalist nation” (Wilson 2014: 184). This leads one of my respondents to state: “I can understand cultural theorists like Žižek who says mindfulness feeds into a capitalist model; it creates passive minorities and docile bodies” (Sid Upeksha WSM).

A ‘narrow’ interpretation of Kabat-Zinn’s ‘second Renaissance’ argument thus underpins TTPs:

[...] change is to be accomplished at the level of the individual: social change will be the natural, incremental result when individuals reach more authentic and healthy understandings of the way they feel and think about their (unchanging) place in society ... Mindfulness training generally takes the form of therapeutic interventions designed to transform our patterns of thought (Goto-Jones 2013).

In the ‘improved resilience’ model, secular mindfulness teachers perform the role of micromanagers (Davies 2015: 35) or therapists who acclimatise individuals to adverse conditions. The group setting provides reinforcement for collective behavioural adaptation through the universalisation of selected themes such as the impermanence of discomfort (Crane et al 2014: 1110; Stanley 2012: 635). The British government’s 2010 Behaviour Insight Unit and Harvard’s 2014 Foundations of Human Behaviour Unit boosted research into behaviour (Davies 2015: 88). These projects, says Davies, direct individual action towards goals “selected by elite powers but without coercion or democratic deliberation. ... When we put our faith in ‘behavioural’ solutions, we withdraw it from democratic ones to an equal and opposite extent” (ibid.). For Davies, mindfulness teachers self-govern and then train others to see stress in medical rather than political terms (ibid.: 35).

In all this, the danger of conflation of mindfulness and psychology persists: “we need to understand the similarities and the differences between different traditions and not assume that they are the same thing otherwise we miss the point of Buddhist mindfulness” (Dawn Upeksha WSF).<sup>183</sup> Alternative to this view, it is precisely the combination of traditions that sponsors particular agendas. Arthington (2016) argues, for instance, that Buddhism’s

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<sup>183</sup> These cautions were not necessarily heeded by Kabat-Zinn’s claims: “It [mindfulness] in no way contradicts the call ... to find ways to fit practices and knowledge from spiritual traditions into the theoretical matrix of scientific psychology. The challenge is to find a fit that honours the integrity of what may be different but complementary epistemologies” (Kabat-Zinn 2003: 147).

potential for social engagement is arrested by psy-professionals who become mindfulness trainers: “Buddhist practices such as mindfulness have acquired the ideological and political functions associated with psychology and the individualism associated with it” (2016: 94). For him, through therapization, TTPs distort mindfulness’ Buddhist underpinnings to detract from social concerns. They advance individualism and subjectification which are bound up with power.<sup>184</sup>

Berila (2016) adopts a feminist critique<sup>185</sup> to contrast secular mindfulness’ individualised, politically-disengaged paradigm with Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy. She also challenges the latter for its neglect of an intersectional analysis that acknowledges race and gender oppression within hegemonic education systems (2016: 8-10).<sup>186</sup> Berila deploys ‘mindful learning’—informed by critical feminist and race theories—as a methodology in anti-oppression pedagogy: “students are encouraged to use their learning process to actively transform society in socially just ways” (Berila 2016: 12).<sup>187</sup> Her approach blends mindfulness and social justice. This exercises mindfulness in diametric opposition to its behavioural function in the models investigated. Michelson’s (2015) feminist critique of experiential learning—discussed below—sets out mindfulness’ engagement with the body and normativity. Collectively, these contributions reveal a mindfulness pedagogy that is, as

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<sup>184</sup> Rose adds further insight into the part TTPs play in diverting democracy: “The modern self is impelled to make life meaningful through the search for happiness and self-realization in his or her individual biography: the ethics of subjectivity are inextricably locked into the procedures of power (Rose 1998, p. 79).

<sup>185</sup> Berila (2016) qualifies feminism as: “... an intersectional analysis of systems of oppression that examines how race, gender, class, ethnicity, and ability, along with sexual and national identities, work together to position us in complex power dynamics with one another” (2016: 4).

<sup>186</sup> Freire’s critical pedagogy is critiqued for its omission of race and gender as categories of difference (Berila 2016, 9). Michelson (2015) adds the problem of Freire’s regard for the masses as needful: “The masses are described in his work as self-deprecating, emotionally dependent, and passive—in other words, as womanly—and Freire sees their intellectual disempowerment as acts of ‘domestication’ ... Secondly, education itself is seen by Freire as an act of intellectual ordering ... The capacity for order and clarity is not seen as arising from the experience of the masses themselves, whose view is seen as partial and subjective. Rather, clarity arrives with the educator who, as authorised knower, is assumed to have access to objective knowledge ... the educator is able to detach from the distortions of social location. The oppressed cannot do so and therefore have no coherent analytical framework or self-authorising capacity of their own” (2015: 40-1).

<sup>187</sup> According to Berila (2016): “Mindful education is one valuable way to help students fully integrate and embody the lessons of anti-oppression pedagogy. In fact, the very practice of mindfulness is a fundamental catalyst for transformation. Like feminism, mindfulness is more about process than it is about product ... we need to learn about new ways of being in the world. Integrating mindful learning into anti-oppression pedagogy lets us do just that” (2016: 12).

yet, insufficiently theorised. They encourage the sector to examine the implicit assumptions, politics, social norms and overarching educational frameworks that govern TTPs.

### **5.2.2 TTPs and the Underpinnings of Exclusion**

TTPs encourage direct, experiential learning that equates the validity of inner experience and non-conceptual awareness with 'objective, evidence-based knowledge'. They promise an education that elevates inner experience to the level of evidence-based research.

In my view, the emphasis on inner experience as a 'second Renaissance' strategy fails to prepare teachers for politically and socially diverse contexts. Despite propositions that mindfulness is to be delivered contextually, I argue that teachers are under-educated in critical thinking and ill-prepared for a mindfulness 'for our times'.

At the time of my research TTPs emphasised inner rather than outer experience: they encouraged learners to come to know their own personalities, patterns and triggers, and to acquire understandings of mindfulness through the vehicle of their bodily experiences. They suggested this could occur through self-inquiry, retreats, further professional training, and familiarisation with the science and research that underpins mindfulness (Maitri Website 2017; Karuna Website 2017; Upeksha Website 2017). Individualised experiential learning (EL) omits the teacher's socio-political status and societal conditioning. Gordon (2015) argues that this casts unconscious bias and prejudice in behaviourist, rather than political terms. TTPs foreground the voices, experiences and invisibilised politics of their architects presented as 'expert' and 'neutral' thereby disguising their privileges and power. Inner worlds are projected politically void, as if the architects are neutral and objective. This premise constitutes what Butler named a 'default' (1993) in which obscuration of the socio-political world reproduces social norms upon which TTPs are premised. Shore and Wright call this 'an invisible web of power' (1999). In other words, edicts of neutrality which undergird mindfulness' multi-tiered TTPs, mask and sustain power.

For Maitri, certification<sup>188</sup> serves to produce a cadre of mindfulness teachers sufficiently trained to deliver medically-insured programmes. As a mindfulness decision-maker explains:

[...] our criteria are not lowering at all. If anything, they keep getting more stringent, not rigid but more rigorous I guess the word is, robust, and I'm absolutely for it because it's no small matter. You know, I can't answer the insurance company that says: 'if we release [mindfulness] to 10,000 people do you have 500 certified teachers?' And the answer is no, we don't. But you know, we're at the work and other schools will emerge and maybe there will be a way to produce 500 teachers ... We are committed to it being rigorous and intensified and transparent and that will only continue to happen as people take that on as their own values and their own ethics (Tom Maitri WSM).

This respondent posits certification as a robust, transparent assessment process. Through additional hours of appraisal, certified teachers represent what Maitri prizes. However, certification does not require critical thinking nor does 'rigorous' training guarantee good teaching. As a respondent states: "sometimes you may have all the right techniques under your belt and still not be a good teacher" (Sid Upeksha WSM). Without critical training, certification addresses neither mindfulness' lack of diversity nor its inaction around social concerns. It fortifies an exclusionary TTP, reinvigorates social norms and 'locks in' power (Roithmayr 2014: 2-6).

Upeksha and Karuna resemble Maitri's research framework, pedagogy and political disengagement. Less visible is their replication of Maitri's implicit ideologies. Arthington (2016) explains MBCT as a 'third wave' CBT method:

[it] involves a concern with a dialectic of acceptance and change (e.g., change will be possible if I learn to accept the reality of my situation), encouraging the individual to reduce experiential avoidance and instead to tolerate distress by adopting an attitude of non-judgmental or 'radical acceptance' toward these experiences (2016: 89).

The model, although successful in relapse prevention, and therefore the TTP, individualises and depoliticises suffering<sup>189</sup> and leads, according to Arthington, to an acceptance of

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<sup>188</sup> Maitri's certification is their most senior qualification. In July 2018, Maitri had certified 220 teachers globally (Jill Maitri WMF). The racial/gender breakdown of this group, requested in 2015 and by email on the 8 October 2018, is unknown.

<sup>189</sup> Linehan spent "part of her sabbatical leave in 1991 with John Teasdale and Mark Williams at the Medical Research Council's Applied Psychology Unit in Cambridge. She had used the concept of de-centring in her

politically-induced pain. Like Davies, Arthington links MBSR and MBCT's behavioural change emphases to a numbing of political agency. A focus on behavioural change—the individual is encouraged to change their behaviour to generate different outcomes—detracts from systemic transformation. A respondent affirms TTPs' behaviourist, non-political aims: "Don't expect mindfulness to cure world inequality, it doesn't say that on the bottle at all" (Sid Upeksha WSM). Yet, TTPs espouse a silent politics. MBCT teachers, following Arthington, are implicated in delivering a non-neutral education.

Like Maitri and Upeksha, Karuna manualises the curriculum, and perpetuates individualised notions of suffering. Their TTP model also resists infusion of social justice goals. In other words, Karuna reproduces Maitri's TTP formulae and structures without significant adjustments in diversity and ethics.

The cost of TT to the participant ranges among the organisations from ±£4,700 to ±£18,000. Common requirements for enrolment include an established mindfulness practice and retreat attendance (Kabat-Zinn and Santorelli n.d.).<sup>190</sup> Retreats are believed to deepen appreciation of 'the dharma' (Kabat-Zinn 2011: 299) and promote teacher qualities (Woods 2009: 471-2). Practice is the bedrock from which these attributes spring (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: 95). Respondents spoke to the value of retreats and practice-centred approach to TT for its immersive aspects: "retreat was a very important component right from the start—an actual 7-day proper mindfulness vipassanā-type retreat ... there's something much more important than all the right techniques and that's the emphasis on

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development of dialectical behaviour therapy. She had worked many years developing this psychological treatment for people who presented clinicians with some of their most challenging problems: those with a diagnosis of 'borderline personality disorder.' This disorder is characterised by among other things, many attempts at self-harm, unstable emotions, intolerance of being alone, unstable relationships, and sometimes abnormal 'dissociative' experiences" (Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002: 39-40). She developed the mindfulness technique of stepping away from charged thoughts and emotions so as to relate to them differently.

<sup>190</sup> Kabat-Zinn (2003) notes: "A working principle for MBSR teachers is that we never ask more of our patients in terms of practice than we ask of ourselves on a daily basis. Another is that we are all students and the learning and growing are a lifelong engagement. ... In our experience, unless the instructor's relationship to mindfulness is grounded in extensive personal practice, the teaching and guidance one might bring to the clinical context will have little in the way of appropriate energy, authenticity, or ultimate relevance, and that deficit will soon be felt by program participants (2003: 150). As McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2011) note: "This means six days a week, 45 minutes a day in the case of Maitri ... frequency remains the same, but duration may differ in other programs" (2011: 95).



personal practice and going on retreat” (Dawn Upeksha WSF); “I cannot overstate the magic of Karuna. I think when people come on our retreats, they pick up something called the magic of Karuna. It’s difficult to know how one maintains this” (Karen Karuna WMF).

In opposition to retreat as an immersion in practice, Arthington (2016) argues that it isolates the teacher from the everyday world and fosters political disengagement (2016: 88).

Retreats also exclude those to whom this format is inaccessible: financially, geographically, socially or culturally. The model presumes domestic arrangements that allow individuals to be away from home for significant periods of time. Moreover, it assumes that the white, heteronormative spaces that predominate in retreat settings are safe and inclusive. It is in these spaces that prized ‘teacher qualities,’ determined by white experts, are fostered (Anderson 2015: 13). To add to questions around power: who gets to attend retreats? Who designs them and for whom? Which qualities and insights are valued; which are dismissed?

