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Festschrift:

Essays in Honour of Peggy Morgan

Edited by

Bettina E. Schmidt, Andrew Burns and Wendy Dossett

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Peggy the Tutor, Mentor, Colleague and Friend

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With this Festschrift we are honouring Peggy Morgan; a colleague and friend who has touched the lives of the editors and contributors of this volume, as well as guided and influenced their careers. The regard in which she is held is evidenced in the tender tributes, poems and the impressive academic articles submitted by colleagues with the express purpose of celebrating and thanking her, in the year of her 80th Birthday.

The three editors of this Festschrift represent elements of the wide field of Peggy's admirers. Professor Bettina Schmidt is Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre based at the University of Wales, Trinity St David in Lampeter, which owes its presence there to Peggy's singleness of purpose in securing Sir Alister Hardy's academic legacy. Dr Wendy Dossett lectures in Buddhism and Religious Studies at the University of Chester and owes to Peggy her time at the RERC a decade ago, and her involvement in the Shap Working Party for Religions in Education. Andrew Burns is former chair of the Alister Hardy Society and a graduate of the MA in Religious Experience, the unique MA programme devised by Peggy while she was at Westminster College, Oxford, and freely gifted by her to the University of Wales, Lampeter. These external facts about Peggy's mentorship, however, do not do justice to what she means to us. They fail to capture her remarkable empathy, her never-ending support, her friendship, her kindness and her hospitality. Along with the editors, most of the contributors to this volume have spent many happy hours in her house, enjoying her home-cooked meals and her lively conversations, and we have all benefitted from her advocacy of our work and her support of our personal lives beyond the professional realm. Peggy – we want to say thank you with this Festschrift, to show you how much you mean to us, and to reflect back to you just some of the many ways you have shaped us. Andrew Burns here speaks of Peggy as a teacher:

> It is a privilege to be one of the editors of this tribute to Peggy. I (Andrew) along with Bettina and Wendy have known Peggy for many years and together with all of

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> the contributors to this Festschrift have some very personal and fond memories of our time with her. My own encounter began when I was an undergraduate in Oxford and Peggy was one of my tutors. Her enthusiasm for teaching religions was infectious, in particular the personal encounters and visits to synagogues, and temples. These personal meetings with those from faith communities was inspiring and so much more informative than simply using a textbook. Peggy's own interest in Buddhism proved very important when I came to research my dissertation and she was happy to share a number of contacts which was a huge help to me in what was then an unfamiliar field. I was later to join the MA programme which Peggy had established at Westminster College (later at the University of Wales). We remain in regular contact and I always value her thoughts and insights into current research and religious studies.

Wendy speaks of Peggy as a feminist advocate:

> Soon after Peggy, singlehandedly, brought the contents of Sir Alister Hardy's study and the archive of more than 6000 letters to Lampeter at the turn of the millennium, I was appointed as an Associate Director. As a non-Oxbridge educated woman from a working-class background, I tended to be somewhat awed by the company I found myself in. However, Peggy showed me, through her incisive observations, that the machinations of class and gender politics were exactly that, machinations. She continuously encouraged me to keep looking for my own voice, as a woman and as a Religious Studies academic in a theology dominated environment.

Bettina too speaks of Peggy's ability to reach out and empower, and of her unique qualities as a friend:

> My link to Peggy had a different origin. In 2004, I was offered a departmental lectureship in study of religions at Oxford. Shortly afterwards, I received an email from Peggy. Mentioning Michael Pye, the professor for study of religions at my alma mater, as a 'reference' Peggy offered her help and even a room if I wanted to come to Oxford looking for a place to live. Peggy became my (unofficial) mentor during my time at Oxford and helped me through the labyrinth of Oxford. She opened her home, introduced me to numerous colleagues and friends, showed me the town and explained how the university works (very different to any other

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university I knew previously). She became a friend, the first one I made after moving to the UK.

Our stories are personal, of course, but Peggy also leaves a huge academic legacy. Peggy was a student of Ninian Smart's in at Lancaster University, where she embraced his ground-breaking (at that time) phenomenological approach. The many texts books that Peggy has written since then (for example, *Testing the Global Ethic* (with M. Braybrooke) (1998) *Six Religions in the Twenty First Century* (with W.O. Cole) (2000), *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (with C. Lawton) (2007) and *Get Set for Religious Studies* (with D. Corrywright) (2006) owe much to Smart's vision, shared by Peggy, of studying religious traditions for their own sake, and not for their relationship to a normative Christianity. Through these books, which are still widely used and cherished today, she has introduced new generations of religious studies students, not only to Smart's approach, but also to a focus on the authority of personal religious and spiritual experience, and an attentiveness to what these days might be called 'lived-religion', especially in the lives of women and children. Peggy has also written widely on Buddhism, and Wendy remembers the time in the 1990s, before Denise Cush's immense contributions to the field, when one of Peggy's work-packs was the literally the only substantial resource available to her for school students on Buddhist practices, as opposed to texts or teachings. The vision behind the focus on practices spoke volumes about Peggy's interest in religious people and their everyday lives.

In addition to her writings, Peggy also has been a truly community-minded member of the academy, taking various responsibilities in associations and centres. A notable feature of her style of engagement with such organisations is her care for their documentary histories. She is an avid collector of agendas, minutes, documents and ephemera, and because of this the organisations with which she has been involved have been able to retain a sense of their own history. This careful archiving is a highly significant form of academic service. So, too, is her commitment to the informal publication of essays and articles by scholars associated with these organisations, such as the splendid series of 'Occasional Papers' of the Religious Education Resources Centre. We cannot list all the organisations to which Peggy has offered both support and leadership but we want to highlight three: the Religious Experience Research Centre, the British Association for the Study of Religions and the Shap Working Party for World Religions in Education. Peggy was the Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, first at Westminster College, and then, when Westminster closed and merged with Oxford Brookes University, she organised the move to Lampeter and set the Centre up in its new home. Peggy was involved in the Shap Working Party from very early on, served a

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period as Chair, and, until its formal closure in 2019, was on the sub-committee which evaluated the Religious Education resources nominated annually for the much coveted Shap Award. Peggy's involvement in the British Association for Study of Religions over the years is not limited to her encouragement of young scholars, although that is now her major and much appreciated contribution. She also served as conference organiser, as secretary, and, lastly, as President 2000-2003. She has rarely, if ever, missed an annual conference since her presidency, and has always been on hand to support those leading the organisation through choppy disciplinary waters since that time. It is no coincidence that within the pages of this Festschrift are contributions from fellow BASR Presidents from recent decades; Ursula King 1991–1994; Brain Bocking, 1994–1997, James Cox, 2003– 2006, Marion Bowman 2006–2009 as well as the current President, Bettina Schmidt.

Other contributions in this Festschrift reflect the wide range of people Peggy inspired with her friendship and generosity. Among the contributors are colleagues Peggy worked with in different institutions and former students that she supported as tutor or mentor over the years at Westminster, Oxford and Lampeter. As editors, we were delighted with the willingness of colleagues to contribute and with the truly excellent quality of the pieces submitted, and we would like to thank each contributor warmly. All the contributors were working under Covid-19 lockdowns and often without access to their academic libraries. We appreciate their efforts to express their regard for Peggy despite the challenges and anxieties many of them faced personally. We would also like to thank Dr. Jack Hunter, honorary research fellow with the RERC, for his work, care and attention to detail in typesetting this volume.

It is entirely appropriate that in a volume dedicated to Peggy that there should be poetry. All of us, we are certain, have received one of Peggy's trademark handmade cards, with a poem, either penned by Peggy herself, or one that caught her eye because of some intimate shared knowledge. Brian Bocking has so brilliantly put into words what so many of us feel about Peggy. Professor Eleanor Nesbitt's beautiful poetry on the other hand, perfectly captures both the kinds of quotidian moments we know move Peggy as much as they do Eleanor herself. It also reflects that curious and investigative attitude to the world around us that Peggy models. Professor Ursula King reflects on her long association with Peggy whom she has known since the early 1970s, through several key organisations and through long-lasting friendship. Professor Denise Cush, in her wonderful account of developments in teaching about Buddhism in schools, tracks and celebrates Peggy's influential part in both insisting that Buddhism was not 'too difficult' for young children, and actively resourcing teachers to teach about it. Denise speaks for many of us when she describes Peggy as 'an inspiring example of a woman not afraid to

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trust the authority of their own experience, nor to speak about about it.' Michael Pye's piece is another one focused on Buddhism. It draws out themes from conversations he had with Peggy during a field visit in Kyoto, Japan, around the messages in, and everyday practices around, Buddhist texts about emptiness. Dominic Corrywright returns the Buddhist theme in the volume to that of pedagogy, and notes his good fortune of working in a certain parampara (tradition of passing teachings from guru to student), that of Peggy Morgan. He draws movingly on Buddhist ideas about the relationship between friendship and teaching inherent in the concept of metta/maitri, and which we see embodied in Peggy's own attitude to both friendship and teaching. As if evincing the parampara to which he referred, his wonderful gender-inclusive analysis of Buddhist Awakening draws explicitly on Peggy's own. Dr Naomi Appleton's piece riffs on a theme resonant with Dominic's first, that of the meaning of friendship in Buddhism, and she puts her redoubtable textual skills to work on examples of friendship in a Sanskrit collection of stories, the Avadānaśataka. She remarks aptly that friendship is 'both an entirely "ordinary experience" and – at its best – an extraordinary and transformative experience." Later in the volume Elizabeth Harris' reflexive account of her fieldwork in Sri Lanka, and of Peggy's role in supporting her as she explored issues of standpoint, gender and postcolonial legacy, closes by naming Peggy as 'a pioneer in religious studies, convinced that the discipline should be critical, outward facing and socially responsible, emphases that have not lost their potency.' James Cox's piece brings Peggy's interest in 'the ordinary' and in 'experience' into conversation with his own work on the definition of religion. Jim contends that 'for an experience to be religious, there is no requirement to posit a transcendental object as the focus or the alleged cause of the experience.' He takes the reader on a journey through some of the fraught definitional and territorial debates in the study of religions, to settle finally on an approach which situates religious experience in socio-cultural terms, and in doing so references Peggy's inaugural article in the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* which influenced his thinking.

Marcus Braybrooke, in his account of working with Peggy on the 1998 volume Testing the Global Ethic, records Peggy's often behind-the-scenes efforts to facilitate and support the work of those committed to interfaith dialogue. Andrew Burns testifies to this too, in his personal account as a former student of Peggy's involved in the Alister Hardy Society and in interfaith activities. Ann Watkins, as a former librarian at the RERC, writes an appreciation of Peggy's 'not for personal gain' approach to networking. Dr Marion Bowman's article, on the common sight of memorial benches as foci for the performance of love and loss, offered a perfect fit for a volume celebrating someone who has been alongside so many of us as we have faced losses. Dr Maria Jaschok's splendid article on Chinese women's mosques resonates strongly with Peggy's own concern with women's

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agency. Maria has Peggy in mind as she reflects on 'the role played by ordinary women in shaping lasting traditions to become conduits of knowledge, the stuff of history, that would otherwise remain unknown.' Professor Bettina Schmidt's piece challenging the nonordinary/ordinary binary with her own fieldwork on mediumship, offers a convincing close to the volume. Rather than re-framing the quotidian as special and meaningful as others have done in this volume, she takes experiences which from a western secular standpoint would naturally be categorised as ' non-ordinary', and considers the tendency to forget that these experiences are had by ordinary people in ordinary contexts. As Bettina acknowledges, with heartfelt gratitude, ordinary people in ordinary contexts have always been Peggy's focus of concern.

In the year of Peggy's eightieth birthday the editors and contributors to this volume seek to honour and recognise a career of significance and value and to do so from both personal and scholarly perspectives. We know we have failed to capture so many dimensions of Peggy's life of academic service and personal friendship, and this collection cannot possibly do her justice. It is however, offered in gratitude and love.

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Verses in Honour of Peggy Morgan on the Auspicious Occasion of her 80th Birthday (With apologies to Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

Brian Bocking

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In Xanadu, did Kublai Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree…
In Lancaster did Ninian Smart
Inaugurate a new degree:
Which studied all the faiths of Man,
A term including (then), woman -
(Though 'he' includes no 'she'.)

In thrice three terms, BAs were earned,
True facts, cool theories duly learned,
And yet our Peggy fast outshone them all
Receiving in the graduation hall
The first MA (Religious Studies) conferred
In that distinguished corner of the world.

But oh! by twists and turns of fate
She found herself in Oxford where, we know,
She found religion, singular, on show,
But scarce a hint of all those other faiths
That Lancaster had taught her to embrace.

Agnostic'lly methodic, through and through
She taught her students (and the Fellows too),
That nothing can be truly understood
By viewing one tree only, not the wood.

The students Peggy tutored – minds expanded
And colleagues she's supported, open-handed,
Regard her with respect and with affection
As 'one of us': a staunch and true campaigner
For scholarship – regardless of one's gender.

The attitudes and values she imbibed
In Lancaster, and nourished through the years
Are now in legion hearts and minds inscribed
Through Peggy's skilful nurture of ideas.

Life's brief; so much we would experience
May lean to 'I', at selfless 'you's' expense.
So, in conclusion, Peggy, let me state
That you, who've helped so many through,
Should be aware that we appreciate
Not just your many kindly deeds, but You!

With love
Brian.

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In Praise of Peggy

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It is a great honour to contribute some words of congratulation on the occasion of Peggy's special Birthday. However, due to my ongoing illnesses I find it difficult at present to write a longer piece of reflection on a highly valued colleague and special friend of many years. Others will have written in greater detail about Peggy's many achievements and strengths, and the valuable contributions she has made over so many years to different aspects of Religious Studies, especially when she was teaching at the Westminster Institute which later became Oxford Brookes University. Equally valuable was her important work as Tutor for the Study of Religions at the Oxford Faculty of Theology and her work as Lecturer in the Study of Religions at Mansfield College, also in Oxford.

I cannot remember where and when Peggy and I first met. It seems a long, long time ago – not quite a life-time, but a large part of it. Peggy's name and some of her work were first mentioned to me when Michael Pye moved from the University of Lancaster to the University of Leeds, probably in 1972 or shortly afterwards. But I had little opportunity to meet her then and got to know her much better after she had moved with her family from Lancaster to Oxford, especially when she worked at the Westminster Institute. I also knew her name through the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) which she joined as an early member, as can be seen from its first Register of Members. Much of Peggy's interests and work have been concerned with world religions in education, especially in schools. Within her wide range of interests Buddhism has always had a special place and she has produced many valuable contributions to all these areas.

Just over fifty years ago British teachers and lecturers working on world religions met in Shap village in Cumbria, at the edge of the Lake District, where they founded the "Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education" which brought together school teachers and lecturers on world religions from colleges and universities all over the country. Neither Peggy nor I were there, but we joined quite soon afterwards and have been members ever since. Later regular meetings used to take place in London, usually

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once a year, but the Jubilee Conference celebrating its 50 years of existence took place last year in the Shap Wells Hotel (11-12 April 2019). We have a wonderful photograph of all its participants standing at the front entrance with Peggy right in the centre – a suitable visual confirmation of the recognition given to her work by her colleagues, many of whom are good friends. All of these appreciate greatly the special gift Peggy has in linking people with each other, so that they can collaborate in many different ways.

Over the years Peggy also contributed much to the BASR as secretary and conference organiser and as Honorary President from 2000-2003. Following on from this she organised in 2004 the BASR's 50th Anniversary Conference in Oxford which will be remembered by many BASR members as a very happy special event. Other contributions to this Festschrift will reveal many different aspects of Peggy's rich experiences gathered during her long life. They show what a wonderful person and lovely friend she is whose special strength is her great capacity of putting people in touch with each other, so that they bond together and collaborate creatively with each other.

Let us celebrate and praise Peggy for her very special qualities and achievements, and may we continue to enjoy her friendship and presence for many years to come.

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Poems of (Extra)Ordinary Life for Peggy

Eleanor Nesbitt

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(1) Something Understood

Upstairs, on Radio 4, that word 'noetic'
propels me to the time I first read William James.
Downstairs, the scent of stocks my cousin sent
transports me. Yes, the world is very good.
Outside, I taste the rain-washed garden's sharpness,
the year's first raspberries, inimitably red.
Indoors again, espy a treasured photo
of potted snowdrops, hyacinth, daffodils,
azalea, bespeaking nurture, welcome –
it's Peggy's porch, and I remember years
of reassuring cards and timely messages.
Inside, a deepening sense of gratitude.

(2) Blackberry Picking

Blackberry picking, I join generations
of blackberrying women. Nothing needs
concentration like picking berries and not
being pricked, but my mind blurs with millennia.

No need to pay entry to pristinely preserved
dwellings, to ponder the pitchers and platters
in kitchens with hearths and no taps. No need
to wander museums or re-enact battles.

Gathering berries I am with women,
future and past – frugal and fanciful,
opportunistic, picking and thinking
ahead and behind.

(3) For Peggy ten years ago on her 70th birthday

The day that you were born the Battle ceased,
But 1940s fortitude remained
To see you through as challenges increased.

Your humour, love and loyalty sustained
So many, many friends who came to you
For wisdom, hospitality and grace
And memorable conversations too –
The generosity of Northmoor Place.

In far-flung countries memories abound
Of warmth and welcome, wit and whimsy here.
The talent and integrity they found
Inspire so many scholars far and near
Who, once in Oxford, came to Northmoor Place
And glimpsed the beauty of Lord Buddha's face.

(4) Foxgloves

The foxglove plants are £4.99.
How do you price a foxglove? By the back door mine
are random, self-sown, unremarkable, apart
from every scalloped bell hiding a work of art.

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(5) The Bush

The bush?
Sudden, red, amber, gold,
Blazing and unconsumed.

The ground?
Like other ground,
Transfigured and
Forgiving, springing green.

My shoes?
I keep them on;
The grass is damp,
Someone might see,
And broom is broom.

(6) Cement Works

For the cement works to look
almost beautiful
takes sunlight after rain,
whipped cloud and windy sky,
the tracery of interlacing branches,
a darting bird,
my heart springing with gladness
on a fleeting train.

(7) Because

Why did I pick them up?
Their glossiness, brownness,
hardness, roundness
reminders of childhood
scrabbling in dewy leaves,
then making dolls house stools,
tables and chairs
from conkers, pins and wools.

I picked them up
because of this week's news:
all over Europe
horse chestnut trees
in terminal decline.

I hold their newness,
wholeness, smoothness,
with gladness
while I can.

(8) Pond

Two or three feet across is enough
and two feet deep
with a plastic lining to hold water.
Edge with agreeably rounded stones.
Add aquatic plants and water snails.
Wait.

Winter will harden the surface, dust it with snow.
In Spring it will seethe
with frenetic frogs.
It will green over with duckweed,
be kingcup-golden,
forget-me-not-blue.

It will be blessed with spawn.
Tadpoles will swim free, stirring the water.
You may see a newt.
Pigeons will drink.

Gold-centred, white petalled,
pristine, poised,
perfection hides under floating leaves.

Remember Monet,
think Buddha.
See.
Be.

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The Authority of Women's 'Ordinary' Experience: Peggy Morgan and the Teaching of Buddhism in Schools

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Introduction: Personal Memories

I think that I first met Peggy at the South Coast Shap conference on Buddhism, in March 1985, organised by the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education at what was then Bishop Otter College in Chichester. At the time I was teaching Religious Studies at St. Mary's RC Sixth-form College in Middlesbrough, including teaching Buddhism at A level and A/O level, and had just negotiated a summer term sabbatical back at Lancaster University to update my knowledge of Buddhism prior to attempting to write a textbook for A level, without any clue as to how such things were published. This was my first teaching post, after completing an MA in Religious Studies at Lancaster University in 1977, where I gained an interest in and love for what are now referred to as 'Dharmic' traditions, and was keen to share this with my students. After eight years of going it alone it was wonderful to discover Shap conferences, meet with others who were also doing similar things, and a happy coincidence that Shap conferences that year were dealing with Buddhism and Hinduism.

During the conference, Peter Connolly, Clive Erricker and Peggy organised a group to discuss creating much needed resources for the teaching of Buddhism in schools, which was at that time relatively neglected. As I was thinking about writing a textbook for A level but had no idea how to go about that I joined the group which decided to set up the Buddhism Resource Project. As well as Peggy, Clive and Peter, the group included Jo Backus, Joy Barrow, Anita Cotterall, Holly Connolly and Barbara Stretch, a mixture of teachers and lecturers, Buddhists and non-Buddhists. The Project met regularly at Peggy's house in North Oxford as well as at King Alfred's College and later in Bath College of HE from 1985 to the early 90s and encouraged and enabled the production of

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books and materials by members as well as replying to queries from teachers and supplying bibliographies and resource lists.

Buddhism must have been in the air in 1985 because both Resource (now the *Professional Reflection* section of *REtoday*) and the *British Journal of Religious Education* were planning special issues on the teaching of Buddhism, and Peggy and other members of the Buddhism Resource Project, contributed articles to both of these publications. By autumn 1986 I had published my first two articles, found part-time work at Bath College of Higher Education, and started to work on my first books, all thanks to Shap conferences, Peggy and the *Buddhism Resource Project,* Bob Jackson and Resource, and Heather Williamson at Bath CHE who decided to employ me to help with primary RE teacher training in spite of my secondary background. Others will be writing about Peggy's contribution to Shap, but I would like to concentrate on her dedication to the cause of teaching Buddhism in schools, and the personal support and hospitality she has provided over the decades to those of us who followed in her wake in this cause.

Peggy Morgan and the development of teaching of Buddhism in Schools

Peggy's contribution to the teaching of Buddhism in British schools cannot be over-estimated. Until the *Buddhism Resources Project* brought a few more of us together, Peggy was almost a lone voice arguing for, and providing ideas and resources for, the teaching of Buddhism in schools in the UK.

Before 1986 - Pioneering

In the early days of the development of multi-faith RE (from about 1969 to 1984), the traditions that featured most prominently in textbooks and syllabuses tended to be Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, 'the famous five' (Morgan 1986b). There were a number of reasons for this. One of the main arguments for diversifying from Christian-based RE was the need to reflect and cater for the increasingly plural society of Britain in the 1970s. Buddhists in Britain however were somewhat fewer in number, and had less of a visible 'ethnic' presence, with many of those identified as Buddhists being converts (though there were, if you bothered to look, Buddhists with origins in Vietnam or Tibet or other Buddhist-majority countries). Few pupils were recognised as being Buddhist in most classrooms. Perhaps as a result of an interest from intellectuals and early scholarly concentration on Pali and Sanskrit texts, Buddhism had a reputation for being too philosophical and too difficult for school pupils, especially the primary age

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group and the under 16s. Buddhism's great cultural diversity was seen as too challenging. Some Buddhists actually argued against its inclusion in the curriculum, fearing misrepresentation and arguing that it could only be 'known' by personal experience and practice. It was hard to fit into the category of 'religion' modelled on Christianity, as it did not centre on 'God'. Many of these objections, and more, are discussed in Morgan (1986b). Even teachers who were in principle willing, complained that they themselves lacked knowledge and expertise, and that there were no teaching resources.

Trying to teach A level Buddhism in Middlesbrough in the late 70s, I too struggled with the 'resources' question. There was literally only a small handful of books available for pupils on Buddhism – in the 1970s I possessed three: two slim (but very good) booklets on *Buddhism* by Trevor Ling (1973), and *Zen and Modern Japanese Religion* by Michael Pye (1973) as well as David Naylor (1976). There was nothing at all aimed at the A level student.

Whether this was Peggy's first publication on the subject I'm not sure, but her 1979 article in the *Shap Mailing* was invaluable for teachers and made quite an impact. It is still referenced today, possibly in part because of its inspired title 'Buddhists have children too!' as well as its content. In this article Peggy argues forcefully that the inclusion of a tradition in the curriculum should not be solely based on the argument for the 'integration of minority communities'. Buddhism has had an important cultural impact on the Western world, and she quotes (while acknowledging its contestable nature) Ninian Smart's opinion that Buddhism 'has all the appearances of being the faith which will challenge Christianity most seriously in the West' (1971:692). She dismisses the 'too difficult' argument with the response that we do not start teaching Christianity to the youngest children by beginning with the most complex doctrinal formulations.

Peggy then gives three positive arguments for teaching Buddhism even to primary children. Buddhists themselves teach their tradition to their own children. The Buddha himself was a skilled teacher who knew how to adapt his teaching to the experience and understanding of his audience. Scholarship such as that of Gombrich (1971), Spiro (1970), Tambiah (1970) and others listed had already moved away from an earlier emphasis on texts only to study also what we would now call 'lived religion' (it really isn't that new an idea), context as well as text, practice as well as precept, the affective as well as the cognitive (thanks to Richard Gombrich for some of this phrasing), Buddhism for this life and not just for the monastic aiming at *nirvana*.

In addition to the arguments, Peggy provided ideas for topics with primary children and notably how to find some of the very few resources then available, and gives ideas for teaching using the life of the Buddha, Buddhist works of art, shrines, Jataka tales, impermanence and the wheel of life. Peggy wisely ends this article with the advice that

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'the important thing is to begin and once we have begun the floodgates of possibilities will open' (1979:27). Excellent advice for anyone. As my mother (another wise woman) used to say 'just get on with it!'. Peggy continued to contribute very useful articles to the annual *Shap Mailing* in the early 80s such as (1983) and (1985c).

Undated, but I think it was around 1982, Peggy characteristically contributed to the resource shortage by producing two books herself, which I for one used extensively with trainee teachers and even undergraduate Study of Religions students for decades, and still keep handy today. These are *Buddhist Stories* and *Buddhist Iconography*. When I say 'producing…herself' I must explain to younger readers that this meant typing them herself on an electric typewriter (*Buddhist Iconography* is 80 pages long), engaging her daughter Catharine to produce the beautifully executed illustrations (black and white line drawings meant that these were suitable to photocopy onto overhead projection transparencies), photocopying multiple copies and posting them out on request to interested teachers for the princely sums of £2 and £3. This did not enable her to give up the day job, which at that time was teaching at Westminster College (now part of Oxford Brookes). Peggy's enterprising attitude inspired the rest of the *Buddhism Resources Project.* Given the lack of resources the answer was obvious – 'we had to write our own' (Cush, 2018:64), and in the decade following our 1985 meeting, other project members joined Peggy in doing so, and eventually, by working together, also found commercial publishers for some of them, for example Connolly & Connolly (1992), Cush (1990, 1993, 1994), and Erricker (1995). Peggy of course continued to produce many more.

