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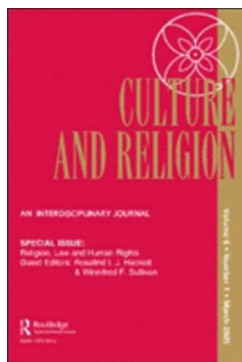
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Religion as practices of attachment and materiality: The making of Buddhism in contemporary London

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Religion as practices of attachment and materiality: The making of Buddhism in contemporary London

Friction between Buddhists and Muslims in South East Asia involving violent attacks on religious minorities has become a matter of serious public concern in recent years (Quintana, 2014; Frydenlund, 2015). In contemporary cities of the UK, Europe and Australia, Muslims face an on-going struggle with non-Muslims over public displays of faith, particularly concerning the height of spires, parking issues, or the call to prayer (Naylor and Ryan, 2002). Even the virtually invisible wire delineating the Jewish space of the eruv, the ritual enclosure which reconfigures private space as public on the Sabbath (Vincent and Wharf, 2002), met opposition in the London borough of Barnet. Yet, thorough searches of newspaper articles and scholarly writing revealed no such contestation around the practice of Buddhism. To the contrary, with only a few exceptions (see Waitt, 2003), Buddhism is largely invisible in cities outside Asia. It is quiet and rarely, if ever, a matter of concern.

That said, Buddhism is garnering a place in the landscape and urban practices beyond Asia. This paper explores the contemporary articulation of Buddhism in London as it arrives, and becomes increasingly embedded in this global city. The paper's tasks are threefold: to consider how Buddhism fits into the postsecular urban landscape; to ask whether it adds to or modifies existing notions of postsecularism; and to investigate what makes Buddhism distinctive and for whom does it matter? Given Buddhism is a faith rooted in continuous practice, prioritising mindfulness in everyday activity over the periodic worship of deities, we are particularly concerned with exploring the practices that bring Buddhism into being in the city. We have identified three, making practices, attachment practices and connecting practices, which are explored through

1
2
3 rich empirical material presented in this paper. Our core argument here is that
4
5 Buddhism makes claims to urban space in much the same way as it produces its faith,
6
7 being as much about the practices performed and the spaces in which they are enacted
8
9 as it is about faith or a collection of beliefs (following much recent research in religion
10
11 (Lee 2014, 436)). Before examining these practices in detail, we locate the study in the
12
13 context of a re-emergence of faith in postsecular cities, and draw on our fieldwork data
14
15 to describe the landscape of Buddhist practice in contemporary London.
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19

20 **Faith in postsecular cities**

21
22 Until recent decades, religion was largely absent from research on the urban. In the
23
24 geographical arena, Kong (1990, 2001, 2010) has played a key role in drawing attention
25
26 to the early absence of religion in geography (1990), charting the ‘new geographies of
27
28 religion’ and suggesting fruitful areas of research (2001). More recently (2010), she has
29
30 questioned whether what we see in the religious landscape represents continuity or
31
32 change, exploring the relative emphases and silences in analyses of different sites of
33
34 religious practice, sensuous geographies, the rise in the discourse of postsecularization
35
36 (Beaumont and Baker, 2011a; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and Vanantwerpen, 2011; Ley,
37
38 2011), and the ways in which religion shapes responses to contemporary global shifts.
39
40 Other geographers have taken up the mantle (e.g Holloway and Vailins, 2002) exploring
41
42 the diversity of religious sites in the city, the place of religion in public life, affective
43
44 and embodied spaces, the contested spaces of minority religious architectures in the city
45
46 (Naylor and Ryan, 2002; Author, 2005) and transnational spaces of new migrant
47
48 religious institutions as they adapt and adjust to a new context (Sheringham, 2010).
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53
54 In a parallel move, scholars in religious studies have called for greater attention
55
56 to spatiality and space in the construction of religious and spiritual practices and faiths
57
58 (see Knott, 2008). Similarly, sociologies of religious communities have variously
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1
2
3 explored the relationship between religious worship and race, class, cultural identity and
4
5 diversity, and the relationship between religious practice and the material dimensions of
6
7 urban life (Orsi, 2005; Eade and Garbin, 2006; Author, 2011). Beaumont and Baker
8
9 (2011a) have too made significant contributions. They argue that ‘new relations of
10
11 possibility are emerging’ (2011a: 2) as religions, faith communities and secular values
12
13 have returned to the centre of public life and social identity, and, more broadly, examine
14
15 how the built environment reflects this shift. For Beaumont and Baker, the concept of
16
17 the postsecular represents a new and exciting conceptual apparatus to understand cities.
18
19 They identify seven areas of debate: the re-emergence of the idea of the sacred in
20
21 understanding urban space, the importance of the city as a key site of intensity in the
22
23 dynamics of religious-secular change, the return of the language of virtue in public life,
24
25 the on-going commitment of religious organisations to social justice, the connection
26
27 between the growth of Pentecostal Christianity and neoliberal globalization, the re-
28
29 engagement of faith and politics, and the contested understanding of multiculturalism as
30
31 it applies to cases of religious freedom (2011: 4).
32
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36 The contested notion of the postsecular is key to these debates. More than
37
38 twenty years ago, Casanova (1994) convincingly dismantled the assumption of a
39
40 singular modernising process of secularisation, drawing attention to social
41
42 differentiation and the ‘privatisation’ of religious faith, and simple notions of religious
43
44 decline. Though there has been decline in the practice of traditional Christian religions
45
46 in Western Europe, there has been a concomitant rise in the significance of other
47
48 religions –notably Islam, Evangelical Christianity in many parts of the world including
49
50 the USA (Woodhead et al. 2009; Davie and Woodhead 2009), as well as the growing
51
52 significance of new religious movements in many Western countries (Bromley, 2007;
53
54 Barker 2013). According to Beaumont and Baker (2011a), the postsecular city is shaped
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2
3 by ongoing processes of secularization as well by the re-emergence of public
4
5 expressions of spirituality. Their focus is on the new religious dynamics and energies
6
7 brought to the Western, and supposedly secular, city by diasporic flows from the Global
8
9 South. Their thinking is thus centrally connected to notions of the postcolonial city, in
10
11 which they identify the importance of supportive and social religious spaces of
12
13 'belonging'. Unlike other studies, where Buddhism represents a notable absence, they
14
15 include the faith within this framework (2011:34). Tse (2014) critiques the
16
17 secular/religious dichotomy, advocating 'grounded theologies' as a way to study
18
19 religion in a secular age. Other studies attribute the significance and rise of faith-based
20
21 organisations to the withdrawal of the welfare state in several domains of public life
22
23 (Beaumont and Cloke, 2012: 3).
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27
28 Despite the widening of social science interest in religion, urban research on
29
30 Buddhism, concerning its emergence and growth in the global cities of traditionally
31
32 non-Buddhist countries, is relatively sparse (with notable exceptions, for example,
33
34 McKenzie, 2012; Capper, 2003; Chen, 2002). McKenzie (2014) in this journal, has
35
36 provided an illuminating study of the motivations of practitioners in a Tibetan Buddhist
37
38 organisation based in Scotland arguing that Weber's notion of rationality and Foucault's
39
40 notion of discourse offer useful routes to understanding secularisation and sacralisation
41
42 in the contemporary world. Otherwise, research on Buddhism beyond Asia is
43
44 principally located in Buddhism specific journals such as the *Journal of Global*
45
46 *Buddhism*, in edited collections or, less frequently still, monographs such as Bluck's
47
48 (2006) history of the major Buddhist movements across the UK to the present. The
49
50 other key sources are the Buddhist organisations themselves, for instance the various
51
52 works published by the Triratna Buddhist school publishing house, Windhorse.
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2
3 In Britain, the first seeds of a mainstream interest in Buddhism were sown with
4
5 the foundation of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1907. This was
6
7 followed in 1924 by the inauguration of a Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society,
8
9 which developed into what was then also named the Buddhist Society. While the former
10
11 soon dissolved, the latter retained the name of the Buddhist Society and became the lay
12
13 Buddhist interest group that still operates today from its base in central London's
14
15 Eccleston Square (Humphreys, 1937). After World War II, Buddhism began to garner a
16
17 still broader attention following the publication in paperback of two key texts
18
19 (Humphrey's *Buddhism* and Conze's *Buddhism: Its essence and development*, both in
20
21 1951), which generated a broader popular appeal. This occurred alongside wider social
22
23 changes, most notably a decline in church attendance, increasing disposable incomes
24
25 and leisure time, and the emergence of youth cultures of drugs, music and sex (Bluck
26
27 2006:10). By the mid 1960s, the number of Buddhist groups and societies was enough
28
29 to enable specialisation and so attract specific audiences. Bluck presents typology of the
30
31 Buddhist movements active in Britain today, identifying Theravada Buddhism, East
32
33 Asian Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and what he terms the emergent strand of
34
35 'Western' Buddhism. Writing on Buddhism in North America, Coleman (2002)
36
37 similarly identifies a particular style of Buddhism which he variously terms 'new',
38
39 'convert' or 'Western' Buddhism. These 'Western' approaches emphasise meditation,
40
41 the lack of distinction between lay and non-lay members, and an increased openness to
42
43 gender equality with women.
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49 Demographically, in research undertaken in North America, most new Buddhists
50
51 are members of the baby boomer generation who are middle class and of medium to
52
53 high levels of income and education (Coleman 2008, 2013). Coleman (2002, see also
54
55 Numrich 1999) distinguishes immigrant or ethnic Buddhists from the cohort of, largely
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1
2
3 white, American converts who participate in Western approaches. Preferred places of
4
5 Buddhist practice are often separated by ethnicity, and even variation of types of
6
7 Buddhist practice underway at the same temple is divisible along ethnic lines. However,
8
9 in more recent analyses, the working assumption of a bifurcation between ethnic and
10
11 Western strands of Buddhism has been called into question for its problematic and
12
13 imprecise terminology and assumptions. For Hickey, the explicit separation of ethnic
14
15 and Western Buddhism are problematic because, she argues, 'some of the assumptions
16
17 underlying taxonomies of American Buddhism reflect unconscious white privilege'
18
19 (2010:5). Her argument is instructive, both because it makes plain the rhetorical dangers
20
21 such an approach unthinkingly implies (for instance, why is it that only non-white
22
23 people are 'ethnic?'), and because it makes it possible to think through a more complex
24
25 global geography of Buddhism. The editors of the collection *Buddhism in Australia*,
26
27 similarly demonstrate the culturally and politically problematic nature of bifurcating
28
29 West and East, noting that 'there has been an increasing circulation of Buddhist
30
31 monastics, students, books, practice and material culture between the West and the non-
32
33 West and within the West' (Barker and Rocha 2011:10).
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39 Following such interventions, the research presented in this paper centres on the
40
41 practices and doings of Buddhism. This is not to argue that such distinctions, imprecise
42
43 and problematic as they are, are not recognisable across the landscape of Buddhism in
44
45 London – they certainly are and their consequences played out in the research process.
46
47 Rather, through a focus on the faith itself, we have sought to foreground the dynamics
48
49 of Buddhism's unfolding across its various schools in the specifically urban and
50
51 postsecular setting of London. In other words, our interest is not solely in what
52
53 Buddhism does, but instead in what Buddhism does to become part of this place.
54
55 Putting aside these binaries, allows us to view the research in a way that is open to the
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3 similarities and connections of practice between schools as they integrate into the
4
5 postsecular landscape. In so doing, the framework of Buddhism in practice provides a
6
7 more coherent way of analysing the complexities and interconnections of different
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Buddhisms in the city.