Uncritical pedagogies allow TTPs to remain politically disengaged. ‘Apolitical’ curricula, behaviourism, retreat and ‘white space’ reconstitute mindfulness’ white, middle-class demography. Claims of neutrality mask invisible politics that cement power structures of whiteness and non-diversity. These arrangements are invisible only to those who benefit from them.

### 5.2.3 Standardisation

Expansion of TT programmes across the UK led some to fear a loss of integrity in training delivery (Crane et al 2012: 79). A tri-university collaboration between Bangor, Oxford and Exeter (2006) culminated in the launch of the UK Network for Mindfulness-Based Teacher Training Organisations (UKN) (Rebecca Crane email communications, 18 September 2018). The first meeting, held at Oxford, attracted representatives from *Oxford Mindfulness Centre*, Oxford University (OMC), the *Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice*, Bangor University (CMRP), *Clinical Education Development and Research*, Exeter University (CEDAR), and NHS Scotland (ibid.).

Formation of the UKN had a significant impact on the direction of TT. It generated an educational policy framework that included voluntary regulation and an audit culture.

Aiming for standardisation, the UKN produced Good Practice Guidelines for training organisations and for teachers. These stipulate retreat requirements and daily practice. Training bodies were initially included on the basis of their commitment to MBSR and MBCT protocols. As secular mindfulness spread, MBSR and MBCT compatibility requirements were relaxed. The network currently incorporates twenty-six organisations not all of which conform to the eight-week MBSR and MBCT programmes (UKN Website 2018).

Voluntary regulation introduced a Teachers' Register of accredited graduates from UKN member organisations. These comply with, and thus reinforce, the UKN Good Practice Guidelines. Collaboration also produced the *Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Teaching Assessment Criteria* (MBI:TAC), first published in 2012 (Crane et al. 2012), detailing required competencies for mindfulness teachers. The Mindfulness Network which provides a listing of vetted supervisors to support TTP processes and secular retreats, is another resource that sprung from the UKN (Mindfulness Network Website 2018).<sup>191</sup> These organs and instruments represent, on the one hand, efforts to standardise teacher performance across different TTPs and delivery contexts. They attempt to control the 'Wild West' of TT (Wilks 2015). On the other hand, standardisation and regulation constitute participation in an audit culture, branded often as a function of neoliberal education (Hyland 1994).

### **5.3 Normative TTPs and the Secular Mindfulness Teacher**

Education can, as Shull (1993) and hooks (1994) argue, be a practice of liberation. In order to promote critical pedagogy in mindfulness, Cannon (2016) calls for the production of a 'social justice mindfulness paradigm':

[...] attention must be given to the training of mindfulness educators, beyond a superficial nod toward diversity and inclusion. If we are to embrace mindfulness as a liberating practice, then we must integrate mindfulness education with anti-racism and social justice pedagogy. An antiracism framework should include a commitment to eliminate the use of mindfulness practices as a behaviour management tool (2016: 402).

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<sup>191</sup> In 2016, the Mindfulness Network converted its status from a CIC to a Charity (email correspondence, Mindfulness Network Secretariat, 12 September 2016). Its founding members are either Directors or staff of UK university-based mindfulness institutions which is indicative of the reinforcement of power and leadership within the sector.

Cannon here, following hooks (1994), Berila (2015), and Bodhi (2013), says mindfulness can possess the potential for social liberation. She proposes a ‘pedagogical orientation’ that uncovers power and privilege, and discloses racism and other forms of discrimination so as to expose the ‘white saviour trope’ (2016: 397-406).<sup>192</sup> For this to unfold, teachers require training in social critique in order to engage fully with social, economic and environmental concerns. In Chapter Four, I draw on Bodhi’s work to argue that in the absence of a ‘sharp social critique,’ secular mindfulness aligns with consumer capitalism (2013). I now extend his argument to suggest that without a critical pedagogy, TTPs produce models of governmentality and self-regulation that buttress sectoral and social inequalities. Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha TTPs are currently devoid of the political or social justice training Cannon appeals for. Teachers do not receive social liberation pedagogy, and, in the current system, they are not meant to.

Associations between secular mindfulness and politics are considered individually inspired choices. As a respondent says: “what people do with mindfulness is up to them. We certainly don’t tell them how to think” (Tom Maitri WSM). As a consequence, TTPs are silent on the politics of stress and social change. They hence omit training in political agency and social transformation. Despite claims of an inherent ethics, TTPs perpetuate ‘apolitical’, universalised models that habituate individuals to political adversity (Walsh 2016: 160-2; Stanley 2012: 635). As a respondent commenting on systemic injustices says, these are “things that cannot be changed by mindfulness” (Dawn Upeksha WSF). Yet, claims of political neutrality can, from a social mindfulness perspective, break open spaces for critical discourses within TTPs.

Growth of the sector and increased TT demand cemented relations between the MBI:TAC formulators and Maitri. Collaboration reinforced social norms, postracial approaches to TTP development, and therefore, ongoing exclusions. Oblivious to their own defaults and inherent politics, these developers identified the following problem in teacher assessment:

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<sup>192</sup> Cannon (2016) draws on Freire to expand the concept of solidarity: “Freire describes solidarity as standing with oppressed communities in their own liberation struggle, rather than extending ‘false generosity,’ acts of charity or service that perpetuate domination” (2016: 406).

On the one hand, the medical, scientific paradigm emphasises theory, translating theory into practice, the cost- effectiveness of interventions, a focus on health outcomes, and a quest for ‘evidence-based practice’; on the other, the meditative contemplative paradigm emphasises the cultivation of particular ways of being, non-attachment to outcome, non-striving, and an apparently paradoxical turning towards painful experiences with an attitude of acceptance. On the face of it, these are unlikely bedfellows. There are tensions inherent in the process of applying a paradigm that emphasises measurement and outcome to a paradigm that has many dimensions that appear inherently unquantifiable (Crane et al. 2010: 76).

Crane et al. allude here not only to paradigmatic dissonance but to a creeping audit culture. For them this creates a tension with mindfulness’ contemplative paradigm which, they say, is unattached to outcome. Yet, this framing demonstrates how TTP designers come to bypass the politics that underpins the sector. Although they acknowledge the irreducibility of embodiment, they disregard the conditioned politics and social norms that teachers and teacher trainers embody. Claims of neutrality, universality and compassion hide privilege. These unrecognised privileges, qualities and norms, constitute TTP outcomes. By focusing on the immeasurability of embodiment, designers bypass inputs and outcomes which to them are invisible. Attempts to reconcile the competing interests of metrics and the cultivation of ‘qualities’ thus occurs in isolation of diversity and social ethics concerns.

Following Linton and Walcott (2018) and Black (2017), TTPs’ diversity-poor approaches fail prospective BME teachers from the outset. Although Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha TTPs developed independently of one another, their mutual drive to standardisation and teacher assessment became foundational to their collaboration and professionalisation (Woods 2009: 470; Crane 2010: 75). These efforts consolidated their shared pedagogical frame (Woods 2009; McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011) devoid of prosocial aspirations.

Mindfulness pedagogy continued to emphasise inner-centred learning, non-hierarchical ‘circles’, “a shared stance of not-knowing, [and] the power of the action of ‘drawing out’ the tacit knowing of the participant” (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: 104, 128, 181).<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> It is worthwhile citing McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2011) at length on this understanding of what occurs in mindfulness training: “Working with mindfulness is not group therapy. It is not psychoeducation. And it is not classroom teaching. All the ‘group-work skills’ can be seen, rather, as rooted in the co-creation of mindfulness among teacher and participants. From this perspective, the distinctive features of the mindfulness-based

Although TTPs reject the “banking model of education” (ibid.: 128), the political stance through which their ideologies operate remains under-investigated (Stanley 2012: 633; Cannon 2016). Claims which position mindfulness as ‘co-produced,’ (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: 104) again obscure its politics. Discourses that align TTPs with liberation education belie the underlying inequalities that beset the sector; they mask the chasm between TTPs and critical pedagogy:

In opposition to traditional theories of education that serve to reinforce certainty, conformity, and technical control of knowledge and power, critical pedagogy embraces a dialectical view of knowledge that functions to unmask the conditions between objective knowledge and the cultural norms, values, and standards of the society at large (Darder, Baltodano and Torres 2003: 12).

Although mindfulness pedagogy may not be characterised as ‘reinforcing certainty’, I argue that they mask the ‘control of knowledge of power’—foundations which critical pedagogy would ‘unmask’. Markedly absent in TTPs, uncritical pedagogies instead obscure difference. Magee explains the reasons:

A survey of mindfulness teachers, a sampling of mindfulness training venues, and a visit to any centre of practice would reveal that social justice is often not associated as core to the practices of mindfulness. Instead, social justice is often seen as something separate from, and optional to, mindfulness practice and mindfulness in the world. This fact is exacerbated or perhaps pre-figured by the contexts within which Western mindfulness emerged: predominantly among white, male, and upper-class students of Buddhism with a dream of taking the practices into the world. Given the relatively privileged backgrounds of many of the original teachers and practitioners of mindfulness in the West, it is easy to see why the practices have become largely if not primarily associated with personal well-being and productivity, and not social justice. For this reason, mindfulness practices are often perceived as more or less unavailable to or unhelpful for members of traditionally marginalized communities (2016: 427-8).

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group and its demands on the teacher become evident. First, because it is a *co-creation* in which the teacher may be a catalyst, but in which *every* participant contributes, a non-hierarchical, non-pathologizing ethos develops. Everyone involved, teacher and participant alike, shares the sufferings and joys of the human condition. Second, all share the intention, explicit or implicit, to explore his or her own direct experience. Such explorations have the potential of revealing one’s authenticity in the moment to the group. Third, every participant has the opportunity to be supported by the group in his or her exploration, and to offer support as well. Finally, all are contributors to the maintenance of the mindfulness, the inter-subjective resonance, of the group” (2011: 104).

Magee orientates TTPs to social forces of exclusion. Her appraisal reinforces Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's disengagement with social transformation and their affinity for adjunctive diversity strategies. She identifies the sector's rootedness in systemic privilege which is reproduced in its TTPs.

Black and critical feminist pedagogies have long framed health and education in political terms (Michelson 2015: 67; Berila 2016: 64). They expose the absence of a politicised stress or health discourse: 'worldly stress' is related to its impact on the individual; patients are trained to become more resilient to global stressors in order to achieve personal wellbeing (Arthington 2016: 94). As Kabat-Zinn writes:

[...] given that many job descriptions will not be rewritten in the short run to lower employee stress, people are forced to cope as best they can using their own resources. The degree to which you are affected by stressful circumstances can be influenced positively by your own coping skills (2009: 387).

Individualised coping strategies, framed as resourcefulness, underpin mindfulness' skills-based pedagogy. Delegation of responsibility to the individual, makes teachers become part of an apparatus that promotes a Darwinian—individual verses systemic transformation—ideology (Giroux 2012). Individualised improvements reproduce cultures of commercialised well-being. The latter undermine community resourcefulness and responsiveness. They foster social atomisation and place limits on social justice prospects (Cederström and Spicer 2015: 25).

Berila (2016), whose starting point is anti-oppression pedagogy, deploys mindful learning to unseat internalised whiteness (2016: 64). In her Women's Studies courses, she joins Cannon in her call for a departure from the behavioural management focus of TTPs. Like Magee, she proposes to replace the domestication of teacher-trainees and course participants (Freire 1972: 180)<sup>194</sup> with a community-care approach that prioritises justice (Magee 2016: 427). Further shifts towards critical community psychology and research premised on social ethics would conduce to diversity-rich TTPs (Cannon 2016: 402).

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<sup>194</sup> Freire (1972) argues that education is never neutral and that it potentially fosters liberation or domestication. He takes domestication to mean the assimilation of teachers and students into a system so that they internalise and perpetuate its social norms and policies (1972: 174).

#### 5.4 Audit Society, Skills-Based Training and Social Justice Tensions

Mindfulness pedagogy serves the skill requirements of knowledge societies (Singh 2011: 480). It coincides with the diminishing yet increasingly urgent role of critical discourses and transformative education (Giroux 2012: 23). In the following paragraphs, I consider mindfulness' relation to neoliberal educational demands, particularly its engulfing audit culture. Its primary measure of teacher competency, MBI:TAC, I argue, constitutes an audit instrument.