A phenomenon of British RE in the last few decades is the idea that there are six 'world religions', an idea which in its harder form solidified into the 'World Religions Paradigm' (see Owen, 2011), which scholars in both Religious Studies and Religious Education have been for some considerable time attempting to deconstruct. In the earlier days of multi-faith RE the list of possible traditions included in RE was much more fluid. A glance through editions of Resource or Shap Mailings through the 1970s and 1980s reveals articles and advice for teachers on for example Zoroastrianism, Bahá'ís, African traditional and other indigenous religions, newer movements such as Rastafari, and Marxism (and often something from Peggy on an aspect of Buddhism). The narrowing to six may be the result of a number of factors. The 1988 Education Reform Act (DES 1988) specified that Agreed Syllabuses must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, whilst taking account of the principal religions represented in Great Britain' (Clause 8/3). The term 'principal religions' was usually interpreted as those with larger numbers of adherents, and thus ruling out smaller communities whether from ancient traditions such as Zoroastrians, or newer religious movements such as Rastafari, and depending on how narrowly the clause is interpreted,

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Humanism or other 'non-religious' worldviews. By the time of the 1994 Model Syllabuses (which decided against Humanism) the 'big six' were well established (SCAA 1994). The specifications of examination boards (now called 'awarding authorities') had mostly offered papers limited to the six traditions, and did not always even offer papers in all of these. The 1993 Shap Working Party publication (Erricker ed.1993) appears to be something of a transitional link, as it provides both 'perspectives of faith traditions' and 'using the traditions' perspectives in teaching' for the big six, while adding less comprehensive coverage of 'further perspectives' – which included Rastafari, Sikh diversity, indigenous Colombians, Bahá'í, Zoroastrians, Jains, Hindu-related new religious movements and New Age/alternative spirituality.

However, before the Big Six there was the Big Five, omitting Buddhism (see above). I always date the promotion of Buddhism into the Premier League as 1984, when a popular textbook for O level examinations at 16+ *Five Religions in the Twentieth Century* (Cole 1981) was re-issued as *Six Religions in the Twentieth Century* (Cole 1984) with the addition of sections on Buddhism by – of course – Peggy Morgan. This material was published separately for the convenience of teachers who wanted to supplement rather than replace their sets of textbooks (Morgan 1985a). One or two other useful books that (like Peggy's) have stood the test of time started to appear, such as *The Buddhist World* by Anne Bancroft (1984) who passed away at the time of writing (June 2020) at the age of 97.

The Spring 1985 issue of *Resource* included an article by Peggy (Morgan 1985b) which in two sides of A4 plus twenty footnotes manages to get to the heart of some crucial aspects to grasp when starting to 'get to grips with' Buddhism, expressed with a straightforward clarity and experiential knowledge of what teachers actually need. Even in such a short article the reader cannot miss Peggy's depth of academic scholarship, familiarity with 'lived religion' through personal encounters with Buddhists from various traditions, grasp of the importance of and extensive knowledge of art as an important way into understanding traditions in addition to written texts and awareness of all the existing resources for teachers and pupils of all ages. Re-reading this 35 years later, I did not really need the reminder of Peggy's ability to link all these together, but I was struck by how up-to-date it all sounded. This could easily have been written in 2020, with the metaphor of journey, the focus on a quest for happiness, a stress on the diversity of the Buddhist tradition while holding on to its distinctiveness, and most of all a brief but sufficient discussion of the contested nature and negative connotations of the word 'religion' which anticipated current debates taking place in both Religious Studies and RE (see for example two forthcoming/in press edited books: Harris 2020 and Biesta & Hannam 2020).

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1986-1999 – Persevering

After 1985, and the formation of the *Buddhist Resources Project*, Peggy's prediction of 'the floodgates of possibilities' for resources for teaching Buddhism began to come true, albeit something of a trickle rather than a flood to start with, and still often produced by Peggy herself. In 1986 issues of both *Resource* (Spring) and *British Journal of Religious Education* (Autumn) were dedicated to teaching Buddhism. Peggy, and other members of the Project such as Anita, Clive, Peter and Holly and myself contributed to both.

In *Resource*, Peggy's article was 'Buddhism in Primary Schools' (Morgan 1986a). She provides lots of ideas including a wealth of stories, explicitly or implicitly Buddhist, drawing on the growing range of resources available, whether from within Buddhist communities (like the children's magazine *Rainbows*), well known books like the *Very Hungry Caterpillar,* or those in her own *Buddhist Stories* (1982). There are festivals to celebrate such as *Wesak* or *Hanamatsuri*, and age-appropriate books about the lives of children in Sri Lanka, Nepal or Thailand. Work on the symbolism of rainbows or which things and people in our world we value most sounds very topical as I write in the middle of the Coronavirus crisis (June 2020), in a town festooned with children's rainbows and a newly discovered appreciation of 'key workers'.

The *British Journal of Religious Education* special issue was about teaching Buddhism in Secondary schools. Peggy's article (1986b) is an eloquent and well-argued case for the inclusion of Buddhism in the RE curriculum for any age or stage, at a time when most syllabuses and textbooks still dealt with the 'famous five' religions rather than the 'big six'. Rereading this 34 years later I found myself affirming every sentence. Many issues that the 'RE community' are still debating about are addressed here with an insight and the elegant but simple turn of phrase that I associate with Peggy. I felt like saying to us all (including myself) – stop writing endless new articles and just read what Peggy has already said in a manner both more profound and more accessible than some of our contemporary efforts. Peggy deals with criteria for curriculum choice; the question of what is meant by 'religion', including its negative associations in the public mind: what Linda Woodhead (2016:258) decades later has called its 'toxic brand'; the pros and cons of the replacement term 'spirituality'; the tendency for some teachers to promote a 'seemingly benign pluralism', suggesting for example that all religions believe in the same God; the frustration of teachers asked to 'cover' yet another item that doesn't fit so well into the current neat package, and the suggestion of also including Bahá'ís or Rastafari could all have been written today. Also sounding contemporary is her linking of aspects of Buddhism with issues of ecological concern, violence, tensions between religion and science, and the value of mindfulness, as well as with trust in the authority of her own

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experience. I particularly liked her contention in this article that 'if the contents of religious education are ever neatly packaged and tied up it is certainly a dead subject that is being dealt with' (1986b: 17).

Also in 1986, Peggy contributed the section on Buddhism and the Introduction as well as co-editing the volume *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*, aimed at the adult reader and thus very useful for teachers/lecturers or older students. This became a best-seller and a revised and expanded edition, still in print, was produced in 2007.

As the 80s continued, among Peggy's publications were two books for Batsford (Morgan 1987a, 1989) the second of which appears today in Amazon's 'top 100 books for children on Buddhism' and 'top 100 books for young adults on Buddhism' (there are now more than 100?!) as does 1985a. This is a testament to their enduring quality, 30+ years later. In the 80s, she enjoyed helping produce the useful wallcharts on Buddhist scriptures, festivals, and rites of passage in the series published by the Pictorial Charts Educational Trust, posters which I made much use of in my many years teaching primary RE to students in initial teacher training from the 80s onwards. There were also more very useful articles for teachers in various Shap publications, such as (1987b). The Shap back catalogue really deserves wider circulation.

The 1990s saw more publications on Buddhism for pupils of different ages by a wider range of authors begin to appear, including those by members of the Buddhism Resource Project mentioned above. Among Peggy's continuing output were two chapters in Jackson & Starkings (1990), further Shap publications such as (1991) and a chapter in Gates ed. (1996). Jackson and Starkings contains updated versions of 1985b and 1986a, and it is noticeable that even within the 4-5 years between 1985/6 and 1990, the list of books and teaching resources for pupils and teachers was already much longer. Peggy's article in the *Shap Yearbook* (1991) on the topic of story in Buddhism continues the work she started ten years previously in giving teachers access to a range of carefully chosen stories from a wide diversity of Buddhist traditions, including some interesting life stories of individual Buddhists from Ashoka onwards, notably including women: 'his and her stories' as Peggy titles this section.

Peggy's chapter in Gates ed. 1996 focuses on the experience of children brought up within Buddhist families. In this very useful chapter Peggy points out the particularity of lived religion 'generalisations must always be qualified by saying not only 'Theravada Buddhists', but 'Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhists', or even 'Sri Lankan Buddhists in this century'; and then they must be qualified again with 'Sri Lankan Buddhists from this village', 'this Sri Lankan family living in London' or 'one Sri Lankan Buddhist that I met.'(p. 115). She looks at children who attend viharas in the UK linked with 'ethnic' groups, for whom Buddhism is part of a package of culture, language, family history and identity

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'religion here is what you are born into' (p.116). The intra-religious education for children in Buddhist communities described by Peggy focuses on morality, behaving kindly and respectfully, 'to reinforce culture and social behaviour, not to challenge it', but also has space for young people to think for themselves. She talks of the warm relationships she has observed between monks, nuns and children in monasteries where the majority of the sangha are from Western backgrounds, and Buddhist children's range of opinions and arguments about topics such as vegetarianism and meat-eating. She includes material from Amaravati's magazine on the topic of animals, and collects some inspiring reflections on the importance of education from a variety of Buddhist voices. Peggy mentions the Dharma school project which led to the establishment of the only Buddhist-ethos independent primary school in the UK in Brighton (checking up on its current situation I find that it has been a casualty of the Coronavirus crisis – closing down in lockdown in March, the trustees have taken the decision that they will not be able to reopen, and will close for good July 2020 after 25 years). In this chapter Peggy mentions briefly some thoughts of Buddhist parents and children on school RE, and reasons why some Buddhists might be dissatisfied with education in community schools. The dissonance between the experience (or not) of Buddhism in school RE and the experience of Buddhist children with family origins in majority-Buddhist countries at home has been further explored 15 years later by Thanissaro (2011).

2000-2020 – Providing a Paradigm

Having provided so much to help teachers and pupils learn about Buddhism for over two decades, Peggy not only continued to do so into the new millennium, but as a role model inspired and assisted others to do so as she moved on to spend more time teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate level rather than in teacher education, and as Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre in Oxford and Lampeter. Her more recent publications on Buddhism tend to be aimed at a different academic level, on topics such as Jesus in Buddhism and Engaged Buddhism. However, never is Buddhism for children and young people forgotten, nor her colleagues taking up her baton and working in the same field. In 2008 she delivered a conference paper on 'Buddhism and Education' (2008) which she kindly made available to Jo Backus and myself when we were invited to write Backus and Cush (2008). As well as recounting the history of including the teaching of Buddhism in the English State-funded school system, our chapter contains the only (briefly summarised) published account of much more extensive research undertaken by Jo Backus with teachers and Buddhist practitioners on their diverse and contrasting approaches to teaching Buddhism. Resources listed then

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included online sources in addition to the ever-growing list of books for pupils and teachers. Peggy's paper was extremely useful in confirming, correcting or adding to our account.

The fact that Peggy's work in this field was still needed as we entered the new millennium is illustrated by Dossett (2000) who was still having to argue for the inclusion of Buddhism as 'Buddhism is often the last religion any teacher may wish to tackle' (200:320). But the collection of books and resources had improved, with a longer list than in earlier decades. In the last 20 years there have been many more added, including by Wendy herself (2003 reprinted 2016). I was about to list more of these but my bibliography would have become too long, and resources are easier to track down these days. However, even in the last decade, Buddhism is still relatively neglected, except perhaps at A level where it remains somewhat popular, though only relatively so, and nowhere near 'Philosophy and Ethics'. As one crude example, I counted the numbers of 'mentions' various traditions gained in the exemplar material for pupils aged 5-14 in the 2013 *National Curriculum Framework for Religious Education* (REC 2013). The scores are: Christianity 26, Islam 16, Judaism 15, Hinduism 13, Humanism 7, Buddhism 5, Sikhism 4, Jains/Zoroastrians/Bahá'í 2 each, Jehovah's Witnesses and Latter-Day Saints 1 each, Pagans 0. So, Buddhism can still be relatively neglected, though not as much and with less excuse than 40,30, 20 or 10 years ago.

The Importance of Experience as a source of Authority, especially Women's Experience

Peggy is not just a role model in the world of Buddhism and Education, she is also a role model for women more generally in Religious Studies and Religious Education. She manages to combine the depth of scholarship that enables her to teach and examine Religious Studies at Oxford University, be Academic Advisor to the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies and be President of the British Association for the Study of Religion (2000-2003), with the practical skills, sensitivity and experience that enable her to find wonderful ways of sharing religious traditions and interesting questions with the smallest of children. Peggy is able to combine knowledge of text and context, precept and practice, the cognitive and the affective. She knows the scholarly material but has also met and talked to many Buddhists, from many different traditions.

An important element here is the experience of women. When reviewing my own disparate publications in 2012, I realised that 'experience' was a word I used a lot – the centrality of religious experience, the experience of classroom teachers, the experience of

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women within religious traditions, the ordinary everyday life experience of women. Others will be writing about Peggy's contribution to the study of 'Religious Experience' with the Religious Experience Research Centre and elsewhere, but I would like to stress the importance not of visions, numinous encounters or mystical moments, but the 'ordinary' experience of women's lives. It was a male colleague specialising in Goddess thealogy (men can be feminists too) who gave me the phrase 'women's experience is a source of authority' (see Reid-Bowen, 2007:44-45). This is particularly important to hold on to in relation to religious institutions, where the other sources of authority – foundational texts and teachers, classical scholars, current spokespersons - tend to be overwhelmingly male. Where the experience of women (and children) is at odds with the authorised version, maybe it is worth listening. Peggy is an inspiring example of a woman not afraid to trust the authority of their own experience, nor to speak out about it.

I will never forget (but I now forget where and when exactly, probably a Shap conference) I heard Peggy talking about the Goddess and goddesses in the Hindu tradition, comparing sweet, gentle, Parvati in the company of her husband Shiva and child Ganesh with the powerful and rather scary Kali or Durga *when on her own and being herself.* I have always admired the two sides of the Goddess in Peggy: gentle, compassionate, hospitable and ladylike, beautifully dressed (we admire each other's sense of style) but fierce and strong when necessary, to continue the struggles that need continuing.

Conclusion

Re-reading Peggy's work in the area of Buddhism and education, I have both been reminded of just how much she contributed, and impressed by just how up-to-date much of her writing even from 35-40 years ago sounds. This article was written under lockdown conditions, reliant on only those publications I had somewhere in the house (quite a few once I unearthed them), so I apologise to Peggy if I have omitted something important. I had just finished writing a short piece on 'Should Buddhism be taught in schools?' (2020) before embarking on my Morgan retrospective and really, we could just have republished one of Peggy's articles from the 1980s.

In many Dharmic traditions, the authenticity of your teaching is established by reference to your lineage of teachers – your guru or lama. I like to think that I am one of Peggy's many disciples, attempting to carry on her approach to teaching Buddhism in schools, and learning to trust in the authority of women's 'ordinary' experience.

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Peggy Morgan: An Interfaith Colleague

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Mary and I have much valued our long friendship with Peggy Morgan, which even survived my reversing into her car. I also appreciate her encouragement and advice when I did some teaching at Westminster College, Oxford. Rather than just learning about other religions from books, she encouraged students to meet and talk with those who believed and lived their faith. Equally important, in her work as Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, she helped people recognise that spiritual experience, although often nourished by membership of a faith community, is a more universal, although diverse, reality.

I am particularly grateful for her support of the World Congress of Faiths and the time and wisdom she gave to the imaginative attempt to establish an International Interfaith Centre at Westminster College. It was an expression of the optimism of the nineties. Yet, as it was to become one of Oxford's "lost causes", it is worth retelling the story of the hopes and disappointments that Peggy and I and many others shared.

International Interfaith Centre, Oxford

To mark the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, which is often regarded as the start of the modern interfaith movement, the then leading international interfaith organisations - The International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), the Temple of Understanding, the World Conference of Religions (WRP), and the World Congress of Faiths (WCF) designated 1993 as "A Year of Inter-Religious Understanding and Co-operation." As the year came to a close many participants wanted to maintain the links that had been built up.

Even before 1993, the International Association for Religious Freedom and the World Congress of Faiths had been in conversation about the need for such a centre. After careful consultation, it was agreed that Oxford would be a very suitable venue.

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Westminster College, which had a strong department for the study of religions and of which Peggy was a leading member, agreed to co-operate. By the end of 1993, both the International Association for Religious Freedom and the World Congress of Faiths had relocated to an office in Oxford, which also housed the European representative of Risho Kosei Kai. In December 1993, a Trust Deed was signed to establish the International Interfaith Centre (IIC) at Oxford, with the hope of creating a purpose-built centre at Westminster College. The wise advice of Peggy, who was one of the Trustees, was much valued by her colleagues. The objects of the Centre were:

> "To advance the education of the public world-wide in its understanding of the different faith traditions and various faith communities and how they might live in harmony, by establishing a Centre to promote or assist research into: Issues of interfaith understanding, co-operation and religious freedom; teaching methods and the development of educational materials; aspects of worship, prayer, meditation and spiritual discipline; and disseminate the useful results of such research" (Braybrooke, 2019, pp.189-193).

IIC Conferences

At first, the Centre was very active, thanks to the hard and dedicated work of Celia Storey and Sandy and Jael Bharat. It arranged a series of important conferences which focused on considering how interfaith organisations could have a real impact on the world. Its first international conference, in April 1994, was on "Religious Practice, Justice and Transformation". This took a critical look at the effectiveness of religion in helping to make society more just. There was discussion of the patterns of religious education in several countries. The second international conference, in April 1995, was on "Threat or Promise? - The Study of Religions and Interfaith Activity". There was again sober analysis of what interfaith organizations could do in areas of conflict.

Lectures, Visits and Visitors

An Annual Lecture was established. Distinguished speakers included by Dr Seyyed Hossein Nasr of George Washington University; Professor Seshagiri Rao of the University of Virginia; Professor Paul Knitter then of Xavier University; Dr Xinzhong Yao of the University of Wales; Professor Nagah El-Ghonimy of Al-Azhar University; Dr Mischio

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Shinozaki, Dean of the Rissho Kosei-kai Seminary in Tokyo; Dr Elizabeth Amoah, of the University of Ghana; and Satish Kumar, Editor of the journal *Resurgence.*

Visits to faith communities and educational centres in or near to Oxford were arranged, including the Postgraduate Centre for Hebrew Studies at Yarnton, Keston College and the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. Other visits provided an opportunity to learn about different aspects of worship, prayer, meditation and spiritual discipline.

The Centre received a steady stream of visitors, who came to seek advice and information. Several were staff members of international or national interfaith organizations or of world religious bodies. Others were scholars in the study of world religions. A far greater number of enquiries came by letter, telephone, fax and increasingly by email.

Plans were put in hand for a purpose built centre at Westminster College. The architects Evans and Shalev, known for the Tate Gallery at St Ives and other well-known buildings prepared an initial design for the centre. A fund raising campaign for the building and endowment fund, under the guidance of Mr Neville Sandelson, a former M.P was launched. Prince Charles wrote a message of support and Sir Richard Greenbury, then Chairman of Marks and Spencer, agreed to be President of the Appeal. Sadly this ambitious project was frustrated, mainly because local residents objected to the proposal as it would increase the traffic on the access road and, they claimed, spoil their view. As a result planning permission was refused. At the same time, Westminster College became part of Oxford Brookes University, which showed no interest in the project.

The Centre, however, for several years co-ordinated and usually hosted an annual meeting for representatives of international interfaith organizations to discuss enhanced communication and co-operation. By the time of the Melbourne Parliament in 2009, it was clear that co-ordination of the rapidly increasing interfaith activity across the world needed properly financed and professional centres of information and co-ordination, especially as governments and the United Nations were now actively promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

Testing the Global Ethic

One of the important achievements of 1993 Parliament of World Religions was proclaiming the “Declaration Toward a Global Ethic” that was endorsed by Assembly members (Küng1993. passim; Beversluis, 1995 Grand Rapids 1995, passim). The Declaration invites people to make four commitments:

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to a culture of non-violence and respect for life,

to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order,

to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness,

to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

In the book, *Testing the Global Ethic* (Morgan and Braybrooke, 1998, *passim)*, which Peggy and I edited, we tried to stimulate discussion, especially among young people, of the Global Ethic Declaration. We also wanted to see whether these general principles were really rooted in each faith tradition and we asked friends of different faiths to reflect on them and to say what the application of would involve for members of their religion. A further section invited comments on how spiritual practice could assist the 'transformation of life.' The book included quotations from the scriptures of the world and a selection of photographs.

Letters of commendation were received from Kofi Anan, Secretary General of the United Nations, and the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. Copies were also given to members of the Assembly at the 1999 Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town

Working on the book with Peggy made me even more aware that her wide-ranging interests were matched by attention to accuracy and detail.

The Bible says that "Wisdom belongs to the aged, and understanding to the old." I trust that Peggy will continue to share her wisdom with an ever-growing circle of friends and admirers for many years.

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Trees, Benches and Contemporary Commemoration: When the Ordinary Becomes Extraordinary

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Introduction

I met Peggy Morgan in 1991 at my first BASR conference in Oxford. BASR conferences then were comparatively small meetings, with everyone in the same room for all the papers. It was a somewhat intimidating experience at the time, but some excellent long-term relationships resulted from that event. I subsequently served on the committee of BASR as conference organizer and President, benefitting greatly from Peggy's wisdom, attention to detail and experience.

Peggy has been tireless and feisty in her championing of Religious Studies, and she has promoted and served the field in myriad ways professionally. However, this research note has been prompted by reflections on the personal Peggy, as it were. Peggy is the compassionate correspondent who has regularly sent encouraging, hand-crafted notes throughout my recent health-related problems. Sharing a love of fritillaries, the walk she organized for us through Oxford meadows awash with them remains an outstanding memory. We are both great admirers of Andy Goldsworthy, whose breathtakingly beautiful artworks in relation to nature can be fleeting (ice sculptures, or striking combinations of berries, flowers, twigs or leaves) or more solid variations on traditional forms such as walls and sheep pens.

I have drawn attention in a number of contexts to the trope of materiality, relationality and connectivity (e.g. Bowman 2017, 2020) concerning material religion, what people do with things and what things do with, for and to people. As I considered what to write about for this Festschrift within the remit of 'ordinary experience', mundane, practical benches which are also commemorative constructions, and trees which become coopted into human dramas of love and loss seemed to fit the bill.

Commemoration expressed through and projected onto natural objects and settings, and the creation of powerful, often unexpected, material installations that others might encounter, respond to or engage with, transform the seemingly ordinary into the extraordinary. This piece examines some of the resourceful, tangible ways in which

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contemporary practices and worldviews are expressed, encapsulated and enacted through the vehicle of material culture. Concentrating primarily on two contrasting examples– trees and benches – I explore briefly the interaction of people and material culture, people projecting biography onto objects and places, and the creation or shaping of object biography in these performances of loss and commemoration.

Roadside memorials have attracted considerable academic attention, especially in countries where roadside shrines to saints have not been the norm (e.g. Clark and Cheshire 2004; Klaassens, Groote and Vanclay 2013), and they have been studied from a variety of disciplines and perspectives (e.g. Churchill and Tay 2008; Klaassens, Groote and Huigen 2009; MacConville 2010). Installations at 'sites of sudden death' (Stahl and Jackson 2019), 'spontaneous shrines' (Santino 2011) and what Margry and Sanchez-Carretero (2011) refer to as 'grassroots memorials' have often been not simply expressions of loss, shock or empathy in relation to deaths, but focal points and catalysts for discontent and protest. The examples to which I draw attention here perhaps may be seen as less dramatic, but they are indicative of widespread, vernacular praxis in relation to grassroots commemoration, and not simply remembering the dead but *relocating* them and their memory in particular landscapes and materiality. The special place or the beloved place away from the site of death (whether in accident, home, hospice or care home) becomes the place where people are metaphysically and to some degree physically 'placed' by and for the survivors.

In the wake of Covid 19, many have been aware of and commented on the therapeutic power both of walking and being in nature. As living entities, trees have been and remain the foci of perceived encounters with or reminders of 'the other'. We address and dress them in calendar customs (such as wassailing and the decoration of Christmas trees), and attach religious significance to some, such as the Glastonbury Thorn. We also involve them in negotiations of human grief. Using examples of tree-related activities in the contrasting locations of former mining town Norton Radstock in Somerset and Loch Lomond in Scotland, the vernacular role of trees as part of the commemorative process can be studied as projections and expressions of conceptions of biography, relationality, connectivity and (arguably) spirituality within and beyond this world.

In 2013 I lectured at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Jagiellonian University, Krakow on 'Mourning and Memorialisation on the Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond', presenting research on issues presented by some emergent commemorative practices within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, including the attachment of memorial plaques to benches and indeed the placement of benches not approved by the park authorities. I stayed in touch with one of the postgraduate students who attended the lecture and had informed me of an imminent

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visit to Scotland. When he contacted me upon his arrival in Edinburgh, he commented that he now understood much better my point about benches and memorialisation: 'Wherever I go here, I am sitting on dead people.' The ubiquitous memorial bench which has become such an ordinary or unremarkable feature of many townscapes and other landscapes is also part of a meaningful deathscape (cf Maddrell & Sidaway 2010), and as such a vehicle for a range of complex emotions and praxis in relation to loss in a physical form which is relatively underexplored. For over a decade, I have been observing the growth of memorial benches at a few sites in Scotland, and changing behaviour in relation to them; here I present just a couple of snapshots illustrating the extent to which these seemingly mundane and highly utilitarian objects can be employed – and indeed subverted – as powerful material expressions of relationality, place-making and place-staking.

As means of appreciating the rich and fluid interactions of humans with objects in expressions and performances of loss and worldviews in non-traditional and informal sites today, these trees and memorial benches are part of the broader context in which 'Grief, mourning and remembrance are experienced in and mapped upon . . . physical spaces, including the public and private arenas of everyday life' (Maddrell 2016: 166.)