The study

The study drew on a range of ethnographic methods. It was initiated through an online survey of London's Buddhist network, through which a list of thirty-three places of Buddhist faith practice in London was assembled. Places were only included which appeared from their web presence to be well established, likely to endure, and to have a fairly permanent physical presence or to be connected to a larger group or organization (see, Figure 1). For reasons of time and coherency, informal and transitory meditation groups, and meetings that took place in private homes, community centres, or other public and quasi-public buildings, were beyond the scope of the study. We then visited as many of these places as possible, seeking to get a sense of their day-to-day activities, the key people and practices. Over the limited research period, thirteen of the thirty-three sites were visited, all more than once and several for an extended period, with the intention being to accrue knowledge of a diversity of Buddhist practice (see Table 1). One of us participated in activities, interviewed and spoke informally to participants, recorded semi-structured interviews, and wrote field notes. The data from all sites was used to inform the conclusions drawn here, though inevitably it was not possible to incorporate data from all sites in the illustrate material used in this paper. Throughout this paper, the names of the sites visited are cited alongside either the name of the participant interviewed, where agreed, or a pseudonym with general biographic details of gender and age. Selecting pseudonyms was problematic, as interviewees had a mixture of European and Asian names, while some Buddhist orders gave ordained

1
2
3 members new, Buddhist names. In the interests of consistency and to preserve
4
5 anonymity, a selection of common European names was chosen for all pseudonyms.
6

7
8 The research sought to be broad and wide ranging and was successful in this
9
10 respect. The diversity of publics engaged with necessitated different data collection
11
12 methods, and the consequences of this are visible in this paper. While some informants
13
14 had a fluency in English, and a familiarity with British academic knowledge creation,
15
16 others were less able to speak the language and felt a mystification or even
17
18 apprehension around the social science research process. In the former case,
19
20 ethnographic interviews were collected which have been cited here. In the latter, the
21
22 data gathered and cited in this paper was predominantly field observations supported by
23
24 informal and often more factual questioning. This is a key example of the tension
25
26 between seeking to elide the ethnic/Western binary conceptually while necessarily
27
28 being required to negotiate with elements of it practically.
29
30
31

32 33 **Buddhism in London today** 34

35
36 In Pinxten and Diktomis's (2009) view, the patterns of association and attachment that
37
38 held communities of worshipers together in what they call the 'traditional' religions—
39
40 Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—have been radically destabilized by the
41
42 unprecedented growth and diversity of the large modern city. Consequently, they are
43
44 experiencing significant transformation under what they call the modern urban
45
46 predicament. Their assumption is that these religions offered an explanation of the
47
48 meaning of life and social organization to their believers and that they were able to do
49
50 so effectively because they functioned in a social context that was small, consisting of
51
52 tribes or clans, and predominantly rural (Pinxten and Diktomis, 2009: ix–x). As far as
53
54 Christianity is concerned, the latest UK census bears out this view. From 2001 to 2011
55
56 there was an increase in the population reporting no religion, from 14.8 per cent of the
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1
2
3 population in 2001 to 25.1 per cent in 2011, and a concurrent drop in the population
4 reporting to be Christian, from 71.7 per cent in 2001 to 59.3 per cent in 2011. What is
5 missing in Pinxten and Diktomis account (Dodsworth et al, 2013) is the corresponding
6 growth in other religions, most notably Islam which rose from 3.0 per cent of the
7 population in 2001 to 4.8 per cent in 2011 and reflecting migrant patterns of settlement
8 in the UK over that decade. Of the other main religious groups: 817,000 people
9 identified themselves as Hindu (1.5 per cent of population); 423,000 people identified
10 as Sikh (0.8 per cent), 263,000 people as Jewish (0.5 per cent). Of specific relevance
11 here was that those who identified as Buddhist had increased from 149,157 (0.26 per
12 cent) to 247,743 (0.4 per cent) from 2001 to 2011 with a slight majority of women
13 (ONS, 2001, 2011). Though overall the number of practitioners is low, this 60 per cent
14 increase in participants over one decade must be regarded as significant. Indeed, it may
15 be that the census data is an underestimate (Bluck, 2004)

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32 Our first concern was to explore what drew people to Buddhism specifically,
33 adding to understandings of the everyday workings of postsecularism. Here, distinctions
34 between Western and non-Western Buddhism were most clearly revealed. Attraction to
35 Buddhism amongst many Western practitioners was articulated in terms of difficult life
36 experiences, a sense of something missing in life, and relatedly a desire for calm and
37 peace in a troubled world. These features were thought to be achievable through
38 meditation, or an encounter with Buddhism on travels overseas. There were many
39 similarities here with McKenzie's (2014) findings in Scotland, where respondents
40 explained their initial attraction to the Buddhist organisation in terms of wanting to
41 learn meditation, a desire for social contact, spirituality and health issues. For example,
42 Oscar, a 30 year old at LBC, describes his situation at the time he first became
43 interested in the Buddhist faith: 'I'd recently left a full time job. I'd had experience of
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3 illness- a dragged out physical illness, followed by depression, followed by quitting the
4
5 job. Around the same time the relationship I was in ended.' Such a scenario is not
6
7 unusual, as the case of Sandra, a woman in her 50s who also attends the LBC,
8
9 illustrates:

10
11
12 In 2000 I became very ill.. And... I had rehab and stuff like that, got my
13 sense of balance back- I was absolutely not going to become housebound or
14 anything like this. ... I realised I was just angry. I was really, really furious.
15
16 And talking to him a whole lot of stuff from the past came up. I was a very,
17 very unhappy. ... So out of that.. I decided I wanted to learn how to
18 meditate. I didn't really care anything about Buddhism, but I thought
19 meditation might be the way forward.
20
21

22
23
24 (Sandra)
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26

27 The experience of Russell, a man in his 30s who is a regular attendee at a Heruka
28 Buddhist centre, reflects the search for a deeper spiritual engagement:
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33 There was just a feeling that there's a better way of being, or that there is
34 something, not missing, but there has to be a better way of being because
35 our minds are so overactive, you know. ... And Buddhism was one of the
36 first things that I came across. It instantly resonated with me.
37
38

39
40 (Russell)
41
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43 Others, like Matthew, a practitioner in his 40s at the LBC, and Robert, in his 50s, and
44 Yvette, in her 40s, both at the WLBC, sought new practices that facilitated calmer or
45 more grounded engagements with the world. Buddhist meditation offered a tool to do
46
47 this, particularly when practitioners were motivated by a group setting:
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53 I'd tried to ... make this change by myself, so rather quirkily I was getting
54 up rather early and trying to meditate, read something spiritual, not Buddhist
55 necessarily but spiritual, and I was also trying to teach myself touch typing
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3 because I wanted to write. So that was my little regime. But I just couldn't
4 keep it going by myself.

5
6 (Matthew)
7
8

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10 While I was doing my finals I was getting a bit stressed, I was interested in
11 meditation, that kind of thing...I saw that somebody was doing some classes
12 in Buddhist meditation, actually on the campus which I thought was rather
13 convenient. So I went to those and they were taught by a member of the
14 Triratna order... And so that was how it started.

15
16 (Robert)
17
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20
21 I went on my first retreat in '96. Which kind of came out of a very strong
22 wish to understand myself more deeply. I didn't at that point understand
23 myself at all and felt I was suffering and inflicting suffering and didn't quite
24 understand why that was.

25
26 (Yvette)
27
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30
31 Finally, global interconnectedness of the contemporary world also had effects. The
32 experience of Alexandra, a women in her early 20s at Jamyang, was echoed by several
33 respondents who had travelled to India or Tibet at some point in their 20s and
34 encountered Buddhist practice:
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41 At the end of our trip..., I think we were gone for two months or so, we
42 ended up in Dharamsala in a centre called Tushita where they teach Tibetan
43 Buddhism in the Gelugpa tradition... it's a beautiful centre, it's surrounded
44 by green, lush things. ... It was blissful... I went home again and felt for the
45 first time when I stepped back home [in Europe], [I had] a real longing for
46 some kind of Buddhist community.

47
48 (Alexandra)
49
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54 Global connections in the postcolonial city have been central to explanations of the
55 growth of religious diversity and sites in recent years. In this respect the less
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2
3 Westernised Buddhist centres were more similar to other religious sites in London
4
5 established to meet the needs of diasporic and transnational communities (Sheringham,
6
7 2010) although unlike many of these religious settlements, they did not emerge from
8
9 within newly established migrant communities. Instead, some had existed for a long
10
11 time and assembled people from across the capital rather than serving locally based
12
13 migrant communities, or had been founded by monks or other Buddhist officials sent to
14
15 London for that specific purpose. There was also an intriguing link with Europe here, as
16
17 London has become something of a hub of European Buddhism. One Jamang
18
19 participant, Alexandra, moved to London as there was no Jamyang Buddhist centre in
20
21 her home country in Europe. Likewise, the young Diamond Way movement regarded
22
23 the establishment of a London base as central in its efforts to be taken seriously as a
24
25 Buddhist tradition in Europe. Many of Diamond Way's core participants were from
26
27 other European countries who reported their intention to return home once the centre
28
29 was off the ground, and they were supported in their work by volunteers from around
30
31 Europe who made use of low cost flights to visit the centre for short periods when
32
33 additional help was required.
34
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38
39 It is worth noting that further complexities to the global and local connections
40
41 and networks add weight to the need to disrupt the notion of a fixed binary of ethnic and
42
43 Western Buddhism in the London context. Although the FGS movement is based in
44
45 Taiwan, its attendees in London are almost entirely from Mainland China with little
46
47 representation of the Taiwanese community. The movements of Jamyang, Diamond
48
49 Way and Rigpa reveal a different but equally nuanced geography of faith and practice.
50
51 Though their London followers are largely white people of European origin, and like
52
53 many Western traditions the movements were recently established, their organisational
54
55 cores are in non-Western locations and they tend to have centres across in the world.
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3 Finally, the Triratna school, founded and based London, reported a growing presence in
4 India where participation in Buddhism can act to efface pre-existing caste structures and
5 generate new forms of social mobility.
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8
9 Unlike other faiths, Buddhism does not actively seek converts, though there are
10 moves to encourage new practitioners, a task many centres achieve through the
11 publically advertised offer of meditation classes. Differently, at Three Wheels, the
12 expansion of those involved in this Buddhist centre was more subtle, framed in the
13 words of its director, Reverend Kemmyo Sato, in terms of ‘encounters’ and the idea of
14 growth that occurs ‘gradually’ or ‘little by little’ in the accumulation of interested
15 people. People typically remained affiliated with the first school of Buddhism they
16 encountered, despite the diversity of Buddhisms in the city. This unsettles notions that
17 ‘consumer culture’, or openness to choice, defines urban dwellers’ identities or the ways
18 they choose to perform them (Schwarz, 2004). In some scenarios, this consistency of
19 affiliation occurs for self evidently pragmatic reasons. In predominantly non-Western
20 Buddhist centres, for instance, the centre acts as a community space, appearing to play a
21 role in creating homes away from home for nationals of other countries. For instance,
22 Thai language and culture courses are offered for young people at Wat Buddhapadipa,
23 and non-English newspapers and magazines are distributed at almost all Buddhist
24 centres predominantly attended by Asian people.
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45 However, for new converts, the reason for remaining with the first school of
46 Buddhism they approach is more complex and intimately related to the new
47 philosophical understandings of the world participants generate through their affiliation
48 with Buddhism. Initially they regard their arrival as being mere good fortune, a chance
49 encounter with a school in which they feel comfortable and accepted. Later, participants
50 spoke of rethinking that arrival through the lens of karma and inevitability. For Jenny, a
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2
3 woman in her 30s from the FGS centre, 'At the moment I would say it's a kind of...
4
5 something linked to karma, it's there. You know, according to Buddhism, everything
6
7 exists with a reason.' Oscar's response is similar, if more nuanced:
8
9

10
11 I think it's important not to frame the whole debate in what I would call, and
12
13 this might sound brusque, secular materialistic terms. ... I don't think I've
14
15 discovered that the hand of God steered me towards the Buddhist Centre. ...
16
17 One of the central teachings of Buddhism is called cognition coproduction,
18
19 it's also known as dependent arising and it just teaches that everything that
20
21 arises does so in dependence on conditions. So when conditions for a
22
23 situation are in place, the situation arises.