In neoliberal pedagogy, by which I mean a pedagogy in service of neoliberal governance (Apple 2001: 31), “notions of the public good, community, and the obligations of citizenship are replaced by the overburdened demands of individual responsibility and an utterly privatised ideal of freedom” (ibid.: 55). New public management strategies shift the purpose of education from public values designed to safeguard the common good to market interests (Singh 2011: 488; Olssen and Peters 2005: 313). The role of universities morphs from critical engagement to the production of neoliberal subjects (Collins 2010). Teaching is no longer aligned with social transformation but fosters elitism, individualism (Gonzales-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2018: 413) and ‘technologies of the self’ (Ng 2016: 139; Foucault 1998: 137; Reveley 2016: 498). In their current ‘apolitical’ form, I argue, TTPs conform to these values. Rather than support vibrant democracies and social equality, TTPs which claim to subtly subvert corporate interests, in effect serve these through skills-based education (Krupka 2015; Eaton 2014; Davies 2016: 65). Outcomes are measured as ends in themselves, in isolation of the values of social equality, access and freedoms.

Critique is not altogether absent from the mindfulness sector. It is promoted when it does not disrupt social norms. As Barnett (1994) argues:

Critique works within a horizon of utility; that is to say, critique is tolerated provided it points towards changes with a use-value which are located within the relevant boundary conditions. Those tempted to critique current operations—to raise their head above the parapet of norms and operations—have, in short, to be prepared to face the response: ‘But what is the point of your objection? Where does it get us?’ Critique is not valued

in itself: it has to promise tangible rewards within the boundary conditions (1994: 165).

Non-disruptive change validates rather than transforms the sector and functions within its 'boundary conditions'. Adjunctive diversity engagement serves as an example. Views that challenge the sector's preservationist strategies, on the other hand, are generally discouraged (Walsh 2016). Audit serves to preserve the sector.

The audit of institutions and their programmes constitutes a modern shift towards a 'metricated' future (Singh 2010: 193). In its political context, audit culture emerged as part of structural adjustments that measured 'teaching performance', judged 'research quality' and assessed 'institutional effectiveness.' And yet, instead of improving quality, "a peculiarly coercive and disabling model of accountability has emerged" (Shore and Wright 1999: 557). Audit, typically, is associated with management, and functions to preserve power and control.

Audit generated its own field of specialisations, academic departments, structures and consultants (Singh, 2010: 192).<sup>195</sup> New audit experts and specialists came to execute the following roles:

First, they developed the new expert knowledge that provided the classifications for the new normative grid. Second, they advised on the design of institutional procedures. Third, they staffed and presided over the new regulatory mechanisms and systems, and judged adherence to or deviance from them. Fourth, they had a redemptive role in so far as they made their expert knowledge available to individuals who wished to engage in the process of self-improvement in order to modify their conduct according to desired norms. The new categories of higher education experts, referred to as ... 'staff development trainers' and 'teaching quality assessors' are fulfilling precisely these four functions (Shore and Wright 1999: 560).

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<sup>195</sup> As Shore and Wright (2015b) state: "There is nothing new about the use of quantitative indicators and performance measurements. However, what is distinctive about performance indicators and audits today is the scale of their diffusion and the extraordinary extent to which society has embraced and endorsed them" (2015b: 423). Michael Power (1994) adds, "... we have lost the ability to be publicly sceptical about the fashion for audit and quality assurance" (1994: 41). Audits have thus become normalised as "benign solutions to the problems of performance, management, and governance" (Shore and Wright 2015b: 423).



Within secular mindfulness, TT architects, pedagogues, trainers and supervisors are normalised as audit experts and guardians of mindfulness. Themselves leaders and decision-makers, they also preserve privileges, norms and claims. In this sense, the naturalisation of audit conceals power which performs best when invisible to those it dominates (ibid. 559). Audit reinforces dominant ideologies and further entrenches hegemonies of control. It operates as a technology of exclusion.

In the mindfulness sector, synchrony with audit's neoliberal culture leads to the formulation of uncritical, metric-based pedagogies (Yancu and Farmer: 2017). In efforts to measure teacher performance, 'highly experienced MBI teacher trainers' (Crane et al. 2013: 685) from the institutional alliance generated MBI:TAC (Crane et al. 2013: 682). First published in 2012 to assess teacher adherence and competence in the delivery of Mindfulness-based Interventions (MBIs) (Crane et al. 2016),<sup>196</sup> the instrument identifies six learning domains across which the trainee is assessed. These include their coverage, pacing, and organisation of material and their ability to convey course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching. Their guidance of mindfulness practices, command of the group, and ability to facilitate a learning environment are appraised. Domains also include less easily assessed areas such as the teacher's embodiment of mindfulness and their relational skills (ibid.: 684). Auditees' abilities in these domains are categorised according to six levels of competency ranging from incompetent to advanced. The idea is that trainees will progress through stages that include advanced beginner, competent, and proficient, on their path to improvement (Crane et al. 2016: 6). Yet, presented as logical and rational, MBI-TAC masks 'deficit-user' theories which mark marginalised communities as needful (Cannon 2016: 402) and pays no attention to social fractures and injustices (Hsu 2017b; Walsh 2016: 156; Payne 2016:124).

Audits claim to generate improved accountability (Shore and Wright 2015: 432). All Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha teachers undergo assessments based on MBI:TAC or a variation

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<sup>196</sup> The Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) competency scale, further developed by Sharpless and Barber (2009) in the evaluation of psychologists, underpins the tool's production (Crane et al. 2013: 2).

thereof. On the surface, these strategies address concerns with standardised delivery and aim to achieve transparency. But this is not the whole story:

[...] accountability and transparency have been conceptualized in market-like terms, with the negative impacts of neoliberalism and audit regimes (e.g., work intensification, growing inequalities, anti-democratic practices) treated as externalities outside accounting's scope ... Neoliberal reforms have been portrayed by their advocates as not only beneficial but as though there were no alternatives ... People also understandably hesitate to look as though they are against accountability, efficiency, and good governance, albeit that the real issue is arguably the need to contest the meanings ascribed to these concepts under neoliberalism and the related marginalization of other values (e.g., social justice, democratic participation, ecological sustainability) (ibid.).

Presented as a rational, academicized response to TT standardisation, audit is another avenue through which mindfulness is implicated in neoliberalism. The juxtaposition of audit and social justice articulates a key challenge to secular mindfulness. A possibility is to integrate anti-racist social transformation pedagogy within an audit frame.

Barnett (1994) suggests that quality evaluations, rather than 'policing', promote the self-reflection and improvement of educationalists (1994: 166). He postulates an audit ideology of enhancement and betterment that resonates with teacher improvement in the mindfulness sector (Crane et al. 2010: 76; Crane et al. 2013: 2). Harvey (2006), however, warns of audit bureaucratisation in academia and the instrumentalization of learning. Audit does not necessarily lead to improvements, he says, especially when designed by the architects of the systems they measure. They presume a naïve positivistic link between the auditing agency and those being measured (2006: 287). Audits are also critiqued as hierarchical and paternalistic relationships of power between scrutinizer and observed. In an individualised culture, as social units of measurement, mindfulness teachers are constantly audited and encouraged to self-audit to enhance their performance and output. In this asymmetrical power relation, the auditee fulfils requirements set by an expert which is then scrutinised by the expert or a surrogate (Shore and Wright 1999: 558). This approach conforms to Freire's 'banking educational model': invested with requisite knowledge and

expertise, the mindfulness trainer, deposits their knowledge in ‘deficit’ trainees (Freire 1993: 53; Cannon 2016: 402).<sup>197</sup>

In contrast to a ‘deficit education’ model, TTPs claim that skilled teacher trainers draw forth innate wisdom from the learner (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: 115). To quote Santorelli (1999): “This is the true meaning of education, the essence of mindfulness—to draw forth that which already is—rather than imagining that we must fill others or be filled from some outside source in order to be complete” (1999: 82). However, some challenge the assertion that mindfulness constitutes an equal, dialogical relationship between teacher and student. Based on research of an MBSR course, Stanley and Longden (2016) believe that teachers, through “three-turn formulations,”<sup>198</sup> are directive and subtly authoritative (2016: 312-3). This reflects the complexity of mutual learning and the absence of critical inquiry into the educational process itself. It also highlights a disparity between the characterisation in TT manuals and conduct within TTPs and mindfulness programmes.

The audit culture in secular mindfulness, it could be argued, preserves uncritical pedagogy. Audit instruments embed teachers in a culture of compliance. Good Practice Guidelines function as disciplinary gatekeepers for both teachers and training institutions—they determine membership in the UKN. The Teachers’ Register holds a self-regulatory function that reinforces the Good Practice Guidelines. The MBI:TAC prioritises competencies that consolidate norms and weaken diversity. At the same time, the power of TTP architects, the arbiters of ‘quality’ and their beneficiaries remain invisible.

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<sup>197</sup> In contrast to mindfulness’ ‘impartial’ politics, Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* highlights education’s purpose to eradicate social inequalities and cultivate vibrant democracies through praxis and ‘dialogics’ (Freire 1970/1993: 106-8). His work foregrounds liberation and the role of solidarity in the cultivation of education as the practice of freedom (ibid.: 76). Mindfulness pedagogy also lays claim to an education of liberation, albeit individualised, in the belief, as Payne (2015) explains in Chapter Three, that it will lead to social liberation through trickle-down compassion (Purser 2019: 10).

<sup>198</sup> Stanley and Longden (2016) explain: “Three-turn sequences are one of the most familiar organisations of pedagogical discourse (Lee 2007). Often referred to as Initiation–Response–Evaluation (IRE) sequences, they take place when the teacher poses a question, listens to a response from a member of the group and feeds back with what may be viewed, on a superficial level, as a summary or confirmation of what they have heard ... formulations have been defined as a method of continuously and actively listening to, evaluating and interpreting talk, while simultaneously creating an opportunity for the speaker to omit certain parts of an account and to emphasise other parts, to advance their own institutional interests” (2016: 312). They explain that teachers learn to repeat certain words back to learners and omit others so as to convey their chosen teaching points: “Formulations are the means by which mindfulness teachers transform the accounts given by participants in order that they fit the pedagogic and institutional aims of the course” (ibid.: 313).

Although a teacher's racial/ethnic identity is known to be significant to marginalised groups (Nieves 2012: 35), audit instruments such as the MBI:TAC disregard both the teacher's race/ethnicity and the delivery context. Aside from a 2017 UKN survey which gathered data on ethnicity (UKN 2017 Survey), audit has not been applied to questions of diversity. Nor has it investigated teachers' cultural competence and suitability to diverse audiences (Cannon 2016: 398). Sullivan (2006) argues that the obscuration of race constitutes a "failure to see the particular impact of racial friction;" it interprets prejudice in behavioural rather than structural terms (2006: 36-37). Furthermore, even though audits possess the potential to support social justice concerns, invariably they tend to benefit white women and can perpetuate racial discrimination (McQueen 2018).

In light of the entrenchment of a racialised, neoliberal audit culture, a pedagogy of freedom requires calibration of new public management strategies with equity. Is it possible for metrics, transparency and accountability on the one hand to coalesce with a politicised mindfulness geared to fulfil a social justice purpose on the other? Their directions appear diametrically opposed: audit is individualised and aims at self-improvement; social justice is a political project that aims to redistribute power (Singh 2010: 193).

Few examples of collaboration between quality assurance and social justice, wherein audits engage with intersectional exclusions, exist (Martin 2010). South Africa's post-apartheid educational reforms integrate social justice and transformation goals into quality assurance systems (Singh 2011). This example reinterprets quality assurance and educational effectiveness in the interests of social transformation (ibid.: 488).<sup>199</sup> I apply the argument to secular mindfulness.

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<sup>199</sup> The interests of new public management and social justice are diametrically opposed. As Singh (2011) explains: "The challenge was to develop a workable fit between the neo-liberal lineages and functions of quality assurance and a local emancipatory agenda which stressed social justice and social transformation. There were potential gains from using a social transformation agenda to mediate and re-orientate what is usually regarded as a new public management strategy but the broader, more progressive intent linked to the transformation agenda was, in turn, likely to be vulnerable to and in danger of being eclipsed by the origins, lineages, values and effects of traditional quality assurance" (2011: 490).