Trees

David Morgan states that in studying material culture we study 'how people build and maintain the cultural domains that are the shape of their social lives' (Morgan 2017: 15). Death as the ultimate disrupter of the lives of those left behind gives rise to material responses of myriad types, and on varying scales. With trees, people produce and perform commemoration in how trees are perceived, addressed and interacted with as conduits of communication, connectivity and expressions of absence-presence.

The growth of woodland burial (Davies and Rumble 2012) and the popularity of various schemes which invite the sponsorship of tree planting either in celebration or commemoration attest to both the appropriateness people perceive in making connections between people and trees, and ways in which people appear to be choosing increasingly to commemorate, memorialise and mourn their dead outwith or in addition to more traditional deathscapes or explicitly religious spaces. Trees in the context of memorialisation tend to get co-opted into human narratives and performances of relationality through intention, proximity or indirect involvement; in this respect trees might be seen as either intentional or incidental. What could be described as 'incidental' trees are trees which are in effect innocent bystanders, as it were, at or near the sites of accidents, or beloved places. These become co-opted into acts of remembrance and

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performances of relationality; their meaning, therefore, can be multivalent, very much an individual matter. 'Intentional' trees, by contrast, are deliberately planted or chosen as a focus of relationality; their biography becomes intertwined with that of the person for whom they are planted.

Roadside shrines and the incorporation of incidental trees at or near the site of accidents into commemoration and the enactment of grief have become increasingly common in the United Kingdom. As an instance of people creating, shaping and re-narrating a tree's biography in performances of connectedness, the tree known as both the Jubilee Oak and Colin Latchem's tree in Norton Radstock is exemplary. By the main road through the centre of Norton Radstock, Somerset, there used to be an oak tree, planted in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. In January 1997, following the death of seventeen-year-old Colin Latchem after being hit by a car near it, the tree became a focal point for his family and friends to lay flowers, commemorate Colin and express their grief. In early 2012, however, the local Council announced its intention to remove the tree as part of alterations to reduce traffic congestion and improve road safety. The family were distraught and started a petition against the move of what became referred to as Colin Latchem's tree. As it was Jubilee year, the fact that the oak had been planted to commemorate another royal jubilee was also used as an argument for its conservation.

Figure 1. Colin Latchem's tree, 2012,Norton Radstock. Photograph Marion Bowman.

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Figure 2. Detail of protest and ribbons on tree, Norton Radstock 2012. Photograph Marion Bowman.

In the course of the protest, the tree once again became altered materially with ribbons, a photograph of Colin, flowers, and an emotional appeal from the family not to move it (Figures 1 and 2). On one of the ribbons bearing messages from family members was written 'Losing this tree would be like losing Col Col [sic] all over again'. What stood out in material terms was what the tree had come to represent for the family; the council was totally unprepared for the family's reaction to its removal and the furore that it provoked. That the tree had been a site and focus of mourning associated with the boy was common knowledge. The extent of the identification of the tree with the boy, the slippage from significant site to surrogate, simply had not been appreciated. In the end, the tree was moved with great care and at considerable expense to the grounds of Writhlington School, which Colin had attended, with a memorial erected to him there. Colin's sister was reported as saying the tree had become 'a living tribute' to her brother which held great significance for the family. As a tree is alive, the life (and by extension the relationships) associated with, celebrated through or focussed via a tree is perceived to have some sort of ongoing material presence. The tree becomes a 'living memorial', with all the ambiguity that entails.

Within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, in 2010 one tree at the site of a road accident had a plaque attached to it, displaying the picture of a smiling 19 year old man, giving his name and dates, and including the message 'Simply The Best . . . Miss You Day & Night'. A football scarf and tee shirts were attached to lower branch of a neighbouring tree which stuck out more prominently above a small, square wooden

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enclosure constructed on the road verge near the tree, and there, for a while, messages and plastic wrapped bunches of flowers were left. A commemorative site on a busy road, once the enclosure and other paraphernalia disappeared, the tree could be easily missed in passing.

However, the more common and obvious tree related activity in the National Park relates to trees at accessible points on the loch shore which become incorporated into multiple processes of mourning and commemoration. The same trees are used by a number of different mourners, sometimes serially, at other places simultaneously. Duck Bay at the southern end of Loch Lomond is an attractive spot with easy parking and access to the shore, and grassy areas with picnic tables at various points across the narrow road from the beach. It attracts a broad demographic, with a range of nationalities, ethnicities and age groups enjoying the facilities there. Because of the easy accessibility to the shore at the southern end of the bay, flowers with or without messages tend to be left where a few small trees stand.

I first noticed one tree in particular because it had tied to it a miniature bottle of whiskey and two purple glass baubles (of the type used for Christmas trees) with 'Dad' written in silver glitter; a 'Dad' birthday card was attached to the tree, the message expressing how much the placer missed and loved her father (figure 3).[1] Other messages and a white ribbon with a handwritten message appeared subsequently on that tree, seemingly from the same person.

Figure 3. Duck Bay, Loch Lomond. Photograph Marion Bowman

[1] That whiskey miniature remained untouched on the tree for at least 10 weeks.

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From observation here and elsewhere within the National Park, this sort of private/public – public/private remembrance appears to inspire others to similar behaviour. A metal plaque has been screwed onto another tree close by, listing the names and dates of three members of the same family, who had died in 2002, 2006 and 2012, described as 'Our Rock', 'Our Rose', and 'Our Braveheart', the final line reading 'SEE YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE'. On one occasion (Figure 4), another tree in this group had tied to it a bunch of purple chrysanthemums, and a typed sheet encased in plastic with the words:

> Beloved Place
> We scatter Ritas [sic] ashes at a beloved place,
> No longer bound by this world, but a part of it.
> No longer tied to one place, one time, but free.
> Every time you feel the warm sunshine on your face,
> Every time you hear the rain softly falling outside your window.
> No matter where you are, no matter where you travel in this big wide open world,
> She will always be around you.

Figure 4. Flowers and printed sheet attached to tree. Note the previously mentioned white ribbon on tree in background. Duck Bay, Loch Lomond. Photograph Marion Bowman.

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More recently, this tree became the focus of expressions of grief and commemoration for a young man, with a variety of items including photographs, messages, a tartan scarf, a kilt belt and bunches of plastic wrapped flowers being attached to it. On trees in this same group photographs and flowers for an unidentified person appeared briefly (Figure 5), while a plastic covered order of service for a funeral from early December 2019, bearing a photograph and details of a 52-year-old man, is there at time of writing (August 2020).

Figure 5. Flowers and photographs attached to tree. Duck Bay, Loch Lomond. Photograph Marion Bowman

Away from the road and public gaze, in more secluded areas, other trees might be adopted for more 'exclusive' or undisturbed longer-term use. In an area of lochside woodland off a path more familiar to locals than visitors, for example, there is a memorial tree which has developed over a number of years, with clothing nailed to the tree, a now tattered Scottish saltire flag[2], vases for flowers, a Christmas decoration and messages (Figure 6).

[2] Scottish flag with a white St.Andrew's cross on blue background.

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Figure 6. Two shirts, a tattered saltire flag and a Christmas decoration are attached to this lochside tree at Loch Lomond, while at ground level there are cards, vases, solar lights and plants. (Location withheld) Photograph Marion Bowman.

Very much in keeping with the move towards memorialisation at the beloved or special place, at Loch Lomond there are ever increasing numbers of intentional trees. In the run up to 2000, the Royal Scottish Forestry Society's vision was to restore an area of native woodland on the east shore of Loch Lomond at Cashel Forest, for which it appealed for public sponsorship for the planting of trees. While tree planting might be supported with the woodland restoration as an end in itself, the Books of Dedications on display at Cashel (recording the sponsor and the location of trees sponsored, with room for optional dedications) indicate that in addition to the celebration of births and wedding anniversaries, the great majority of sponsorship has related to commemoration. On one visit to Cashel, I encountered a man in his sixties from the north of England, who told me that he comes up every Easter to visit his trees, adding 'There are seven of us up there'. Trees and lives and deaths become intertwined in a beautiful, beloved location. However, precisely because a tree is alive, it is subject to damage and decay. A Cashel volunteer told me that she likes to know in advance if people are making a special trip to see their trees, so that she can check on them; if people have sponsored a commemorative tree they tend to get very upset if it dies. (The Norton Radstock case reflects such trauma.) The tree as commemorative medium can bring distress as well comfort through (another) loss.

Across the loch, in the glebeland belonging to the Church of Scotland church of St Kessog at Luss, a popular and picturesque village on the west bank of Loch Lomond,

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there is a memorial area in which trees could be planted in memory of loved ones.[3] Luss is rather an iconic site for many reasons, not least as a much-loved place for many Scots, and for innumerable other UK and overseas visitors. The trees planted at Luss are redolent with positive associations, as trees are used to root people and memories in a special place, somehow (re)situating them there and recapturing happy times. Typically, after giving the names and dates of birth and death of a married couple, the plaque beside one tree reads, 'Honeymooned in Luss 1946. Together forever'; another states 'Met in Luss in 1955. Together again 2011' (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Luss glebeland memorial plaque at base of specially planted tree. Photograph Marion Bowman.

In these 'snapshot' examples, we see vernacular practices of commemoration involving trees (incidental and intentional) through which people project, express, and capture life-worlds and biographies, within and beyond this world.

Benches

Memorial benches associated with significant or beloved places are increasingly common in both urban and rural landscapes. Again, they provide memorials to a people in forums away from formal sites such as cemeteries or crematoria, with an opportunity for the donor to 'place' the deceased at a personally significant site. There is an obvious logic in the association between a frequently occupied or loved spot leading to commemoration

[3] This was the initiative of a previous minister, Dane Sherrard, in relation to a pilgrimage path developed there (see Bowman 2020). While the pilgrimage path and its paraphernalia have gone, the trees and memorials remain.

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of that person in material form through a bench with a plaque naming that person, and possibly some detail linking her or him to the site.

Memorial benches and their inscriptions often attract attention from those unconnected to the individual commemorated; there appears to be popular understanding, acceptance and interest in them as vernacular phenomena. In her Memorial Bench Stories blog, Carol Kubicki posts photographs of memorial benches and the commemorative plaque. As she says of the benches on her site,

> Each bench tells a story of someone loved and remembered. These are not celebrities, they are you and me. I hope to find out some of the stories of the lives of the special people who are commemorated in these benches; either through my own research or by people getting in touch. (Memorial Bench Stories blog)

As recorded in an online BBC News article 'Memorial benches: A quiet reminder of people gone, but not forgotten' (Peachey 2020), mapping site Open Benches allows people to upload pictures of benches in their area; of over 15,000 entries, 'the vast majority' are in the UK.

The removal of benches by park authorities and councils which are deemed to have been inappropriately sited or positioned without permission tends to cause considerable outrage and grief in the donors, for, like the removal of Colin Latchem's tree, it can be perceived as another 'removal' or displacement of the person commemorated. Additionally, while trees can die, benches can become damaged, and in addition to distress caused to donors if the damage is wilful, issues arise as to whose long-term responsibility memorial benches are. There was an outcry in some Scottish newspapers in January 2020 when it was revealed that 70 or more benches bearing memorial plaques had been removed from West Princes Street Gardens and destroyed by fire by council workmen as a less costly solution than repairing them ('Council probe after workers burn memorial benches in Edinburgh', BBC news website,18 January 2020)[4].

Many national parks have policies on the purchase and placement of memorial benches, but as at Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park custodians have discovered, on occasion people are unwilling to accept that a particularly popular site might only reasonably accommodate a certain number of benches, leading to their unauthorised placement. It is clearly important to place 'their' people in 'their' spot.

[4] City of Edinburgh Council was forced to explain that while it had in the past been 'maintaining benches in perpetuity', on financial grounds it had introduced a scheme involving 'a 20-year maintenance warranty' and appropriate costs for people wishing to purchase memorial benches in future.

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Similarly, existing benches might have additional plaques added, something which can offend and annoy the original donors.

Figure 8. Bench positioned on hillside above Loch Lomond. Photograph Marion Bowman.

One particularly creative example of placement relates to a bench sited just below the crest of a hill popular with walkers which commands a splendid view of Loch Lomond (figure 8). The sheer effort, ingenuity, logistics and determination in positioning that bench so that it is unobtrusive from the angle from which most people approach the hill command admiration. (It is possible to be on the hill but be unaware of the bench.) There is a name but no dates or other information on the bench plaque, but it is assumed by those who have spotted it to be commemorative.

While in Britain 'sitting on dead people' (as my Polish correspondent put it) has become commonplace, at one site in the Scottish town of Dumbarton I have noted material change in the use and appearance of some benches. Below Dumbarton Castle (also known as Dumbarton Rock), there is an area of open grounds popular with many Dumbartonians, rendering the presence of memorial benches there unsurprising. However, the placement of flowers on a bench (figure 9), and indeed the transformation through the attachment of vases in relation to a couple of the benches there (e.g. figure

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10) appear to signal visually a shift from seat to shrine which is unlikely to encourage people to sit there. The commemorative aspect has overtaken the functionality of the bench, revealing it unequivocally as a deathscape.

Figure 9 and 10. Memorial bench with temporary flowers, Dumbarton, and memorial bench beneath Dumbarton Castle, with vases and flowers. Photographs by Marion Bowman.

Conclusion

By concentrating trees and benches here, I wished to explore the interaction of people and material culture, people expressing and commemorating lives through material culture, and people's creation, shaping and possibly hijacking of object biography in their performances of love and loss.

Remembering loved ones at special or beloved places obviously is not new. Indeed, for decades the widower of my cousin who died in her 20s went to Loch Lomond once a month and scattered a bunch of red roses on the water in her memory, at a place which held happy memories. People still leave 'anonymous' flowers at the lochside or scatter them on the water.

I have focused on more public, often more materially lingering modes of commemoration, highlighting some examples of the creative, tangible ways in which contemporary practices and worldviews are expressed and enacted as part of a broader 'trend to more personal forms of memorial and associated ritual' (Maddrell 2009: 690). What such performances allow is the opportunity for people to do something *tangible* in

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the 'private/ public – public/ private' act of remembrance, away from formal deathscapes such as the crematorium or the cemetery, situating loved ones in a beloved or special place. Erika Brady talks of the 'Beau Geste' in relation to 'personalized symbolic gestures in the form of burial inclusions, specifically composed graveside rituals, and other similar actions.' (Brady 1988: 26). However, precisely because they are perceived as meaningful and personal actions, perhaps unsurprisingly their impact on others, the object and the site itself are not always considered. One National Park ranger (while empathising with people's desire to commemorate) characterised some acts, such as inappropriate positioning of benches in sites of natural beauty, attaching objects to trees whether potentially damaging metal plaques or bunches of flowers in plastic wrappings that become pollutants, as 'Guerrilla' acts of commemoration (personal communication).[5]

Maddrell (2009: 690) comments that 'Negotiating absence–presence is increasingly recognised as part of the experience of bereavement that creates liminal emotional, intellectual and spiritual spaces, where boundaries shift and are breached.' Trees and benches in special places can become significant objects (or, in Latour's phraseology, actants) in such liminal spaces, aiding the production of contact and comfort, participating in the negotiation of absence-presence. Maddrell further argues that '[c]ontemporary examples of individualised micro-memorials . . . likewise suggest that expressions of absence–presence might offer insight to the blurry middle ground of belief– unbelief in the contemporary UK' (Maddrell 2009:690).

In studying 'how people build and maintain the cultural domains that are the shape of their social lives' (Morgan 2017: 15) through the medium of material culture, we learn to look for and appreciate the raw emotion, creativity and pragmatism of those finding ways to come to terms with death, to 'place' the irreplaceably lost, to celebrate and commemorate love and loss. The tendency, as Santino puts it, 'to commemorate a deceased individual in front of an undifferentiated public' (2011: 6) - that is not simply among fellow mourners, those familiar with the deceased, or in places associated with the dead – can lead to unexpected encounters. People looking up at the Cashel Forest on the hillside above Loch Lomond or seeing in the distance the fringe of trees at one edge of the glebeland at Luss cannot know what stories, emotions, memories, biographies, metaphysical relocations and creativity are embodied in those trees. People wandering onto the beach at Duck Bay or elsewhere at Loch Lomond are suddenly confronted by other people's grief and commemorative installations, an uneasy conjunction of beauty spot and deathscape. Visitors to the open ground at the foot of Dumbarton Castle might encounter a bench that is clearly not simply a place to sit.

[5] Similar issues are raised in relation to mountainside memorials (cf Maddrell 2010).

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Through familiar and mundane objects, people project, express and capture relationality and connectivity, love and loss, within and beyond this world. In such objects, actions and encounters, the ordinary can indeed become the extraordinary.

I arrived at the subject of this research note for Peggy Morgan's festschrift by considering the personal qualities I have come to know and appreciate over the past thirty years: Peggy's creative talents, her aesthetic preferences, her love of nature and walking, her compassion and her instincts and ability to *do* something tangible – often quietly and unobtrusively, but nevertheless effectively. As we celebrate and explore the ordinary in this volume, we do so in honour of an extraordinary person.

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Emptiness in Brief, a Very Ordinary Matter Indeed

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In the *Sutra of Brilliant Golden Light*[1] there is a chapter about "emptiness once again" which begins with the announcement that although emptiness has already been explained at length, it will now be explained once again, in brief.

I personally quite like these throwaway expressions in religious contexts. They remind me to take things seriously, but not too seriously. This is important in the study of religions in Japan, because like much else in that country religious matters are often quite muddled up in ordinary life.

When visiting a cemetery, it is usual to pour a little water from a ladle on to the head of a tombstone, or perhaps even on to the head of a small stone Jizō Bosatsu who is standing there keeping watch. Jizō Bosatsu is quite unassuming as a bodhisattva (*bosatsu*). He does not carry a large number of arms and heads around with him. But he is good for going down into the hells, plucking people out and guiding them back up into more normal forms of existence. Or he looks after the souls of poor children who cannot get across the river to the underworld and are stuck in the no-mans-land of a stony riverbed. The least one can do when coming across him in a cemetery therefore is to sprinkle some water on his head. Why is this done? One reason given is that "we always do it" and the other reason I have heard is that he likes it.

This may seem straightforward enough, but I will add to it a notice about a similar action found at a very small shrine to another divinity, whose name I admittedly forget. This divinity, unusually for a native *kami* rather than a Buddhist worthy, is represented by a standing image, before which there is a small basin of cleanly trickling water and a ladle. The purpose of this is to rinse hands and mouth before paying respects and asking for some sort of beneficial care. But some visitors evidently think it is for dripping water over his head. Hence there is a little notice pinned up at the side which reads "Please do not

[1] Also known as *The Sutra of Golden Light*. Cf. Nobel's *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-Sūtra. Das Goldglanz-Sūtra* (1958) for the only full translation of the version used in China and Japan.

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pour water over the divinity!" Obviously, we must take care over what these noble spirits, no doubt competent in themselves, like and do not like.

These are stories out of the fullness. Now let us return to emptiness. It is briefly explained, or rather rehearsed, in the popular *Heart Sutra*. This has been copied out ritually countless times, for merit, and has also been recited countless times in front of temples all over Japan, and of course elsewhere in East Asia. It is a simple act, performed almost automatically by uncountable pilgrims going round any of the well-worn pilgrim routes devoted to Kannon Bosatsu (who always seems to me to be a little bit senior to Jizō Bosatsu). It is quite easy to pull out the little folding booklet, or indeed to have learned this short sutra by heart, and rattle off its very few lines, with or without comprehension. The point is that it might lead to the accrual of some merit, which in turn could be of benefit either to oneself or even to others. But it should be recited, ritually, in the right place. Not just anywhere. And here again people sometimes get into a muddle, because adjacent to a Buddhist temple (a right place, assuming it is not the wrong sect) there may be a Shinto-style shrine (wrong place). Hence I gently draw attention to a notice once viewed which said "Please do not recite the Heart Sutra here". All these little notices are quite useful to people who are just trying to carry out a bit of normal religious behaviour, in the course of their ordinary lives. Let us look at one more example. In front of a Buddhist temple, apart from bowing, one folds one's hands flat, silently, in the *namaste* or *gasshō* position. But in front of a Shinto shrine the attention of the *kami* is drawn not only by pulling on a rope to strike a gong up above (as is also common in front of Buddhist temples) but by clapping the hands firmly twice. This is preceded and followed by the appropriate bows, and a silent moment, which might possibly be prayerful. At Buddhist temples, some people mistakenly clap, making an unexpected sharp sound, and this is also regarded as rather poor behaviour. Young people, or secularised people, often get this all mixed up and fail to clap properly at Shinto shrines, even if their wishes are earnest. Hence there are notices at many a shrine which tell people how to do it properly. The notices are authorised by the Jinja Honchō, usually referred to in English as the Association of Shinto Shrines.

But does any of this matter? Well, it does, and then again, it does not. This is where a brief explanation of emptiness might be relevant. The matter is strikingly addressed in another chapter of the *Sutra of Brilliant Golden Light* which is about "the fulfilment of wishes on the basis of emptiness". This might seem not to make any sense, and yet it does. Shifting the terminology, one might say that without ultimate reality there is no ordinary life (which is easy enough to follow) but also that without ordinary life no perception of ultimate reality is possible. I cannot expound this chapter about the fulfilment of wishes now, because my relevant texts are separated from me by about

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10,000 miles as a result of the Corona Virus. But the same dialectic runs through all the "emptiness" sutras.

As is well known, a Buddhist sutra typically begins with the words "Thus I have heard" and purports to recount the words of the Buddha as uttered on such-and-such an occasion. Less widely recognised is that the historical Buddha could not possibly have uttered all the millions of words which are introduced in this way. The only defence against this comment, possibly scandalous in some people's ears, is that the contents of the sutra *could be* in tune with what is otherwise known of his teaching. Some academics like to say that sutras which exist in Chinese but have no known Sanskrit original from which they were translated, are apocryphal. They are, but so are the ones transmitted in Indian languages, especially Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, a language both special and ordinary. In fact, *all* the sutras of Buddhism are "apocryphal" in that they are ascribed to the Buddha without there being any evidence or serious likelihood that they do in fact derive from him. Of course, there are also some nuggets of history in the deep past of Buddhist tradition, but that is not my topic here. The point is simply that the *Heart Sutra*, for all its charm, and incisiveness, just like the other Mahāyāna sutras, does not derive directly from the Buddha himself. Realising this, especially in connection with the sutras to do with Amida Buddha, caused quite a shock in nineteenth century Japan, even though a learned but underestimated man had pointed it out clearly in the early part of the eighteenth.

Although there are two suttas (i.e. sutras) about emptiness among the canonical texts of Theravāda Buddhism, these do not achieve the paradoxical brilliance of the Mahāyāna texts on this matter, of which there are both very long ones and very short ones. These are the "perfection of insight" sutras or as Edward Conze called them, the "perfection of wisdom literature". This "insight" (corresponding to Erich Frauwallner's use of the German term *Einsicht*), or this wisdom, was the quality "practised" by a bodhisattva (a *bosatsu*) who was set on achieving the highest goal of all.

In his *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom* (1968), which he "chose, arranged and translated" Conze included at the end a "supplement" entitled "The Mantric Path". This consisted of a rather short text setting out the contraction of the perfection of insight into a few brief mantra-like syllables. It culminates in its expression in just one letter, namely "A", which "is a door to the insight that all dharmas are unproduced from the very beginning" (p.120). In his exploratory Introduction, Conze has various interesting statements. He is quite forthright in stating that "the teachings of the Prajñāpāramitā have little significance for the present age" and continues "To be quite truthful, they are equally irrelevant to any other age. They are meant for people who have withdrawn from society, and who have little, if any interest in its problems." (p. 16) On the other hand he declares,

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"The Prajñāpāramitā expresses a state of intoxication with the Unconditioned, and at the same time it attempts to cope with it and to sober it down." (p. 19) Those who, like Peggy Morgan and others at Lancaster, knew Conze in his lifetime would no doubt confirm that he was personally quite competent in sobering down his intoxication with any encounters with the Unconditioned which he may have experienced. He was neither a monk nor a pious householder. But he saw it like this: "Nirvana is called the Signless, because it cannot be recognised for what it is; the Wishless, because it cannot be desired; the Void, because it does not concern us at all." (p. 15) It is because of this that the Prajñāpāramitā can be expressed either at length, or in brief. We may recite the Prajñāpāramitā in 100,000 lines, if we have time, or just bring it down to the letter A.

Figure 1. Rinzai Zen monks honour the divinity Benzaiten by reciting the *Great Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* at speed. Photograph, Michael Pye.

Ordained Buddhist priests in Japan have an excellent method of loudly reciting the version in 100,000 lines, called *tendoku*. This involves picking up the numerous folded booklets of this single sutra, reciting the first line of each, spinning it through the air like a fan, then reciting the last line and moving on to the next (see Figure 1 above).

In between the long and the short there are various other lengths which have attracted attention, notably the compact *Heart Sutra* already mentioned. This also concludes with a mantra, but above all it reflects very clearly the dialectic between the spiritual and the ordinary, which Conze was interpreting. He was in general a good guide to these matters, but mistaken in regarding this text as "addressed to the spiritual

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élite" (above, p. 15), for as we know it is precisely this text which has been adopted in particular by multitudes of pilgrims and recited at temples all over Japan, sometimes even at inappropriate places. Famously, it begins with the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (in Jpanese Kanjizai, equals Kanzeon or Kannon) practising the "deep" *prajñāpāramitā* (the perfection of insight), perceiving the five constituents [of ordinary experience] to be empty [of own-being] and [thereby] giving release from all sufferings. It moves quickly to the well-known saying "The very form is emptiness, the very emptiness is form" and having expounded this, in brief, it tells us that "a bodhisattva is free of hindrances in spirit" and therefore without fear. "He is far removed from upsetting daydreams, and he finally perfects nirvana."[2] The bodhisattva does not need the concluding spell, but the pilgrims certainly conclude very clearly with that. After all, they are hoping to be released from all sufferings, and that could include various benefits in the world of ordinary experience. A short magical push might make all the difference: *gyatei gyatei haragyatei harasoogyatei boji sowaka* (in the Japanese pronunciation, which of course differs from Indian-Sanskrit). There is also the aspect of creating a little bit of merit, which can be transferred to others, to the deceased for their resting in peace, to the young who are finding their way and may need qualifications, or for the peace of the world around us. So it is that the fulfilment of wishes, or in other words this-worldly benefits, can arise "on the basis of emptiness", and profound spiritual insight is transformed into ordinary experience.