24
25 (Oscar)

26
27 The key exception here is the Buddhist Society which offers a diversity of Buddhist
28
29 practice styles. As Louise Marchant, the registrar, explained:

30
31 Why have all these different styles under one roof? Because you can
32
33 appreciate the diversity of how Buddhism went to different countries, the
34
35 different forms, how to compare if you wanted to- how to compare how one
36
37 developed to another... here, you can try them out without actually
38
39 committing to one form of Buddhism.

40
41 (Louise Marchant, registrar of the Buddhist Society)

42
43 Buddhism, once arrived at, becomes thought by many through the concept of home
44
45 (somewhat akin to Beaumont and Baker's (2011b) idea of 'belonging'). This notion of
46
47 homeliness emerges both on a spiritual level and in terms of the building of community
48
49 with other people and developing shared connections. Amanda describes this feeling in
50
51 the following way: 'I can't remember much of the teachings, I can't remember my
52
53 emotional response to the actual facts about Buddhism. All I remember was some kind
54
55 of emotional ease, like I was very at home.'
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Buddhism as Practices

Building upon this understanding of the way practitioners become engaged with Buddhism in postsecular London, in this section we consider the significance of practices to the processes of becoming and remaining a Buddhist in the city. Here, by being focussed on the ways different Buddhisms converge in matters of practice rather than faith, we seek to explore what is possible and what is required in the establishment of a relatively new faith, and particular schools within that faith, in a postsecular city. We clustered the practices we observed around three themes, making practices, connecting practices and attaching practices, which will be examined in turn.

Making practices

Investigating the materiality of religious attachments in the East End of London, Dodsworth et al. (2013) argued that undertaking material acts of building construction matters (see also, Dwyer et al 2015). This pattern was also clearly evident in our research. On a tour by the building manager during our first visit to Jamyang we recorded these field notes:

The Jamyang centre is in a former courthouse... purchased at auction 1 November 1995, following which there was a careful restoration and conversion of the building that which was undertaken by members of the Buddhist community in communication with groups like English Heritage as the building is Grade II listed. [On the day of our visit, t]here has been a work camp going on for the previous days, during which building users have been making repairs and refreshing paintwork, and there are still signs of that being underway.

(Field notes)

The head monk at Three Wheels, recounted a significant event in this Buddhist centre's history - the making of the Zen garden that was designed by John White, the then

1
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3 Provost of UCL and Professor of Art History. According to Reverend Kemmyo Sato,
4
5 White had been impressed by the Zen gardens in Japan where he had practiced
6
7 meditation even though he was not himself a Buddhist:
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10
11 A few months after the purchase of the house [in which the centre is
12 located], Professor John White and I were standing in the garden. I didn't
13 like the previous garden very much. The atmosphere was very gloomy... I
14 said to John, 'I would like to change a little bit this garden'. And he suddenly
15 said, 'how about making a Zen garden?'.
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20 Reverend Kemmyo Sato was unable to agree before calling his master in Japan who
21 thought it a 'wonderful idea' which would 'improve the mutual understanding' between
22 the two men. As a consequence the garden was constructed, employing voluntary
23 manual labour over a period of three years. As Reverend Kemmyo Sato reflects, 'John
24 insisted this point, we shouldn't use machines. We did it by hand. "Why are you
25 insisting this point?". "It will involve people"... 80 people from the UK and Japan. We
26 had a very nice, yes, happy time at that time.' One hundred and sixty people gathered at
27 the inaugural ceremony of the garden in 1997, including a majority of non-Buddhists,
28 scholars, the neighbours, and those involved in the making of the garden.
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40 FGS represents another illustration. This organization bought a property to
41 convert in London's West End, as Jenny, a woman in her 30s of Taiwanese origin,
42 explains:
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47 I started to volunteer. At that time because everything started from scratch
48 so we didn't have many things like- even the meditation hall. So everything-
49 the wood or whatever- there's a monk, they're actually cutting the wood... So
50 everything had to be very economic and you had to try and do as much as
51 you can by lay people's help without buying them ready cut, ready made.
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56 (Jenny)
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3 Similarly, across the Triratna movement there is a history of doing considerable
4 building works on their key sites, such as the transformation in the late 1970s of the old
5 fire station into the current London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green which was
6 undertaken largely by volunteer labour. The former WLBC was in a Victorian house
7 near Royal Oak tube station, which was purchased in the early 1990s, and gradually
8 became too small for the growing number of attendees. Property price increases over
9 the period militated against buying a larger residential property in the area. However, a
10 new building erected nearby included a ground floor and basement required by the local
11 authority to be used for educational purposes only. An agreement was made with the
12 developer to exchange their residential property for a long lease on this, much larger
13 and, because of the limits on its use, much cheaper, premises. Because the new site was
14 essentially a shell that required a complete fit-out, they departed from the normal ways
15 of furnishing a new Buddhist centre, a necessity which generated, as Yvette, a woman
16 in her 40s who was born in the Netherlands sets out, some unease amongst the WLBC's
17 attendees:
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37 Normally, what would happen is that you buy an old place with loads to do
38 and you get your volunteers and everybody starts painting. ... So... just
39 because of this project developer, just because we get this concrete box, we
40 needed to have architects and we've been launched into this whole way of
41 being and operating that we're just not used to at all. Paying all kinds of
42 money which we just find staggering.
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47 (Yvette)
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50 Diamond Way, presently a new and relatively small movement in the UK, established a
51 Tibetan Buddhist Centre in 2013 in the buildings of the Beaufoy Institute in Vauxhall.
52 The buildings, which are Grade II listed, once housed a boys' technical institute which
53 was established in the early 1900s as part of the ragged school movement. When
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3 Diamond Way took control of the site, the buildings had been lying derelict for some
4
5 time. The objective of Diamond Way was to expand and become more prominent on the
6
7 London Buddhism stage. Once again renovation proved to be an important part of their
8
9 narrative, where presently the intention is to construct a ground floor café and Buddhist
10
11 centre with residential spaces on the upper floors. Because the community is small, the
12
13 centre has been organising work weekends for members who fly in from across Europe.
14
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16
17 Constructing sites through voluntary labour was thus revealed as core to carving
18
19 out the new Buddhist milieus in London, whilst also serving to generate a feeling
20
21 community between practitioners. Voluntarism was found to be central across new
22
23 movements and old ones, different ethnicities, and also different levels of wealth. What
24
25 was striking, however, in contrast to other faiths that have expanded in recent years
26
27 (Dwyer, Gilbert, and Shah, 2013; Naylor and Ryan, 2002) was the relative invisibility
28
29 of Buddhist sites. By occupying former domestic dwellings, old schools and churches,
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31 and by electing to mark their presence discretely, their presence had gone largely
32
33 unnoticed and uncontested by the wider community.
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37 *Attaching Practices*

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39 Physical involvement in the material construction of Buddhist sites is one way by which
40
41 Buddhists demonstrate a clear attachment to their community and embed it, albeit
42
43 subtly, into London's urban fabric. In the course of our fieldwork, we also identified a
44
45 series of other, more day to day practices, which generate an attachment with
46
47 Buddhism. These operate to keep people engaged in ways extending beyond purely
48
49 faith-based practice, and in so doing act to strengthen their connection with the faith,
50
51 generating Buddhist 'resolve' by involving practitioners in the continual activity of
52
53 bringing Buddhism into being. Often, they are rooted in the creation of a new, Buddhist,
54
55 social and cultural identity practices or the maintenance of existing ones. To be able to
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1
2
3 do so rests upon the presence of the collective of Buddhist participants available in a
4
5 large city. By undertaking these activities, individuals build Buddhist practice into their
6
7 everyday life.
8

9
10 In the running of a large Buddhist centre, there are numerous day to day tasks
11
12 like cooking and cleaning which need to be accomplished. To undertake these tasks is,
13
14 on one level, an act of generosity towards the centre, but participants like Jenny and
15
16 Alexandra, a young woman in her early 20s, also reported finding a particularly
17
18 Buddhist way by which to undertake them.
19

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21
22 Right from the beginning... I was really fully engaged... And simply you ...
23
24 clean the Buddha statue like those in the service or even go in the reception,
25
26 answer the phone or help in the main shrine while doing the services.

27
28
29 (Jenny)

30
31 In order to graduate along the path, as a Buddhist would say... to expand the
32
33 mind and become a better person maybe, to use normal words, you would
34
35 use meditation as a main tool for that... But another way is of doing it by
36
37 more physical labour... And that's when cooking fits into that. It's just like
38
39 the way we put our intention to whatever we're doing. We can completely
40
41 transform that task.

42
43
44 (Alexandra)

45
46 Similar contributions take place in non-Western Buddhist centres, too, though perhaps
47
48 taking different forms. For example, monks do not cook their own food but instead eat
49
50 food prepared by members of the community that is cooked or heated up in Buddhist
51
52 centre kitchens. During our observations, one of us ate a meal prepared by women at the
53
54 Wat Buddhapadipa temple. In Triratna, not only is volunteering on cleaning and
55
56 maintenance tasks important, but so also are their 'team based right livelihood
57
58 activities'. These offer a subsistence wage to enable participants to devote their time to
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1
2
3 Buddhism and to the organisation without being dominated by the demands of a
4 conventional job. The concept of 'right livelihood' is a particularly Triratna based
5 perspective on the Buddhist teachings around employment which urge followers to earn
6 a living in a way that is positive and does not cause harm (The Buddhist Centre, 2016).
7
8 It also acts as a way of financially supporting people to take charge of the day to day
9 running of the centres, or to operate small businesses to raise funds. At the London
10 Buddhist Centre, the economic pressures of recent times have put this system under
11 strain, leading to the demise of the Cherry Orchard café which they had been running
12 for several years. However, a second hand bookshop called Jambala, and a second hand
13 clothes shop, Lama's Pyjamas, continue to operate. As Sarah, a woman in her 40s who
14 had much experience on the Centre's right livelihood approaches, these activities
15 generate attachment to the Buddhist faith and opportunities to incorporate Buddhism
16 into day to day practice.
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33 You have to get on with it and find a way of working together. ... the cafe
34 was successful in terms of money for a few years, and it was also very
35 successful in terms of a place for people, women, to practice. It was a
36 women's team, and quite a lot of women got ordained in that situation. You
37 know, in terms of friendship and spiritual practice, I think it really did help
38 people.
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42

43 (Sarah)
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46 Communal living represents a further route to deepen involvement with Buddhist
47 practice. Many centres have monks living permanently in or adjacent to the site: Wat
48 Buddhapadipa, Wat Buddharam, London Buddhist Vihara, East London Buddhist
49 Cultural Centre, London FGS, and Three Wheels. Monks at Wat Buddhapadipa have a
50 strict schedule to which they adhere, as these field notes from a conversation with
51 several monks describe:
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3 Breakfast is at 6am with morning chanting following at 8am. Then the
4 monks work in the garden or on paperwork in the office until 11am, when
5 they have lunch (they must not have food after midday unless sick or
6 travelling). At 6pm there is evening chanting. Some monks study English at
7 college during the day or study other things. They may also be called out to
8 attend ceremonies or bless businesses.
9