The reconstitution of 'quality' with social purpose requires a policy framework that centres ethics and calls for equity and societal transformation. It requires the production of new curricula and pedagogies that prioritise social transformation and interrogate the manner in which unjust institutional systems that inform educational experiences and outcomes become prominent (ibid.: 489). Such a framework would need to value diversity in all its forms. It would also embrace changes in institutional cultures, curriculum reforms, innovative scholarship, academic freedom, and establish education as a public good (Lange and Singh 2010: 57). Teacher trainees would require competencies to live, work, make choices and act in diverse educational settings. TTPs would need to prepare teachers through pedagogies geared towards social transformation. This requires an education that dismantles underlying ideologies of Othering. Social mindfulness would centre the traditions, cultures, strengths and interests of communities and integrate mindfulness appropriately. Research ambitions would serve social rather than individual output measures. These requirements, in turn, call for critical epistemologies. To bring about reform of this nature, mindfulness would constantly be reviewed for its 'fitness of purpose' in social justice terms. These adjustments constitute systemic change that uproots the epistemic whiteness of secular mindfulness. It challenges neutrality and universality and foregrounds community.

Instrumental strategies that adjust for representation without changing underpinning ideologies do not address diversity deficits. Affirmative action programmes commonly constitute non-performatives (Saha 2017). Eradication of systemically embedded cultures of Othering is necessary to achieve a sector able to attend to matters of justice:

[the] ideology of inclusion—which is implicit in notions of widening participation and lifelong learning—has a very uncertain and ambivalent relation to equality, for the simple fact of inclusion does not in itself bring about greater equality. Wider participation and 'inclusion' cannot be achieved simply by increasing numbers (Delanty 2003: 79).

Delanty and Saha shed light on cosmetic reforms that bypass systemic transformation. The premise of inclusion is itself problematic as long as unequal power obtains. Sarfaty (2010) similarly argues that the inclusion of minorities into current power configurations will fail to induce significant changes if they reinforce dominant ways of thinking (2010: 683). It is only

systemic, epistemic transformation that can deracinate tacit ideologies of whiteness that sabotage social justice.

Without a critical approach to transformation, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's adjunctive diversity strategies constitute 'non-performatives' (Ahmed 2012: 117). Improving the intake of BME teacher trainers and trainees under current conditions repeats the current dilemma. Social justice innovation necessitates policy, pedagogy and curricula disruption. This calls for decolonisation rather than diversification (Bhanot 2015; Okundaye 2017; Arday and Mirza 2018; Bhambra, Gebriel and Nişancioğlu 2018). Such radical change requires quality assurance modalities designed to achieve social justice in the long term. This necessarily challenges the confines of bounded critique.

### **5.5 Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET): MBI:TAC**

I now discuss TTPs' entrenchment in Competency-Based Education and Training (CBET). I explain how MBI:TAC, an audit instrument framed by CBET, reinforces an overarching educational framework that bolsters a neoliberal politics.

As demands for TT grew, MBI:TAC set out to standardise TT assessment to ensure consistency of delivery (Crane et al. 2010: 76). As a respondent explained: "it's a bit of a wild west out there in terms of teacher training with people setting up trainings without very much experience of their own. The university sector, working with the network, is building clarity around this" (Sal Upeksha WMF).<sup>200</sup> In addition, formulators expressed concern that 'second generation' educators—those originally trained by first generation mindfulness teachers—were less qualified than their predecessors (Crane 2010: 84). By implication, MBI:TAC preserves TTPs in the image of its founders, which may pre-empt transformation. Standardisation is thus linked to a conservatism aimed to sustain existing systems and pedagogies. Cannon argues that TTPs valorise the knowledge and wisdom of white

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<sup>200</sup> In the UK this standardisation concern was tied to the Mindfulness Initiative's attempts to train a sufficient number of teachers to respond to anticipated demands for programmes to be delivered through the NHS, schools and in prisons (Loughton and Morden 2015). For Maitri, as noted previously, quality training was linked to insurance.

mindfulness teachers thus reasserting white dominance (2016: 403-4).<sup>201</sup> The quest for standardised assessment is, in her view, irreconcilable with social justice aspirations that address systemic power. MBI:TAC literature does not engage with audit culture, nor its critique. It adopts a CBET framework uncritically seeking to capture the competencies of first-generation teachers.

CBET bears on performance- and outcomes-based teacher education and on ‘public accountability and control’ (Hyland 1994: 1). Historically, there was little research to support CBET’s implementation in the early 1970s. Its supremacy over other teacher training approaches was unproven (Tuxworth 1989: 12). CBET grew prominent in the US and UK through its advocacy of ‘social efficiency’ and behaviourism<sup>202</sup> (Norris 1991: 338). Snedden and Prosser’s social efficiency thesis, based in skills-training, sprang from expanding markets and a quest for increased worker efficiency (Wirth 1991). Their work draws on a German model of conservative social philosophy, stress-response psychology, industry needs and supreme efficiency (ibid.: 56-57).<sup>203</sup> These principles reinforce education’s link to industry,

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<sup>201</sup> Cannon’s (2016) critique of mindfulness is noteworthy: “The mindfulness curriculum does not include a critical inquiry about the student’s socio-political context; there is no critical analysis of poverty, institutional racism, the school-to-prison pipeline, or the multitude of reasons teenagers might be bored or disruptive in school. There is also no exploration of contemplative practices the youth already utilise in their home life or communities ... Mindfulness educators, if teaching from a foundation of antiracism and social justice, will begin to pay careful attention to power dynamics associated with race and class, including the fraught dynamic of the white teacher or white saviour” (2016: 403-4). Cannon’s work is supported by Ladson-Billings (2007) who writes in the context of school education and challenges a pedagogy that “constructs students as defective and lacking ... When we speak of an education debt we move to a discourse that holds us all accountable. It reminds us that we have accumulated this problem as a result of centuries of neglect and denial of education to entire groups of students. It reminds us that we have consistently under-funded ... poor communities where education is needed most. It reminds us that we have, for large periods of our history, excluded groups of people from the political process where they might have a say in democratically determining what education should look like in their communities” (2007: 321).

<sup>202</sup> Collins notes that: “the rhetoric of the so-called competency-based movement ... has spawned mounds of curriculum formats which are devoid of any significant inputs from adult learners and teachers. They are characterised largely by a myopic perspective on needs typically expressed in the form of simplistic behavioural objectives” (1991: 90).

<sup>203</sup> Wirth’s full quote reads: “[...] training programmes were highly meshed to the hierarchical skill needs of the technological system. It was administered by the Ministry of Commerce rather than Education so that it could be run by practical men rather than fuzzy-minded educators. American manufacturers became convinced that they could compete successfully only if the American school system introduced a set of separate vocational schools patterned after the German model. David Snedden and Charles Prosser in their work and writings developed the theoretical rationale for the technocratic model. It was marked by a conservative social philosophy, a methodology of specific training operations based on principles of [stress-response] psychology, and a curriculum designed according to a job analysis of the needs of industry, and by a preference for a separately-administered set of vocational schools ... the ultimate aim of education was ‘the greatest degree of

quality assurance and market interests. In other words, CBET is a function of audit and corporatized education. Its ideological frame drives subservient competency approaches.

Efforts at standardisation manualise less quantifiable qualities of the teacher (Crane 2010: 76). In the MBI:TAC embodiment and authenticity—terms associated with the mindfulness teacher—are included as objectifiable measures (Mitra and Greenberg 2016: 412; Payne 2016: 132; Wilson 2016: 118). These qualities are themselves conditioned, contextual and contingent. Embodiment, for instance, is intimately interwoven with alterity—bodies are differently inscribed by social forces and conditions (Butterwick and Selman 2012: 66): “The body is a discursive category, a site of struggle ... Pedagogies which are embodied ... involve a more complex understanding of how the body is culturally and socially constructed and experienced” (ibid.). Following this thought, secular mindfulness teachers commonly embody whiteness through racialised privilege and white spaces. This, however, is protected or invisibilised through underpinning social norms that valorise the embodiment of mindfulness without attention to conditioning, privilege and power (Darder, Baltodano and Torres 2003: 12; Sullivan 2006: 37). The teacher is trained to proclaim neutrality and promote ideologies that obscure difference. MBI:TAC, in other words, anonymises and neutralises the mindfulness teacher. It evades questions around the power dynamics of assessment.

Another of the MBI:TAC domains covers course content and delivery. It judges the trainee’s skill in their interpretation and transmission of secular material. The integration of Buddhism into mindfulness teaching, however, generates its own difficulties:

You are trying to turn people into secular Dharma teachers. If you look at people from my generation ... we have gone through a huge amount of training. I didn’t start teaching until the 80s and started practicing in 1970 and so I have this huge training and accumulated material, hearing it over and over again, and yet we’re asking someone after—I don’t know how many hours it works out at—to suddenly start being upfront in a fairly short period of time, to start conveying some of those meditative approaches in a traditional context that is usually only expected after a significant period of time, a long time. So, the good training of teachers is a huge ask and

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efficiency’ [which required] utilitarian training which looks to individual efficiency in the world of work (1991: 56-57).



Bangor, Oxford and Exeter are trying to keep standards really high. Again, it's an on-going dialogue of how we do that. The MBI:TAC and the honing of that assessment criteria is really important for turning out good teachers (Sid Upeksha WSM).

Sid leads us back to the Buddhist critique of secular mindfulness. He identifies a misalignment in the time required to cultivate understanding in Buddhism, and the speed with which Maitri and Upeksha teachers become qualified. MBI:TAC assumes that trainees can become proficient in mindfulness teaching in a short period. It considers it fair to assess their Buddhist comprehension even though the assessor may themselves not be Buddhist. The teacher's capacity to secularise Buddhist material, without attention to the politics and implications of secularisation, is also unproblematised (Brown 2013).

The tension described above pertains to a mindfulness which initially favoured teachers with Buddhist training.<sup>204</sup> Over time, trainees without foundations in Buddhism joined mindfulness organisations. A teacher trainer recollects:

As time went on and mindfulness became more popular, people were coming in through professional doorways so it was all the different healing arts you might say but not necessarily with an understanding of the dharma and the roots that this whole programme rests on (Jane Maitri WSF).

In order to support their Buddhist training various documents such as Bob Stahl's *The Heart of the Dhamma* were used. In it, he pinpoints expressions of the *Four Noble Truths*, the *Three marks of existence* and the *Four Foundations' of Mindfulness* in the eight-week curriculum (Stahl n.d.; Brown 2016: 81). Stahl illustrates MBSR's commitment to the programme's Buddhist underpinnings. Code-switching and camouflaging (Brown 2016) are thus embedded in the training process in multiple ways. Teachers themselves need to find ways to secularise their understanding of Buddhism as well as universalise and 'neutralise' the teachings.

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<sup>204</sup> As a respondent reports: "When people first came to study and to want to learn to teach here, so this is before me, the assumption was that you came with a dharma practice ... [we] always said 'you could see the dharma in the programme' but emphasised delivering it with the compassion and skill of meeting people where they were at and not flooding them with jargon—it never was that. It was always about accessibility which to me is skilful action" (Jane Maitri WSF). This comment, as Brown (2013) argues in Chapter Three, captures Maitri's ambiguity in training teachers in Buddhist dharma while insisting that public programmes are secularised.

MBI:TAC functionality has been tested in two studies. The first, conducted in 2013 aimed to measure its reliability. It was used by sixteen assessors who evaluated forty-three teachers (Crane et al. 2013). In 2017, a further study deployed MBI:TAC to assess the effect of MBCT TT on participant outcome (Huijbers et al. 2017). The 2013 study found MBI:TAC to be a reliable tool for use in the assessment of MBSR and MBCT teachers (Crane et al. 2013: 688). The 2017 study noted no significant correlation between competence and participant performance (Huijbers et al. 2017: 960). Its authors explain their findings as follows:

The reliability of the MBI:TAC in our study was lower than that reported by the developers of the instrument (Crane et al. 2013). ... There are several explanations for the relatively low agreement between assessors in our study. Unlike the assessors in the study by Crane et al. (2013), who collaborated in the development of the MBI:TAC for several years, the assessors in our study had no previous experience with the instrument, were trained in MBCT at different institutes, were less acquainted with each other, and evaluated teachers of whose teaching they had no or little prior knowledge (ibid. 2017: 970).

This suggests that MBI:TAC may not be a reliable measure when used outside the setting in which it was developed. The authors also argue that MBCT's standardisation and manualisation, coupled with an emphasis on participant self-reliance, may diminish the role of the teacher: "It is possible that the role of the teacher relative to the curriculum, the group, the mindfulness home practice, and the participants themselves is overestimated" (ibid.: 971).

Reservations of MBI:TAC notwithstanding, in an effort to customise it for their own purposes, other organisations such as Karuna adapted the instrument. They give priority to the 'soft qualities' of the teacher such as compassion, embodiment and kindness. Trainees are assessed through on-course practice teaching and mentoring (Su Karuna WMF).