I will conclude these brief reflections with other illustrations (Figures 2 and 3 below) that show a hanging scroll, hand-drawn and scripted by a devotee. Judging by the style of the mounting, this unidentified person was probably also a pilgrim. The text itself is the *Heart Sutra*, the figure below is the Bodhisattva Kanzeon (popularly known as Kannon-sama), and the thin lines of his or her attire (the gender of Kanzeon being ambivalent) are made up of a further text.

[2] See the writer's *Japanese Buddhist Pilgrimage* (2015), 254-5, for an uninterrupted translation of the text as used in Japan, and Conze 1958 for a translation from Sanskrit with commentary.

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Figure 2. Scroll with Heart Sutra and Kannon-sama.

Figure 3. Detail of same. (Personal collection)

The characters of the latter text are too small to read, but as they are apparently more numerous than are needed for the *Heart Sutra* itself it may be drawn from the Kannon chapter in the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Heart Sutra* is delivered in exquisite calligraphy, but unfortunately the precise year of this offering, indicated at the end, is not completely legible. It is stated to have been produced during the Shōwa Era (1926-1989) but for reasons relating to its provenance I estimate the date to lie between 1950 and 1970. Such is the evanescence of this ordinary world.

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Peggy:
Tutor, Mentor and Friend - A Personal Reflection

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It is an honour to be asked to write a tribute for this Festschrift for Peggy Morgan in celebration of her eightieth birthday and to look back on her life and the contribution made to academia and interfaith relations.

I first encountered Peggy whilst an undergraduate at Westminster College where she was one of my tutors. She taught world religions and encouraged personal encounters with those from faith communities. This was a very interesting approach and so much more informative than simply reading about faith communities in textbooks. During the first year we visited a local synagogue in Oxford and also the Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in Great Gaddesden in Hertfordshire. Both of these visits provided real opportunities to meet and ask questions of those faith practitioners and we were made very welcome at both venues. I recall how tactfully Peggy dealt with a rather awkward question by one of my student group which prevented any offence to those hosting us. This is just one example of her open and careful approach in multi faith encounters. Peggy was my supervisor for my final year dissertation and carefully guided me in defining my topic choice and more importantly keeping me on track. She was happy to share her numerous contacts within the Buddhist community to enable me to meet and interview the Ven Dr Medagama Vajiragnana Nayaka Thera who was at that time the Chief Bhikkhu of the London Buddhist Vihara based in Chiswick, London. This proved a pivotal part of my research and I was welcomed back on several occasions to participate in ceremonies and meet other bhikkhus and many years later took part in several interfaith events based on the initial meeting which Peggy had facilitated.

During my time at Westminster I, along with other students, was introduced to the Religious Experience Research Centre which was housed on the campus. At that time Peggy was the Director and it was fascinating to learn about the history of the archive founded by Sir Alister Hardy in 1969 in Oxford. I spent some time researching the accounts of religious experiences catalogued within the archive and at that time

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researchers were permitted to examine the original submitted accounts which gave them a special resonance. When Westminster College closed in 2000 the site at Harcourt Hill was leased to Oxford Brookes and became part of that university. As a result the decision was taken to transfer the archive to the University of Wales (Lampeter campus) and Peggy oversaw the relocation and establishment of the RERC in its new home.

Also during this time a new Masters course in religious experience was about to be launched, initially at Westminster College but later under under the University of Wales. Peggy used her considerable experience and knowledge to write a Buddhist module for the Religious Experience MA programme. The degree was available by the time that I graduated and Peggy was instrumental in bringing it to my notice and encouraging me to continue with my studies on the part time MA programme. I duly enrolled and enjoyed the study days at both Westminster and later at Lampeter.

Peggy was an active member of the World Congress of Faiths and also supported the establishment of the International Interfaith Centre in Oxford in collaboration with the Revd Marcus Braybrooke (who was incidentally also a tutor at Westminster College) I became aware of the WCF through Peggy and later heard that The Buddhist Society was seeking a representative on the executive committee. I volunteered for the post and attended for an informal interview where to my surprise the first question was, 'so you are one of Peggy's' indicating the esteem that she was held in by those at the Society. I believe that this endorsement alone secured the post for me.

As I mentioned earlier Peggy first introduced me to the RERC archive during my time as an undergraduate at Westminster College. Peggy was very active in both the Society and Trust and attended many conferences organised in conjunction with Lampeter. She often lectured and we are fortune to have some recordings from those conferences still available today.

I remained in touch with Peggy and we often met at interfaith events or conferences and she is also a regular attendee at the Alister Hardy Members' Day conference held annually in Oxford and has lectured and spoken at many related events.

In the present day I continue to benefit from Peggy's wisdom and knowledge of faith communities, particularly from the Buddhist perspective. She is always gracious in welcoming you to her home in Oxford and is happy to discuss new developments in religious studies or prompt you to consider new avenues of research. Most generously she will often loan books, indeed sometimes suggesting that you share these with others, rather than returning them.

In summary, I am honoured to know Peggy and have learnt so much from her own tactful interactions with those of other faiths. Writing this article caused me to recall many key moments of my life and to appreciate the influence that Peggy had in guiding me at

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both Oxford and later in Lampeter whilst also supporting my membership of the WCF and AHS.

Peggy is widely known and respected in both academia and the interfaith world. However, perhaps her greatest achievement is reflected in the number of young students that she has supported over many, many years. Her gently persuasive manner which opens doors and encourages new avenues and approaches to the study of religions is a wonderful testament to her life in education which of course continues today, although she is in semi retirement. I would like to add my own best wishes and thanks and wish Peggy many more years of active and healthy life.

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Social and Engaged: Learning Transformations, Gender and Trans-Formations in Buddhist Teaching

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Prologue

Can there be a view from which the viewer is absent? Or a view point which is not also a point of view? Simplistic facticity assumes an external objective world. The basic objectivist stance is that the world exists without mediation, without interpretation, quite self-sufficient in its existence – it does not need perception of it to come into being. Nor, from such a simple objectivist stance, is gender identity anything other than a factual given: a-historical, outside culture, beyond even the necessity of self-conscious reflection of the identity's owner. However, there are few philosophical systems, and few individuals, who would not recognise that humans construct and shape their environment and identity, at least in part, by perception and interpretation. A certain amount of social, cultural and historical constructivism is allowed into even the most robust of realist worldviews. There is always the viewer and the viewed, both equally real.

Curiously, certain forms of Buddhism assert that there is no real world to perceive, nor is there any real perceiver of the world. All is, (or is not) nothing (*sunyata*). Buddhism is neither realist, nor anti-realist, in this sense, for it denies the validity of either position. Equally, there is no self (*anatta*) to perceive a gender or an identity. *Nirvana* (a word that perhaps describes this understanding) is neither a place nor a state, nor is it even a purposive action; it is neither delusion, nor the wisdom (*prajna*) that recognises delusion. By inaction all is accomplished: by having no 'view', of world or of self, all views are included.

But if this is the deep understanding of the meditating nun or monk, it leaves little room as a worldview for purpose or meaning, for acting in the world. So, there is a tradition of practical wisdom in Buddhism that enables the individual to function with meaning. In historical versions of the Mahayana this is encapsulated in the actions of the

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Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are individuals who have attained the realisation of *nirvana*, yet, instead of being released from the endless cycle of *samsara* (birth, death and rebirth), they elect to continue engaging in the world, driven by compassion for all sentient beings. They are, primarily, teachers.

This short article is informed by two great teachers, Peggy Morgan and Rita Gross. Their academic practice of teaching and sharing is supported on the foundations of research and writing. Their writing informs their practice as pedagogues. As teachers they offer a way of understanding, a perspective on the world for the student to interpret, to recognise their own and other's points of view and become transformed by learning.

Pedagogy and Personality

> Then the Buddha said to Śāriputra: "Did I not previously tell you that all the Buddha Bhagavats explain the Dharma with various explanations and illustrations, using skilful means, all for the sake of highest, complete enlightenment? All of these teachings are for leading and inspiring the bodhisattvas. Moreover, Śāriputra, I will now clarify what I mean with illustrations. Those with wisdom will be able to understand through these illustrations. (*The Lotus Sutra* 2009:56)

There is a term in Sanskrit for the tradition of passing on teachings from guru to student called *parampara.* It is my good fortune to work in a certain *parampara*, that of Peggy Morgan. I have described this same understanding in reference to one of my other great teachers, Ursula King (2017:2) While Ursula was my supervisor for Masters and doctorate, I met Peggy at a conference in 1997, where she encouraged me to join the British Association for the Study of Religions, a significant part of my academic identity for over twenty years – and where both Peggy and Ursula, as ex-Presidents of the association, remain committed supporters. As I completed my PhD in 2000, an academic position came up to establish a new programme in Religious Studies, alongside the existent Theology degree at Westminster College (where Peggy was an academic member of staff). It was an exciting opportunity to set up a new programme, as at the same time Westminster College merged with Oxford Brookes University. The post was in fact a replacement for James Cox (also an ex-President of the BASR) as he had moved to Edinburgh University. Peggy was planning her retirement (from the college), but she had also planned that there would be a period of handover and support for the new post-holder. I took the post and was delighted both to have Peggy as mentor in my first academic role and to discover the substantial and high-quality teaching materials in the

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study of religions strand of the Bachelor in Theology programme. Of course, Peggy had nurtured and maintained a robust programme design, underpinned by high quality learning materials for distance and face-to-face learning (ironically, as I write, this is exactly the kind of programme Universities are now developing to deal with the effects of Covid 19).

Not only did Peggy support me developing learning and teaching materials in the study of religions, but she also introduced me to Oxford and led me on tours around the city to sites of religious and cultural interest, while introducing me to religious leaders and facilitators – sources that I would use in organising trips and events for my new undergraduate cohorts. I also first visited the Ashmolean Museum with Peggy, where we will continue to meet for tea and cakes, after the prohibitions of the coronavirus crisis of 2020.

It is true to our friendship that in recent correspondence during the UK 'lockdown', we had been sharing our interest in wildlife and the natural world in which she remarked on the large number of bees visiting her garden and, perhaps with reference to the Buddhist understanding that Buddha is always 'going on' ie that practice is always ongoing whether a lay person or a Boddhisattva, she wrote:

> "Came across this: 'Aerodynamically the bumble bee should not be able to fly, but the bumble bee does not know it, so it goes on flying anyway' Stay safe and well" (personal correspondence, May 2020)

In recovering memories of our friendship, and Peggy's influence on my life and work, I lately realised that I had in fact used Peggy's published work in my first career as a secondary school teacher. As a teacher of History and Religious Education in the 1990s, I had used one particular text as a resource from the *Looking into World Religions* series (sic), published by Batsford. In *Being a Buddhist* (1989) I had a resource that explained some core characteristics of Buddhist life and practice. One of the chapters is entitled, 'Giving Loving Kindness and Friendship' and relates to *maitri or metta*, which is a central ethical and practice-based approach within most Buddhisms. It can be translated, as Peggy notes in the chapter, 'as both loving kindness and friendliness' (39). Moreover, she begins the chapter with an example of phenomenological *eidetic* essentialism about the core of Buddhism: 'Someone once asked the present Dalai Lama what his religion was. His reply was very direct: "My religion is kindness"' (38). The point is not framed that way – it is, after all, a text for younger readers - but the source is authoritative, however one views essentialist reductions. These points aside, as I look at the text now, it is the selection of sources used that intrigues me as pointers towards Peggy's understanding of

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the key features of Buddhist practice. In describing *metta,* Peggy uses a source written by Dharmachari Subhuti from a modern Buddhist organisation established in 1967, not a classical source. It is particularly apt in this section to cite his (and her) understanding of friendship:

> Real friendship involves an awareness of the other's potential. We do not simply see what they are but what they could be. Not only do we have powerful feelings of well-wishing towards our friends, but we hope that they will grow. Our friendliness would lead us to do everything we could to help them realise their potentiality. Real friendship is not need-based but growth-based and becomes fully possible when both friends are committed to developing as individuals. (from *Buddhism for Today*, D. Subhuti, cited in Morgan, 1989:39)

This narrative preamble is resonant with the experience of meeting and talking with Peggy. The narrative discourse is the sharing. Such passing on of experience and knowledge is the essence of the pedagogues' skilful means, or skill-in-means – it is often not the direct content of the lesson, but that the lesson is a step, or a partial step, toward another truth. Thus, (as an apt simile), in the academic study of religions, we use the term 'religion' while recognising that it is functionally incapable of covering the diversity and complexity of the phenomena we will later examine. We use the term, while we unpick its clumsy catch-all conception of religiosity. We share, at the start of undergraduate teaching, the exoticisation and reification of 'religions', gently unmasking the cookie-moulding tendency of the concept, before forcefully challenging its paradigmatic construction. And our students find themselves at the end of their programme in a wholly other place than where they began. Peggy's skilful sharing works like this.

Peggy Morgan's concern for teaching has always extended beyond higher level institutions. She has sought to engage and support organisations that develop teaching materials for younger and older students, such as the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education. She has also published widely texts for schools and lay readers. These include, *Buddhism in the Twentieth Century* (1984), *Being a Buddhist* (1989) and entries in the Dorling Kindersley *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2004), as well as multiple other publications. In 2006, Peggy and I co-wrote the text *Get Set For Religious Studies*. This was for a series at Edinburgh University Press that aimed at the transition of students from secondary level teaching to undergraduate teaching. In fact, we found it was used both for A levels and high schools as well as first year undergraduate courses. Peggy's interest in laying secure foundations for understanding how to study religions, as much as what religions are, underpins two of her key contributions to the academic study of

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religions: *Six Religions in the Twentieth Century* with W. Owen Cole (1984, revised and expanded to *Six Religions in the Twenty-first Century*, 2000) and *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* with Clive Lawton (1996, second edition, revised and expanded, 2007).

One specific text, among the plethora that are used in the many-jewelled net of Buddhisms, which has drawn the attention of Peggy Morgan is that of the 'The Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law' – The *Lotus Sutra* (see, for example, 1998 and 2004). The *Lotus Sutra* is an effective model for Morgan's own interests in gender and pedagogy as an academic writing and thinking about Buddhism. As some scholars on the sutra have observed:

> One text in particular lends itself to a discussion of women and children, the *Saddharma puṇḍarīka Sūtra* ("The Sūtra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law") or *Lotus Sūtra* (*Lotus* for short). The *Lotus* espouses all major Buddhist doctrines, has provided fodder for many thinkers, and is a source of much popular lore and practice. It is especially famous for its inclusiveness, a point reflected in the vast array of characters inhabiting its verses -- thousands of monks, nuns, laymen and women, *bodhisattvas,* gods, titans, centaurs, demigods, monstrous birds, ogres, ghosts etc. The *Lotus* is also notable for its use of child imagery (it continually refers to devout Buddhists as "sons/daughters of Buddha" and features the famous parable of "The Burning House" in which sentient beings are compared to children) and the presence of noted female Buddhists such as the historical Buddha's foster mother, Mahaprajapti, and his former wife, Yashodara. (2012: 60-61)

The next sections investigate in a little more depth how this sutra develops the importance of women within the Buddhist tradition and how a wider inclusivity makes transformation a process for all humans, beyond gender.

Emphasising Gender and Ethics in Buddhist Studies

The importance of gender in consideration of the Lotus Sutra has been highlighted by a number of significant scholars of Buddhism, such as Peggy Morgan and Rita Gross, as is noted in a study of key elements of the sutra ('Women and Children *Last*? Buddhism, Children and the *Naga* King's Daughter', 2012):

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> Another contemporary scholar, Peggy Morgan, discusses ethics in the *Lotus Sutra* from a more Western perspective. Morgan draws on Rita Gross' work *Buddhism After Patriarchy* to highlight her argument that the *Lotus Sutra* has more or less established a positive position for women. Gross also stresses how bodhisattvas are often depicted with feminine (as well as masculine) qualities, a fact that suggests their true nature as enlightened beings is beyond sexuality, including any "essential" characteristics of either male or female (qtd. in Morgan 362). Morgan observes, "This affirms that the enlightened nature belongs to women as well as men, those in female as well as male forms" (Morgan 362). (2012:66)

Neither Morgan nor Gross have shied away from highlighting the patriarchal history of Buddhism. It has been the work of scholars such as these, to uncover both the patriarchal structure and history of Buddhism and recover the positive role of women in a history that has mostly been written by men. For Morgan, one practice an academic can follow to recognise the role of women is simply the selection of illustrative material where affirmation is implicit in the presentation of female characters. One such example is in her consideration of female characters in Buddhist stories:

> An old lady who was a member of the Pure Land Buddhist sect was walking along a street when she met a Zen master, who rather teasingly said to her: 'On your way to the Pure Land, eh, Granny?' She nodded. 'Amida is there, waiting for you, is he?' She shook her head 'Not there? The Buddha not in his Pure Land? Where is he then?' She put up her hand and pointed to her heart. She then continued her walk. The Zen master was surprised and pleased. He called after her. 'You are a real believer in the Pure Land.' (Morgan, 1990)

In the short article from which this example is taken, which is aimed at teachers, Morgan uses the subtitle 'People in the tradition — *his and her stories'* (my emphasis). The deliberate inclusion of gender within the category of story is an important element of Morgan's contribution to understanding contemporary Buddhism for teachers and children. In the article, this is equally echoed in her selection of indicative key persons in Buddhist history which includes 'Mahaprajapati, the Buddha's aunt, who had brought him up after his mother's death and pressed for an order of nuns to be founded and, with Ananda's persistent support, became the first of this new order' (Morgan, 1990) and also her bibliographical selection of resources on women in Buddhism.

Morgan's conception of how stories work for children, also functions almost as a self-reflective commentary on her understanding of pedagogy, while her purposive

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selection of illustrative material underpins her ethical perspective for the necessity of including gender. We do not judge right or wrong interpretations, her pedagogical philosophy seems to suggest, but we can *select and direct* content and examples:

> Good stories, then, are effective: they work. It also seems to me that they work all the more powerfully because we are usually happy to leave their appreciation resting in the experience of each child, without any rigorous testing of exactly what s/he has gained from listening or of any right or wrong interpretation of each story. (Morgan, 1990)

Peggy Morgan's interest in Buddhism is of course more encompassing than is covered by the Lotus Sutra, or even by matters of gender – though gender underpins her wider interests. She is interested in ethical Buddhism and iconography and representation and, especially, in modern transformations of Buddhism that make the varied doctrines and multiple denominational branches relevant to modernity.

In a 2003 article entitled 'Wealth and Poverty in Buddhist Texts' Morgan delineates some of the key movements and figures who she deems important to the contemporary tradition:

> There is now a good body of secondary analytical work on those contemporary and sometimes controversial Buddhist movements, which come under the name of Engaged Buddhism or Socially Engaged Buddhism. The movements focus on issues of gender, environment, peace, work in prisons and hospices, for example, all of which have a wealth and poverty dimension. The talks and writings of the key figures in the movement are key *contemporary* texts for Buddhist reflection. These key figures are from a variety of Buddhist cultures and contexts. For example, Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Zen monk living in a community in France and with a global sangha network; Sulak Sivaraksa is a Thai lay-activist; A T Ariyaratne the founder of the Gandhian inspired Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka; Ken Jones a Welsh ecological activist; Chatsumarn Kabilsingh and Rita Gross are active for women in Thailand and the USA, but with global outreach and from Theravada and Tibetan Buddhist backgrounds respectively. Going back historically, there are also figures such as Dr B R Ambedkar, whose portrait has become an iconic text for the bodhisattva ideal amongst the ex-untouchable communities who became Buddhists. Ambedkar influenced the British founder of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, Venerable Sangharakshita, and is linked

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> through their Karuna Trust with self-help programmes amongst some of India's poorest communities.

The figures in this listing come from a range of traditional and more modern denominational strands in the broader Buddhist tradition. There are Theravadans and Mahayanans, people from across the globe, men and women. All are activists whose interests and activities are political and social. They apply interpretations of Buddhist teachings to global cultures and societies in order to bring about social change, that is more egalitarian and (to use a term with particular contemporary resonance) inclusive. Morgan's selection and affirmation of these figures and their associated movements places her in the same tradition. Some of these figures and their ideologies have been, as Morgan notes, controversial across the wider Buddhist network and within their own political cultures. For some Buddhists, these new networks are transgressive, they are not Buddhism. Yet scholars of religion, such as Morgan, embedded in the study of the history of religions, in descriptive phenomenology, seek to avoid doctrinal prescriptivism, and simply map the trajectories of religious adaptations. Morgan would merely agree with the social facts of changing forms of Buddhism as analysed by sociologist Phil Henry that,

> What is apparent is that the level of practice of the vast majority of engaged Buddhists … leaves one in little doubt that the changing circumstances (identities-in-transition) in a globalized environment are no less Buddhist for the practitioners than at any other time in history (Henry, 2006:30)

No scholar of religion though can claim to 'simply map' or 'merely agree with the social facts'. The selection of material, the emphases in research focus, are a manifesto of personal interests and objectives. Peggy Morgan's interests in gender, teaching and socially engaged Buddhism reflect both significant academic concerns and personal objectives to transform people and the world.

Putting the Trans in Trans-Formation in the Lotus Sutra

Morgan begins her article on 'Ethics and the Lotus Suutra' (1998) with a personal ascription of identity:

> My approach to the study of the *Lotus Suutra* and to the subject of the *Lotus Suutra* and Ethics is from the perspective of a western woman with a Christian

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> background and as an academic who teaches in the field of the study of religions or religious studies (1998)

It is an important statement of ethical values, not a caveat of mere biography. For, as she goes on to note, this particular article 'can be placed quite naturally against the background of my recent writing on ethics' (ibid. her reference is to the first edition of *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* edited with W Owen Cole, 1996). The ethics of personhood, and a persons' relations and actions with others is a core value of the wisdom of interpretation of texts, as much as ethics in daily social engagement.

In Morgan's analysis of the Lotus Sutra, a key theme is that of the possibility of enlightenment for women, and, more broadly, the non-gendered nature of the Buddhist ideal type of an enlightened being:

> Westerners who are not used to the conventions of Buddhist art often react to the rounded forms of the images of buddhas and bodhisattvas and, in the case of bodhisattvas, to their jewelled robes, with comments about their feminine appearance. It can be suggested that this sense of ambiguity is entirely appropriate since the true nature of an enlightened being is beyond sexuality, beyond the characteristics of male and female. (1998)

Morgan is arguing for an inclusive understanding of enlightenment that recognises women as capable of reaching this state, not from a bi-gendered inclusivity but because Buddhism is non-gendered, is 'beyond' sexuality'. Rita Gross, takes the ethics of gender ascription further in her challenge to fixed gender identities:

> Our clinging to our notions of gender can cause us suffering, but it can also cause others to suffer – something that should bother any Buddhist committed to Buddhist ethics (2018:97)

So, for Gross, a statement of personal identity, is a satisfactory beginning, but it is contingent on the deeper realisation that such categorisations may themselves *cause* consequent suffering if applied as absolute distinctions of personhood.

There is then, a progression between the approach of Morgan, that seeks to recollect and highlight the role of women, and then emphasise the non-gendered aspects of Buddhist teachings, and the approach taken by Gross in her last work, *Buddhism Beyond Gender*, which more vigorously challenges the gendered nature of Buddhism. It is

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a distinction akin to the various 'waves' of feminism whereby earlier forms of feminism sought to challenge patriarchal structures and uncover the history of women, to make her-stories too, and the later forms of feminism which have systematically unpicked the patterns of patriarchy and constructions of gender normativity.

Gross is uncompromising in her analysis of the way patriarchy influences Buddhism and creates a 'prison of gender roles':

> … I have repeated many times. Classical Buddhism presents an *intolerable contradiction between its gender-neutral and gender-egalitarian teachings and its male-dominant institutions* (her emphasis, 2018:25)

The reason that the Lotus Sutra is the locus of such debates about gender and enlightenment in Buddhism revolves around a key section of this long and complex text. (This sutra is often the focus of analysis of the central Mahayana teaching of 'skilful means' – *Upaya Kausalya* - and the trope of the burning house, rather than reification of the feminine or even positive representation of female characters in the narrative). This key section for a feminist reading relates to the daughter of the *naga* king. We see in the presentation of the daughter exactly the patriarchal assumptions both Morgan and Gross have highlighted in the tradition. The Sutra explicitly refers to the traditional assumption, prevalent not only within Buddhism but also in the Indic cultures from where the text derives, of the pollution of the female body.

> At that time Śāriputra spoke to the daughter of the *nāga* king, saying: "You say that you will soon attain the highest path. This is difficult to believe. Why is this? The female body is polluted; it is not a fit vessel for the Dharma. (2009:184)

Corporeal pollution is, then, ascribed to the impossibility of spiritual realisation (the Dharma and the 'highest path'). Yet the daughter of the *Naga* king does achieve the 'highest, complete enlightenment' – by transforming, becoming trans-sexual:

> Then the assembly there all saw the daughter of the *nāga* king instantly transform into a man, perfect the bodhisattva practices, go to the *vimalā* world in the south, sit on a jewelled lotus flower, and attain highest, complete enlightenment, become endowed with the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics, and expound the True Dharma universally for the sake of all sentient beings in the ten directions.

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> Then the bodhisattvas, *śrāvaka*s, eight kinds of *deva*s, *nāga*s, and so on, humans and nonhumans of the *sahā* world, all saw in the distance that the daughter of the *nāga* king had become a buddha and was universally teaching the Dharma for the sake of the humans and *deva*s in that assembly. They rejoiced greatly and honored her from afar (2009:185)

The pronoun for the daughter, though she has transformed into a man remains feminine. What are we to make of this bi-gendered Buddha? Or, is she not bi-gendered, but, in fact transgender? The Sutra repeatedly emphasises that the path laid out is available for all sentient beings, for 'monks and nuns, 'sons or daughters of a virtuous family'. It would seem this Buddhism of the Lotus Sutra crosses time to address contemporary gender identity politics and the concerns of LGBTQ+ discourses on sexuality and gender.