10
11 (Field notes)
12

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14
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16 By comparison, the more recent or Western focused movements do not have monks in
17 the traditional fashion. However, people often live on site or group together with others
18 to create faith centred communities. Like right livelihood, communal living offers
19 another way to create new cultures and traditions of the kind Oscar outlines.
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21
22
23

24
25
26 Thursday's community night so you're in unless you're away... people don't
27 make any other plans in London on a Thursday. And we have dinner in the
28 normal way although it's more relaxed because people spend a bit longer at
29 the table ... Someone makes cups of tea. We go through anything practical,
30 pretty briefly... Then we split up to do cleaning. ... On other community
31 nights, we'd study a bit of text. On every other community night this year
32 we've been doing life stories, so it's a different person's turn each week to
33 tell the story of their life in two hours. And everyone else just listens.
34
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39 (Oscar)
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41

42 In this way, through cooking and cleaning, and even the routine practices of living,
43 London's Buddhists generate and strengthen their attachment to the faith.
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48 *Connecting practices* 49

50
51 Buddhist practice does not take place in isolation from its wider urban community. That
52 said, it is not a faith that sets out to proselytize or actively recruit followers, nor are
53 there calls to prayer or church bells, which contribute to Buddhism's lack of visibility in
54 the city. Nevertheless, Buddhism seeks a presence in London and have a positive impact
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3 upon it, and Westerners involved in Buddhism are typically socially engaged (Cantwell
4 and Kawanami, 2009). Often, these activities bear a resemblance to various other faith-
5 based organisations' voluntary activities in the public sphere (Beaumont and Cloke,
6
7 2012). These connecting practices are typologised in the following three key ways,
8
9 through commercial engagements, the offering of meditation classes to the lay
10
11 community, and through voluntary activities in the public sphere.
12
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14

15
16 First, there are the commercial engagements that, as well as providing much
17
18 needed funds, are seen as a way of making their centres relevant and accessible to the
19
20 wider community.
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22

23
24 We've got people going to the second-hand clothes shop who would never
25
26 come into the Buddhist centre.

27
28 (Matthew)

29
30 I suppose I'm quite interested in giving people a taste of- you could say a
31
32 taste of the Buddha's vision without them really knowing about it. It's a bit
33
34 like at Lama's Pyjamas, not everyone would even know that we're Buddhist,
35
36 but they might leave the shop feeling, 'wow, I had a really nice chat with
37
38 her' or 'that was a really good interaction'. They can't quite say what it is
39
40 but they pick up on it.

41
42 (Sarah)

43
44 Jamyang has a café, several function rooms and office spaces that can be hired by local
45
46 businesses, although they are selective about to whom they will rent spaces and limit
47
48 themselves to small, ethical, businesses and NGOs. They also deploy the former prison
49
50 cells for renting on a bed and breakfast basis.
51

52
53 Second, meditation has been key for making Buddhism relevant publically for
54
55 all Buddhist centres, particularly the new Western focussed centres (as McKenzie
56
57 (2014) also highlighted in a different context). Guided meditation for newcomers to
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1
2
3 Buddhism was available at all the centres visited with the exception of the Wat
4
5 Buddharam. Though there is an aspiration at all centres that such activities will
6
7 encourage new people to join the Buddhist faith, such an outcome is not obligatory and,
8
9 generally, the provision is or claims to be welcoming of secular participants.
10

11
12
13 I think [teaching meditation] is offering life tools to people and those tools
14
15 are of use to people and it may or may not be that they want to integrate
16
17 them with the complete package of Buddhism. And I feel I'm planting seeds
18
19 and it may be in the future that they realise that they want a bit more and
20
21 they've had a sense of Buddhism and they'll come back to it... It's nice when
22
23 that happens.

24
25
26 (Robert)

27
28 Western Buddhist movements have also made significant inroads into mindfulness
29
30 courses which are deliberately secular and entirely separate from their Buddhist
31
32 practice. For example, the LBC has a space specifically designed to be adapted from a
33
34 Buddhist meditation hall into a secular space called Breathing Space, and Jamyang also
35
36 offers secular mindfulness meditation. This has reflected a wider public interest in
37
38 mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn 2006, The Guardian, 2016), and its therapeutic recognition by
39
40 the British National Health Service (NHS, 2016). LBC's mindfulness initiative followed
41
42 that of their sister centre in Manchester, who were offering mindfulness retreats for full
43
44 time carers. As one practitioner, Dr. Paramabandhu Groves, who led the development of
45
46 Breathing Space at the LBC explained:
47

48
49 [Initially] there was some concern. ..we've always made it very clear that
50
51 our beginners classes are open to anybody. You don't have to be Buddhist,
52
53 you can come along and learn to meditate... although we have the big
54
55 Buddha figure we didn't light the candles because somehow that was being
56
57 religious, you've got the Buddha figure though [laughs] so it sounds a bit
58
59 ridiculous I suppose what I'm saying in that is that there was always
60

1
2
3 sensitivity to .. make it really accessible to anybody and not bash people
4 over the head with Buddhism ... sometimes, actually, I think too much, I
5 think we were almost too shy of saying it's a Buddhist Centre which it
6 obviously was. I think that has changed over the years as Buddhism's
7 become more wide and accessible. ...Having said that, there were some
8 concerns from some quarters.. who feared that in a way it was watering
9 down the dharma.

10
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14 (Dr. Paramabandhu Groves)

15
16
17 Third, there is engagement with local communities, which was evident in all the
18 Buddhist centres visited. For many centres, particularly those affiliated with older, non-
19 Western movements, the centres act as a point of connection to the country or region of
20 origin. Wat Buddhapadipa in particular has language and cultural classes for children of
21 Thai families and all distribute non-English newspapers from the country of origin.
22 Each of the centres openly encourages visitors to come and look around. Wat
23 Buddhapadipa and the London Buddhist Vihara also had connections with local school
24 that enabling the school to hold assemblies and other events there. Three Wheels,
25 although somewhat hidden in an indistinguishable suburban house opens, its spectacular
26 Zen garden to the public for the National Gardens Scheme's open gardens day (NGS,
27 2016).

28
29 Some Buddhist centres extend a caring role in the local community. For
30 example, at Wat Buddhapadipa we were introduced to a homeless man who regularly
31 attends the temple to eat and help out there. Similarly, on an early visit to the LBC, we
32 witnessed a man in some distress sitting talking to one of the workers in the garden. In a
33 more formalised caring capacity, the LBC also makes its retreat centres in rural parts of
34 the UK available for respite breaks for full time carers of elderly or disabled people.
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Conclusion

In conclusion, how does Buddhism fit into the postsecular urban landscape, what makes it distinctive and for whom does it matter? The number of people declaring themselves as Buddhists has indeed risen in recent years, following the rise of other non-traditional religions in the UK, however this research suggests that Buddhism differs from these in several ways. First, it is a faith whose growth is not predominantly attributable to the rise in new migrant communities in the city (though this does have a contributory effect). Rather it owes its growth predominantly to an increased interest expressed by people attracted to the religion for its practices of meditation and mindfulness, which are seen as helpful in dealing with the hectic and stressful pressures of everyday life in the city. Second, Buddhism remains largely invisible in the urban and suburban landscape of London, adapting buildings that are already in place, with little material impact on the built environment; as a result its arrival in the urban landscape has been less subject to contestation than other religious practices¹. Third, Buddhist practices, such as meditation, are quiet, and even where chanting takes place it bears no resemblance to the loud singing and music of many of the new popular religious practices associated with Evangelical Christianity. Buddhism has no sonic presence in the city- there is no call for prayer as in mosques, or church bells. There is no proselytizing and followers find their own way to Buddhist practice, often through a very personal path rather than public, familial or ethnic connections. In each of these ways, Buddhism operates almost under the radar from public view. At a broader socio-political level, Buddhist practitioners from overseas are not associated with wider

¹ This is not to suggest that there are no Buddhist temples in some cities that are purpose built or more visible. In London however, there are few of these.

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3 political or fundamentalist movements, sharing neither the conservatism of some of the
4
5 Evangelical Christian movements, which is articulated publically in relation to debates
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7 around gay equality for example, neither are they subject to wider demonising
8
9 discourses of association with terrorism which have plagued some Muslim
10
11 communities.
12

13
14 In this paper we have demonstrated also the importance of religious practices.
15
16 All Buddhist groups, with varying degrees of both willingness and success, seek to
17
18 make aspects of their Buddhist faith accessible to the wider community whether through
19
20 offering catering, public access to their buildings and gardens, or through offering
21
22 mindfulness-led mental health initiatives. And while Buddhist practitioners might like
23
24 to encourage outsiders to become part of the faith, these community engagement
25
26 practices are neither directly nor implicitly motivated by congregation building
27
28 objectives. This research has thus revealed that Buddhism features as a small but
29
30 significant part of the postsecular urban landscape, but that it differs in various ways
31
32 from other religions that have had a growing presence in the city in recent years. This
33
34 study has shown the importance of a focus on religious practices as well as faith, and
35
36 contributes to a growing sociological and geographical set of literatures that point to the
37
38 significance of religion in the making of contemporary urban social worlds.
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4 **Religion as practices of attachment and materiality: The making of**
5 **Buddhism in contemporary London**
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8
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Religion as practices of attachment and materiality: The making of Buddhism in contemporary London

Friction between Buddhists and Muslims in South East Asia involving violent attacks on religious minorities has become a matter of serious public concern in recent years (Quintana, 2014; Frydenlund, 2015). In contemporary cities of the UK, Europe and Australia, Muslims face an on-going struggle with non-Muslims over public displays of faith, particularly concerning the height of spires, parking issues, or the call to prayer (Naylor and Ryan, 2002). Even the virtually invisible wire delineating the Jewish space of the eruv, the ritual enclosure which reconfigures private space as public on the Sabbath (Vincent and Wharf, 2002), met opposition in the London borough of Barnet. Yet, thorough searches of newspaper articles and scholarly writing revealed no such contestation around the practice of Buddhism. To the contrary, with only a few exceptions (see Waitt, 2003), Buddhism is largely invisible in cities outside Asia. It is quiet and rarely, if ever, a matter of concern.