In Maitri, MBI:TAC plays a role alongside other, long-standing methods. A respondent explains:

[...] our collaboration with colleagues in the UK is becoming increasingly important because there are *ways to assess objectively* as well as subjectively the strength of a teacher ... who knows if it's good enough but it's good enough to begin. I think the fact that we can have some kind of standardisation—that we can look at MBSR teachers in Denmark and

Sweden and Worcester and San Diego and Kalamazoo and South Africa would be of value. We'd learn something from employing it in some way. So, we are employing it here; we are employing it within our teacher training. But we are not relying on it as the central measure. We are saying it's one way. [Alongside] supervision by senior teachers, peer supervision, observation, reflection—these all play a part in this thing called the on-going assessment and evaluation of an MBSR teacher without the MBI:TAC so we're not going to just dump all of that (Tom Maitri WSM).

Maitri's reservations are echoed by some Upeksha respondents even though MBI:TAC remains integral to their training: "With escalating training demands, we use the MBI:TAC to make sure our assessment is standardised" (Lu Upeksha WMF). However, concerns include design flaws and the irreducibility of certain qualities:

At the moment they are giving equal weighting to the various components. I was very much arguing a few years ago that embodied mindfulness is a huge part and should have a heavier weighting in it than some of the other elements. The ability to explain didactically is less important than the ability to explain what is going on in the mirroring when someone is actually giving a mindfulness approach in their being (Sid Upeksha WSM).

This respondent highlights the extent of uniformity applied across qualities of the teacher. Maitri expresses similar concerns: "we are in discussion with the UK colleagues about measuring embodiment ... we're not sure that's an easy undertaking" (Tom Maitri WSM); "We appreciate efforts to standardise assessment. It's difficult to evaluate teacher qualities and be fair when we are training people across different continents. However, we lose something when we put qualities into a grid" (Jane Maitri WSF). Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha all express concern at the instrumentalization of mindfulness. In the same way that research supersedes teaching, audit takes precedence over teaching qualities.

The sector adopts MBI:TAC despite reservations about its shortcomings. In fact, a respondent indicates ongoing subscription to an audit culture:

I think there are also more formalised potential accreditation processes that are being discussed. In the longer term, the MBI:TAC will have a role in that as well ... there might be different tiers of registration and teachers will have needed to be assessed by MBI:TAC to appear on the most prominent lists. In a sense, hopefully this will help to put pressure on those training organisations that are not in line with the Good Practice Guidelines of TT organisations to come into line with them (Sal Upeksha WMF).

Confirmed recourse to MBI:TAC reflects a narrow view of assessment focused on fixation of norms and control. MBI:TAC promotes certain competencies and disregards others. For instance, domains that assess the teacher's cultural competence, anti-racism, critical thinking and social values, are absent. This is consistent with claims of neutrality and an absence of social justice aspirations. In selecting competencies, MBI:TAC's policy framework (re)embeds ideologies that foster exclusion and non-diversity.

Barnett (1994) favours competency but concedes that these may present problems under certain settings:

Competence is a contested concept [but is] an entirely acceptable aim for the academic community. We want our doctors, accountants and even philosophers to be competent. We may want more than competence from them but, still, competence remains a near-universal virtue. Competence, then, is not problematic in itself ... It becomes problematic when either or both of two conditions are fulfilled: firstly, when competence becomes a dominant aim, so diminishing other worthwhile aims; or, secondly, when competence is construed over-narrowly (1994: 159).

The two conditions Barnett lays out provide a helpful frame for an MBI:TAC review. As an audit instrument, MBI:TAC conceals its own political orientation and does not engage social justice. It prioritises competence over transformation and thus fulfils Barnett's first condition. CBET fragments learning to the reductive composition of competences for assessment purposes. MBI:TAC's inclusion of embodiment as a competence equivalent to 'coverage, pacing and organisation' is contested. Several secular mindfulness leaders and numerous Maitri respondents challenge its reduction (Tom Maitri WSM; Be Maitri BMF). Kabat-Zinn (1990; 2005; 2011), and Woods (2009: 463) argue that mindfulness is more than skill-based—that it constitutes 'a way of being'. Teachers demonstrate insight and skill that arise through their practice in their 'embodiment' of mindfulness (McCown, Reibel and Micozzi 2011: 92; Kabat-Zinn 1999: 226; Woods 2009: 471; Segal, Williams and Teasdale 2002: 65-6). This interpretation of embodiment as an irreducible quality did not prevent its diminution as an MBI:TAC competence (Crane et al. 2012: 81). Thus, despite efforts to de-instrumentalise mindfulness and to frame it as a 'holistic' practice, it participates in an audit culture premised on self-improvement over social justice. Satisfaction of both Barnett's conditions suggests the need for reconsideration of audit.

Audit culture, focused on the individual as a social unit of measurement, depoliticises and decontextualizes assessment. The CBET field recognised the need for a “more holistic model which identifies the role played by knowledge, understanding and context in the assessment of competence” (Hyland 1994: 23). Politically-decontextualised instruments perpetuate social norms and defaults. This is no different in the case of mindfulness. Presented as neutral, MBI:TAC re-centres privilege and relocates social justice to the margins.

## 5.6 Experiential Learning (EL) and Embodiment

Mindfulness pedagogy declares the learner’s direct encounter with the world as a foremost pathway to cultivating mindfulness (Woods 2013: 3). A respondent combines experience and practice: “Our practice is experiential—we experience, and we discuss” (Jane Maitri WSF). Experiential learning (EL) is deployed for what Kabat-Zinn calls a ‘re-membering’ of mind and body:

If it is true that Mr Duffy lived a short distance from his body, maybe what would be required is to get back into the body. How do we cultivate mindfulness of the body? We see meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, Qi Gong as ... methods for the systematic cultivation of our capacity to optimise functions that we hardly understand at all, including being in the body (2000: 233).

Mindfulness pedagogy formulates several assumptions about the body. To begin with, it postulates the existence of a discrete body (Ahmed 2014). It also presumes homology across bodies. In my critique of EL, I adopt a critical Black feminist approach which departs from scientific rationalism and the default of an ‘abstract male knower’ (Michelson, 2015: 59-60). In *Gender, Experience and Knowledge*, Michelson traces the gendering of experience to the European Enlightenment which associates it with a female body (ibid.: 7). She expands on the numerous epistemologies, untouched by Cartesian duality or normative binaries, that acknowledge “the emotional and embodied qualities of knowledge, hold personal testimony and shared experience as epistemologically valuable, and thus challenge the Enlightenment claim that knowledge is ever value-free” (ibid.). I use this frame to examine EL in mindfulness pedagogy which privileges certain experiences and bodies. I then consider EL in relation to the reification of the embodiment of mindfulness on the one hand, and concealment of the teacher’s conditioned habits, on the other. Here, I question the

depoliticization of experience isolated from context. I also discuss the objectification of experience and the use of inquiry and language to re-assert the teacher's authority at the expense of the learner. I begin with practice, linked to both embodiment and EL.

Mindfulness is cultivated through regular formal practice. Practice, says Santorelli (2001), is not a rehearsal for teaching. It cultivates the teacher's quality of presence. More specifically, it constitutes: "... an authentic embodiment of this commitment to be awake to one's life no matter what is occurring" (2001: 11).<sup>205</sup> This view is prevalent within the sector. It is endorsed also by some of my respondents: "research seems to increasingly suggest that it's the teacher's practice and the degree of their embodiment that is very influential in terms of what people take on in their understanding and practice of what mindfulness is" (Bob Upeksha WMM). Today, practice is often viewed as a 'second Renaissance' mechanism that sensitises practitioners to social justice. When asked about mindfulness' relation to social justice, a respondent puts forward this view:

I think we have to continually name these [social justice] issues and put them out there and say: 'are we waking up to them and are we directing our wakefulness towards some exemplars of potential ways of meeting this injustice, this inequity, this unfairness.' And I think that this is happening in lots more ways. Is it happening fast enough? Probably not. I don't know the answer to that, but I think there's a hell of a lot more engagement in the world now than there was twenty-five years ago in the mindfulness community and I think that in itself is an expression of the ripening of practice in peoples' lives. (Tom Maitri WSM).

Such claims overlook the politically-fraught context within which secular mindfulness evolves and the conditions that inform its teachers. Tom proclaims social justice interest despite the sector's lack of diversity or transformation. They also are at odds with findings of Huijbers et al. (2017) and oversimplify embodiment, reinforcing the power of experts to arbitrate what embodiment is, who possesses it, how to scrutinise, perceive and experience it—all, in the end, to declare an auditee competent or not. The proposition that mindfulness constitutes "a shared project [aimed at] the alleviation of human suffering" (Dawn Upeksha WSF) creates a vacuum in which trainers and assessors bypass distinctions of 'power and privilege'.

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<sup>205</sup> Santorelli continues: "When patients feel this unspoken connection with their instructor, it offers them the possibility of feeling the same kind of warm connection with themselves" (2001: 11).

Practice is held to be a key to good teaching. It is also posited as an equaliser—a ‘flattener’ of difference—that allows any aspiring mindfulness teacher to attain mindfulness qualities. Mindfulness, we are told, transcends difference. This is evident in the ‘common humanity’ argument. However, practice camouflages power. Within Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha, practice is decontextualized and depoliticised. ‘Experts’ and decision-makers determine what constitutes practice, experience and embodiment, and what does not. Social power, privilege, bias and whiteness are discounted as embodied experiences. Yet, denial of the embodiment of privilege, as Michelson argues, renders it all the more visible to those without such power. Currently, practice serves to sustain rather than transform power.

EL is a contested field. Proponents, such as Kolb (1984), advocate individualised, normative epistemologies of EL. Critical, Black feminist, queer theorists, on the other hand, problematise bodies, borders and classification schemes. Michelson (2015), for instance, draws on Harding’s experiential foundationalism (1991: 269) to refute the view that individual experience “provides uniquely legitimating epistemic grounds. ... By assuming that experience provides unmediated access to reality, this view neglects the complex cultural, discursive, and psychological matrix within which ‘experience’ happens” (Michelson 2015: 84-91). To demonstrate her argument, Michelson dissects an MBCT practice that asks participants to visualise an imaginary scenario in which a friend does not see/ignores/rejects them.<sup>206</sup> She examines the ways in which the ‘you’—the person undergoing the experience—is universalised and unparticularised (ibid.: 75). Typically, through formulaic responses, teachers erase different realities. They homologise and universalise experiences. Yet, bodies hold ‘historical, cultural and political memory’ (Nieves 2012: 34) that render experiences divergent.

In mindfulness TT, Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle, which he bases on Dewey’s humanistic theories, dominates EL discourses. He describes learning as “the process whereby

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<sup>206</sup> Michelson comments on this generic visualisation used to elicit responses to reclaim the body as a source of knowledge. Like Ahmed (2014), she argues that the universalisation of fear, for instance, presumes a universalised knowing of another’s fear. When the body is described as historically embedded, she says, it stores ‘the unspoken effects’ of marginalisation, oppression and violence (Michelson 2015: 76). These can be neither universalised nor discarded.

knowledge is created through experience” (1984: 38). Informed by the liberal humanist tradition which considers experience unmediated, shapeless and prelinguistic (Kolb 1984: 52), his view juxtaposes emancipatory schools represented by theorists like Freire who view experience as socially constructed (Freire 1993: 107). Following Freire, individuals first become aware of their own prior perceptions through which they view the world. This is a politically-informed self-awareness of positionality. Kolb’s claims are disputed for their originality by feminist educationalists who re-examine Dewey’s contextualisation of the learning process (Michelson 2015: 86-7). Kolb’s model sidesteps communal and social context thus reinforcing mindfulness’ dominant discourses of individualism and scientific reason.

Dewey’s (1958) humanist stance, by contrast, remembers the individual’s socio-political context and presents knowledge as collectively generated. For him, EL is not simply an assemblage of mind-body but a reconnection of individual, society and context (1958: 282). Dewey deploys the term body-mind to explain thought and action as simultaneous, non-separate processes. Hickman (1990), like Dewey, suggests that investigation and knowledge are not merely prefrontal cortex activities but involve the entire living being. Dewey expands: “thinking, or knowledge-getting, is far from being the armchair thing it is often supposed to be. ... Hands and feet, apparatus and appliances of all kinds are as much a part of it as changes in the brain” (cited in Miettinen 2000: 67). Inquiry, in other words, is an embodied process (Hickman 1990: 36). The proponents of secular mindfulness do not dispel this proposition (Woods 2013: 1; Woods, Rockman and Collins 2016: 5). Dewey, however, argues that experience is mediated through the invisible lenses of power and social norms. Crane et al. (2014) accept this: “The teacher is making continuous micro-judgements about how much floor space to give to a particular participant contribution” (2014: 1112). The teacher thus exercises power and foregrounds certain experiences at the expense of others. Not only are the teachers’ politics entrenched in these micro-judgements, so are the politics and contexts of their training and delivery. As long as these embedded power structures remain camouflaged, experience is depoliticised.