But it would be a generous interpretation that states this is formal recognition of the equality of women either in the institutional tradition, or in the teachings. She is not even identified with her own name, but through ascription to her father – 'the daughter of the *Naga* King'. It is only by transformation to a male that she attains enlightenment. Yet, that she does, that she is transgendered, identifies the *Naga* king's daughter as a positive model for both women and transgendered people in the Buddhist teachings.

Freed from the 'prison of gender' we may excise the cultural baggage of patriarchy and valorise the inclusivity of the Sutra:

> "O Nakṣatrarājasaṃkusumitābhijna! This sutra saves all sentient beings. This sutra makes all sentient beings free from suffering. This sutra greatly benefits all sentient beings and brings their aspirations to fulfilment, just as a clear, cool pond satisfies the thirsty, as a fire satisfies those suffering from cold, as clothes for the naked, as a caravan leader for merchants, as a mother for her children, as a boat for the traveller, as a physician for the sick, as a lamp for the gloom, as a treasure for the poor, as a king for the people, as the sea for traders, and a torch for those in darkness. In the same way, this *Lotus Sutra* frees sentient beings from every suffering, all the pains and bonds of illness and of birth and death." (2009: 285)

Unfortunately, Rita Gross' death in 2015 meant she was not able to address transgender issues in Buddhism. In the foreword to *Buddhism Beyond Gender: Liberation from Attachment to Identity*, Judith Simmer-Brown notes that 'Shambhala editors informed me that Rita had, in fact, intended to include a short section on this topic, but it was never completed' (2018: xvi).

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Morgan concludes her analysis of the Sutra with the clear statement that gender is not a feature of the possibility of Buddhist enlightenment

> We are left with the queries "What are these external forms that we judge so important? How do they relate to Enlightenment?" These questions are central for the Buddhist and are ones to which there is a confident answer that physical forms are illusory and insubstantial compared with the potential for Enlightenment that is within all sentient beings. (1998)

Transformation by Sharing

Metta is both loving kindness and friendship. Both are practices, not merely existential categories. The constancy of love and compassion is not fixed, it is a constant practice. It is one of the boons of Buddhist teaching that practice and action are entwined with understanding of emotional and mental states. Equally, in the ethics of social engagement there is a focus on action.

In the inclusivity of the Lotus Sutra worldview, we are all practitioners, whatever our gender identity. The Sutra uses the trope of the burning house for a parent who seeks to lead their children to safety, though they do not understand the danger they are in. The Sutra refers to a father, but we may assume it is any parent, just as we may assume the children are female, male, intra-sex or trans.

> This house is already engulfed in flames. If my children and I do not get out, we shall perish in the fire. I will now use skilful means to help my children escape from this disaster. (2009:57)

Clearly a burning house and the existential safety of children are ultimate concerns. In the language of the academic study of religions, Religion is defined as an 'ultimate concern'. So too are the practices we choose to undertake in the living of our lives – we say, 'I gave my life to …' to describe our personal histories. Our ultimate concerns are partly defined by the history of our practices. For Peggy Morgan we see this in the academic study of religions, of Buddhism particularly, of highlighting the role of women in these studies, and of sharing and teaching about these ideas for many years.

I would argue that sharing and teaching are both actions and practices, that can develop loving kindness and friendship. They are also both cores to change and transformation. Humans transform in relation to others. Transformation occurs because of

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teachers, gurus and friends. In the Buddhist tradition, a person who is recognised as one who has deep knowledge of the texts, of the practices that underpin deep understanding, is called a Dharma-teacher. It is appropriate to recognise that, for many students and friends, Peggy Morgan has been a transformative Dharma-teacher.

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What Makes an Experience 'Religious'? The Necessity of Defining Religion

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I recall sitting in my office in Edinburgh University in 1996 when I received a telephone call from Peggy Morgan. She asked if I would consider serving as the Bulletin Editor for the British Association for the Study of Religions, of which at the time she was the Honorary Secretary. I had just been at Edinburgh for three years, having arrived from the University of Zimbabwe in 1993, and was relatively new to the BASR. Nonetheless, I was honoured to be asked and readily accepted. That initiated a long and fruitful collegial relationship with Peggy that saw me work with her as a fellow faculty member at Westminster College, Oxford in 1998-99, as the BASR Secretary after she became President of the Association in 2000, as founding editors of the Advances in Religious Studies Series of Continuum (now Bloomsbury) and as close working partners when she was External Examiner for Religious Studies at Edinburgh University. Peggy and I have maintained a close friendship over the years, mostly through meeting at the conferences of the BASR, but also at the conferences of the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), and at numerous seminars in Oxford and Edinburgh.

With the many ways our paths have crossed over the past twenty-five years, I have considered how I might reflect in my contribution to this much-deserved *Festschrift* on a subject that does justice to our mutual academic interests. I could have highlighted Peggy's dedication to promoting inter-religious understanding, considered her firm commitment to exploring issues raised by new methods in the study of religions, referred to her earlier work on religious education in schools or analysed her particular interest in the contribution of Ninian Smart to the British interpretation of the phenomenology of religion. I have chosen none of these, but want in this chapter to explore some new ways of thinking about 'religious experience', a topic that is relevant to Peggy's academic work having served as Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC) from 1996 to 2002, when it was located in Westminster College. During her time as Director of the RERC, she sought to enlarge the remit of the academic study of religious experience by linking it methodologically to the programme of non-confessional Religious Studies she learned first as a student at Lancaster University. In the remainder of this chapter, I want

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to follow Peggy's lead by exploring the fundamental theoretical and practical question that asks what are the necessary conditions that must exist when distinguishing a religious from a non-religious experience.

The Object of Religious Experience According to William James and Alister Hardy

In 2015, Peggy wrote the first article in the inaugural issue of the open access *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience,* which is published by the Religious Experience Research Centre, now located at the University of Wales Trinity St David, under the editorship of its current Director, Professor Bettina Schmidt. In her article, which carries the title, 'Continuing the Heritage: William James, Alister Hardy and the Work of The Religious Experience Research Centre', Peggy traces the history of the study of religious experience primarily through the work of the founder of the RERC, the marine biologist Sir Alister Hardy, and the seminal figure in the study of religious experience, William James (Morgan 2015: 3-19). After he retired from the Chair of Zoology at Oxford University in 1969, Hardy, who since a boy had a strong interest in religious experience, established the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford. He began collecting and collating statements in response to the question, 'Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?' (Schmidt 2015: 1-2). Hardy published this question in British newspapers and began a project of classifying the responses he received following the taxonomic procedures he learned as a marine biologist. At the time of writing, the RERC has compiled and codified over 6000 entries based on testimonies of individuals who have described their own religious experiences, some of which now have been obtained from sources outside the English-speaking world.

In her contribution to the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*, Peggy draws attention to similar methods employed by William James and Alister Hardy. Relying on research on conversion experiences conducted by his PhD student at Harvard University, Edward Dillen Starbuck, James organised religious experiences according to four basic typological classifications: that which cannot be communicated using ordinary language (ineffability); that which opens the individual to a special knowledge (noetic quality); that which cannot be replicated (transiency); that in which the individual's will is suspended and subject to a superior power (passivity) (James 1902: 380-81). James presented his findings in the Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1901-1902, which were published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Although

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James wrote in many other connections, including philosophy and theories of science, his work on religious experience became the starting point and foundation for subsequent modern studies in this field. Peggy notes that James and Hardy developed typological classifications of religious experience as 'scientific pragmatists', who derived their findings not from ideological presuppositions but from the application of experimental methods (Morgan 2015: 8).

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James (1902, 31) defined religion as '*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine*' (emphasis in original). It should be noted that James was not rejecting sociological interpretations of religion in this statement by his apparent emphasis on the individual and solitude, but was explaining the context for his research into religious experience (See, Carrette and Lamberth 2017: 206-08). Nonetheless, he does make it unmistakably clear that religious experience must relate to what the individual considers divine, a thread, as we will see, is followed in later definitions. James (1902: 38) explains that he uses the 'divine' not only to refer to 'the primal and enveloping and real' but to suggest the deep importance of the object of experience to the individual, who, as a result, responds to the divine 'solemnly and gravely'. Of course, James understands differences in the intensity of experiences, but he maintains that for the experience to be 'religious', it must reflect an encounter with a 'primal reality' that is treated with utmost seriousness and not 'by a curse or a jest' (James 1902: 38).

In her article focusing on William James and Alister Hardy, Peggy contends that both James and Hardy understood religion as 'personal' (Morgan 2015: 12). After citing James's well-known definition of religion that I noted above in support of this assertion, she turns to a more detailed analysis of how religion and, hence religious experience, was understood by Hardy, In his important book, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Hardy refers to religion as a 'feeling of contact with a Greater Power beyond the self' (cited by Morgan 2015: 12). He adds: 'The main characteristics of man's religious and spiritual experiences are shown in his feelings for a transcendent reality' (cited by Morgan 2015: 12). Although Peggy uses these statements to support the 'personal' nature of religion, they suggest equally that because religion is seen always as relating to a greater power or transcendent 'reality', what makes an experience religious and distinguishable from other experiences for James and Hardy is precisely its relation to such an alleged reality. This widespread interpretation is supported further if we look at a sampling of how scholars writing in respected reference books have defined the 'object' of religious experience.

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How Religious Experience is Commonly Defined

An informative entry on 'Religious Experience', published in the *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions* in 1981, was written by H.N. Malony, who at the time was Professor in the Graduate School of Psychology in Fuller Theological Seminary. Malony provides a classic example of a scholar who defines religious experience as related to transcendental entities. In his opening sentence, he provides an overview of what he discusses in the article and, at the same time, makes clear the parameters within which he considers an experience to qualify as 'religious':

> An encounter with what is seen as transcendent reality; varies among major religious traditions; can be theistic or nontheistic, individual or group, passive or active, novel or recurring, intense or mild, transitory or enduring, tradition-centered or not, initiatory or developmental, expected or spontaneous; types may include ascetic, mystical, or prophetic, either reviving, affirming or converting, either confirming, responsive, ecstatic or revelational (Malony 1981: 613).

He then defines the focus of religious experience as 'a claim of an encounter with a novel object, i.e. the divine'. This 'accounts for its uniqueness in comparison to all other types of experience' (Malony 1981: 613). A religious as opposed to a non-religious experience, therefore, for Malony, is identified exclusively by an encounter with a transcendent entity. It need not be novel or intense, and there is no necessary relationship between a religious experience and a particular belief about the nature of the divine.

This definition of religious experience, or permutations of it, has been repeated in numerous publications, three of which demonstrate deepening levels of sophistication. For example, Robert Kaizen Gunn's entry in the *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* defines religious experience simply 'as an experience of the transcendent or the supernatural (or some equivalent term)' (Gunn 2010: 773). A related, but more technical analysis, is provided by Keith E. Yandell in his article on 'Religious Experience' that appeared in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, in which Yandell defines religion soteriologically. He argues that every religion 'has two essential components, a *diagnosis* and a *cure*' (Yandell 2010: 405) (emphasis in original). The important distinction between a religious and a non-religious diagnosis is that a religious diagnosis 'asserts that every human person has a basic non-physical illness so deep that, unless one is cured, one's potential is unfulfilled and one's nature crippingly flawed' (Yandell 2010: 405). As a result,

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a religious experience occurs when a person is cured of the non-physical illness that inflicts itself on every human as it has been diagnosed by a particular religious tradition. Writing in the *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Jerome Gellman defines 'religious' as referring to an alleged out of the ordinary experience 'purportedly granting acquaintance with, or supporting belief in the existence of, realities or states of affairs not accessible by way of sense perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection' (Gellman 2015: 155). In each of these definitions, reference is made to what the individual perceives as the non-ordinary causes of the experience: 'transcendent or supernatural' (Gunn); knowledge of cures of a 'non-physical illness' that stifles individual development (Yandel); that which is inaccessible by way of ordinary perceptions, including sense, bodily or mental apprehensions (Gellman). In his entry on Religious Experience in the *Sage Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion*, Mihai Coman classifies these typical ways of defining religious experience as emphasising 'a certain type of experience, radically different from any other type of human experience', which, as interpreted by theologians and phenomenologists, such as Rudolf Otto, Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade, is treated as not having been 'influenced by linguistic, cultural, or historical circumstances', that is as remaining 'untouched by profane things' (Coman 2020: 685).

Much recent academic work has been done on re-thinking religious experience that pushes our understanding of the 'religious' nature of such experiences beyond theological or ahistorical assumptions. Two examples include the monograph by Ann Taves, entitled *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (2009), and Bettina Schmidt's edited volume, *The Study of Religious Experience: Approaches and Methodologies* (2016). Of particular interest to me in this context is the manner by which Taves proposes to separate 'religion' from 'non-religion' by constructing a pragmatic interpretation of religion, with quite practical implications for the study of religious experience. After reviewing Taves's approach, in what follows, I offer my own analysis of religion and religious experience, one in which I contend that, for an experience to be religious, there is no requirement to posit a transcendental object as the focus or alleged cause of the experience.

Ann Taves on Religion as 'Things Considered Special'

Chapter one of Taves's book carries the simple title, 'Religion', with the sub-title, 'Deeming Things Religious'. Initially, Taves distinguishes between what she calls a 'sui generis' approach to religious experience, which assumes that some experiences are inherently religious, and ones that are ascribed as religious by those who have undergone

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the experience. These two perspectives are reflected in approaches to the study of religion: the first represents the idea that religion stands as a category by itself that cannot be reduced to other disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, biology or any other field of study; the second argues that religion, in Taves's (2009: 16) words, 'is purely relational and has no essential content of its own'.

By differentiating between sui generis and ascriptive methods, Taves suggests that defining religion or religions substantively is confusing. A far better approach is to study what people deem religious, that is, what they 'view as special, or that they set apart' (Taves 2009: 17). On this model, it is possible to re-frame how religious experience is understood. Rather than following the 'sui generis model', which assumes that 'there are uniquely religious (or mystical or spiritual) experiences, emotions, acts, or objects', the 'ascription model' contends 'that religious or mystical or spiritual or sacred "things" are created when religious significance is assigned to them' (Taves 2009: 17).

Taves (2009: 18-19) argues that during the latter half of the twentieth century, scholars of religion advanced as a 'disciplinary axiom' that religion constituted an irreducible object for study that could only be explained in religious terms. It was accepted that to do otherwise was to fall into the trap of reductionism whereby religion was erroneously interpreted in nonreligious terms. According to Taves, this had unintended consequences for the comparative study of religions, the field with which most scholars in the 'sui generis' camp associated. If religion is irreducible to that which is nonreligious, the consequence is that religious studies scholars limited themselves to comparing what they defined as religious things, such as Eliade's cosmogonic myths or Wilfred Cantwell Smith's expressions of personal faith (See Cox 2010: 64-68). The ascription model, as outlined by Taves, makes genuine comparative studies possible because, she argues, 'it frees us to compare things that have features in common, whether they are deemed religious or not' (Taves 2009: 19). It also has the advantage of urging scholars to understand why 'people deem some things … as religious and others as not' (Taves 2009: 19).

The study of religious experience on the ascription model is based on empirical methods for interpreting causality and thereby avoids the theological associations of the sui generis model, which assumes that 'religious things, existing as such, have special inherent properties that can cause things to happen' (Taves 2009: 20). Scholars of religion, that is those who study what people deem religious, focus on how people 'characterize things as religious' and as a result how they 'endow them with the (real or perceived) special properties that are then presumed to be able to effect things' (Taves 2009: 20). Even scholars who define religion non-theologically, fail to achieve genuine empirical results because they limit themselves to studying what *they* deem to be

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religious rather than investigating whether 'people directly involved with the "thing" in question deem it religious or not' (Taves 2009: 21).

Were Taves to have stopped at this point, she would have been left open to the charge that the scholar of religion simply accepts commonsense, unreflective ideas about what constitutes religion and what types of experience qualify as being religious. She admits that 'even if our primary interest is in how people on the ground deem things religious…we still need to specify what we mean by "religious"' (Taves 2009: 22). In order to avoid the problem of falling back into the error of the 'sui generis' model, Taves introduces the concept 'specialness' as a 'generic net that captures most of what people have in mind when they refer to "sacred," "magical,", "spiritual," "mystical," or "religious"' (Taves 2009: 26). She claims that she is following in the steps of Durkheim by adopting this approach, who referred to 'sacred things' as 'things set apart and forbidden' (Taves 2009: 26). In like manner, it is possible to study what things people identify as special and 'if there are particular types of things that are more likely to be considered special than others' (Taves 2009: 26). This enables 'specialness' to be studied both behaviourally and substantively. In this way, Taves addresses the problems created by all attempts to define religion, while at the same time resolving the dichotomy set up between sui generis and ascriptive methods in the study of religions:

> Rather than stipulating a definition of "religious ascriptions" or "things deemed religious," we can use the idea of "specialness" to identify a set of things that includes much of what people have in mind when they refer to things as "sacred," "magical," "mystical," "superstitious," "spiritual," and/or "religious". Whatever else they are, things that get caught up in the web of relations marked out by these terms are things that someone or some group has granted some sort of special status (Taves 2009: 27).

If we follow Taves, an experience to be considered religious must satisfy two conditions: it must be deemed religious by the individual experiencing it and/or the group among whom the experience occurs; and it must be granted the status of 'specialness' by the individual who has undergone the experience and/or the group of which the individual forms a part.

Defining Religion

I have worked for the past twenty years on developing an increasingly restricted definition of religion, partly in response to the challenge to Religious Studies articulated by Timothy

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Fitzgerald in what I regard as his groundbreaking book, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2000). My first effort at doing this was published as the Afterword to the volume commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the British Association for the Study of Religions entitled *Religion: Empirical Studies*, edited by Steven Sutcliffe and published in 2004 (Cox 2004: 259-64), a volume for which Peggy Morgan wrote the Foreword (2004, xiii-xv). In my contribution to the book, I began a process in which I gradually added layers to my argument that religion can be defined analytically in non-theological terms. I based my initial theory largely on the work of the French sociologist, Danièle Hervieu-Léger. In her book, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (2000), first published in French in 1993, and in a later chapter appearing in a volume on issues in defining religion edited by Jan Platvoet and Arie Molendijk (1999: 73-92), Hervieu-Léger defined religion in purely sociological terms by stressing its transmission from generation to generation in the collective memory. In my subsequent publications, I have slowly refined what I mean by religion so that in my most recent monograph, *Restoring the Chain of Memory: T.G.H. Strehlow and the Repatriation of Australian Indigenous Knowledge* (2018), I have arrived at a definition of religion that is socially contextualised and, I believe, is entirely free of theological associations.

In her discussion of sociological theories concerning the place of religion in the late twentieth century, Hervieu-Léger (1999: 76) suggests that the predictions of the demise of religion have been proved wrong by the contemporary situation, but in a quite ambiguous way. In line with the secularisation thesis, society in the West has for many years been experiencing the 'evaporation of the socio-religious link which once constituted long term support for the construction of a religious culture encompassing aspects of social life', but, at the same time, we are witnessing the unexpected, or at least unanticipated, wide dissemination of religious belief (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 76). This latter phenomenon suggests that 'religion still speaks … But it does not speak in those areas where one might expect', that is, within institutions like churches or mosques or through official channels of the historical religions (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 76). Rather, 'one discovers its presence, diffuse, implicit or invisible, in economics, politics, aesthetics, in the scientific, in the ethical and in the symbolic' (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 76). This broad dissemination of religion in modern life makes defining religion at once extremely difficult, but necessary. The scholar needs to know what to investigate as 'religion' when describing and analysing what Hervieu-Léger (1999: 76) calls 'the diverse surreptitious manifestations of religion in all profane and reputedly non-religious zones of human activity'.

If we follow Hervieu-Léger's train of thought, we will see that the question confronting scholars is not, for example, could a modern spectator sport like football be considered a 'religion' any more than it asks if modern expressions of Christianity,

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Judaism or Islam can be considered a religion. According to Hervieu-Léger, the important issue for a socially embedded modern definition of religion pivots on the question of legitimisation. How is the act of believing legitimised? And here Hervieu-Léger arrives at the essential and necessary condition for religion to exist in any human community: 'There is no religion without the explicit, semi-explicit, or entirely implicit invocation of *the authority of a tradition*; an invocation which serves as support for the act of believing' (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 87-8, emphasis in original). On this accounting, what makes something religious depends on whether or not the forms of believing invoke or 'justify themselves, first and foremost, upon the claim of their inscription within *a heritage of belief*' (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 88, emphasis in original). Religious groups define themselves 'objectively and subjectively as *a chain of memory*, the continuity of which transcends history' (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 89, emphasis in original). By relating to a chain of memory, religious communities collectively share in acts of remembrance of the past which give 'meaning to the present' and contain the future (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 89). Hervieu-Léger (1999: 88) calls this proposition a '*working hypothesis*', the aim of which is to create 'one sociological theory (among others)' that responds to the question of how religion is manifested in modernity (emphasis in original).

In *Restoring the Chain of Memory*, I argue that religion consists of three necessary elements: community, authority and tradition (Cox 2018: 30). This reflects a socio-cultural definition of religion that stands in contrast to numerous other ways religion is described, such as belief in supernatural agents, the deliberate affirmation of individuals to alleged transcendent demands, a relationship of humans to a power or powers greater than themselves, a solution to questions about ultimate meaning, or the sense of or feeling for the numinous. Communities, as Hervieu-Léger observes, need not be restricted to traditional institutions, since even individuals can be bound to a 'heritage of belief' on which they construct 'the meaning they give to their own existence' (Hervieu-Léger 1999: 90). For example, individuals who take part in contemporary 'new age' movements, such as trance dance or drumming sessions as practised by neo-shamanic groups, sometimes simply as weekend participants, will discover that the organisers appeal to ancient shamanic traditions to legitimise the authority on which they base their message (Cox 2015: 15-19). This is what Hervieu-Léger means when she observes of such groups that it matters 'little that the reference to past witnesses is 'in the main extraordinarily inconsistent and fanciful' (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 81). What matters is 'the imaginative perception of the link which across time establishes the *religious* adhesion of members to the group they form and the convictions that bind them' (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 81, emphasis in original). This leads to her conclusion: 'One would describe any form of

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believing as religious which sees its commitment to a chain of belief it adopts as all-absorbing' (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 81).

This interpretation of religion is particularly useful for analysing religion in light of problems inherent in the so-called religion-secular divide, or in the current movement to distinguish religion from non-religion in the field of 'non-religion studies' (Lee 2012; Cox 2016: 26-31). It also sheds light on what Ninian Smart differentiated as genuine religion from religion-like contemporary movements, such as nationalism, patriotism or even sport. Smart's dimensions of religion (Smart 1977: 15-25) could be applied nicely to religion-like activities, or what he called 'secular world views' (Smart 1992: 25), but he argued that they could not be classified as 'religion' because they lacked a transcendental referent and because participants in such movements did not themselves consider their activities religious (Smart 1992: 25). If we follow Hervieu-Léger on this point, we collapse the strong differentiation between religion and the secular in classical secularisation theory, but, as a consequence, we need not separate religion from non-religion on the basis of belief in out of the ordinary, transcendental entities. What identifies religion as opposed to non-religion depends on the authority by which identifiable communities are legitimated and the sense of obligation such authority maintains, even over individuals, who may only loosely relate to community activities. If I return to the case of neo-shamanic groups, what constitutes a shamanic experience as 'religious' is not that references are made to travelling to other worlds and encountering unusual spirits, such as power animals, but that the beliefs in such worlds and spirits are legitimised by appeals to an ancient, primal and universal human tradition that authenticates the participation of individuals in the transitory group. Or, to take another more generalised example, the overpowering force of world capitalism is rooted in an authoritative ideology that is all-encompassing and demands conformity by members of most contemporary societies. This fits Hervieu-Léger's definition of religion, despite the fact that capitalism fosters intense individualism and competition, a spin-off of the same authoritative tradition. In such an analysis, strict dichotomies between religion and the secular, religion and non-religion, based on beliefs in transcendental entities, fail, whereas analyses of the sources of legitimation and authority prove helpful and productive in identifying what we mean by religion in the modern world.

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Religious Experience as the Experience of an Overwhelming Authoritative Tradition

According to my definition, religion does not refer of necessity to a transcendent source nor must it be related to that which extends beyond ordinary explanation, but it must include identifiable communities, authority and tradition, all understood in terms of Hervieu-Léger's 'heritage of belief' forming a chain of memory. If this is accepted, what we mean by 'religious' experience must be reframed by removing it from its connection to theological or quasi-theological assumptions about the 'divine', a 'Greater Power' or a 'transcendent reality'. A religious experience, to be religious, must occur in the context of what individuals or groups experience when they are placed into a situation whereby a tradition to which they relate, either explicitly or implicitly, exercises an overwhelming power over them. It does not matter if such an experience occurs in moments of patriotic fervour, at great sporting events, when purchasing a new home in the market economy, when attending a political rally or being baptised by the Holy Spirit in a Pentecostal Church. The criteria for the experience to be religious must relate to a tradition that has been embedded in the individual or group consciousness and that by its transmission has produced the environment for the experience to occur.