That said, Buddhism is garnering a place in the landscape and urban practices beyond Asia. This paper explores the contemporary articulation of Buddhism in London as it arrives, and becomes increasingly embedded in this global city. The paper's tasks are threefold: to consider how Buddhism fits into the postsecular urban landscape; to ask whether it adds to or modifies existing notions of postsecularism; and to investigate what makes Buddhism distinctive and for whom does it matter? Given Buddhism is a faith rooted in continuous practice, prioritising mindfulness in everyday activity over

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2
3 the periodic worship of deities, we are particularly concerned with exploring the
4
5 practices that bring Buddhism into being in the city. We have identified three, making
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7 practices, attachment practices and connecting practices, which are explored through
8
9 rich empirical material presented in this paper. Our core argument here is that
10
11 Buddhism makes claims to urban space in much the same way as it produces its faith,
12
13 being as much about the practices performed and the spaces in which they are enacted
14
15 as it is about faith or a collection of beliefs (following much recent research in religion
16
17 (Lee 2014, 436)). Before examining these practices in detail, we locate the study in the
18
19 context of a re-emergence of faith in postsecular cities, and draw on our fieldwork data
20
21 to describe the landscape of Buddhist practice in contemporary London.
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26 **Faith in postsecular cities**

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29 Until recent decades, religion was largely absent from research on the urban. In the
30
31 geographical arena, Kong (1990, 2001, 2010) has played a key role in drawing attention
32
33 to the early absence of religion in geography (1990), charting the 'new geographies of
34
35 religion' and suggesting fruitful areas of research (2001). More recently (2010), she has
36
37 questioned whether what we see in the religious landscape represents continuity or
38
39 change, exploring the relative emphases and silences in analyses of different sites of
40
41 religious practice, sensuous geographies, the rise in the discourse of postsecularization
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43 (Beaumont and Baker, 2011a; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and Vanantwerpen, 2011; Ley,
44
45 2011), and the ways in which religion shapes responses to contemporary global shifts.
46
47 Other geographers have taken up the mantle (e.g Holloway and Vailins, 2002) exploring
48
49 the diversity of religious sites in the city, the place of religion in public life, affective
50
51 and embodied spaces, the contested spaces of minority religious architectures in the city
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53 (Naylor and Ryan, 2002; Author, 2005) and transnational spaces of new migrant
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55 religious institutions as they adapt and adjust to a new context (Sheringham, 2010).
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3 In a parallel move, scholars in religious studies have called for greater attention
4 to spatiality and space in the construction of religious and spiritual practices and faiths
5 (see Knott, 2008). Similarly, sociologies of religious communities have variously
6 explored the relationship between religious worship and race, class, cultural identity and
7 diversity, and the relationship between religious practice and the material dimensions of
8 urban life (Orsi, 2005; Eade and Garbin, 2006; Author, 2011). Beaumont and Baker
9 (2011a) have too made significant contributions. They argue that ‘new relations of
10 possibility are emerging’ (2011a: 2) as religions, faith communities and secular values
11 have returned to the centre of public life and social identity, and, more broadly, examine
12 how the built environment reflects this shift. For Beaumont and Baker, the concept of
13 the postsecular represents a new and exciting conceptual apparatus to understand cities.
14 They identify seven areas of debate: the re-emergence of the idea of the sacred in
15 understanding urban space, the importance of the city as a key site of intensity in the
16 dynamics of religious-secular change, the return of the language of virtue in public life,
17 the on-going commitment of religious organisations to social justice, the connection
18 between the growth of Pentecostal Christianity and neoliberal globalization, the re-
19 engagement of faith and politics, and the contested understanding of multiculturalism as
20 it applies to cases of religious freedom (2011: 4).

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43 The contested notion of the postsecular is key to these debates. More than
44 twenty years ago, Casanova (1994) convincingly dismantled the assumption of a
45 singular modernising process of secularisation, drawing attention to social
46 differentiation and the ‘privatisation’ of religious faith, and simple notions of religious
47 decline. Though there has been decline in the practice of traditional Christian religions
48 in Western Europe, there has been a concomitant rise in the significance of other
49 religions –notably Islam, Evangelical Christianity in many parts of the world including
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3 the USA (Woodhead et al. 2009; Davie and Woodhead 2009), as well as the growing
4
5 significance of new religious movements in many Western countries (Bromley, 2007;
6
7 Barker 2013). According to Beaumont and Baker (2011a), the postsecular city is shaped
8
9 by ongoing processes of secularization as well by the re-emergence of public
10
11 expressions of spirituality. Their focus is on the new religious dynamics and energies
12
13 brought to the Western, and supposedly secular, city by diasporic flows from the Global
14
15 South. Their thinking is thus centrally connected to notions of the postcolonial city, in
16
17 which they identify the importance of supportive and social religious spaces of
18
19 'belonging'. Unlike other studies, where Buddhism represents a notable absence, they
20
21 include the faith within this framework (2011:34). Tse (2014) critiques the
22
23 secular/religious dichotomy, advocating 'grounded theologies' as a way to study
24
25 religion in a secular age. Other studies attribute the significance and rise of faith-based
26
27 organisations to the withdrawal of the welfare state in several domains of public life
28
29 (Beaumont and Cloke, 2012: 3).
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35 Despite the widening of social science interest in religion, urban research on
36
37 Buddhism, concerning its emergence and growth in the global cities of traditionally
38
39 non-Buddhist countries, is relatively sparse (with notable exceptions, for example,
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41 McKenzie, 2012; Capper, 2003; Chen, 2002). McKenzie (2014) in this journal, has
42
43 provided an illuminating study of the motivations of practitioners in a Tibetan Buddhist
44
45 organisation based in Scotland arguing that Weber's notion of rationality and Foucault's
46
47 notion of discourse offer useful routes to understanding secularisation and sacralisation
48
49 in the contemporary world. Otherwise, research on Buddhism beyond Asia is
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51 principally located in Buddhism specific journals such as the *Journal of Global*
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53 *Buddhism*, in edited collections or, less frequently still, monographs such as Bluck's
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55 (2006) history of the major Buddhist movements across the UK to the present. The
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3 other key sources are the Buddhist organisations themselves, for instance the various
4
5 works published by the Triratna Buddhist school publishing house, Windhorse.
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7
8 In Britain, the first seeds of a mainstream interest in Buddhism were sown with
9
10 the foundation of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1907. This was
11
12 followed in 1924 by the inauguration of a Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society,
13
14 which developed into what was then also named the Buddhist Society. While the former
15
16 soon dissolved, the latter retained the name of the Buddhist Society and became the lay
17
18 Buddhist interest group that still operates today from its base in central London's
19
20 Eccleston Square (Humphreys, 1937). After World War II, Buddhism began to garner a
21
22 still broader attention following the publication in paperback of two key texts
23
24 (Humphrey's *Buddhism* and Conze's *Buddhism: Its essence and development*, both in
25
26 1951), which generated a broader popular appeal. This occurred alongside wider social
27
28 changes, most notably a decline in church attendance, increasing disposable incomes
29
30 and leisure time, and the emergence of youth cultures of drugs, music and sex (Bluck
31
32 2006:10). By the mid 1960s, the number of Buddhist groups and societies was enough
33
34 to enable specialisation and so attract specific audiences. Bluck presents typology of the
35
36 Buddhist movements active in Britain today, identifying Theravada Buddhism, East
37
38 Asian Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and what he terms the emergent strand of
39
40 'Western' Buddhism. Writing on Buddhism in North America, Coleman (2002)
41
42 similarly identifies a particular style of Buddhism which he variously terms 'new',
43
44 'convert' or 'Western' Buddhism. These 'Western' approaches emphasise meditation,
45
46 the lack of distinction between lay and non-lay members, and an increased openness to
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48 gender equality with women.
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54 Demographically, in research undertaken in North America, most new Buddhists
55
56 are members of the baby boomer generation who are middle class and of medium to
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3 high levels of income and education (Coleman 2008, 2013). Coleman (2002, see also
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5 Numrich 1999) distinguishes immigrant or ethnic Buddhists from the cohort of, largely
6
7 white, American converts who participate in Western approaches. Preferred places of
8
9 Buddhist practice are often separated by ethnicity, and even variation of types of
10
11 Buddhist practice underway at the same temple is divisible along ethnic lines. However,
12
13 in more recent analyses, the working assumption of a bifurcation between ethnic and
14
15 Western strands of Buddhism has been called into question for its problematic and
16
17 imprecise terminology and assumptions. For Hickey, the explicit separation of ethnic
18
19 and Western Buddhism are problematic because, she argues, ‘some of the assumptions
20
21 underlying taxonomies of American Buddhism reflect unconscious white privilege’
22
23 (2010:5). Her argument is instructive, both because it makes plain the rhetorical dangers
24
25 such an approach unthinkingly implies (for instance, why is it that only non-white
26
27 people are ‘ethnic’?), and because it makes it possible to think through a more complex
28
29 global geography of Buddhism. The editors of the collection *Buddhism in Australia*,
30
31 similarly demonstrate the culturally and politically problematic nature of bifurcating
32
33 West and East, noting that ‘there has been an increasing circulation of Buddhist
34
35 monastics, students, books, practice and material culture between the West and the non-
36
37 West and within the West’ (Barker and Rocha 2011:10).
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43 Following such interventions, the research presented in this paper centres on the
44
45 practices and doings of Buddhism. This is not to argue that such distinctions, imprecise
46
47 and problematic as they are, are not recognisable across the landscape of Buddhism in
48
49 London – they certainly are and their consequences played out in the research process.
50
51 Rather, through a focus on the faith itself, we have sought to foreground the dynamics
52
53 of Buddhism’s unfolding across its various schools in the specifically urban and
54
55 postsecular setting of London. In other words, our interest is not solely in what
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3 Buddhism does, but instead in what Buddhism does to become part of this place.

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5 Putting aside these binaries, allows us to view the research in a way that is open to the
6
7 similarities and connections of practice between schools as they integrate into the
8
9 postsecular landscape. In so doing, the framework of Buddhism in practice provides a
10
11 more coherent way of analysing the complexities and interconnections of different
12
13 Buddhisms in the city.
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15 16 17 18 **The study**

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20 The study drew on a range of ethnographic methods. It was initiated through an online
21
22 survey of London's Buddhist network, through which a list of thirty-three places of
23
24 Buddhist faith practice in London was assembled. Places were only included which
25
26 appeared from their web presence to be well established, likely to endure, and to have a
27
28 fairly permanent physical presence or to be connected to a larger group or organization
29
30 (see, Figure 1). For reasons of time and coherency, informal and transitory meditation
31
32 groups, and meetings that took place in private homes, community centres, or other
33
34 public and quasi-public buildings, were beyond the scope of the study. We then visited
35
36 as many of these places as possible, seeking to get a sense of their day-to-day activities,
37
38 the key people and practices. Over the limited research period, thirteen of the thirty-
39
40 three sites were visited, all more than once and several for an extended period, with the
41
42 intention being to accrue knowledge of a diversity of Buddhist practice (see Table 1).
43
44 One of us participated in activities, interviewed and spoke informally to participants,
45
46 recorded semi-structured interviews, and wrote field notes. The data from all sites was
47
48 used to inform the conclusions drawn here, though inevitably it was not possible to
49
50 incorporate data from all sites in the illustrate material used in this paper. Throughout
51
52 this paper, the names of the sites visited are cited alongside either the name of the
53
54 participant interviewed, where agreed, or a pseudonym with general biographic details
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3 of gender and age. Selecting pseudonyms was problematic, as interviewees had a
4
5 mixture of European and Asian names, while some Buddhist orders gave ordained
6
7 members new, Buddhist names. In the interests of consistency and to preserve
8
9 anonymity, a selection of common European names was chosen for all pseudonyms.
10

11
12 The research sought to be broad and wide ranging and was successful in this
13
14 respect. The diversity of publics engaged with necessitated different data collection
15
16 methods, and the consequences of this are visible in this paper. While some informants
17
18 had a fluency in English, and a familiarity with British academic knowledge creation,
19
20 others were less able to speak the language and felt a mystification or even
21
22 apprehension around the social science research process. In the former case,
23
24 ethnographic interviews were collected which have been cited here. In the latter, the
25
26 data gathered and cited in this paper was predominantly field observations supported by
27
28 informal and often more factual questioning. This is a key example of the tension
29
30 between seeking to elide the ethnic/Western binary conceptually while necessarily
31
32 being required to negotiate with elements of it practically.
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37 **Buddhism in London today**