To demonstrate the teacher’s power, Fenwick argues that within EL contexts, teachers can appropriate, manage and make a project of the life experiences of learners (Fenwick 2000:



244). In this light, teachers extract and objectify narratives for group scrutiny and inquiry. Ahmed (2014) believes this manner of emotional objectification to be bound up with the complexity of power relations, the appropriation and imposition of knowledges in exercising authority, and the tendency of hegemonic power to seek resolution (2014: 35). Cannon (2016) draws on this view in her discussion of the film *Room to Breathe* in which a white mindfulness teacher ‘saves’ dysfunctional, needful youth of colour:

Room to Breathe reinscribes white dominance by valorising the knowledge and wisdom of the mindfulness teacher, by elevating her status as disciplinarian and authority figure, and by highlighting the deficits of the youth rather than their strengths and talents. By the end of the film, our teacher-hero has helped transform the rowdy and disrespectful youth of colour into calm, centred, meditating students (2016: 403-4).

This reflection captures the mechanisms that portray power as ‘helpful’ and ‘generous’, while denigrating marginalised communities and discounting their knowledges and strengths. In this interaction, says Cannon, their experiences are replaced or corrected by the white teacher whom, she suggests, represents a ‘saviour’ culture. Cannon’s thesis that whiteness dominates TTPs resonates with Singh who argues that new public management strategies deny the competencies of marginalised groups (Singh 2011). These insights link back to the politics at play in the selection of essential competencies.

In Cannon’s example, the teacher mediates learners’ experiences, superimposing their own lens. There is here no Freirean awareness of the teacher’s own perspective (Freire 1993: 107). In expanding on the role of the educator in processes of sense-making, Fenwick (2006) says:

Experiential learning discourses in adult education have tended to presume the existence of an experiencing body inhabited by a reflecting mind, constructing meanings to bring some coherent order to a sensate chaos. The role of the adult educator produced in these discourses is also variously presumptuous: examining, calculating and recording these meanings; educating and liberating them; granting them immanence in educative languages; or midwifing the very experiences, along with their meanings and the experiencer’s identity (2006: 42).

In this extract, Fenwick proposes that authority embodied in the teacher is not neutral. She posits an asymmetrical power relation between the teacher and participant: the teacher ‘guides’ the participant to particular outcomes including “turning difficulties into

discoveries” (Stanley and Longden 2016: 313). Tomkins and Ulus (2016) believe that in transforming their own experiences into knowledge, students take their cues from the teacher and absorb the teacher’s rather than their own experience as more authentic (2016: 169). This aligns with Stanley and Longden (2016): the teacher directs the learning experience and, as Fenwick argues, overlays their interpretation on student experience.

The mindfulness teacher, in both Cannon and Fenwick’s extracts, is depersonalised, depoliticised and transcendent. Claims of neutrality obscure unconscious biases and the teacher’s own positionality (Acevedo et al. 2015: 28). Generally, teachers are considered suitably trained to teach mindfulness across different contexts. A Maitri teacher who feels that they needed additional training—and a different model—to work in prisons, contradicts this assumption and signals a void in TT. As a corollary, BME trainees who defy social norms are expected to bypass politics, ignore difference and conform to epistemic notions of embodiment and normativity (Black 2017).

Language poses a further problem in EL. Used as the filter through which experience is perceived, interpreted and expressed, language is itself subject to cultural and political persuasion. As Scott (1991) argues, experience is “already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward ... Experience is, in this approach, not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain” (Scott 1991: 797). Scott speaks of the distorted hegemonic discourses through which experience is filtered, and subaltern experiences obscured. Nieves (2012) casts knowledge creation in a different light. She suggests that educators can be at the service of the co-production of marginalised narratives (2012: 36). For her, as long as power remains with the experiencer and storyteller, and the teacher does not hijack it, new knowledge and understandings can emerge through collaborative investigation. Her approach to co-produced knowledge coincides with Dewey’s stance on collective, contextual sense-making that may lead to action. Dewey interprets ‘thinking’ as a collective process and argues that while “there is a private, inchoate moment in which new ideas gestate, [this] does not mean that the self is the source or author of the thought and affection nor its exclusive seat” (1958: 233). Dewey and Nieves do not believe that the self

or body is discrete and independent of context. Ahmed (2014) echoes their understanding of 'body' and 'experience' as processes that can only be politically located.

Discussing the work of Nieves, Michelson comments on communal experience and safety:

[...] the safety to speak what the body knows requires the presence of equally particularised other bodies. The women whose bodies speak their stories trust her [Nieves] because she is one of them, because her body carries the same social markings of gender and ethnicity (2015: 76).

Bodies that share social markings and particularised experiences create safety in a group. Conversely, safety is commonly disrupted by asymmetrical experiences. If the teacher does not share participants' experiences, they cannot easily establish nor assume commonality. Nor will deep listening and empathy substitute for shared experience. When teaching racialised marginalised groups, white, middle-class teachers may never be able to achieve the levels of safety to which Nieves and Michelson refer. At the same time, in white, heteronormative spaces, when bodies diverge from the social norm, in my experiences as a Black woman, spaces become un-communal and unsafe. In another study of the mindfulness sector, black respondents describe similar experiences of "feeling marginal and devalued" (Kucinkas 2019: 176). Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha are predominantly white, middle-class spaces. Even when the teacher proclaims safety and inscribes it on spaces, this does not make them so. Following Michelson and Nieves, participants from marginalised groups may continue to feel unsafe.

Nieves and Michelson help us understand what is wrong with the demographics and politics of Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha. TTPs adhere to social norms that discount, decontextualize and depoliticise difference, experiences, physiologies, bodies and brains. TTPs elide all diversities. As a strategy to dismiss identity-based politics, TTPs emphasise pre-subjective experience and non-essentialism (Raiche 2016; Maitri TDI 2015). They reproduce discourses that 'flatten' experiences and depoliticise sense-making. The 'common-humanity' rhetoric, for example, simultaneously obscures and perpetuates defaults and differences. The teacher, untrained in locating themselves socio-politically, is ill-equipped to navigate political narratives. Instead, they are trained to non-essentialise difference, and to generalise and universalise experiences expressed through narrative. As such, teacher

trainers commonly perform the role of Cannon's 'white saviour trope:' they reaffirm whiteness and (re)marginalise Others.

Ahmed (2014) and Berila (2016) argue that knowledge is not abstractly universal, but culturally and politically located (Ahmed 2014: 36, 180; Berila 2016: 9).<sup>207</sup> If experience is contingent and bodies are inscribed, Kolb's claim that EL frees us to "chart the course of our own destiny" (1984: 109) does not persuade. And if indeed bodies and knowledges are shaped by cultures, locations and environments, it is impossible to perceive experience unfiltered by prior, distorted perceptions (Freire 1993: 95). As Ahmed argues and Michelson concurs, it may be impossible in fact, to separate thoughts, emotions and sensations from the 'felt lives of our bodies' (Michelson 2015: 59).

In societies where power is organised hierarchically—for example, by class or race or gender—there is no possibility of an Archimedean perspective, one that is disinterested, impartial, value-free, or detached from the particular historical social relations in which everyone participates. ... The subject of belief and knowledge is never simply an individual, let alone an abstract one capable of transcending its own historical location. It is always an individual in a particular social situation (Harding 1991: 59).

Harding, here, highlights the complexity of subjectivity and the impossibility of impartiality. She refutes both the rationalisation of discernment and the reproduction of mind/body and reason/emotion dualities. Michelson adds:

[EL] has problematised any notion of the body, or of experience, as immediate and pre-symbolic or as separable from historical conditions and power relationships ... it has marked the relationships of the individual body as the bearer of knowledge to the other knowing, history laden bodies that make up the world (2015: 63).

Here, Michelson underscores experience's infusion with context and power. Like Harding, she argues that 'the individual'—the social unit reified in neoliberalism and mindfulness—cannot be extracted from history. Her point, again, highlights TTPs' inattention to societal and sectoral power structures. In contrast to Dewey, Ahmed and Michelson, secular mindfulness embraces Kolb's epistemology of individualised experience,

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<sup>207</sup> Berila (2016) expands: "... critical pedagogy argues that knowledge is historically produced and culturally located. Students are thus encouraged to situate themselves and their experiences within historical socio-political power dynamics and to understand those dynamics as both socially produced and changeable" (2016: 9).

independent of context. 'Sameness' universalises the experiences of the white middle-class subject, designated as a discrete entity devoid of politics and history. Mohanty (1992) unpacks the implications of this position. She rejects the universalisation of women's experience questioning whose experiences are centred. Michelson (2015) supports her view asking "in whose name 'we' claim the truth of experience. Whose experience gets appropriated in the process? Whose interests are being masked in the name of authenticity?" (2015: 63). Universality and neutrality once again come under review.

Black feminist critique does not deny that it is possible to train the mind in analysis. It questions the cultural, political and historical dynamics in educational contexts. When TTPs explicitly discount difference so that invisible social norms and defaults remain, it goes unchallenged. Mohanty (1988), for instance, refutes the category of the "Third world woman' as a monolithic subject [as opposed to] real, material subjects of their collective histories" (1988: 61-2). This ethnocentric act re-positions white, Western women (and men) as the universal norm, individualised and free to 'save' other 'groups'. Such norms, inherent in mindfulness pedagogy, says Cannon (2016), underpin the 'white saviour' mentality and fuel sectoral inequalities (2016: 397). EL is thus but another area where secular mindfulness fails to embrace and possibly resists social justice.

Claims of neutrality lend themselves both to depoliticization and disruption. In the same way that audit can consider social justice integration, TT spaces are able to accommodate anti-racism and prosocial aspirations. EL is not in itself problematic. When it falls prey to decontextualized experience and flattens difference, it works in the interests of postraciality and dominant structures of whiteness. This is not to say that Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's claims of universality and non-essentialism are devious. It serves to highlight the deep-rootedness of social norms and their invisibilisation by and to those in power.

## **5.7 Concluding Remarks**

TTPs display multiple flaws. Uncritical pedagogy dislocates TT from politics and invisibilises the sector's embodiment of whiteness. This re-imposes social norms and defaults without interrogation. Such lack of critical engagement white-washes and uncomplicates TT

processes; it ignores difference and fails to enrich the sector through diverse epistemologies. Non-diverse educational epistemologies and architects distance TTPs, TT processes and the teacher's educational purpose from social justice.

Compliance with an audit culture and competency-based education perpetuates secular mindfulness' integration within the boundaries of new planning management education. Coupled with an ideology of universality and discourses of 'sameness', Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha face fundamental questions of how they might accommodate epistemologies that disrupt their current frameworks of exclusion. Yet, mindfulness as formulated by these organisations, is presumably still evolving. Although the organisations are uncritical of the socio-political contexts in which they operate, Kabat-Zinn has always insisted that his definition is operational (Kabat-Zinn 2017: 1127). This suggests that the sector too, which forms around current interpretations of mindfulness, is open to review.

If indeed Kabat-Zinn's vision of mindfulness in underserved communities is to flourish, integration of social justice into TTPs calls for radical epistemic and pedagogical reframing. Practically-speaking, this requires political agility and architectural transformation of the sector's educational system and ethos. It implies interrogation and dismantling of the social norms that perpetuate a default of whiteness. Questions of mindfulness' purpose, and who gets to pose and address such queries, and in what kinds of spaces, are foundational. Equally crucial are investigations into the forms of mindfulness immanent within traditions and communities that are Othered. In this chapter, I have argued that the embeddedness of whiteness in the service of neoliberalism works in concert with corporatized academia to re-constitutes a white mindfulness.

## **Conclusion: Institutional Racism and White Mindfulness**

This thesis investigates the emergence of mindfulness in the US and UK, troubled by racialised neoliberalism and social inequalities. I examined Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha as organisational expressions of a system of modern mindfulness. By way of conclusion, I use Love's (2006) 'feeling backward' to reflect on a highly popularised sector, beset by conditions that contribute to suffering. There is no question of mindfulness' social permeation: Fortune 100 companies, hospitals, schools, prisons, the military and governments subscribe to mindfulness as a feature of twenty-first century society. Scientification, commercialisation and digitisation have helped establish it as an essential ingredient of modern living. However, this status applies largely to the consumer classes and more especially, to white middle- and upper-classes (Kucinkas 2019: 156; Purser 2019: 22). This study set out to understand why mindfulness has meaning for certain social strata and not others. It examines how, in meaning-making, white mindfulness has taken up modern roots and forms consistent with neoliberal postraciality in the interests of capitalism.