The term 'overwhelming authority' does not imply that the experience is overwhelmingly intense, sudden, novel, unanticipated or extreme. It does suggest that the experience results from adherence to a tradition that is legitimised in a way that results in its exercising profound authority over groups or individuals. If we take one of Ninian Smart's 'religion-like' examples, American patriotism, we can see precisely how this works (Smart 1992: 24). The tradition out of which American patriotism emerges relates to stories about the founding of the nation, including the authority vested in the written constitution, and the struggles for independence embodied in the early freedom fighters during the Revolutionary War. Of course, the tradition was not new; it was emerging throughout the eighteenth century in the form British liberalism with its ideals of individual liberty and was informed by the development of capitalist ideals in the late eighteenth century as expressed in the writings of Adam Smith. Nonetheless, for the ordinary American, from an early age, the idea of individual liberty, the freedom to develop according to one's own efforts, and the notion that opportunity is extended to all are enshrined in the collective consciousness. Every American school pupil knows by daily repetition the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag and no sporting event from high school basketball to professional baseball begins without the spectators standing and singing the National

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Anthem. Patriotism forms a part of the fibre of the American tradition and it is transmitted with an overwhelming authority. At times, it produces experiences of deep emotion and intensity, as experienced by memorials to the victims of the Twin Towers attack in New York on September 11, 2001, which was regarded as much more than a single event, but thought of as an unforgettable violation by those intent on destroying the American way of life. Other experiences of American patriotism can be much less intense, but no less important, such as might be experienced when a person approaches a view of the Rocky Mountains while travelling in a car from the east, a sight that might prompt the individual to suddenly sing the song, 'America the Beautiful'. The point I am making is obvious: unless one thinks of America as a transcendent reality, a divine entity, or a supernatural being, what makes the experiences of American patriotism 'religious' is precisely the community adhesion that forms the American nation, which is borne by a tradition that has been transmitted from generation to generation by those in authority from governmental officials through educational systems to the media. Even in today's polarised state, loyalty to the national interest binds patriotic Americans together regardless of where they situate themselves on the political spectrum.

Clearly, what I have suggested about American patriotism can be applied to societies that possess a strong focus on the divine, as in some Islamic states, or among groups that interpret their traditional social structure as having been established by supernatural entities. With respect to this latter example, I have written in numerous places about Indigenous Religions, particularly as I have researched them in Alaska, Zimbabwe and Australia (Cox 2007; Cox 2014). I have discovered that the most important elements in indigenous societies are precisely the manner whereby localised traditions are maintained by appeals to an authoritative tradition, even though such appeals have adapted to numerous outside interventions, including colonial governments, Christian missions and neo-colonial economic interference. What makes it possible to speak about Indigenous Religions as a whole, although with great qualification, does not result from beliefs in spirits or the living forces within nature, but the manner whereby beliefs in spirits, usually ancestors, are used to re-enforce the traditions through which the communities trace their identities. Oftentimes today these same traditions form the basis for recovering the past and restoring the chain of memory that had been interrupted by invading cultures. Indigenous Religions thus can be identified by kinship ties and quasi-legendary stories about founding ancestors through which the authoritative tradition is transmitted in the collective memory. In Zimbabwe, for example, the social order of local communities mirrors the spiritual world based on ancestral traditions; it is this which makes their stories and

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rituals 'religious'. The experiences of spirit possession, ancestor protection, or healing by unseen forces do not make such experiences religious; they are religious because they are embedded in a 'heritage of belief'.

Defining Religion and Things Deemed Religious

My interpretation of religious experience shares some common themes with the theory advanced by Ann Taves, particularly her emphasis, which was voiced also by Ninian Smart (1992: 25), that a scholar studies as religious that which is deemed religious by individuals or a community. If we follow my theory, which I have argued is consistent with the phenomenological method that insists on including the perspectives of adherents, a tradition that is transmitted must be accepted as authoritative by participants; it must be owned or named as such, even if only implicitly, and linked through tradition to a shared memory. This, however, is as far as I can go with Taves's insistence on religion as that which is 'deemed religious', because what I call religion in my definition need not be deemed *religious* by those participating in the tradition. American patriotism or other forms of nationalism, such as that reflected in the rituals surrounding Remembrance Day in the United Kingdom every November, in most cases, would not be deemed religious by those participating in the national remembrance, despite the pressure exerted on celebrities, politicians and the general public to wear a poppy as a symbol of the collective memory that legitimises the authoritative tradition of the nation. On my definition, American, British or other forms of patriotic nationalism are fully religious because they manifest the three elements necessary for religion to be present: community, tradition and authority. By contrast, if we follow Taves on this point, seemingly if people do not deem patriotism religious, it cannot be deemed religious by scholars who are conducting research on how people respond to national demands for loyalty. Surely, this stifles critical thinking by limiting what is possible to define as religion entirely to 'insider' or 'emic' perspectives. It also reduces what is meant by empirical research to mere observation by excluding the place of hypotheses and testing in constructing the framework for investigating data.

Of course, my approach is susceptible to the complaint that *I* have decided what religion is rather than allowing participants to determine what *they* deem to be religion. This means that what I define as religion might be unrecognisable as such by those who take part in activities that fit my definition. This objection has often been raised by those who study localised, kinship-orientated traditional societies, who commonly have no word for religion in their language. They rather speak of a way of

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life that includes everyday occurrences like eating, working in the fields, caring for animals or sexual activity – things scholars would not normally include as religion but which are interlinked with other events that would seem to qualify as religion, such as death rituals, appeals to ancestors for protection and honouring spirits responsible for successful harvests. This, however, is precisely my point. I include everyday activities as religious if they are connected holistically to customary ways of life that have been established by long traditions that are enshrined in authoritative social structures, which in turn are transmitted from generation to generation in the collective memory.

That I call ordinary activities a part of Indigenous *Religions* clearly is done for academic purposes in order to clarify for other researchers in the scholarly community what I mean by the term, and also to communicate to the wider public information about indigenous societies in order to foster understanding and promote tolerance. That the communities themselves do not (or at least did not) separate life activities into categories conforming to the Western concept 'religion' does not prohibit me from using the word, if I communicate clearly what I mean by it, qualify the contexts in which I use it and admit the limitations it imposes. In his extremely helpful chapter, entitled 'To Define or Not to Define', in the book on definitions of religion he edited with Arie Molendijk, the Dutch scholar, Jan Platvoet, justifies defining religion in just this way. He argues that the primary reason for defining religion is not to provide 'a universally valid definition', which, he admits, is 'unattainable' (Platvoet 1999: 255), but 'to clarify the precise meaning in which a scholar uses the term when communicating … findings to the scholarly community for critical testing, and to the general public for information' (Platvoet 1999: 260).

Religious Experience: A Conclusion

The contemporary study of religious experience owes much to the work of the Religious Experience Research Centre to which Peggy Morgan made a significant contribution. In this chapter, beginning with Peggy's discussion of William James and Alister Hardy, I have argued that what constitutes the field of religious experience depends on how we define the category religion. I have shown that many academic writers conform to the popular understanding of religious experience as a personal or group encounter with a transcendent, divine or supernatural reality, or, at the very least, as an extraordinary interaction with someone or something that extends beyond normal sense, bodily or mental functions. I have also explored how in her book on

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religious experience, Ann Taves sought to overcome the problem of prescribing the nature of religion in advance by simply asserting that religion is what is deemed religious, and that religious experience reflects an encounter with 'specialness'. I have contended that this theory runs the risk of reducing scholarly research on religious experience to unreflective, commonly accepted understandings of religion in ways that suppress critical thinking.

Building on my definition of religion, I have suggested that the study of religious experience ought not to be constrained by theological or quasi-theological assumptions. Rather, experiences should be classified as religious insofar as they result from the social contexts that create religions. On this analysis, religious experiences occur among identifiable communities, which are constituted either explicitly or implicitly, and which reflect the overwhelming authority of a tradition that has been legitimated through its transmission from generation to generation in the collective memory. This means, of course, that much of what fits into the category religion involves experiences with alleged transcendent realities, but it is the interaction between communities and their authoritative traditions, not the purported presence of supernatural entities or out of the ordinary encounters that makes the experiences religious. My conclusion closely resembles the argument for the study of religious experience to be firmly rooted in empirical research that Peggy Morgan developed in her inaugural article in the *Journal for Religious Experience*, with which I began this chapter. The emphasis that Peggy and I share on a non-theological interpretation of religion enables scholars to study, as religious, varieties of human experience that mould the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, behaviours and reactions of people based on evidence that is experimentally validated and explained in socio-cultural terms.

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A Fortuitous Chain of Events

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I think I must have met Peggy Morgan first at Westminster College in 1991 but not in a teaching and learning situation because although I was doing my PGCE it was in Early Years Education rather than in a specific subject. However, I had been studying Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in Tokyo and it had been suggested that I introduced myself to Peggy and request some materials.

Our first real meeting however, was after I had returned to Lampeter. Professor Cyril Williams former president of the British Association for the Study of Religions who was always keen to help, advised me that the BASR conference was to be held at the University of Wales, Lampeter and that I should get in touch with Peggy Morgan and offer to be a local coordinator.

You may wonder why this necessitated an immediate visit to Wendy Dossett. The answer is simple despite our difference in age we were contemporaries in the Department of Religious Studies and being poverty-stricken students, we shared an "interview suit" that had been made for me as a gesture of gratitude by the mother of an overseas student I'd helped with English. Wendy and I found the outfit extremely useful. In hindsight, I expect it looked very homemade. Yet at our official meeting Peggy admired the bow on the skirt; just enough of a compliment to initiate conversation and put me at ease.

My next encounter with Peggy, in the summer of 2000 was in her capacity as Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, when she brought the RERC library from Oxford to Lampeter. No move is easy and unpacking books is heavy work, which I believe Peggy did. However, when the work of shelf-ordering, stock-taking and catalogue-updating commenced, it would clearly be easier with one person at the computer and another up the ladder. Fortunately for me, Peggy remembered that I was nearby. Working with Peggy was the best training anyone could have for a role. Peggy gave a description or explanation about the author, content, donor or circumstance of writing of each book I handled, as she input the data. It was clear that the Centre was important to her and that I must give it and its members the same respect and concern as she did. Peggy returned to Oxford and I was left, initially, with processing her

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correspondence. This grew into the post of librarian and administrator until two additional members of staff were employed.

Peggy retired as director of RERC and Wendy Dossett inherited responsibility for the MA Religious Experience. In 2010, with redundancies looming my concern for the RERC was extreme and then we learned that Bettina Schmidt who had transferred from Bangor to Lampeter would be its next director. What a relief. My next two librarian posts were in Oxford. Typically of Peggy she acknowledged my presence and introduced me to the colleges with which she had connections, took me to various lectures and shared her favourite walks with me. My own professional links with Oxford have disappeared, yet Peggy kept in touch. Our most recent get together in 2019 was when we went to visit Irene Williams, the widow of Prof Cyril Williams, now in her late 90s, who lives near Carmarthen. Then came COVID-19, a time of lockdown and isolation, but not loneliness. Through the letterbox regularly dropped one of Peggy's recognisable handmade notelets with greetings, news and an interesting cutting from something she had read; followed soon after by a phone call from Irene Williams saying how thrilled she had been to receive a letter from Peggy. That great and time-giving skill and gift of Peggy's, to bring people together, was thriving in adverse circumstances.

I thank Peggy for her professionalism and friendship also Wendy, Andy and Bettina, for facilitating my contribution to this celebration of Peggy's career whilst I do not have access to a word processor or the Internet because of the Coronavirus pandemic. Now that I have retired, I look forward to future social and leisure activities shared with Peggy.

At a business development course I once attended, the benefits of networking were extolled but as a way for one’s own financial gain. Apart from the academic and practical things I learned from Peggy, I experienced the joy and pleasure shared by genuine heartfelt networking. I hope that I am able in some way to live up to Peggy's admirable example.

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The Sound of Faith: Chinese Women's Mosques, Islamic Resurgence and Religious Agency

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Preface

What amounts to a meaningful contribution to the Festschrift for Peggy Morgan? It is a contribution written for a friend and mentor, and for a colleague who provided me with opportunities to share work-in-progress with members of the seminars Peggy convened for so many years during her years of teaching at Oxford. These seminars offered an intellectual focus and discursive space for many of us, irrespective of our topic and disciplinary approach to religion and religious studies. Under her guardianship, space was created for informed knowledge of religious traditions, whether global in reach and organization or localized in origin, constitution and impact, to shine light on the multiplicity of meanings concealed in the term 'religion'. And I remember well the sense of home-coming when arriving in Peggy's seminar, the smile with which we were greeted when entering the seminar room and, at the same time, the sense of anticipation that came with speakers' explorations of a vast spectrum of meanings of 'religion' in its manifold and varied expressions, functions and institutional roles, its universal significance and its local translations. Theological disputes over scriptural readings featured side by side with anthropological investigation of locally embedded faiths as they relate to, and intersect with, state politics and policies, ethnicity, class, geography, and importantly with gender. It is the factor of gender, in its imbrication of marginalized ethno-religious identities, that structures my own research and writing and which I was invited to bring into seminar discussions, chaired so often and memorably by Peggy Morgan. And Peggy never failed to enliven debates with her receptive intellect and sympathetic, informed questioning.

It is this connection with my work, so generously supported by Peggy, that made me decide to bring a brief extract from current writing to the Festschrift, as an

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acknowledgement of her facilitation of my on-going research into gender, Islam and localization of religion in modern and contemporary Chinese society.[1] When Ursula King (2005) talks about the quite recent transformative impact of women's and gender studies on the study of the world's religions, overturning, or at least de-legitimizing, the gender-blindness to which mainstream scholarship had been prone, this transformation found a hearing in Peggy's seminars; something for which I, among many others, will always be profoundly grateful. Adding to my intellectual kinship with Peggy has been our shared conviction that 'ordinary life' matters and that in close and sympathetic interpretation it reveals itself not to be quite so ordinary. This principled stance has colored Peggy's values, life-choices and purposeful application of her knowledge, and it is something that also for me shapes preferences for research topics and methodologies of the kind contributed to the Festschrift.

This is the background to the choice of a contribution which explores aspects of the lives of Chinese women in early 20th century rural China, illiterate, steered from cradle to grave by paradigmatic, womb-centered life-cycles encoded by Neo-Confucian family morality and Islamic principles, ignorant of the world beyond village boundaries – references which distil and seemingly define the very essence of 'ordinariness' which prove so elusive to the researcher's gaze, searching for that which qualifies as outstanding or unique and thus significant. Discovering in the very process of engagement with so-called 'ordinariness' the stories of life extraordinary has been a part of my journey as an ethnographer of (Islamic) religious life of women. These discoveries have been made possible by collaboration with women from various women's mosque congregations in central China's Hui Muslim communities when we, together, recovered, recorded and transcribed chants of worship and celebration, transmitted orally from generation to generation of believing women. One such chant, the center-piece of my contribution, forms the basis here for an exploration that included long conversations with the chanter, the listeners, the community of women realizing a collective purpose, that is, to make Chinese Muslim women's extraordinary histories visible. In their wake, they not only made apparent the ideological underpinning of what counts as 'the ordinary', they supported the researcher in helping to problematize related tropes of feminine gullibility, religious belief, and stunted agency.

[1] See for further contextualization: Durneika 2018; Erie 2016; Gladney 2004; Ha 2017; Jin 2017.

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I have chosen a *jingge* (经歌Islamic chant) from the Republican era (1912-1949), an era in Chinese modern history marked by reformist and radical impulses and movements when the aspired modernization of the nation inspired initiatives for reforms in all spheres of society, importantly so in education. Islamic education, then in the main the responsibility of mosque-based *ahong* (阿訇imams, in the Chinese Hui Muslim usage in central China a title equivalent to that of male *ahong* and teachers), was no exception (Jaschok and Shui 2000, 2005). Women's mosque teaching of the languages of the scriptures, of rudimentary knowledge of Muslim rituals and practices, depended on largely oral traditions and forms of transmission. Crucial to the success of motivating and inspiring girls and women without previous educational experience to sustain a discipline of learning, was the creative instruction by female *ahong* who applied well-tried learning tools, involving collective repetitive chanting, to help illiterate women retain in their memory fundamental guidelines for guarding and preserving Muslim family life. Collaboration between male Hui Muslim educational reformers, importantly the role of 李复真Li Fuzhen *Ahong* (late Qing) and 望纯理Wang Chunli *Ahong* (Republican era) and between scholars and educational reformers in general, working closely with influential female *ahong,* led to an unprecedented enrichment of women mosques' repertoire of *jingge* (Jaschok 2018; Jaschok and Shui 2005; Zhongyuan Musilin Funü Editorial Committee, afterwards ZMFEC 2017).

Two traditions evolved in this oral culture; *zanzhu zansheng* (赞主赞圣, Chants in Praise of Allah and Prophet) passed down the generations in Farsi and Arabic, whereas *jingge* were transmitted in Arabic, Farsi and, in greatest numbers, in Chinese.[2] *Jingge* appear in a diversity of genres and are expressive of cultural life of Muslims, with tunes both from mainstream non-Muslim tradition and from locally popular musical forms. On the whole, mostly Chinese language *jingge* were adapted for use by female religious practitioners during a time that chants largely ceased to feature in worship and education in men's mosques. In subsequent years, as the performance of all chants, in particular of *jingge,* came to be rejected by male *ahong* as no longer in keeping with a more austere reformist Islam, learning through guided repetitive chanting then marked the *jingge* tradition as a clearly gendered tool of pedagogy for the instruction of illiterate women. This turned *jingge* into a unique and much-loved feature associated with women's

[2] The terms of *zanzhu zansheng* and *jingge* are often used interchangeably, the term *jingge* is used commonly to refer to all genres which constitute the chanting traditions associated with the mosque culture in central China (see below).

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religious culture. Women were able, guided by their *ahong*, to learn correct pronunciation of the scriptural languages, but these chants also served as expressions of faith that made them somehow a part of the global community of worshippers beyond local mosque walls. *Jingge* are chanted to this day. The confluence of Confucian ritual culture, richness of Arabic and Farsi thought and imagery that resonate in the chants of Islamic worship and social ethics evolved into a unique Islamic ritual tradition which 'entered the very souls of central China's Muslims' (preface, ZMFEC 2017: 4).

Whilst the number of *jingge* available for instruction in women's mosque education increased over time, the content of *jingge* continued to benefit from contemporary currents of ideas and movements. *Jingge* reflect women's aspirations in evocative and poignant images, revealing subjectivities that could not be simply confined to performing as exemplary Muslim mothers and wives, although these roles were ever dominant. *Jingge* give expression to challenges and conditions under which women were able to make their aspirations and beliefs heard in a cacophony of voices which have articulated, to this day, the Chinese nation's drive for modernity and national regeneration.

Important themes of chants from the Republican era revolve around nurturing of patriotism and contributions made by Muslims to the great project of national reinvigoration, showing up the presence of a reformist and educated Muslim population. An important thread of these chants is the responsibility carried by women to contribute to the nation and to Islam in newly significant roles that undergirded a social expansion of traditional functions as wives and mothers beyond home and mosque. By facilitating, as primary educators of their children, the strengthening of Islamic faith and orderly practice of Muslim life, women were serving, by implication, a society in transition and at its most needful; that is, communities as needful of maternal guidance and care. Other *jingge* reflect on women's difficult balancing act of being good Muslim wives at home whilst ensuring salvation of their souls in afterlife with a daily discipline of prayer, often relying on the guidance from their female *ahong*. Complexities of family life, precarious kinship ties, worldly preoccupations, but also sadness and grief in the face of illness, loss of loved ones, an overwhelming sense of the transitoriness of life as well as social and political turmoil and material hardship feature in these *jingge* (Jaschok and Shui 2005).

The *jingge* chosen for this article comes from such a historical teaching tradition of China's women's mosques. The origins of many *jingge* are uncertain, some accounts by members of the older generations of women and men link the earliest chants to the origin of the first Islamic cultural movement (early 17th century when the Ming dynasty gave way to a more hostile environment under Qing imperial rule, 1644-1912). It was a movement that sought to stem the diminishing force of Islamic faith, and Chinese Muslims' knowledge of their faith, by devising major translations of seminal scriptures and

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facilitating expansion of education for all. In the gender-segregated educational system of *zhongyuan* (中原)[3] Muslim culture, regional women's mosques, more than was the case with women's mosques anywhere else in the country, came to enjoy considerable religious and administrative autonomy under the guidance of female *ahong.* Although these *jingge* did not form part of the mandatory prayer, their characteristic emotional evocation of belief, faith, and yearning for salvation in afterlife contrasts so starkly with the strong ties binding human beings to what are women's preoccupations with the mundane clutter of daily domestic life; and they resonate to this day. *Jingge* and other genres of chants have changed over time, with tunes and content influenced and shaped by an *ahong*'s linguistic abilities, educational capacities and creative spirit. But many of the core themes have remained intact, their relevance undiminished by time.

Women and men have influenced a multitude of genres and traditions, but women have inscribed *jingge* with a highly gendered experience of faith, hope and trepidation, often fear, making the chants a precious record of religiously informed interior worlds. And where the literary capacity of an individual *ahong* allowed for this, she helped to keep chants alive with faithful transmission of inherited and newly added songs, bequeathing these rare records as a precious legacy to her successors. Following the suppression of all religions, including Islam, during the late 1950s right until after the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966 to late 1970s), a relatively more liberal treatment of religious worship during the 1980s permitted a somewhat tentative resumption of beloved traditions, such as collective chanting of *jingge* after *zhuma* (主麻Friday) prayer. Initially dismissed by particularly younger women as unhappy, even humiliating reminder of the past history of female ignorance, deficient spirituality and passivity in the face of patriarchal authority, subsequent decades have brought about an incipient change in women's thinking about the place of their history in the current Islamic revival. This has been helped by systematic research into the history of a richly diverse oral tradition of women's mosques. The long process of research gave rise to new networks and associations of researchers, *ahong* and Muslim women, an impactful collaboration which culminated in the first record of their history of faith, of spiritual and worldly aspirations (referred to hereafter as SongBook, ZMFEC 2017).

The nearly three-hundred chants recovered through collective rituals of remembering by older generations of believers – indeed, too many chants have entirely vanished from memory – have given rise to unprecedented acknowledgement of their

[3] The *zhongyuan* region, central China, may refer to Henan province only but it carries also a wider meaning, including thus the provinces of Henan, Shanxi, Hebei, and Shandong. Unless indicated otherwise, the term as used in this article highlights the unique cultural significance which Henan occupies in the gendered history of Islam in China (Jaschok and Shui 2000).

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intrinsic value and the revelations of religious spirituality, moral values, shared belonging but also to the importance of gendered spheres in which ritual and informal expressions of professions of faith would take place. Such oral traditions have also enlivened the immersion of women *hailifan* (海里凡khalifah)[4] into a faith that had not been a part of their upbringing during long years of repressive treatment of religion by an aggressively secularist government, during times of political regimentation and suppression of worship outside officially approved religious venues.

However, faith and Muslim life expressed in colloquial language and evocative images, set to appealing popular tunes, have proven effective pathways to connecting with past generations of faithful believers, with history once more present as a precious source of pride and belonging. This resurgent expressive culture has furthermore led to the writing and composition of new chants, informed by both aspirations and the challenging perplexities of being Muslim in a highly nationalistic country where religious commitment must be reconciled with protestations of patriotic loyalty. New *musilin gequ* (穆斯林歌曲 Muslim Songs) can be heard in classes, in mosques attended by men and women, teaching the fundamentals of Islam and intensifying collective exuberance over belonging to the true faith. Formerly the prerogative of men only, women nowadays predominate when it comes to a resurgent expressive culture of faith. And this resurgence has brought into circulation Farsi *zansheng*, connecting with a language that was once the defining characteristic of women's mosque teaching, before educational reform during the late 1990s made opportunities for learning Arabic an educational feature also of women's mosques. Moreover, closer connections with Muslim majority countries in the Middle East but also with SEAsia, whether through pilgrimages, educational visits or commercial trade, have expanded the repertoire of chants further. The extraordinary history of several hundred years of transmitted oral culture generated by Muslim women's own mosques, comes out of a shared faith which has inspired a sense of collective belonging that transcends gender and status but which is also the product of an intermingling of Islamic and mainstream cultures, of local and global traditions of Islamic expressive culture. These newer arrivals, in the main Arabic language *zansheng,* can be heard in China's mosques and in provincial *zanzhu zansheng* contests. This is the case, for example, with songs from the *nasyid* genre popular in Southeast Asia. *Nasyid* feature in many *zansheng* contests (among these the frequently performed and highly emotive *nasyid*, Ummi 母 亲赞, Ode to Mother).

[4] Students of Islamic knowledge, often candidates for Imamate, preparing themselves for religious life.

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Finally, there has been a remarkable change in the kinds of spaces where so-called *nüxing zansheng* (女性赞圣women's songs of praise) can be legitimately performed. Formerly confined to the seclusion of women-only sites of prayer and gatherings, starting in 2005, these chants, as pointed out above, have become the staple of song contests among mosques, both male and female. The events are organized by representatives of local *Yisilanjiao Xiehui* (伊斯兰教协会 Islamic Association) and *ahong* from influential mosques and are held in the larger and prestigious mosque compounds in front of large, appreciative audiences. Women's chants have moved outside the mosque and into the community. Mosque choirs are in popular demand, particularly if considered of requisite spiritual performance, of a certain musical standard and, always appreciated, featuring attractive hijab – mostly long modest dresses in distinctive monochrome color and matching *gaitou* (盖头, a headdress which conceals hair and neck but exposes the face). Their performances are seen as heightening the intensity of significant occasions, whether these occasions be weddings, name-giving ceremonies or any other milestones of significance to family or the wider community. There is widespread appreciation of mixed repertoires of religiously informed *zansheng*, older *jingge* or current popular, tuneful chants that reflect local cultural influences. Nevertheless, a certain trend can be noted, that is, a marked development from a historically dominant culture of *jingge* (with its spectrum embracing a diversity of worldly and religious, often gendered, topics and themes) to the greater spiritual intensity of *zansheng*, reflecting the resurgence of Islam noted by anthropologists and ethnomusicologists of Islam in China (Harris, Ha and Jaschok 2021 forthcoming). It is a resurgence also in central China's Hui Muslim communities of the importance of women's mosques led by charismatic *ahong* that has enabled a reinvigorated religious education and revival of collective practices of prayer by which ordinary women sustain their sense of worth and notable pride in what is a uniquely gendered history of Islam. In a context of strengthened Chinese state authority over all spheres of society, the solidarity and sense of belonging engendered by expressive communal rituals brings also a vindication of enduring commitment to being Muslim in a non-Muslim society.