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39 In Pinxten and Diktomis's (2009) view, the patterns of association and attachment that
40
41 held communities of worshipers together in what they call the 'traditional' religions—
42
43 Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—have been radically destabilized by the
44
45 unprecedented growth and diversity of the large modern city. Consequently, they are
46
47 experiencing significant transformation under what they call the modern urban
48
49 predicament. Their assumption is that these religions offered an explanation of the
50
51 meaning of life and social organization to their believers and that they were able to do
52
53 so effectively because they functioned in a social context that was small, consisting of
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55 tribes or clans, and predominantly rural (Pinxten and Diktomis, 2009: ix–x). As far as
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3 Christianity is concerned, the latest UK census bears out this view. From 2001 to 2011
4 there was an increase in the population reporting no religion, from 14.8 per cent of the
5 population in 2001 to 25.1 per cent in 2011, and a concurrent drop in the population
6 reporting to be Christian, from 71.7 per cent in 2001 to 59.3 per cent in 2011. What is
7 missing in Pinxten and Diktomis account (Dodsworth et al, 2013) is the corresponding
8 growth in other religions, most notably Islam which rose from 3.0 per cent of the
9 population in 2001 to 4.8 per cent in 2011 and reflecting migrant patterns of settlement
10 in the UK over that decade. Of the other main religious groups: 817,000 people
11 identified themselves as Hindu (1.5 per cent of population); 423,000 people identified
12 as Sikh (0.8 per cent), 263,000 people as Jewish (0.5 per cent). Of specific relevance
13 here was that those who identified as Buddhist had increased from 149,157 (0.26 per
14 cent) to 247,743 (0.4 per cent) from 2001 to 2011 with a slight majority of women
15 (ONS, 2001, 2011). Though overall the number of practitioners is low, this 60 per cent
16 increase in participants over one decade must be regarded as significant. Indeed, it may
17 be that the census data is an underestimate (Bluck, 2004)

18
19
20 Our first concern was to explore what drew people to Buddhism specifically,
21 adding to understandings of the everyday workings of postsecularism. Here, distinctions
22 between Western and non-Western Buddhism were most clearly revealed. Attraction to
23 Buddhism amongst many Western practitioners was articulated in terms of difficult life
24 experiences, a sense of something missing in life, and relatedly a desire for calm and
25 peace in a troubled world. These features were thought to be achievable through
26 meditation, or an encounter with Buddhism on travels overseas. There were many
27 similarities here with McKenzie's (2014) findings in Scotland, where respondents
28 explained their initial attraction to the Buddhist organisation in terms of wanting to
29 learn meditation, a desire for social contact, spirituality and health issues. For example,
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3 Oscar, a 30 year old at LBC, describes his situation at the time he first became
4 interested in the Buddhist faith: 'I'd recently left a full time job. I'd had experience of
5 illness- a dragged out physical illness, followed by depression, followed by quitting the
6 job. Around the same time the relationship I was in ended.' Such a scenario is not
7 unusual, as the case of Sandra, a woman in her 50s who also attends the LBC,
8 illustrates:
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17 In 2000 I became very ill.. And... I had rehab and stuff like that, got my
18 sense of balance back- I was absolutely not going to become housebound or
19 anything like this. ... I realised I was just angry. I was really, really furious.
20 And talking to him a whole lot of stuff from the past came up. I was a very,
21 very unhappy. ... So out of that.. I decided I wanted to learn how to
22 meditate. I didn't really care anything about Buddhism, but I thought
23 meditation might be the way forward.
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28 (Sandra)
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32 The experience of Russell, a man in his 30s who is a regular attendee at a Heruka
33 Buddhist centre, reflects the search for a deeper spiritual engagement:
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37 There was just a feeling that there's a better way of being, or that there is
38 something, not missing, but there has to be a better way of being because
39 our minds are so overactive, you know. ... And Buddhism was one of the
40 first things that I came across. It instantly resonated with me.
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44 (Russell)
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47 Others, like Matthew, a practitioner in his 40s at the LBC, and Robert, in his 50s, and
48 Yvette, in her 40s, both at the WLBC, sought new practices that facilitated calmer or
49 more grounded engagements with the world. Buddhist meditation offered a tool to do
50 this, particularly when practitioners were motivated by a group setting:
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3 I'd tried to ... make this change by myself, so rather quirkily I was getting
4 up rather early and trying to meditate, read something spiritual, not Buddhist
5 necessarily but spiritual, and I was also trying to teach myself touch typing
6 because I wanted to write. So that was my little regime. But I just couldn't
7 keep it going by myself.
8

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10
11 (Matthew)
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14 While I was doing my finals I was getting a bit stressed, I was interested in
15 meditation, that kind of thing... I saw that somebody was doing some classes
16 in Buddhist meditation, actually on the campus which I thought was rather
17 convenient. So I went to those and they were taught by a member of the
18 Triratna order... And so that was how it started.
19

20
21
22 (Robert)
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25
26 I went on my first retreat in '96. Which kind of came out of a very strong
27 wish to understand myself more deeply. I didn't at that point understand
28 myself at all and felt I was suffering and inflicting suffering and didn't quite
29 understand why that was.
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32
33 (Yvette)
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35
36 Finally, global interconnectedness of the contemporary world also had effects. The
37 experience of Alexandra, a women in her early 20s at Jamyang, was echoed by several
38 respondents who had travelled to India or Tibet at some point in their 20s and
39 encountered Buddhist practice:
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46 At the end of our trip..., I think we were gone for two months or so, we
47 ended up in Dharamsala in a centre called Tushita where they teach Tibetan
48 Buddhism in the Gelugpa tradition... it's a beautiful centre, it's surrounded
49 by green, lush things. ... It was blissful... I went home again and felt for the
50 first time when I stepped back home [in Europe], [I had] a real longing for
51 some kind of Buddhist community.
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55 (Alexandra)
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3 Global connections in the postcolonial city have been central to explanations of the
4 growth of religious diversity and sites in recent years. In this respect the less
5
6
7 Westernised Buddhist centres were more similar to other religious sites in London
8
9 established to meet the needs of diasporic and transnational communities (Sheringham,
10 2010) although unlike many of these religious settlements, they did not emerge from
11 within newly established migrant communities. Instead, some had existed for a long
12 time and assembled people from across the capital rather than serving locally based
13 migrant communities, or had been founded by monks or other Buddhist officials sent to
14 London for that specific purpose. There was also an intriguing link with Europe here, as
15 London has become something of a hub of European Buddhism. One Jamang
16 participant, Alexandra, moved to London as there was no Jamyang Buddhist centre in
17 her home country in Europe. Likewise, the young Diamond Way movement regarded
18 the establishment of a London base as central in its efforts to be taken seriously as a
19 Buddhist tradition in Europe. Many of Diamond Way's core participants were from
20 other European countries who reported their intention to return home once the centre
21 was off the ground, and they were supported in their work by volunteers from around
22 Europe who made use of low cost flights to visit the centre for short periods when
23 additional help was required.

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43 It is worth noting that further complexities to the global and local connections
44 and networks add weight to the need to disrupt the notion of a fixed binary of ethnic and
45 Western Buddhism in the London context. Although the FGS movement is based in
46 Taiwan, its attendees in London are almost entirely from Mainland China with little
47 representation of the Taiwanese community. The movements of Jamyang, Diamond
48 Way and Rigpa reveal a different but equally nuanced geography of faith and practice.
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3 many Western traditions the movements were recently established, their organisational
4
5 cores are in non-Western locations and they tend to have centres across in the world.
6
7 Finally, the Triratna school, founded and based London, reported a growing presence in
8
9 India where participation in Buddhism can act to efface pre-existing caste structures and
10
11 generate new forms of social mobility.
12

13
14 Unlike other faiths, Buddhism does not actively seek converts, though there are
15
16 moves to encourage new practitioners, a task many centres achieve through the
17
18 publically advertised offer of meditation classes. Differently, at Three Wheels, the
19
20 expansion of those involved in this Buddhist centre was more subtle, framed in the
21
22 words of its director, Reverend Kemmyo Sato, in terms of ‘encounters’ and the idea of
23
24 growth that occurs ‘gradually’ or ‘little by little’ in the accumulation of interested
25
26 people. People typically remained affiliated with the first school of Buddhism they
27
28 encountered, despite the diversity of Buddhisms in the city. This unsettles notions that
29
30 ‘consumer culture’, or openness to choice, defines urban dwellers’ identities or the ways
31
32 they choose to perform them (Schwarz, 2004). In some scenarios, this consistency of
33
34 affiliation occurs for self evidently pragmatic reasons. In predominantly non-Western
35
36 Buddhist centres, for instance, the centre acts as a community space, appearing to play a
37
38 role in creating homes away from home for nationals of other countries. For instance,
39
40 Thai language and culture courses are offered for young people at Wat Buddhapadipa,
41
42 and non-English newspapers and magazines are distributed at almost all Buddhist
43
44 centres predominantly attended by Asian people.
45
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49
50 However, for new converts, the reason for remaining with the first school of
51
52 Buddhism they approach is more complex and intimately related to the new
53
54 philosophical understandings of the world participants generate through their affiliation
55
56 with Buddhism. Initially they regard their arrival as being mere good fortune, a chance
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3 encounter with a school in which they feel comfortable and accepted. Later, participants
4
5 spoke of rethinking that arrival through the lens of karma and inevitability. For Jenny, a
6
7 woman in her 30s from the FGS centre, 'At the moment I would say it's a kind of...
8
9 something linked to karma, it's there. You know, according to Buddhism, everything
10
11 exists with a reason.' Oscar's response is similar, if more nuanced:
12
13

14
15 I think it's important not to frame the whole debate in what I would call, and
16
17 this might sound brusque, secular materialistic terms. ... I don't think I've
18
19 discovered that the hand of God steered me towards the Buddhist Centre. ...
20
21 One of the central teachings of Buddhism is called cognition coproduction,
22
23 it's also known as dependent arising and it just teaches that everything that
24
25 arises does so in dependence on conditions. So when conditions for a
26
27 situation are in place, the situation arises.

28
29 (Oscar)

30
31 The key exception here is the Buddhist Society which offers a diversity of Buddhist
32
33 practice styles. As Louise Marchant, the registrar, explained:
34

35
36 Why have all these different styles under one roof? Because you can
37
38 appreciate the diversity of how Buddhism went to different countries, the
39
40 different forms, how to compare if you wanted to- how to compare how one
41
42 developed to another... here, you can try them out without actually
43
44 committing to one form of Buddhism.

45
46 (Louise Marchant, registrar of the Buddhist Society)

47
48 Buddhism, once arrived at, becomes thought by many through the concept of home
49
50 (somewhat akin to Beaumont and Baker's (2011b) idea of 'belonging'). This notion of
51
52 homeliness emerges both on a spiritual level and in terms of the building of community
53
54 with other people and developing shared connections. Amanda describes this feeling in
55
56 the following way: 'I can't remember much of the teachings, I can't remember my
57
58 emotional response to the actual facts about Buddhism. All I remember was some kind
59
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3 of emotional ease, like I was very at home.’
4
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6 7 **Buddhism as Practices**

8
9 Building upon this understanding of the way practitioners become engaged with
10
11 Buddhism in postsecular London, in this section we consider the significance of
12
13 practices to the processes of becoming and remaining a Buddhist in the city. Here, by
14
15 being focussed on the ways different Buddhisms converge in matters of practice rather
16
17 than faith, we seek to explore what is possible and what is required in the establishment
18
19 of a relatively new faith, and particular schools within that faith, in a postsecular city.
20
21 We clustered the practices we observed around three themes, making practices,
22
23 connecting practices and attaching practices, which will be examined in turn.
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27

28 *Making practices*

29
30 Investigating the materiality of religious attachments in the East End of London,
31
32 Dodsworth et al. (2013) argued that undertaking material acts of building construction
33
34 matters (see also, Dwyer et al 2015). This pattern was also clearly evident in our
35
36 research. On a tour by the building manager during our first visit to Jamyang we
37
38 recorded these field notes:
39
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42

43 The Jamyang centre is in a former courthouse... purchased at auction 1
44
45 November 1995, following which there was a careful restoration and
46
47 conversion of the building that which was undertaken by members of the
48
49 Buddhist community in communication with groups like English Heritage
50
51 as the building is Grade II listed. [On the day of our visit, t]here has been a
52
53 work camp going on for the previous days, during which building users
54
55 have been making repairs and refreshing paintwork, and there are still signs
56
57 of that being underway.