In setting out to undertake this study, I established my position as an outsider-within. I now use this critical stance to discuss what I found. As is inevitable with reflection, I also look forward, recognising that futurity does not presume a linear progression from a single past to a unidimensional future. My narrations of the past and the future are contingent. In projecting forward, I tentatively consider how this work might be continued especially with meaningful diversity and social justice aspirations.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The scale of secular mindfulness in the US and UK is now so significant that in referring to it, the qualifier 'the secular' is dropped. The term mindfulness is used today without the need to differentiate it from its Buddhist roots, and without the latter having any hold over it. This serves marketisation: mindfulness is referred to as if there is only one type—the now fully modernised Western version. This further functions to elide forms of appropriation, and to overshadow Buddhist-based mindfulness. In other words, modern mindfulness is not a homologous entity. It comprises multiple modalities. Yet, media predominance and

research proliferation of MBSR derivatives overshadows Buddhist mindfulness and monopolises popular cultures and portrayals. It is Buddhist forms of mindfulness that now have to distinguish themselves from commercialised models. These acts constitute contemporary forms of the appropriation and Westernisation of knowledges. In fact, they establish what I conclude is a political mindfulness built on social norms and values that are largely invisible to those who occupy and preserve power. In effect, this constitutes, I contend, white mindfulness.

Jon Kabat-Zinn played a pivotal role in the formation of secular mindfulness. His particular position as science-meditator, at the heart of medical change, is indicative of the power of interpreters like himself to shape secularisation projects. Kabat-Zinn's 'second Renaissance' thought envisions social transformation and the spread of mindfulness across the globe (Kabat-Zinn 2013). It articulates renewal, hope and human flourishing. Mindfulness' secularisation follows on from Buddhist modernisation in the West which brought about increasing therapization of Buddhism and a growing divide between Asian and convert Buddhists. The Americanisation of Buddhism (Wilson 2014), dominated by white convert Buddhists (Gleig 2016), became a modern phase of Orientalism: teachings were stripped of their cultures and traditions and increasingly commercialised. Secularism of mindfulness morphed through stages of suppressing ties with Buddhism, medicalising mindfulness, and re-establishing Buddhist links mainly through science and research to legitimise mindfulness. Throughout this process, critiques of appropriation were levelled from various quarters, including Asian Buddhists and marginalised groups. One criticism resonates with that of Orientalist's proclaimed authority over Buddhist doctrine which in the case of mindfulness, became established as universal dharma, consonant with the values and aspirations of the European Enlightenment. This form of secularism involved key ingredients that brought the dominant forms of mindfulness closer to hegemonic power.

Kabat-Zinn's original premise in secularising mindfulness to alleviate stress and cultivate wellbeing coincided with a shift in biomedicine away from pharmaceutical treatments toward patient-centred care. His strategies, and methods, however, coalesced with socio-political and economic forces. The rise of neoliberalism in the US and UK shared with secularised mindfulness ideologies of individualism and healthism. The individual replaced



the community as the foremost social unit of organisation (Gebrial 2018: 21). Both systems favoured the suppression of identity: neoliberalism's strategy of postracialism effectively privatised race. No longer the concern of governments or workplaces, racist incidents were considered episodic, treated with behavioural interventions and made the problem of the racialised.

In neoliberal settings, mindfulness promoted patient-centred care and pathologized stress. This individualisation of stress encouraged the individualisation of wellbeing, an ideology that merged with healthism to make wellness an individual responsibility. Through universalisation and neutrality, causes of and solutions to stress were homologised, a feature that was to become mindfulness' mediation of all forms of suffering: pain, stress and depression. This level of universalisation, Hall (2011) contends, merges with a form of individualism that denies and represses any notion of society or community. Mindfulness' version of individualisation also disregards socio-political and economic causes of suffering. It treats all stress as 'equal' and homologises suffering by using Westernised interpretations of Buddhist psychology to 'include' all participants 'equally' under the rubric of 'common humanity'. This ideology is complicated by its premise in whiteness. The social norms and defaults of the secularised mindfulness project protect the vestiges of whiteness. Consequently, white mindfulness' entire architecture is tainted by privilege and supremacy. This methodology complements postracial rhetoric that denies inequivalences and privatises inequality.

Through market-driven economies, US/UK neoliberalism holds individuals responsible for their employment, education and wellbeing. Mindfulness, in other words, becomes a mechanism through which citizens who are classified 'equal' may attain health. What began as an Americanisation of the dharma, became its 'neoliberalisation'. On account of neoliberalism's inextricability from race, and more specifically from postracialism, secular mindfulness' suppression of identity results in a disregard of race. As I establish through examining organisational demographics and expansion strategies, the work of postracialism produces racialised formations while claiming that race is immaterial. Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha each follow the same pattern of whiteness. This can be argued to be institutionalised because the architects, decision-makers, models, research studies, and the

adjunctive 'diversity' ventures reproduce social norms and hegemonies inextricable from structural power.

Numerous features embed the secular version of mindfulness in the US/UK. These include the recourse to science and research, commercialisation, and policy formulation. These strategies mainstream mindfulness among consumers and the professional classes. Professionalisation of mindfulness which elevates it to a modern therapy also encourages uptake. Here again, the sector shares an intimacy with neoliberal education.

The coalition of audit, individualism and corporatisation of education further entrench mindfulness as an instrument of power. Pedagogies predicate social norms that sustain power. Postracialism and whiteness, for instance, are hidden in mindfulness pedagogies. Essentially, teacher training programmes invisibilise these ideologies and universalise racialised models. Pedagogy serves to elide difference. It trains disengagement from the causes of systemic suffering. Teachers proclaim political 'neutrality' and promote an illusion of 'sameness'. Mindfulness advocates believe that the cornerstones of universality and neutrality allow them to embrace politically-divergent audiences. In the absence of critical discourses these underpinnings go by unnoticed. There is little regard that they mask a consensual politics that supports power structures. White mindfulness is thus seen to promote an uncritical pedagogy that conforms to corporatist agendas. Teacher training promotes strategies oppositional to prosocial aspirations: teachers become habituated to social cultures and in turn train their participants in self-governance. These pedagogical foundations of the mindfulness enterprise further remove it from dispossessed communities. Uniformity and standardisation, deployed to 'protect' the sector and 'enhance integrity', adopt audit which brings mindfulness closer to market-driven interests. These stages of progression widen the gap between Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's missions to reduce suffering for all groups, and their performance. Pedagogies are increasingly drawn to corporates, resilience training in schools, reduced recidivism among prisoners, stress-reduction and relapse prevention. None of these are unattractive. When viewed in relation to individualism, patterns of incarceration, subjugation and race, mindfulness is less about freedom, albeit personal, and more about conformity and governance. In this light, the translation of secularising mindfulness 'for our time' conforms to a white, privileged,

heteronormative, male worldview which produces organisations and models in its image. Hegemonic mindfulness trains coping strategies rather than ‘second Renaissance’ ambitions of human flourishing. These underlying shifts inform epistemologies of experiential learning that flatten difference and forecast the same (favourable) outcomes for all.

Numerous flaws spring from the reification of a racially-generated model. ‘Second Renaissance’ thought universalises the causes of stress and its solutions. It discounts intersectional discriminations and fosters marginalisation. The politics of inclusion implanted in strategies to widen participation demonstrate non-performative adjunctive models of diversity. This highlights not only the suppression of marginalised identities, but the sector’s denial of its own systemic whiteness and architecture. Inclusion into such spaces effectively constitutes exclusions. But more than this, interpretations of ‘second Renaissance’ thought propose that practicing mindfulness is sufficient to effect structural change. Mindfulness comes to replace community organisation and mass mobilisation as the route to transformation and justice.

The question of in whose image the mindful individual is cast, occupies much of this thesis. Privileged Western interlocutors, scientists and psychologists shape mindfulness’ secularisation. Their interests, perspectives and politics inform the social norms of the sector. So invisible are these, especially to its architects, that they are submerged in models and reproduced in pedagogies. The models, programmes and products, cast in the image of their makers, quietly reproduce whiteness. Yet, given how power operates, they are deemed suitable for all audiences. The very architecture—selective research, training, commercialisation—generate a sector increasingly removed from marginalised communities.

The cultures that promote mindfulness and individualism advance more than inner healing; they foster mindfulness’ underwritten principles, ideologies and values. In this light, mindfulness functions as much more than a set of coping mechanisms. It supports and reproduces dominant structures of power. Healthism, individualisation, postracialism and privatisation imprinted on secular mindfulness, are so commonplace as to go unnoticed. Ongoing promulgation of mindfulness through governments and public sector provisions

like education and health, adds to the manner in which discourses themselves propagate. My analysis has shown that, in its own circulation, mindfulness reinforces and commercialises whiteness in all its operations. Within Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha, mindfulness and whiteness are mutually legitimating, making it near impossible to uncouple them. This entanglement allows mindfulness to use the rhetoric of universality, neutrality and postracialism to promote itself while advancing whiteness. Strategies to widen participation or engage diversity are shaped by the invisibility of privilege and power. Under these conditions, diversity is a non-performative. Policies may include commitments to diversity, but these do not translate into meaningful change. Systemically, Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha promote a mindfulness imbued with ideologies that foster inequality. This is inconsistent with their organisational intentions to alleviate suffering.

As a form of self-regulation, secular mindfulness creates a new, independent individual (Braun 2017: 196). The mindful individual assumes personal responsibility to become productive, well, kind, thriving and happy. Ideologies of individualism, universalism and postracialism work collaboratively with self-regulation to impose these visions of humanity on all. The new individual is not merely spiritually content, but entrepreneurial, calm and of benefit to society. Failure to conform to these outcomes suggests an unmindful or disruptive individual. White mindfulness thus interweaves into the fabric of US/UK societies beyond the commercial sphere. In schools, hospitals and prisons, it propagates ideologies, cultures and discourses that feed neoliberal agendas.

### **Policy Implications**

In addressing questions of pedagogy, this study considered the possible combination of audit with the political ambitions of social justice which relates to human rights and access to resources for well-being, equity and inclusion. I briefly consider other aspects here to test prosocial possibilities. Social justice extends the discussion of diversity and difference, to one of fairness and equity. It requires material, structural and cultural conditions for its achievement. (Singh, 2011: 482). It sheds light on the fact that conditions conducive to human flourishing are absent for vast populations. In this light, 'second Renaissance' thought on its own, is impracticable. Its ambition to effect structural change, rebirth and a

new flourishing human being falters in its premise in whiteness. It cannot but be coupled with social justice to imagine and create possibilities for different futures. Yet, if whiteness were removed from the equation, 'second Renaissance' still remains inhospitable to community organisation or ground-up initiatives since universalised mindfulness models fail marginalised communities. The issue here is not simply one of finding a good model, it involves rediscovering the forms of healing and mindfulness present within communities. The question then is whether 'second Renaissance' is a good enough starting place for communal wellbeing services or whether communities simply build organisations and institutions independently of initiatives that have been exclusive. In the pursuit of social justice, mindfulness would need to consider a diversity that decentres whiteness discourses and defaults. It would have to return to facts like equity, redress and intersectionality to focus action around legacies of inequalities, such as uneven access to education, housing, income and security as well as their effects on communities. Whereas equality emphasises sameness, uniformity and standardisation, equity and intersectionality aim to produce fair and just treatment.

For the mindfulness sector, equity, redress and intersectionality move social justice beyond reparation, important though it is. Steps towards social fairness acknowledge and place centre stage the lived experiences, cosmologies and epistemologies of marginalised groups. Through such actions, mindfulness becomes embedded in communities rather than in neoliberal structures.

Emergent decolonisation theories engage the uneven playing fields that beset US/UK societies. They provide a frame that addresses the roots of coloniality. Emphasising difference rather than universality, and political transformation instead of neutrality, these new theories supersede old approaches to 'widening participation'. They question the place from which theories are formed, leveraging diversity rather than uniformity. This encourages multiple models to represent different marginalised communities and discourses. Decolonisation politicises social change.

Presuming that mindfulness is a worthwhile practice or a meaningful 'tool' that can support transformation, questions of its accessibility become urgent. In this light, strategies must

centre the margins through organisational projects and movements untethered to the formal sector. Only minimal steps have thus far been taken within Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha to transform 'their' sector. Bolder initiatives towards the infusion of mindfulness and social justice are being advanced by the Radical Dharma movement.