Being Women of Faith in a Transitory World

When a highly respected woman *ahong*, presiding over an influential women's mosque in central China, explained the overwhelming necessity for revival of *jingge* during a time of resurgence of Islam in many parts of China, she made reference to intensification of sensations as women chant *jingge* in the safety of their own space, in the prayer halls of

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women's mosques, and in more public Islamic gatherings, during times of competitions organized usually by local branches of the Islamic Association.[5] Whereas the successful performance of a mosque choir, particularly when taking place in a friendly but competitive atmosphere in front of large gatherings is always a matter of pride and a cause for much celebration, the intensity of feeling engendered by collective chanting is associated with women's own spaces of worship and prayer. That which is frowned upon in public, often gender-mixed gatherings – the physical demonstration of emotion evoked by a chant, movement of heads and arms or swaying of bodies to underline the power of words – is permissible wherever no external gaze can misconstrue meanings and impose injunctions.

Here the role of the teacher and *ahong* as serving to enable and legitimate innovation, is crucial, deserving closest attention by the researcher. The most authoritative religious leader of the mosque congregation, an *ahong* occupies multiple roles. The nature of her responsibilities varies depending on the size, income and independent status of the mosque, with her influence growing exponentially as she is acknowledged to perform her role with informed moral authority; moreover, what comes to matter are her reputation for integrity and learning, but also her ability to balance interests of her congregation with government-issued legal, administrative and regulatory constraints on approved religious venues (Jaschok 2012). In a demanding, daily enacted balancing act, she represents her mosque in relation to the adjacent male mosque, to the wider Muslim community, and to the various ministries and departments which the Chinese state has entrusted with responsibility for monitoring internal activities and external relations of religious venues. An *ahong*'s political acumen guides the development of a mosque's internal culture in the same way that her marshalling of political and economic resources and nurturing of useful allies from within the political sphere, from whom to gain support when needed, shape the transformative capacities of a mosque. An *ahong*'s talents as political intermediary can also lead to competitive advantages over other religious institutions. Yet all her worldly accomplishments and social networks are as nothing if the *ahong* does not enjoy respect from members of her congregation for religious learning, wise counsel, unblemished moral incorruptibility, teaching skills and an empathic personality. Moreover, legitimacy comes from her principled and respectful treatment of members of her congregation, regardless of their level of education, family background and prospects.

All these qualities give an *ahong* the legitimacy to address critical issues, critique existing injustices or patriarchal legacies in the treatment of female religious practitioners

[5] Conversation held in Henan, in August of 2016, during preparations for a collective project to record women's most beloved chants.

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and, indeed, lead new initiatives for change. These were the characteristics prominent of *ahong* who brought new life to education during the Republican era, and these are characteristics to be found among younger generations of *ahong* leading the resurgence of the traditional expressive culture of women's mosques, at the heart of which are the chants, seemingly long 'forgotten', until recent years brought about a renewed awareness of their importance as conduits of women's collective memory (Jaschok 2012; Jaschok and Shui 2000).

In their historical role as transmitters of *jingge, ahong* are known to adapt tunes to enhance the mood and impact of a chant, both more pleasing to women but also easing an unfamiliar task of memorizing unfamiliar language and expressions. *Ahong* would also be likely to adapt words of a chant to reflect current vicissitudes of time and place, with each generation adding words expressive of most subjective and also always of the collective experience of communities of worship, allowing us a glimpse of interior worlds inscribed in generational transmissions of prayer of faith and fear. *Jingge* have thus never been static, fixed, and unmoved by sentiment. These chants have undergone changes because expressive of on-going life experiences. They are collectively created narratives which bring into voice generations of women who together constituted the communities of women that kept faith in gatherings in the prayer halls of their women's mosques. Here we are entering another realm of textual exegesis, the embedding of a text which is evolving in time and place and shaped and inscribed by a multitude of voices and influences, in what Adam Chao calls the 'social heat' (Chao 2008: 488) of collective rituals. Interpretation of chants make audible the voices of instruction, the voices of learners and listeners, the voices of women who would repeat lines of the chant until the words become the collective experience of emotional and spiritual yearning.

In other words, it becomes important to ask what has changed during centuries of evolution of the *jingge* tradition from a tool for the illiterate to a uniquely expressive culture of women's mosques? Who is listened to; whose voices matter in ways that shift thinking sufficiently, so Gaile Pohlhaus, to afford recognition of 'particular knowers as knowers' (Pohlhaus 2017: 13)? What had not counted historically as wisdom, had lacked epistemic authority, is in contemporary times chanted in collective solidarity and with passionate conviction, and is subject to often intense criticism. Dissenting voices within China's Muslim community, critical of continued women's mosque tradition, berate leading female religious practitioners at the forefront of a resurgent expressive culture as *haram* in the encouragement for female voice over long traditions of *xiuti* (羞体*awrah*, parts of the female-gendered body, including the female voice, considered shameful and in need of concealment). Such renewed criticism comes as a reminder of other practices of denigration of women's epistemic and spiritual status. Indeed, complaints by Islamic

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authorities I interviewed in a number of cities where women's mosques have peripheral status or have given way to the status of 'religious activity centres', make reference to the corrosive impact of *nüxinghua* (女性化feminization) on Islam. Weakening of strict observance of an austere, purist (and non-chanting) Islam, so it is said, is a most worrying a trend in women *ahong*-led women's mosques in the Hui Muslim communities in central China (Jaschok, Shui with Ge 2021 forthcoming).

From an Islamic faith standpoint, the subject of ethics embodies a living and practiced relation to the divine, requiring a different notion of subject-formation. Countering objections to the sounding of female voices, believing women in *zhongyuan* Muslim communities see cultivation of faith as expression of ethical conduct that is no longer compatible with female gullibility and passivity. Objections are held by leading *ahong,* and women around them, to reflect a bygone era. Instead, so the consensus, modern women of education, with the capacity to debate critically patriarchal interpretations, must oppose with convictions, backed up by textual evidence, unjust and distortive interpretations of female spirituality. Thus, women have begun to place themselves in the forefront of a resurgent, progressive Islam (Jaschok, Shui with Ge 2021 forthcoming).

An old woman *ahong,* who had spent her childhood in the village women's mosque was of the opinion that the origin and manner of on-going adaption of many a popular *jingge* could not but remain obscure. She pointed, however, to the close collaboration of religious professionals across gender and mosque membership as a significant feature of local *zhongyuan* Muslim culture, a historical characteristic which informs the complementarity of gender relations to this day. The fact that most chants are entirely anonymous therefore mirrors an important assertion made by local Muslim women, namely the nature of solidarity between Muslim women and men, and the joint effort made to convey the faith that binds them – when the external environment is all too often hostile – in close ties of belonging. Moreover, a frequently reiterated assertion by informants was the role that male religious practitioners played in providing illiterate rural women with the precious key of an enriched imagination and the opening to a world beyond the domestic threshold.

When examining the chants of greatest emotional resonance to women, they tend to be most frequently those chants which respond to deep-seated fears over reconciling women's domestic duties and multiple roles as wives and mothers and daughters-in-law with duties as believers, conducive to a culture of dread over consequences of deficient observance of daily prayer duties for admission to paradise (Jaschok and Shui 2000). The theme of many a *jingge* revolves around tensions between reconciling obligations incumbent upon a faithful Muslim and what are in particular for women incessant

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demands on their daily discharge of responsibilities, moreover demands which are locked into social expectations that these responsibilities are performed in selfless service to husbands, children and the wider family, but also to neighbourhood and community. The *jingge* selected here illustrates women's deep inner contradictions and fears over the fate of their souls.

Jingge (early Republican era 1912-1949), **on chanting faith and sadness over transience of human life**

叹人生 *Tan ren sheng* LAMENTING LIFE

日月如梭昼夜忙，替叹人生不久常。Life, like the shuttle [of a loom], day and night no rest, we lament how short our life

古往今来君何在，文宫武将在哪厢? From ancient times to the present, where are the powerful, where are learning and military might?

最多能活百十岁，有钱难买不老方. At best we live to a ripe old age, no riches can buy eternal life

长江后浪推前浪，一辈生来一辈忙. The Yangtze River rolls on, wave after wave, and so generation after generation comes into the world and passes away

曾记当年骑竹马，而今不觉两 鬓霜. Remembering riding my bamboo toy horse, I am oblivious to the frosting of my temple hair

生儿只说长不大，长达娶妻忘爷娘. To give birth and take tender care of a child is a time of anxiety, yet when the time comes to take a wife, father and mother are forgotten

看见媳妇怪喜欢，瞧见爷娘恼心肠. Catching sight of daughter-in-law, there is great joy, but the sight of parents brings disharmony

劝君若到中年后，举好捏提行端庄. Be advised when reaching middle age, bring offerings of *nieti* [alms] and conduct yourself with dignity and solemnity

儿孙自有儿孙福，多千善功少奔忙. Children have the blessing of their own offspring, do engage generously in good work and not be overwhelmed by mundane tasks

今世光阴如闪电, 抓住教门莫轻放. In this world, time is like lightening, embrace faith and do not treat it lightly

儿女财帛今世伴, 唯有善功后世常. Children and wealth are worldly belonging, only good deeds become the foundation of afterlife

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有心再想说句话，笔前墨尽纸不长. As the heart wants to open up once more, upon lifting the brush, the ink dries up and the scroll runs out.[6]

What does the popularity of this *jingge* 'Tan ren sheng', included in the SongBook of recorded chants, tell us about the participants' religious imaginary and subjective sentiments? The chant opens with a most domestic metaphor, the shuttle of a loom that is the sound of the female sphere, an evocative and pervasive feminine soundscape. This sound resonates with chanters and listeners, bringing instant association with the busy schedules that constitute a traditional female lifecycle. It is a sound anchored in the domestic space where the care for husband and children and the extended family dominate and shape a woman's daily routine.

The opening line frames the lamentations with a seemingly unresolvable contradiction for women: their duty encoded in the very moral systems of Islam and Neo-Confucianism, entailed in paradigmatic mother-and wifehood, in tension with duties enshrined in adherence to the five Islamic pillars of faith. Overwhelming this *jingge* is the sense of urgency that needs heeding as life passes by all too quickly and approaching mortality overwhelms with dread and anxiety. Musing on the inescapably fleeting nature of all worldly acquisitions, a fate shared by the powerful, privileged and mighty, it is nature – here the evocation of the majestic Yangtze River and the perpetual motion of the tide – which brings a cruel contrast in its unending motion as humans are subject to a very different law: 'Generation after generation comes into the world and passes away', so the *jingge*. Childhood is evoked with a bamboo toy horse, and such is the power of this reminiscence that the nostalgic ride on childhood's beloved toy ends with an image of old age, the greying of hair, and with it the realization that time granted in which to write a life-story is running out.

Yet a short lifespan is filled with the riches that only close family bonds can bring, the birth of, and care for, precious children and witnessing of the birth of further generations ensuring continuity. But an underlying subtext of anxiety, fear and trepidation darkens the depiction of domestic idyll and of ordinary life. Child mortality, ceaseless worry about a child's health, the imperative for a daughter-in-law to continue the family line and the rupture of family relations if she brings disharmony and estrangement, all play a part in unease over domestic strife and how quickly attention is deflected from what

[6] This chant came into great popularity during the Republican era (1912-1949). It is to be found in Muslim women's own SongBook and contributed by 虎长法Hu Changfa *Ahong*阿訇 in April 2015. 葛彩霞阿訇 Ge Caixia *Ahong* from the Fuminli Women's Mosque in Zhengzhou, Henan 阜民里清真女寺 took responsibility for the collation. Zhongyuan Musilin Funü Zansheng yu Jingge Huibian Editorial Committee 2017: 147. Translation by author.

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really matters. And the *jingge* issues a warning, all these apparent crises are after all quite humdrum matters. When fascination with wealth or absorption with family relations take up time, take over life, this leads to neglect of diligent preparation for afterlife. Generosity and charitable conduct steeped in faith and awareness of what constitutes the ultimate meaning of human existence during latter stages of life must replace all else. Metaphors give expression to life passing 'like lightening.' The end catches humans unaware, brutally so. The last line does not spare the listener. Ready to lift the brush to continue with the record of life, instead 'the ink dries up and the scroll runs out'. No more words are forthcoming, no more sound is heard; the scroll as a record of the lifespan apportioned to an individual has come to an end.

Remembering that this particular *jingge* has its origin in male tradition, the metaphorical and sociological references – from safeguarding the patriline to responsibilities for safety and material support of family as well as the tools of literacy, brush, ink and vellum – seem to exclude women's experiences, responsibilities and capacities. But this is a chant which did not stay with the tradition cultivated by men, indeed, when chanting in men's mosques ceased in the course of educational reform for a more austere Islam during the Republican era, women became almost the sole heirs to the *jingge* tradition, and turned into its creative transmitters. More than that, they filled these chants with their meanings and lived experiences, adding to the tension over worldly and other-worldly preoccupations their sharpened awareness of women's conundrum: how would their souls fare in *houshi* (后世 afterlife)? Would the fires of hell await their compromised souls when even the most conscientious wife and mother might fall short of exemplary Muslim conduct? These were the agonizing issues brought up by older women we interviewed over the years. In imagining the fate expecting them, visual rendering of the cruelty inflicted on lost souls which can be seen in wall-paintings of neighbouring Buddhist temples, colours many of our informants' anxious laments (Jaschok and Shui 2000).

And yet, this is a much-loved chant. As the *ahong* of a prominent women's mosque in central China put it, the positive sentiment comes with the sound of collective voices led by an *ahong* who, because of her learning, is trusted with safeguarding the salvation of their souls.[7] And in this shared experience of intensity of faith, the prospect of salvation creates exuberance. The atmosphere in the prayer hall of women's mosques, undisturbed by accusations of practising *xiuti,* engenders confidence that all can be well, domestic and religious duties balanced, and their souls saved. In becoming the chanters of songs

[7] Interview in Zhengzhou, Henan, with the late, revered Du *Lao Ahong* whose support and detailed responses to the researcher's questions contributed to the first study of women's mosques in China (Jaschok and Shui 2000).

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which tell of conundrums besetting female-gendered lives, the fear that otherwise might darken their spirit becomes exorcized, affording a glimpse of paradise as deserved reward for women who insist that their right to spiritual equality commands respect for their history within, and without, gendered spaces of worship and domestic life (Jaschok and Shui 2000).

The SongBook, a compilation of beloved Islamic chants constitutes a powerful testimonial to the strength, courage and belief of women who grew up under a moral system that commanded women to speak with self-abnegating modesty, out of public sight and hearing – but demonstrates that that these same women were indeed not silent, and ultimately, not silenced (ZMFEC 2017). Partitioning curtains and walls that formed the symbolic and socio-spatial borders of women's assigned spaces for religious learning and worship were never, indeed never could be, hermetically sealed. Thresholds between inner and outer social spheres were crossed by women constantly, throughout the day, fetching, carrying, questioning, leaving, returning. And would it not be the case that women, returned home from their mosques, still resonating with the sound of chanting, were likely to continue humming tunes and try out newly learnt words when going about domestic tasks and caring for children? Not derived from the soundscape of authoritative spaces, their chants were nevertheless not without influence over those of whom they had charge.

It is thus possible to argue that whereas women could not make themselves heard, were not listened to, in the public spheres of male leadership, inside women's spaces, however, their own traditions evolved, inscribed by their life experiences and spirituality. The voices which for many generations practised pronunciation of foreign tongues and scriptural languages and affirmed belief in the pillars of Islam, which committed to memory essential guidelines for a good Muslim life and Muslim women's responsibility for family and community, which celebrated the great female role models in the history of Islam, and which lamented loss and bereavement but held on to the promise of afterlife – these voices, loud and clear, come from women who are fashioning, together, a record of their claim to equal worth (ZMFEC 2017: 16-17).

Sounding Their History of Silence

'Voices come in many manifestations, in the form of speech or of song, loudly rendered or quietly whispered, in spaces that are public or curtained off and walled in. And voices are always gendered. That is, they are marked by the moral codes of historical time and place that assign to women spheres of duties and rights, entitlements and dependencies. The history of women's mosques is the history of many generations of women who spoke,

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wept, and consoled, who preached and chanted, and it is thus a history which embraces all of the many forms of female voice' (preface ZMFEC 2017: 15).

The SongBook is the extraordinary outcome of a collective effort of members of women's mosque communities, religious practitioners, Islamic scholars and researchers to provide a record, their very own testimonial, of a rich, previously un-heard, history of generations of female voices of faith (ZMFEC 2017). Probing the place of faith in modern Chinese society is to take stock of accumulated learning acquired over many generations of leading women teachers and *ahong* who interpreted universal Islamic principles for application to women's everyday practice of faith. Voice (声音 *shengyin)* is therefore not only a declaration of self/belief but may also be understood as affirmation of women's reconnection with their cultural-educational Islamic heritage by which to lay claim to rights and entitlements that reflect wider societal reforms (Battaly 2017). Reaching back into the recent past of women's circumscribed spiritual, intellectual and physical mobility, when her predecessors were confined to limited educational and ceremonial duties inside the mosque compound, an elderly *ahong,* and an influential supporter of the project to record women's chants, holds that she is following in the tradition of reformist female *ahong* from the Republican era when she uses her voice as vital link between past and present.[8] And it is her hope that the living link between a reaffirmed cultural heritage and leading women as vocal transmitters of this heritage thus also sustains and strengthens the institutional standing and influence of female-led traditions and their place in China's Muslim society.[9]

Deeply rooted in the unique Muslim female culture of China's central plains we find expression not only of ordinary women's reception of the teaching of Islam, as instructed by their *ahong*, understanding of their familial roles and duties but also, in a world beyond domestic courtyards, their vision of social responsibility incumbent upon women of faith. Such chants provide us moreover with rare glimpses of an imaginary where a world is at

[8] In a long account of her educational work among a women's mosque congregation in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital of Henan Province, a middle-aged *ahong* tells me her story from the point of view of a teacher of women's souls. This is how she refers to her role. Conversations with a leading female *ahong* in preparation for the SongBook, Zhengzhou, Henan, August 2016. She wished to remain anonymous.

[9] Whereas the last twenty years have witnessed a burgeoning both of scholarship, and of international interest, in China's unique Islamic institutions, seeing publications on a previously unknown and certainly under-recognized history of women's contributions to Islamic faith and a considerable diversity of Muslim cultures in China, much more needs to be known of the oral culture women's mosques and their key to women's inner life and spirituality within a rapidly changing China. The translation and interpretation of *zansheng* and *jingge* have only recently begun, a challenge which will occupy us for considerable time to come. Comment: I wonder whether this comment here might be better in the text? It shows how "understudied" women's experience are and that there is much need for more research.

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peace and in harmony, enabled by and rooted in an idealized gender-based complementarity of responsibilities, duties and rights (ZMFEC 2017:10).

The extraordinary history of several hundred years of transmitted oral culture generated by Muslim women's own mosques, comes out of a shared faith which has inspired a sense of collective belonging that transcends gender and status but which also is the product of an intermingling of Islamic and mainstream cultures, of local and global traditions of Islamic expressive culture. In recovering knowledge of such history, knowledge that could be produced only slowly, collectively – with many pauses and silences – grounded in an evolving collaboration of researchers and local communities of believing women, the ordinary lives of women has come to be revealed for their complex interior beliefs and aspirations. Creative of ways of making sense of seemingly unchanging, ordained female fates have made possible – thus the community of transmitters, interpreters, listeners and chanters also tell us – the sympathetic vernacularization of global, overarching values of justice and salvation for believing women.

What is moreover also revealed, and here I re/connect with many hours of conversation with Peggy Morgan, is the role played by ordinary women in shaping lasting traditions to become conduits of knowledge, the stuff of history, that would otherwise remain unknown. Such chants of prayer, worship and of emotions revelatory of the interior world of believers, are given centre-stage in collective performances of intensified emotion. At the core of a sensory expressive culture of female-gendered religiosity, they elevate ordinariness of life to a heightened sensory experience by which are marshalled significant resources of collective strength and validated agency.

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Peggy Morgan and the Support of Twentieth Century Scholars of Religion

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Introduction

My contribution to this Festschrift merges autobiography with developments in the field of religious studies in the United Kingdom in the late twentieth century. Using a narrative method, I begin in the 1980s with the 'religious experience' that eventually led me to embrace the methods of religious studies, specialising in Buddhist traditions. Within this, I reflect on Peggy Morgan's influence on my development, both when I was resident in Sri Lanka and when I worked with her at Westminster College in the mid-1990s. My aim is to illustrate her untiring support of younger scholars, her contribution to socially relevant expressions of the study of religions and her engagement with the emerging phenomenon of interreligious or interfaith encounter. The paper, therefore, offers a window onto some critical twentieth century moments within the history of religious studies, which have been both a formative influence on and a foil for religious studies in the twenty first, whilst at the same time offering a tribute to Peggy Morgan.

Autobiography: Crossing Religious Boundaries in the 1980s

In the early 1980s, in my thirties, having taught English in Jamaica and in the multi-cultural classrooms of Brent and Harrow in London, I was working for a small non-governmental organisation, Christians Abroad, providing an information service for people who wished to work abroad in different sectors from agriculture to education to medicine. With my experience of the Caribbean, I was totally committed to the benefits of inter-cultural learning but was also opening myself to the religious diversity of North-West London. I joined the new inter-faith group in Harrow and the World Conference on Religion and Peace, now Religions for Peace. Then, in 1984, I visited Sri Lanka as part of

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an interreligious group and it was there that the 'experience' happened. Years later, I described it in this way:

> When at the ancient city of Anuradhapura, I stole away from the group I was with to return for a few minutes to the shrine room adjacent to the sacred bo tree, the one believed to have grown from a cutting of the original tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. Devotees dressed in white were sitting or prostrating silently. I joined them and looked towards the image, which showed the Buddha sitting in meditation against a painted scene of pale blue sky, white clouds, and mountains. Suddenly the image became more than mere plaster. All I can say is that it communicated. It beckoned. Against the blue of the sky, the serene head became suffused with cosmic significance. I knew that there was unfinished business between me and the Buddha (Harris 2000: 89).

This 'experience' seemed to come from nowhere without 'an initial situation' (Antes 2004: 35-38), except perhaps an aspiration towards empathy. For I hardly knew anything about Buddhism at the time, and was simply an outsider, curious about what was happening in the shrine room. The result of this experience, however, was that I responded to an invitation from the Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue in Colombo for westerners to come to the country to study Buddhism, and lived in Sri Lanka between 1986 and 1993, eventually completing a doctorate at the Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies of the University of Kelaniya (PIPBS).I had not expected to stay over seven years. Initially, I had envisaged a one year break from paid employment but one thing led to another in a serendipitous way.[1]

Kenneth Cracknell, Executive Secretary of the Committee for Relations with People of other Faiths (CRPOF) at the then British Council of Churches, helped me prepare, and it was he who introduced me to Peggy, whom he knew through bodies such as the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education. I believe we met before I travelled in June 1986. Most certainly, we corresponded before I left and continued to do so for my entire time in Sri Lanka. We also met again on my three return visits to England. For instance, my diary for 1987 shows that I visited Oxford to see Peggy on 3 July, during a four week visit to England. When I came back for six months in 1990 to raise money to do my doctorate, we were again in contact and I still possess a letter she sent to Sri Lanka in

[1] The main influence on my extended time in Sri Lanka was the Indologist and liberation theologian, Aloysius Pieris S.J. who asked me to be his research assistant in 1988 and encouraged me to undertake doctoral work at the PIPBS.

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1991, encouraging me to persist in my research: 'It will be a splendid contribution to the area of study, I know, and you will have so much to give in understanding and knowledge when you return'.[2]

When I returned to England in December 1993, without a job, it was Peggy who encouraged me to apply for one of two Junior Research Fellowships that were advertised in 1994 at Westminster College, Oxford, where she was teaching. I had not considered applying at first. I was, after all, 43 years old and unrealistically thought I should earn more than £11,000 a year, since, in real terms, it was less than my salary before I had left for Sri Lanka! But, having failed to gain a post with a non-governmental advocacy organisation connected with Sri Lanka, I submitted an application and was successful. The dye was then cast for the rest of my career and, in retrospect, I can see that working with Peggy at Westminster College was the best preparation I could have had. I will always be grateful for it.

Let me return, however, to my years in Sri Lanka and what I learnt before I arrived at Westminster College. I travelled there as a Christian but was convinced that my task was not to engage in 'dialogue' with Buddhism, and certainly not to compare Buddhism with Christianity. Rather, I sought to enter Buddhism, to immerse myself in it, in order to see the world through Buddhist eyes. I wanted to be a learner who was willing to experience Buddhism, not a western expert. Conversations with Kenneth Cracknell and Peggy helped me to reach this position, although it is difficult to trace its exact provenance now. My long-held conviction that inter-cultural learning invited vulnerability, humility and a letting go of preconceptions about the superiority of one's own cultural practices without doubt contributed as well. It was a framework that could be transferred without difficulty to learning from a new religious tradition. And conversations with Sri Lankan mentors confirmed me within it. So I did not label myself when I visited Buddhist *vihāra*s, meditated at the Buddhist Meditation Centre at Nilambe or went to lectures at the PIPBS. Only those who became close friends knew my background.

My chosen position, however, was not easy. I struggled, for instance, over whether I was a participant or observer, when I joined the line of devotees at a Bodhi *pūja* during the rains retreat (*vassa*) or sat with them during safeguarding recitals (*paritta*), unaware of the importance of this issue within religious studies. In situating myself as a 'learner', I respected the 'authority of believers' (Kristensen 1960), uncritically at first, and sought to place my Christian preconceptions and judgements in hibernation – to bracket them. Seen in retrospect, my chosen stance was similar to that advocated by early religious

[2] Peggy Morgan to Elizabeth Harris, 5 November 1911. See Harris 1993b for my doctorate. It was re-written with new research as Harris 2006.

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studies pioneers, as they separated themselves from theological disciplines and a comparative method conditioned by Christian frameworks. As Ninian Smart said in 1982:

> It seems to me that one of the noblest as well as one of the most immediately practical of human endeavors is that attempt to voyage into other minds, to walk in the moccasins of others, which is represented in the study of religion by the phenomenological method. (Smart 2009a: 225).