58 (Field notes)
59
60

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2
3 The head monk at Three Wheels, recounted a significant event in this Buddhist centre's
4 history - the making of the Zen garden that was designed by John White, the then
5 Provost of UCL and Professor of Art History. According to Reverend Kemmyo Sato,
6
7 White had been impressed by the Zen gardens in Japan where he had practiced
8
9 meditation even though he was not himself a Buddhist:
10
11
12

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14
15 A few months after the purchase of the house [in which the centre is
16 located], Professor John White and I were standing in the garden. I didn't
17 like the previous garden very much. The atmosphere was very gloomy... I
18 said to John, 'I would like to change a little bit this garden'. And he suddenly
19 said, 'how about making a Zen garden?'.
20
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24
25 Reverend Kemmyo Sato was unable to agree before calling his master in Japan who
26 thought it a 'wonderful idea' which would 'improve the mutual understanding' between
27 the two men. As a consequence the garden was constructed, employing voluntary
28 manual labour over a period of three years. As Reverend Kemmyo Sato reflects, 'John
29 insisted this point, we shouldn't use machines. We did it by hand. "Why are you
30 insisting this point?" "It will involve people"... 80 people from the UK and Japan. We
31 had a very nice, yes, happy time at that time.' One hundred and sixty people gathered at
32 the inaugural ceremony of the garden in 1997, including a majority of non-Buddhists,
33 scholars, the neighbours, and those involved in the making of the garden.
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44
45 FGS represents another illustration. This organization bought a property to
46 convert in London's West End, as Jenny, a woman in her 30s of Taiwanese origin,
47 explains:
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51
52 I started to volunteer. At that time because everything started from scratch
53 so we didn't have many things like- even the meditation hall. So everything-
54 the wood or whatever- there's a monk, they're actually cutting the wood... So
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1
2
3 everything had to be very economic and you had to try and do as much as
4 you can by lay people's help without buying them ready cut, ready made.
5
6 (Jenny)
7
8

9 Similarly, across the Triratna movement there is a history of doing considerable
10 building works on their key sites, such as the transformation in the late 1970s of the old
11 fire station into the current London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green which was
12 undertaken largely by volunteer labour. The former WLBC was in a Victorian house
13 near Royal Oak tube station, which was purchased in the early 1990s, and gradually
14 became too small for the growing number of attendees. Property price increases over
15 the period militated against buying a larger residential property in the area. However, a
16 new building erected nearby included a ground floor and basement required by the local
17 authority to be used for educational purposes only. An agreement was made with the
18 developer to exchange their residential property for a long lease on this, much larger
19 and, because of the limits on its use, much cheaper, premises. Because the new site was
20 essentially a shell that required a complete fit-out, they departed from the normal ways
21 of furnishing a new Buddhist centre, a necessity which generated, as Yvette, a woman
22 in her 40s who was born in the Netherlands sets out, some unease amongst the WLBC's
23 attendees:
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44 Normally, what would happen is that you buy an old place with loads to do
45 and you get your volunteers and everybody starts painting. ... So... just
46 because of this project developer, just because we get this concrete box, we
47 needed to have architects and we've been launched into this whole way of
48 being and operating that we're just not used to at all. Paying all kinds of
49 money which we just find staggering.
50
51 (Yvette)
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57 Diamond Way, presently a new and relatively small movement in the UK, established a
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3 Tibetan Buddhist Centre in 2013 in the buildings of the Beaufoy Institute in Vauxhall.
4
5 The buildings, which are Grade II listed, once housed a boys' technical institute which
6
7 was established in the early 1900s as part of the ragged school movement. When
8
9 Diamond Way took control of the site, the buildings had been lying derelict for some
10
11 time. The objective of Diamond Way was to expand and become more prominent on the
12
13 London Buddhism stage. Once again renovation proved to be an important part of their
14
15 narrative, where presently the intention is to construct a ground floor café and Buddhist
16
17 centre with residential spaces on the upper floors. Because the community is small, the
18
19 centre has been organising work weekends for members who fly in from across Europe.
20
21

22
23 Constructing sites through voluntary labour was thus revealed as core to carving
24
25 out the new Buddhist milieus in London, whilst also serving to generate a feeling
26
27 community between practitioners. Voluntarism was found to be central across new
28
29 movements and old ones, different ethnicities, and also different levels of wealth. What
30
31 was striking, however, in contrast to other faiths that have expanded in recent years
32
33 (Dwyer, Gilbert, and Shah, 2013; Naylor and Ryan, 2002) was the relative invisibility
34
35 of Buddhist sites. By occupying former domestic dwellings, old schools and churches,
36
37 and by electing to mark their presence discretely, their presence had gone largely
38
39 unnoticed and uncontested by the wider community.
40
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43

44 *Attaching Practices*

45
46 Physical involvement in the material construction of Buddhist sites is one way by which
47
48 Buddhists demonstrate a clear attachment to their community and embed it, albeit
49
50 subtly, into London's urban fabric. In the course of our fieldwork, we also identified a
51
52 series of other, more day to day practices, which generate an attachment with
53
54 Buddhism. These operate to keep people engaged in ways extending beyond purely
55
56 faith-based practice, and in so doing act to strengthen their connection with the faith,
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2
3 generating Buddhist 'resolve' by involving practitioners in the continual activity of
4
5 bringing Buddhism into being. Often, they are rooted in the creation of a new, Buddhist,
6
7 social and cultural identity practices or the maintenance of existing ones. To be able to
8
9 do so rests upon the presence of the collective of Buddhist participants available in a
10
11 large city. By undertaking these activities, individuals build Buddhist practice into their
12
13 everyday life.
14

15
16 In the running of a large Buddhist centre, there are numerous day to day tasks
17
18 like cooking and cleaning which need to be accomplished. To undertake these tasks is,
19
20 on one level, an act of generosity towards the centre, but participants like Jenny and
21
22 Alexandra, a young woman in her early 20s, also reported finding a particularly
23
24 Buddhist way by which to undertake them.
25
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27
28 Right from the beginning... I was really fully engaged... And simply you ...
29
30 clean the Buddha statue like those in the service or even go in the reception,
31
32 answer the phone or help in the main shrine while doing the services.

33
34 (Jenny)
35

36
37 In order to graduate along the path, as a Buddhist would say... to expand the
38
39 mind and become a better person maybe, to use normal words, you would
40
41 use meditation as a main tool for that... But another way is of doing it by
42
43 more physical labour... And that's when cooking fits into that. It's just like
44
45 the way we put our intention to whatever we're doing. We can completely
46
47 transform that task.

48
49 (Alexandra)
50

51
52 Similar contributions take place in non-Western Buddhist centres, too, though perhaps
53
54 taking different forms. For example, monks do not cook their own food but instead eat
55
56 food prepared by members of the community that is cooked or heated up in Buddhist
57
58 centre kitchens. During our observations, one of us ate a meal prepared by women at the
59
60

1
2
3 Wat Buddhapadipa temple. In Triratna, not only is volunteering on cleaning and
4
5 maintenance tasks important, but so also are their 'team based right livelihood
6
7 activities'. These offer a subsistence wage to enable participants to devote their time to
8
9 Buddhism and to the organisation without being dominated by the demands of a
10
11 conventional job. The concept of 'right livelihood' is a particularly Triratna based
12
13 perspective on the Buddhist teachings around employment which urge followers to earn
14
15 a living in a way that is positive and does not cause harm (The Buddhist Centre, 2016).
16
17 It also acts as a way of financially supporting people to take charge of the day to day
18
19 running of the centres, or to operate small businesses to raise funds. At the London
20
21 Buddhist Centre, the economic pressures of recent times have put this system under
22
23 strain, leading to the demise of the Cherry Orchard café which they had been running
24
25 for several years. However, a second hand bookshop called Jambala, and a second hand
26
27 clothes shop, Lama's Pyjamas, continue to operate. As Sarah, a woman in her 40s who
28
29 had much experience on the Centre's right livelihood approaches, these activities
30
31 generate attachment to the Buddhist faith and opportunities to incorporate Buddhism
32
33 into day to day practice.
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39
40 You have to get on with it and find a way of working together. ... the cafe
41
42 was successful in terms of money for a few years, and it was also very
43
44 successful in terms of a place for people, women, to practice. It was a
45
46 women's team, and quite a lot of women got ordained in that situation. You
47
48 know, in terms of friendship and spiritual practice, I think it really did help
49
50 people.

51
52 (Sarah)

53
54 Communal living represents a further route to deepen involvement with Buddhist
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56 practice. Many centres have monks living permanently in or adjacent to the site: Wat
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58 Buddhapadipa, Wat Buddharam, London Buddhist Vihara, East London Buddhist
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2
3 Cultural Centre, London FGS, and Three Wheels. Monks at Wat Buddhapadipa have a
4
5 strict schedule to which they adhere, as these field notes from a conversation with
6
7 several monks describe:
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11 Breakfast is at 6am with morning chanting following at 8am. Then the
12 monks work in the garden or on paperwork in the office until 11am, when
13 they have lunch (they must not have food after midday unless sick or
14 travelling). At 6pm there is evening chanting. Some monks study English at
15 college during the day or study other things. They may also be called out to
16 attend ceremonies or bless businesses.
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19
20 (Field notes)
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23
24 By comparison, the more recent or Western focused movements do not have monks in
25 the traditional fashion. However, people often live on site or group together with others
26 to create faith centred communities. Like right livelihood, communal living offers
27 another way to create new cultures and traditions of the kind Oscar outlines.
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32
33 Thursday's community night so you're in unless you're away... people don't
34 make any other plans in London on a Thursday. And we have dinner in the
35 normal way although it's more relaxed because people spend a bit longer at
36 the table ... Someone makes cups of tea. We go through anything practical,
37 pretty briefly... Then we split up to do cleaning. ... On other community
38 nights, we'd study a bit of text. On every other community night this year
39 we've been doing life stories, so it's a different person's turn each week to
40 tell the story of their life in two hours. And everyone else just listens.
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46 (Oscar)
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50 In this way, through cooking and cleaning, and even the routine practices of living,
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52 London's Buddhists generate and strengthen their attachment to the faith.
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Connecting practices

Buddhist practice does not take place in isolation from its wider urban community. That said, it is not a faith that sets out to proselytize or actively recruit followers, nor are there calls to prayer or church bells, which contribute to Buddhism's lack of visibility in the city. Nevertheless, Buddhism seeks a presence in London and have a positive impact upon it, and Westerners involved in Buddhism are typically socially engaged (Cantwell and Kawanami, 2009). Often, these activities bear a resemblance to various other faith-based organisations' voluntary activities in the public sphere (Beaumont and Cloke, 2012). These connecting practices are typologised in the following three key ways, through commercial engagements, the offering of meditation classes to the lay community, and through voluntary activities in the public sphere.

First, there are the commercial engagements that, as well as providing much needed funds, are seen as a way of making their centres relevant and accessible to the wider community.

We've got people going to the second-hand clothes shop who would never come into the Buddhist centre.

(Matthew)

I suppose I'm quite interested in giving people a taste of- you could say a taste of the Buddha's vision without them really knowing about it. It's a bit like at Lama's Pyjamas, not everyone would even know that we're Buddhist, but they might leave the shop feeling, 'wow, I had a really nice chat with her' or 'that was a really good interaction'. They can't quite say what it is but they pick up on it.