Institutionalised whiteness cannot produce inclusive futures. To effect meaningful change, these organisations require outside thinkers and innovations to bring diverse perspectives. The transformation of current patterns of exclusion require, in the first instance, a willingness to learn from the growing evidence base of decolonisation and intersectional praxis.

### **Limitations of Present Study**

This investigation is far from comprehensive. It raises many questions and leaves some of these unresolved. Methodological shortcomings are noted in Chapter Three. In addition, engagement with community leaders from marginalised groups would have brought additional understandings of mindfulness' potential value across society. This would embellish thinking around how to develop ground-up, community-led initiatives.

Discussions of identity, social justice and difference are inexhaustive in this study. These are in themselves vast areas of investigation and their expansion would benefit this thesis overall. Consideration of intersectional inquiry, for instance, would allow for greater understanding of the diverse needs of mindfulness within contexts of inequality. It could also bring new perspectives on common and divergent agendas that expand the field of modern mindfulness. The 'leveraging' of difference (Mirza 2017), can itself widen discourses to enrich the field. Investigation of different models, existent and emergent, would feed understandings of larger projects such as the mindful commons (Doran 2018).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The present study could develop in multiple directions. First, an investigation into how mindfulness might be put to work to support inclusive futures that accommodate difference, could enrich understandings of mindfulness' modernisation. Radical Dharma

(2016), Mindfulness for the People (2018), and Mindfulness and Social Change Network (2019) are initiatives concerned with the deployment of mindfulness in support of social justice. These are among the subversive interventions thinking beyond the hegemonic MBSR and MBCT models. They consider not only novel ideas around self-care but also contemplate a mindfulness that addresses difference to produce appropriate services led by marginalised communities. Their teacher training programmes revolve around social justice concerns and are informed by critical race, feminist and queer theories. Although, in some instances, co-produced knowledges and programmes are still 'owned' by these institutions, in the sense that they copyright and provide services, the possibilities of co-ownership are far greater than in the research-driven mindfulness sector. An investigation of these initiatives can provide insight into the divergent approaches among them to produce a richer appreciation of how to navigate difference, and diverse requirements of mindfulness. Such an investigation could revisit secularism's suppression of identity and claim of universality to consider new strategies, methods and praxis. It could map the architectures behind the development of co-produced, inclusive, diverse, non-homologous mindfulness programmes. This could provide an alternative to the monopoly of 'universality' and 'neutrality' which invisibilise power.

Second, examining what is meant by 'human flourishing' and 'being fully human' is important. These are terms to which secular mindfulness repeatedly refers (Kabat-Zinn and Davidson 2011; Williams and Kabat-Zinn 2013). In highly fractured societies where growing numbers of people are excluded through the hardening of national borders, and intersectional discriminations, 'common humanity' is a problematic concept (Asad 2003: 141; Harvey 2005: 185). A study that considers how mindfulness might meaningfully negotiate the utopic view of 'human being' against the reality of inequalities imposed on people, could help unpack the universalist vocabularies predominant in the field. Currently, secular mindfulness denies power structures and the inhumane treatment of those who are deemed 'less than human' (Mirza 2018: 189). Such an investigation could also explore the ways in which humanity is differently interpreted in different cultures. Notions of being human are not consistent across traditions and cosmologies, some of which include nature in depictions of humanity (Gaita 2016). The idea of the new individual or 'universalised being' to which the 'second Renaissance' alludes is also in need of interrogation.

Consideration of the ontologies and epistemologies of 'being human' can meaningfully broaden understandings of mindfulness across a range of traditions.

Third, an investigation into the decolonisation of secular mindfulness could add to the understanding of transforming power structures inherent in the sector. Scholarly inquiry in this field is expanding. A comparative investigation of the challenges being addressed in higher education would allow the sector to attend in meaningful ways to its inherent coloniality. Embracing variation rather than uniformity, scholarly interventions and campaigns challenge normative epistemologies, the importance of which is signalled throughout this thesis. They also offer avenues through which to consider colonialism, Orientalism, empire and racism, areas that are invisibilised in the white mindfulness sector. Such a comparative work could draw on intersectional inquiry and praxis as well as other emergent models in higher education. These would support research into innovative practices in mindfulness that are grounded in critical theory and perspectives. It would provide a frame that can accommodate ground-up initiatives that satisfy Maitri, Karuna and Upeksha's missions. A decolonised mindfulness could embrace innovative community-enhancing understandings of wellbeing. It could also consider alternatives to audit, or how audit might serve social justice aspirations. Navigating the demands of funders and governments while addressing the challenge to broaden the purview of mindfulness, requires careful investigation of areas of common interest as well as divergence. More importantly, investigations concerned with an alternative paradigm could look beyond the 'audit-social justice' impasse to consider innovations in line with decolonisation approaches. It could uncover and be guided by the many expressions of mindfulness and accountability embedded in indigenous traditions as well as imagined, inclusive futures.



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## Appendices

### Appendix One: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### 1. Organisational Framework

- a. What is the institution's ethos, values, vision, mission, goals?
- b. What is its purpose and strategic plans and how regularly are these revisited?
- c. Does the institution have a shared vision?
- d. To whom is the organisation accountable and how is this enacted?
- e. What is the relationship with other mindfulness institutions?
- f. Who is your primary audience?
- g. Does the organisational race-gender profile reflect the participant profile?
- h. Do you actively seek 'users' across lines of difference?

#### 2. Conceptualisation of Mindfulness

- a. What is the institution's conceptualisation of mindfulness?
- b. How does this relate to its Buddhist provenance if at all?
- c. What are the ethical foundations of the institution's concept?
- d. How is the ethical component of mindfulness embedded in the curriculum?
- e. How are other aspects of mindfulness such as compassion, kindness, skill, joy, concentration, wisdom imparted?
- f. Do agency and political empowerment feature in the concept?

#### 3. Educational Policy and Curriculum Frameworks

- a. What are the intentions in the training pathway?
- b. What are the curriculum intentions?
- c. How is the curriculum devised?
- d. What power relations are embedded in the curriculum (e.g. centre/trainer; trainer/student; community/individual; affordability)?
- e. Is the curriculum exclusively therapeutic?
- f. Is the emphasis on improved coping?
- g. Is the curriculum suitable for non-therapeutic intervention?
- h. Does the curriculum reinforce the notion of individualism?
- i. Does the curriculum promote community?
- j. Is the curriculum reviewed and changed? By whom?

#### 4. Teacher training

- a. How are teachers trained to teach?
- b. Are there any Buddhist studies in their training?
- c. Who designs teacher training curricula?
- d. What informs the choice of content?
- e. To what extent are ethics included?
- f. Who decides when teachers are ready to teach?
- g. What are the criteria considered?

**5. Organisational demographics, diversity and social justice**

- a. Can you comment on poor racial diversity within the field?
- b. What are your thoughts on the 'white, middle-class' profile?
- c. Are there strategies in place to tackle this and what are they?
- d. Can mindfulness support social justice?
- e. Is mindfulness political?

**6. Student (participant) Profile**

- a. Is there a typical student participating in MBIs in relation to:
  - i. Gender, race, income, age, health, physical ability
  - ii. Are any students actively excluded?
  - iii. Does the organisation sense that any students or groups exclude themselves?
- b. How are students recruited?
- c. Is there active engagement in certain sectors?
- d. How are teachers recruited?
- e. How is the costing structure for delivery of mindfulness determined?
- f. Are students who can't afford the service catered for?

**7. MBIs and exclusions**

- a. Are the programmes sensitive to race, socio-economic, gender, sexual orientation and other diversities?
- b. Does affordability of training prohibit access to certain groups?
- c. How does the organisation relate to difference, especially race and gender?

**8. Any further comments**

Appendix Two: Respondents by Organisation

Karuna			Upeksha			Maitri		
1	John	John Karuna WMM	1	Bob	Bob Upeksha WMM	1	Tom	Tom Maitri WSM
2	Karen	Karen Karuna WMF	2	Sid	Sid Upeksha WSM	2	Jane	Jane Maitri WSF
3	Rick	Rick Karuna WMM	3	Sal	Sal Upeksha WMF	3	Paul	Paul Maitri WMM
4	Rita	Rita Karuna WMF	4	Lu	Lu Upeksha WMF	4	Jill	Jill Maitri WMF
5	Sam	Sam Karuna WMF	5	Hank	Hank Upeksha WMM	5	Deb	Deb Maitri WMF
6	Jim	Jim Karuna WMM	6	Ant	Ant Upeksha WSM	6	Jo	Jo Maitri WSF
7	Kitty	Kitty Karuna WMF	7	Lisa	Lisa Upeksha WMF	7	Kat	Kat Maitri WSF
8	Su	Su Karuna WMF	8	Dawn	Dawn Upeksha WSF	8	Pip	Pip Maitri WSF
			9	Ali	Ali Upeksha WMF	9	Col	Col Maitri WMF
			10	Jack	Jack Upeksha WMM	10	Tina	Tina Maitri WMF
						11	Jeff	Jeff Maitri WSM
						12	Kay	Kay Maitri WMF
						13	Be	Be Maitri BMF
						14	Chris	Chris Maitri WSF
Totals		WMM = 3 WMF = 5	Totals		WMM = 3 WMF = 4 WSM = 2 WSF = 1	Totals		WMM = 1 WMF = 5 WSM = 2 WSF = 5 BMF = 1

Key:

B = BME

W = white

M = middle-aged (35-65 years)

S = senior (65+ years)

### Appendix Three: SOAS Research Data Consent Form

You are hereby invited to participate in my doctoral research study to be submitted to the Department of the Study of Religions at SOAS, University of London. Kindly read this form and clarify any questions you may have before consenting to participate in this research.

<b>Researcher</b>	Cathy-Mae Karelse Email: info@cathymae.com Tel: +44 (0)7590-677761
<b>Project title (provisional):</b>	Modern Mindfulness: the case of the United Kingdom and United States.
<b>Project objectives:</b>	The purpose of the proposed study is to examine the trajectory of mindfulness in the West over the last 4 decades. I am interested in the proliferation of mindfulness programmes as efficacious therapeutic interventions and inquire into their disconnect from their Buddhist provenance. I inspect the orientation and elements of modern mindfulness and its emergence supported by modern science. 'Secularisation', appropriation and commodification of mindfulness are considered in the context of the power of market forces. I investigate the racialization of mindfulness in the context of neoliberal societies and the prospects for diversity and justice. I am hoping that interviews with key persons who work in reputable mindfulness centres will enhance my understanding.
<b>Data recipients:</b>	Interview data will only be used for the purpose of my doctoral research and subsequent publications and will not be given to any third party.
<b>Countries to which the data may be transferred:</b>	Data about you gathered in the course of your participation in this project may be transferred to countries or territories outside the European Economic Area for purposes connected with this project and similar future projects, subject to appropriate safeguards to protect the security and confidentiality of your data. Specific countries include the UK and the USA.
<b>Methods of anonymisation:</b>	Any information gathered in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your real name and identity will not be disclosed on public record; pseudonyms will be employed in case of quoting your remarks.

<b>Methods of publication:</b>	Anonymisation will be carried through to any format of publication that arises from the study including the final thesis as well as further published materials.
<b>Security Measures and Archiving:</b>	Records of your responses (audio data and transcripts) will be kept in a secure location to which only I will have access. Data sets will be discarded once my thesis is completed, subsequent articles published, and any future projects executed. A key will be used to protect your anonymity. Quotations from this interview that may appear in published form in a doctoral thesis or in a book or articles will remain anonymous or ascribed to you with your express permission.
<b>Future use:</b>	Data gathered in the course of your participation in this project may be used in similar future research projects. At this time, it is not possible to predict how the data may be used, e.g. a research project may investigate trends in mindfulness in the West.

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**Data Protection Statement**

Information about you, gathered in the course of this research project, once held in the United Kingdom, will be protected by the UK Data Protection Act and will be subject to SOAS's Data Protection Policy. You have the right to request access under the Data Protection Act to the information that the researcher holds about you.

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**Copyright Statement**

By completing this form, you permit the researcher to edit, copy, disseminate, publish (by whatever means) and archive your contribution to this research project in the manner and for the purposes described above. You waive any copyright and other intellectual property rights in your contribution to the project, and grant the researcher a non-exclusive, free, irrevocable, worldwide license to use your contribution for the purposes of this project and similar future research projects.

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**Research Participant Declaration**

I confirm that I have read the above information relating to the research project. I consent to participate in this project.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

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