(Sarah)

Jamyang has a café, several function rooms and office spaces that can be hired by local businesses, although they are selective about to whom they will rent spaces and limit

1
2
3 themselves to small, ethical, businesses and NGOs. They also deploy the former prison
4
5 cells for renting on a bed and breakfast basis.
6

7 Second, meditation has been key for making Buddhism relevant publically for
8
9 all Buddhist centres, particularly the new Western focussed centres (as McKenzie
10
11 (2014) also highlighted in a different context). Guided meditation for newcomers to
12
13 Buddhism was available at all the centres visited with the exception of the Wat
14
15 Buddharam. Though there is an aspiration at all centres that such activities will
16
17 encourage new people to join the Buddhist faith, such an outcome is not obligatory and,
18
19 generally, the provision is or claims to be welcoming of secular participants.
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24 I think [teaching meditation] is offering life tools to people and those tools
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26 are of use to people and it may or may not be that they want to integrate
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28 them with the complete package of Buddhism. And I feel I'm planting seeds
29
30 and it may be in the future that they realise that they want a bit more and
31
32 they've had a sense of Buddhism and they'll come back to it... It's nice when
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34 that happens.

35
36 (Robert)

37
38 Western Buddhist movements have also made significant inroads into mindfulness
39
40 courses which are deliberately secular and entirely separate from their Buddhist
41
42 practice. For example, the LBC has a space specifically designed to be adapted from a
43
44 Buddhist meditation hall into a secular space called Breathing Space, and Jamyang also
45
46 offers secular mindfulness meditation. This has reflected a wider public interest in
47
48 mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn 2006, The Guardian, 2016), and its therapeutic recognition by
49
50 the British National Health Service (NHS, 2016). LBC's mindfulness initiative followed
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52 that of their sister centre in Manchester, who were offering mindfulness retreats for full
53
54 time carers. As one practitioner, Dr. Paramabandhu Groves, who led the development of
55
56 Breathing Space at the LBC explained:
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3 [Initially] there was some concern. ..we've always made it very clear that
4 our beginners classes are open to anybody. You don't have to be Buddhist,
5 you can come along and learn to meditate... although we have the big
6 Buddha figure we didn't light the candles because somehow that was being
7 religious, you've got the Buddha figure though [laughs] so it sounds a bit
8 ridiculous I suppose what I'm saying in that is that there was always
9 sensitivity to .. make it really accessible to anybody and not bash people
10 over the head with Buddhism ... sometimes, actually, I think too much, I
11 think we were almost too shy of saying it's a Buddhist Centre which it
12 obviously was. I think that has changed over the years as Buddhism's
13 become more wide and accessible. ..Having said that, there were some
14 concerns from some quarters.. who feared that in a way it was watering
15 down the dharma.
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18 (Dr. Paramabandhu Groves)
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28 Third, there is engagement with local communities, which was evident in all the
29 Buddhist centres visited. For many centres, particularly those affiliated with older, non-
30 Western movements, the centres act as a point of connection to the country or region of
31 origin. Wat Buddhapadipa in particular has language and cultural classes for children of
32 Thai families and all distribute non-English newspapers from the country of origin.
33 Each of the centres openly encourages visitors to come and look around. Wat
34 Buddhapadipa and the London Buddhist Vihara also had connections with local school
35 that enabling the school to hold assemblies and other events there. Three Wheels,
36 although somewhat hidden in an indistinguishable suburban house opens, its spectacular
37 Zen garden to the public for the National Gardens Scheme's open gardens day (NGS,
38 2016).
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52 Some Buddhist centres extend a caring role in the local community. For
53 example, at Wat Buddhapadipa we were introduced to a homeless man who regularly
54 attends the temple to eat and help out there. Similarly, on an early visit to the LBC, we
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3 witnessed a man in some distress sitting talking to one of the workers in the garden. In a
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5 more formalised caring capacity, the LBC also makes its retreat centres in rural parts of
6
7 the UK available for respite breaks for full time carers of elderly or disabled people.
8
9

10 11 **Conclusion**

12
13 In conclusion, how does Buddhism fit into the postsecular urban landscape, what makes
14
15 it distinctive and for whom does it matter? The number of people declaring themselves
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17 as Buddhists has indeed risen in recent years, following the rise of other non-traditional
18
19 religions in the UK, however this research suggests that Buddhism differs from these in
20
21 several ways. First, it is a faith whose growth is not predominantly attributable to the
22
23 rise in new migrant communities in the city (though this does have a contributory
24
25 effect). Rather it owes its growth predominantly to an increased interest expressed by
26
27 people attracted to the religion for its practices of meditation and mindfulness, which
28
29 are seen as helpful in dealing with the hectic and stressful pressures of everyday life in
30
31 the city. Second, Buddhism remains largely invisible in the urban and suburban
32
33 landscape of London, adapting buildings that are already in place, with little material
34
35 impact on the built environment; as a result its arrival in the urban landscape has been
36
37 less subject to contestation than other religious practices¹. Third, Buddhist practices,
38
39 such as meditation, are quiet, and even where chanting takes place it bears no
40
41 resemblance to the loud singing and music of many of the new popular religious
42
43 practices associated with Evangelical Christianity. Buddhism has no sonic presence in
44
45 the city- there is no call for prayer as in mosques, or church bells. There is no
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47 proselytizing and followers find their own way to Buddhist practice, often through a
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55 ¹ This is not to suggest that there are no Buddhist temples in some cities that are purpose built or
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57 more visible. In London however, there are few of these.
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3 very personal path rather than public, familial or ethnic connections. In each of these
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5 ways, Buddhism operates almost under the radar from public view. At a broader socio-
6
7 political level, Buddhist practitioners from overseas are not associated with wider
8
9 political or fundamentalist movements, sharing neither the conservatism of some of the
10
11 Evangelical Christian movements, which is articulated publically in relation to debates
12
13 around gay equality for example, neither are they subject to wider demonising
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15 discourses of association with terrorism which have plagued some Muslim
16
17 communities.
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21 In this paper we have demonstrated also the importance of religious practices.
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23 All Buddhist groups, with varying degrees of both willingness and success, seek to
24
25 make aspects of their Buddhist faith accessible to the wider community whether through
26
27 offering catering, public access to their buildings and gardens, or through offering
28
29 mindfulness-led mental health initiatives. And while Buddhist practitioners might like
30
31 to encourage outsiders to become part of the faith, these community engagement
32
33 practices are neither directly nor implicitly motivated by congregation building
34
35 objectives. This research has thus revealed that Buddhism features as a small but
36
37 significant part of the postsecular urban landscape, but that it differs in various ways
38
39 from other religions that have had a growing presence in the city in recent years. This
40
41 study has shown the importance of a focus on religious practices as well as faith, and
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43 contributes to a growing sociological and geographical set of literatures that point to the
44
45 significance of religion in the making of contemporary urban social worlds.
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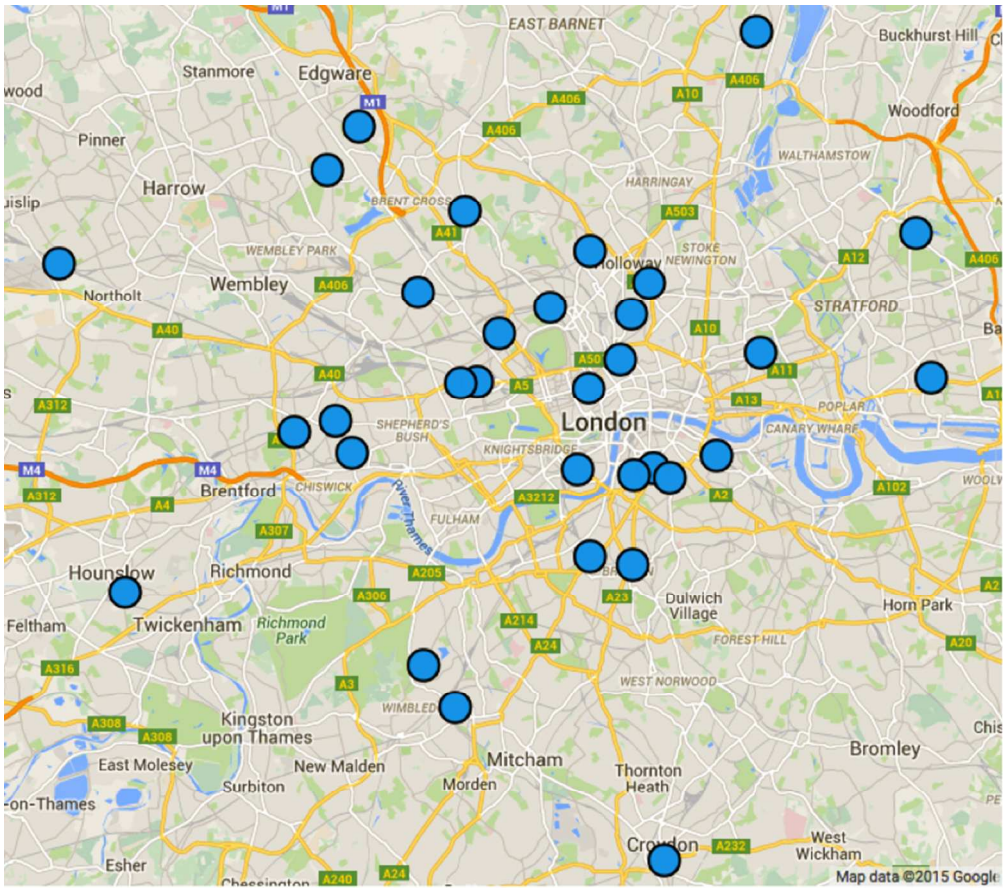


Figure 1: Map showing the location of the thirty-three places of Buddhist faith practice identified in London. (Map date © Google Maps 2015, points plotted using hampstermap.com)

Table 1: Table showing Buddhist centres visited over the research period.

Name of Centre	School of Buddhism	Further details	Location
Diamond Way	Karma Kagyu	Diamond Way founded by Lama Ole Nydahl in 1972 in order to diffuse Buddhism in the West. Follows the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism	Kennington, inner south London
Jamyang	Mahayana	Part of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Traditional (FPMT) movement which was founded in 1975 to teach Buddhism to Western students in Nepal.	Kennington, inner south London
Buddhist Society	N/A, Lay	Founded in 1924 in London by Christmas Humphreys.	Pimlico, central London
Heruka	New Kadampa	A tradition founded by Kelsang Gyatso in the UK in 1991 which draws from Mahayana Buddhist teaching deliberately reinterpreted for a Western audience.	Golders Green, suburban north-west London
London FGS	Pure Land	The Fo Guang Shan (FGS) movement was founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun in Taiwan in 1967.	Fitzrovia, central London
Three Wheels	Shin	A branch of the Shogyoji Temple, founded in Japan in 1593.	Acton, suburban north-west London
Wat Buddhapadipa	Theravada	Thai regional tradition.	Wimbledon, suburban south London
Wat Buddharam	Theravada	Thai regional tradition.	Wanstead, suburban east London
London Buddhist Vihara	Theravada	Sri Lankan regional tradition.	Turnham Green, suburban west London
East London Buddhist Cultural Centre	Theravada	Sri Lankan regional tradition.	Newham, inner east London
London Buddhist Centre (LBC)	Triratna	Formed in the UK in 1967 as the Friends 'of the Western Buddhist Order and renamed Triratna (Three Jewels) in 2010. Intended to be a new and specifically Western interpretation of Buddhism.	Bethnal Green, inner east London
West London Buddhist Centre (WLBC)	Triratna	See above.	Royal Oak, inner west London
Rigpa	Vajrayana	Rigpa follows the Tibetan tradition. The movement was founded by	Barnsbury, inner north London

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		Sogyal Rinpoche in 1979.	
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