My choice of an emic rather than an etic method certainly enabled me to encounter and engage with what Theravāda Buddhism meant for its practitioners. After I took a decision to use only Buddhist meditation methods when meditating at Nilambe in December 1986, opening myself to experiencing rather than simply learning about concepts such as *anicca* (impermanence) and *anattā* (non-self), what I would call a further religious experience occurred, on the early-morning return train to Colombo. What I wrote in my diary afterwards is worth quoting:

> Mist, an early morning, white, numinous touching, blurred the hills and the paddy fields. White birds rose up from the water. An occasional blue or green flashed among the trees, in brilliant colour…….Suddenly the Buddhist concept of the body and the world as a series of processes became clearer. The idea of static entities suddenly seemed ridiculous. Everything was moving. My seeing no longer seemed to belong to my individual body. Rather, it was a cosmic process working through me. 'Seeing' became a gift, an exciting and changing thing. The fields became greener and the mist more beautiful. 'Seeing' was happening through me without thought dominating it. I realised that to think of the senses as processes rather than as my possession was not to diminish them, but to enhance the wonder of seeing, hearing and touching. *Anicca* and *anatta* suddenly became clear, not as doctrine but as experience. (Personal diary, 23 December 1986, quoted in Harris 2002: 13-14)

Here, there certainly was 'an initial situation', namely my meditation practice, and I interpreted it through that practice and my academic work at the PIPBS. I realised, through experiences like this, however, that the attempt 'to voyage into other minds' could be both unsettling and energising. At this point, I could not lay claim to 'methodological agnosticism', *epoché.* I was actively embracing another way of seeing and being religious, drawing it into myself, whilst, at the same time, studying Buddhism

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academically under Buddhist scholars. Both, however, helped me towards the accurate description that is still important within religious studies (e.g. Bowman 2004).

At the academic level, I was fortunate that the founder and director of the PIPBS, Jotiya Dhirasekera, insisted that the Institute was non-confessional. It was for the academic study of Buddhism rather than a Buddhist institute. In addition, a number of the academic tutors there had attained their doctorates in the West in a religious studies environment.[3] Almost by a process of osmosis, therefore, I absorbed some religious studies methodology, although my tutors did not hide that they were committed Buddhists.

There was a naiveté, of course, in my initial journey into Buddhism that mirrored a naiveté in some early representations of phenomenology within religious studies, in that they overlooked the situatedness of the agents involved in the processes of observing, participating and listening, and the historically contingent nature of the result, as Flood cogently pointed out in 1999 (Flood 1999; Cox 2006: 211-216). I learnt that my mind was not a clean slate onto which Buddhism could be written, and also that Buddhism in Sri Lanka was multifaceted, with a diversity of practitioner 'voices', conditioned by the country's colonial past. Respecting the authority of believers, I realised, involved asking what diversity of opinion meant for and within Buddhist traditions (Morgan 1996). As for my own situatedness, however hard I attempted to bracket the spirituality I had brought to Sri Lanka, it conditioned what I selected from Buddhism, the Buddhists I associated with, and the conversations I had with people of all religions and ethnicities in the country, making a neutral position impossible. In other words, my twentieth century western spiritual explorations before 1986 did not go into complete hibernation, for instance my feminism, my concern for social justice and the work I had already done on contemplation/meditation. As an avid reader of the *New Internationalist*, a member of CND and an anti-apartheid campaigner, I could not immerse myself in Sri Lankan Buddhism without also interrogating and questioning some facets of the Buddhism around me, most particularly Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and its aggravation of an increasingly violent ethnic conflict (e.g. Bartholomeusz & De Silva 1998; Rāghavan 2016). The same was true for my feminist side. As a critic of patriarchy in all religions, I was naturally drawn to women who similarly critiqued Sri Lankan Buddhism. And the benefit I gained from meditating at Nilambe, under its teacher, Godwin Samararatne, was conditioned by the contemplative practice I had already experienced in Britain, in spite of my choice to use Buddhist rather than Christian meditation methods. I would eventually

[3] For example Chandima Wijebandara (Lancaster) and Y Karunadasa (London).

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ask myself whether there is not always, 'a colonisation of the other by the perceiver, a drawing of the other into the perceiver's own thought patterns?'(Harris 2004: 334).

I experienced the unintended consequences of my initial naiveté in the mid-1990s, when I returned to Sri Lanka, during my time at Westminster College, with the Head of the BBC World Service, David Craig, to make a series of radio programmes, *The Way of the Buddha.*[4] During this time, a Buddhist friend came to see me, not in connection with the programmes but about an article of mine, 'The Female in Buddhism', which had been published locally and was based on a talk I had given in 1989 in Kandy, fairly early within my time in Sri Lanka (Harris 1993a). In the talk, I had chosen to approach the topic from a feminist perspective, using the analytical model I would have used if I had been writing about Christianity - women as symbol, image and metaphor in the texts. Under these headings, the article contained an exploration of both negative and positive representations of women in the Pāli texts. After this conversation, my friend wrote an article for the *Daily News*, a local newspaper, that accused me of distorting the *Dhamma* by arguing that Buddhism was patriarchal, pointing out that I was a Christian who expressed an affinity to Buddhism (Karunaratne 1996). Her criticism, therefore, was that I had learnt about Buddhism only to undermine it. At the time, I was convinced that she had misrepresented me and my reply to her was also printed in the *Daily News* (Harris 1996).

Eight years afterwards, I reflected more deeply on the episode and realised it concerned issues at the heart of debates within religious studies. I wrote this:

> Why was this? [her accusatory reaction]. It was certainly not because I had any personal wish to undermine Buddhism. It was because I had not seen myself as dealing with something that was truly 'other' when writing on the female in Buddhism. I had assumed I would meet issues I was familiar with in Christianity. I therefore used tools I knew well, those that feminists in the West were using to judge all religion. Overlooked was the historical context I was working within and the fact that I, as a Christian, could not be seen as a neutral academic. If I had attempted to see the paper through the eyes of a Sri Lankan Buddhist woman such as my interviewer, I would have taken into account the historical legacy of mistrust between Christians and Buddhists in Sri Lanka because of 19th century missionary activity, which, among women, had resulted in the wish to defend the record of Buddhism's treatment of women

[4] David Craig and I gave a presentation on communicating Buddhism through radio at the 1996 BASR conference, which was on the theme of 'Religion and Media', held at the University College of St Martin, Lancaster. Harris 1998 was based on the interviews conducted for the programmes.

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> against western criticism. I did not and clashed. In retrospect, I realise that I could have done more to enable my listeners/readers to see that the negative case I built towards the beginning was a caricature that I wanted to challenge rather than a view that I supported. (Harris 2004: 342)

Another way of putting this would be that I had not listened carefully enough to the diversity of attitudes among Buddhist women in Sri Lanka or recognised the 'contingent conjunctures' that affected the reception of my 1989 presentation (Abeysekara 2002: 3-4), which incidentally was well-received by some western Buddhist women (See Harris 1999). I had failed to realise that, as Flood argued, representation is always interpretation, and that 'all accounts of religion are from a location' (Flood 1999: 90; Cox 2006: 211-215). The experience reinforced my awareness that my immersion within Sri Lankan Buddhism was inextricably conditioned by the country's postcolonial context and the revivalist Buddhist modernism or Protestant Buddhism (Obeyesekere 1970) that had emerged through the encounter between evangelical Christian missionaries and Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Harris 2006: 168-180). To be fair to the early religious studies pioneer, Ninian Smart, he neither denied the multidisciplinary nature of the field, stressing that it was 'plural, polymethodic non-finite and aspectual' nor the impact of colonialism on the development of religions (Smart 2009b: 22 & 29). But it took later scholars to give additional stress to self-reflexivity, the insights of postmodernism and the historically contingent nature of religious traditions.

Return to Britain

Where was Peggy in all this? I returned to Britain in 1993 with attitudes that were primed towards a religious studies approach, although the criticism of 'The Female in Buddhism' was yet to come. My doctorate had been a contextually dense study that entered the western discourse about Protestant Buddhism, through challenging theoretical approaches that ignored the agency of Asian Buddhists, and the dialogue that took place on the ground between them and western missionaries and orientalists (Harris 1993b: 491-566).[5] However, I rightly saw myself as lacking in methodological formation within religious studies, due to my rather unconventional entry into postgraduate research. Experience had certainly taught me much, not only about Buddhist meditation and devotional practice but also about the activities of some Asian Buddhist women – I had attended the conference in Bodh Gaya that had given birth to Sakyadhita (Daughters of

[5] One study that ignored this agency through an over-reliance on Edward Said was Almond 1988.

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the Buddha; see Lekshe Tsomo 1988) and had been a member of the Sakyadhita Committee in Colombo – and Buddhism in times of ethnic war. My knowledge of the Pāli textual tradition was also sound. Yet, I had much to learn with Peggy as my guide, at a time when religious studies scholars were rigorously interrogating phenomenology, and concepts such as the 'authority of the believer' and 'methodological agnosticism'. Peggy entered all these debates and at least two others, namely (1) the existence of gender and ethical awareness in religious studies and (2) the relationship between religious studies and interreligious engagement. To explore her involvement with these issues, I will continue in autobiographical mode.

Diversity, Gender and Ethical Awareness

The first event Peggy involved me in after 1993 was a conference she organised in March 1994 at Westminster College on 'The Contribution of Methodists to the Academic Study of Religion'.[6] The line-up of speakers was impressive, including Geoffrey Parrinder (Forward 1998; Cox 2006: 146-153), Andrew Walls (Cox 2006: 153-159), Frank Whaling and Wesley Ariarajah (e.g. Ariarajah 1985), although it was rather male dominated. Most of the papers concerned interreligious encounter in line with the extended conference description, although Parrinder spoke on 'Rabindranath Tagore and Robert Bridges'.[7] I will return to this aspect of Peggy's work. Suffice to say at this point that it was an early confirmation of Peggy's willingness to engage with this emerging field.

The next thing Peggy quite rightly encouraged me to do was to give a paper at the 1994 fortieth anniversary conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), held in Bristol. My topic was 'Reclaiming the Sacred: Buddhist Women in Sri Lanka' and it drew on my empirical experience, for instance of Sakyadhita and the aspiration of some of its Sri Lankan members to restore an Order of *Bhikkhūṇi*s (Buddhist nuns with higher ordination) in the country. I can remember my nervousness, particularly when I realised that Rupert Gethin and Paul Williams, key scholars within Buddhist Studies in the United Kingdom, were in the front row. I think it went well! Peggy then helped me prepare the paper for publication, with a more sophisticated theoretical

[6] 19 March 1994. The journal *Discernment*: *an ecumenical Christian journal of inter-faith encounter* was also relaunched at the conference. My own paper was on 'Buddhist-Christian Encounter with special reference to Sri Lanka', concentrating on the colonial period.

[7] The small-print of the conference programme included 'The College provides an excellent venue for this celebration and sharing of the contribution of Methodist thought and Methodist scholars to the study of religions and interfaith dialogue'. The papers included: 'Interpretative Dialogue: A Christian Reflects on the Meaning of a Hindu Tradition' (Eric Lott), 'Wesley's Premonitions of Interfaith Discourse' (Frank Whaling), 'The figure of Jesus in Interfaith Dialogue' (Wesley Ariarajah), 'The Pioneering work of James Hope Moulton' (Andrew Walls).

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framework (Harris 1997a). She similarly helped my next BASR paper in 1995, in Wolverhampton. Speaking to the conference theme, 'Authority and Religious Traditions', Peggy gave a critically important paper, 'The Authority of Believers in the Study of Religions' (Morgan 1996) and, using fieldwork undertaken in the summer of 1985, I spoke on 'Internal and External Authority among lay Buddhist Women in contemporary Sri Lanka' (Harris 1997b). The very framework of the paper – internal and external authority – emerged from conversations with Peggy. Through these conversations, my sensitivity to religious studies methodology in the West increased, as did my awareness of key issues such as the frequent absence of gender awareness.

Peggy was also a mentor in my teaching. I had been teaching and moderating discussions since the 1970s but preparing undergraduate lectures was new to me, since my doctoral research responsibilities in Colombo had not involved this. My diaries hint at the help Peggy gave me. On 3 February 1995, for instance, I rose early to finalize a lecture on Buddhism – Buddhist ethics I think - and wrote, 'I'm not sure how it went. Peggy claims I paced myself well and one mature student said how much she'd enjoyed it'. At that point, however, I was placing far too much emphasis on the Pāli texts in my lectures on topics such as ethics, following the method of the PIPBS. Pace was perhaps one of the few things I got right! Through listening to Peggy's lectures, learning from her method, my focus broadened so that I did greater justice to lived Buddhist traditions, across the globe, in their diversity and complexity, without losing my love of the Pāli textual tradition. I must also thank her for creating a slot in the curriculum for me to draw on my empirical experience, namely a course on 'Buddhism in Context: Sri Lanka', which moved from lived devotional practice to the impact of colonialism, Buddhist Nationalism, Buddhism and Gender, and Socially Engaged Buddhism, playing to my strengths. In contrast to my experience within some other institutions, Peggy's wisdom drew the best out of me.

Enabling encounter between students and practitioners of different religious traditions as well as experts in the discipline was also at the heart of what Peggy sought to offer students. According to Peggy, no religious studies course worth its name could omit this. For instance, between 1994 and 1996, students engaged with Sulak Sivaraksa, pioneer of engaged Buddhism from Thailand or Siam as he prefers to call it, Martine Batchelor, writer on women in Buddhism, Frank Whaling and Ninian Smart. And Peggy set an example for me of how to introduce such visiting speakers. She had a rare gift of gracious and courteous affirmation that I will always remember and have sought to emulate. Under her mentoring, teaching became exciting, challenging and relevant. The application to religious studies of Westminster College's openness to the contemporary world owed much to Peggy and had an influence wider than the immediate College context.

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During the 1990s, Peggy was collaborating with other specialists on two key publications that related to ethics: *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (Morgan & Lawton 1996) and *Testing the Global Ethic: Voices from the Religions on Moral Values* (Morgan & Braybrooke 1998). Written with great attention to accuracy, both faced outwards into the world and encouraged students to do the same. Peggy was not uncritical of the idea of a global ethic, declaring that its initial documents had 'an air of inter-faith confessionalism and para-theology' (Morgan 1995: 167). Her willingness to engage with it as an object of academic study, however, in collaboration with one of its supporters, was indicative of her method and integrity in religious studies. For the book 'tested' the idea of a global ethic rather than advocated it, using the voices of practitioners as data, a method completely in line with her positioning within religious studies. Similarly the undergraduate 'Guided Research Project' on the topic that we prepared together recognised its importance for some practitioners but also its drawbacks.[8] Her stance in this was similar to her position within the emerging field of interreligious encounter.

The Relationship between Religious Studies and Interreligious Encounter

Within contemporary religious studies, inter-faith studies and inter-faith dialogue are kept at arms' length, because of their historical link with the theological agendas of one faith, Christianity, and their perceived endorsement of a now discredited world religions paradigm. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the line between religious studies, and the study and practice of interreligious relations was more porous than now, with a number of religious studies pioneers involved also in the practical task of enabling interreligious encounter. After all, at that time, both those involved in religious studies and Christians who pioneered inter-faith dialogue were united in their opposition to Christian hegemony. Unlike some religious studies scholars, Peggy was not, to my knowledge, involved with CRPOF and the British Council of Churches.[9] As a member of the Shap Working Party and other such initiatives, however, she encountered some of the Christians who were attempting to build a new relationship with other religious traditions such as Kenneth

[8]This encouraged students to interrogate three areas: 'the nature of the crisis' - global inequality, consumerism and the sustainability of the natural environment; the contribution of religious traditions; the barriers to implementing any global ethic.

[9] Ursula King, Shirley Firth and Kim Knott, for instance, were, in the late 1980s, members of CRPOF. All were also involved with BASR. See for example minutes of the 35th Meeting of the Committee held at the Stony Croft Hotel in Leicester, 22-23 November 1989. Under this umbrella, King was also a member of the Women Interfaith Dialogue Group. Lambeth Palace Library holds the Minutes of CRPOF, from which this information was gained.

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Cracknell (e.g. Cracknell 1986), Marcus Braybrooke (e.g. Braybrooke 1992) and Owen Cole (e.g. Cole 2004), and was very well informed about developments in this area, as demonstrated in the March 1994 conference on the contribution of Methodists to the academic study of religions and inter-faith encounter.

Given this emerging context, it was inevitable that the relationship between religious studies and interreligious encounter became the focus of academic reflection and Peggy became instrumental in this. The September 1993 BASR conference in Newcastle included a panel discussion on the issue, chaired by Ursula King, with the discussion led by Terry Thomas and Brian Bocking (Morgan 1995: 156). It coincided with events to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the 1893 Chicago World's Parliament of Religions (Seager 1993), one of which, in Bangalore, Peggy attended. Concurrent with these events, she was writing a paper entitled, 'The Study of Religions and Interfaith Encounter' (Morgan 1995), which quoted one of Thomas's remarks in Newcastle, 'nothing that religions do is outside the scope of the study of religions', reformulating it as 'nothing that religious people do is outside the scope of the study of religions' (Morgan 1995: 168).

Since religious people were involved in interreligious encounter, it was a legitimate field for engagement and study for Peggy. She avoided being labelled as belonging to any religious tradition but both supported and critically studied developments in this field. During my time at Westminster College, we both went to meetings of the Oxford Roundtable of Religions, hearing a diversity of presentations from the Bhahma Kumaris at Nuneham Courtney to a Zoroastrian woman on women and religion. Together, we participated in events at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, for instance a Buddhist-Christian meditation retreat from 7-8 October 1995, and in an interreligious dialogue hosted by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) from 19-21 January 1996. In all of these meetings, we were both participants and observers, enjoying the interactions they afforded but also gleaning material for research and for our religious studies lectures.

Peggy's principal interreligious activity in Oxford was in connection with the new International Interfaith Centre (IIC), which Peggy hoped to bring to Westminster College.[10] In December 1993, the Centre was inaugurated at the College, Peggy giving the first draft of her paper on the study of religions and interfaith encounter. In brief, the paper outlined how she saw her role in the Centre's development, namely as a critical friend, adviser and consultant, who could ask questions about representation and focus, noticing and exposing gaps between confessional and scholarly perspectives (Morgan 1995). She sought to take this further through the theme of the 1995 IIC conference, entitled 'Interfaith Activity: Threat or Promise', which included the theme, 'Threat or Promise? The

[10] To cut a long story short, this was prevented because of opposition from residents local to Westminster College, who feared an increase in traffic and congestion.

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Study of Religions and Interfaith Activity'. With case studies from countries such as Bosnia and Sri Lanka, the focus was contemporary and engaged. The relationship between the study of religion and interfaith activity was not given as much attention as it could have been, except perhaps by Michael Pye, who affirmed that 'in one sense reflection on religious pluralism began with the emergence of religious diversity in ancient India and ancient China' (Braybrooke 1995: 20).

Peggy, I would suggest, was a key voice in arguing for a role for the religious studies scholar in the expanding field of interreligious encounter and interreligious dialogue, as consultant and adviser. Without ever becoming a confessional participant in this landscape, she gave support to those who were involved, and cast her critical academic gaze on the result, convinced that it was as valid a subject for research as any other expression of religion in the contemporary world. In this she was supported by BASR. Ninian Smart, for instance, wrote in 1998, 'I consider it as part of our task as intellectuals not only to theorize about the configurations of religions and worldviews, but to reflect more philosophically about the relations between religions' (Smart 2009b: 18), as he had done in 1993, the year of the BASR conference debate (Smart 1993). And, in the 1990s, the BASR Bulletin certainly reported on and publicised conferences that focussed on interreligious relations, for instance, in 1999: 'Islam and other Faiths' at Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education; and the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, on the theme 'A New Day Dawning: Spiritual Yearnings and Sacred Possibilities'.[11] It also reviewed books on these issues, for example Masao Abe's *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, edited by Steve Heine (Werner 1996: 41-42), and *All in Good Faith*: *A Resource Book for Multi-faith Prayer*, by Jean Potter and Marcus Braybrooke (Whaling 1998: 39-40).

In the third decade of the twenty first century, it could be argued that this field is no longer 'expanding' but rather that there has been a retrenchment, which offers itself as a further subject for academic scrutiny. Yet, in the 1990s, Peggy's critical engagement with this field and principled position helped me immensely in my own negotiation of it, especially during the time when I acted as adviser to a Christian church on its relationships with other religious traditions.[12]

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[11] BASR Bulletin No. 86, March 1999, 13 & 22-23.

[12] Between 1996 and 2007, I was Secretary for Relationships with People of Other Faiths for the Methodist Church in Britain. Some religious studies specialists saw this as a betrayal of my religious studies credentials. In contrast, I saw it as an opportunity to be a resource person on the religious landscape of Britain for a significant religious body, utilising principles connected with religious studies such as accurate representation/description and the challenging of theological bias. Throughout my time in this post, I continued to write within Buddhist Studies, serving on the Management Committee of the UK Association of Buddhist Studies, and acting as a visiting lecturer at Birmingham and Lund Universities.

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Conclusion

When I started writing this contribution, I knew that I owed a debt to Peggy Morgan. Writing it has increased that sense of debt. I am not, of course, the only younger scholar Peggy has encouraged and influenced. The other contributions in this issue prove that. In this and the other areas outlined in this paper, she was a pioneer in religious studies, convinced that the discipline should be critical, outward facing, relevant and socially responsible, emphases that have not lost their potency.

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The Buddha's Teachings on Friendship in the *Avadānaśataka*

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Introduction

In an oft-cited passage found in a few different early Buddhist texts, and quoted here from *Avadānaśataka* 37, the Buddha's personal attendant, the monk Ānanda, declares to the Buddha:

> "Sir, when I am here alone and solitary in retreat, this thought arises in my mind, that this is half of the religious life, namely good friendship, good companionship and good associations, and not evil friendship, evil companionship and evil associations."

To which the Buddha replies:

> "You should not say this, Ānanda, that this is half of the religious life … . Ānanda, this is the entire, complete, whole, pure, accomplished religious life, namely good friendship, good companionship and good associations, and avoiding evil friendship, evil companionship and evil associations."[1]

This exchange is fairly well known amongst Buddhists because it is at the heart of an important notion: the ideal of what is referred to by terms such as "spiritual friend" or "admirable friend" (*kalyāṇamitra* in Sanskrit).[2] The term *kalyāṇamitra* is more directly translated as "good friend" as above, with *kalyāṇa* meaning good and virtuous, as well as

[1] All translations and summaries from the *Avadānaśataka* are my own and reproduced from Appleton 2020, which is based on Speyer's 1958 Sanskrit edition.

[2] Usually the exchange as it appears in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (3.18 and 45.2; Bodhi trans. 2000: 180–1, 1524–5) is the source cited in such discussions.

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beautiful and agreeable, and here presented as the direct opposite of "evil" (*pāpa*). A *kalyāṇamitra* is not a "good friend" as you or I might use the term, however, to describe someone who is loyal, kind or even fun; this is precisely why translations such as "admirable" and "spiritual" have gained currency. A friend of this kind is one who is good (i.e. virtuous), but also one who is good for you, in other words one who leads to your improvement. It is someone who helps you along the Buddhist path, guiding your practice, encouraging you; the best *kalyāṇamitra* was the Buddha, but now Buddhists find such friendship in teachers and mentors.

This exchange between the Buddha and Ānanda appears twice in the *Avadānaśataka*, a Sanskrit collection of one hundred karmic stories affiliated to the now lost (Mūla-) Sarvāstivāda school of Indian Buddhism, and dating to perhaps the fourth or fifth century CE.[3] Both occurrences of the exchange appear in association with the telling of a *jātaka* story, or story of a past-life of the Buddha, in which we learn more about friendship. In this article I will explore these two occurrences, in the context of a literary work that – I argue – deliberately presents the Buddha as speaking in favour of rather mundane goods: generosity, cherishing teachings, looking after one's parents, and dwelling as good friends.

The article is a tribute to Peggy Morgan, whose good (virtuous, spiritual and nourishing) friendship in my own formative years as an Oxford doctoral student was invaluable to my welfare and development. Since friendship is both an entirely "ordinary experience" and – at its best – an extraordinary and transformative experience, I hope this brief article may contribute at least a little to the wider debates and studies in this volume.

Avadānaśataka 37:
The Story of the Hare

Many people will be familiar with the story of the Buddha's past birth as a hare who sacrifices his life to feed a brahmin ascetic and, as a result, has his form painted on the moon by the king of the gods. However, the version in the *Avadānaśataka* is not the same as that in the better-known Pāli *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* or Sanskrit *Jātakamālā* of Āryaśūra.[4] In those tales, the hermit is simply passing through the forest – indeed he is not really a brahmin ascetic at all, but the god Śakra/Sakka in disguise as such, come to test the

[3] For a fuller discussion of the nature and history of the text, as well as a full bibliography and a translation of the first forty stories, see Appleton 2020. This article draws upon and expands ideas first expressed there.

[4] Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā* 6 (Khoroche trans. 1989: 32-38), *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 316 (Shaw trans. 2006: ch18), and elsewhere including *Cariyāpiṭaka* 10; for the range of stories, including in art, see the appropriate cluster on the Jataka Database (https://jatakastories.div.ed.ac.uk).

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virtue of the hare.[5] The hare and his animal friends (a jackal, otter and monkey) have a rather fleeting encounter with the brahmin, in which they demonstrate their careful observance of the holy day and obligations of hospitality by each offering some food. The hare, having nothing to give, offers his own body.

The *Avadānaśataka* version represents a rather different transmission.[6] Here the hare (who, conveniently, has a human voice) develops a friendship with an ascetic living in the forest. During a time of drought, the ascetic decides he must give up on being a forest-dwelling renouncer and go to a village or town to seek food. The hare is distraught, not only at the thought of losing the companionship of his friend, but also because of the obstacles to religious practice that his friend will encounter in leaving the forest. As a result, he decides to offer himself as a meal to his friend, to keep him in the forest at least another day.

His friend is so shocked by the hare's sacrifice (which he manages to prevent in the nick of time) that he promises not to leave after all. The hare then offers a verse of truth:[7]

> "Having come to the forest my heart delights in solitude!
> By this statement of truth may the god rain down the rains of Great Indra!"

This statement of truth causes the abode of the god Śakra to shake, alerting him to what is going on below. He sends rain, the food supply resumes, and the sage considers the hare as a good (or spiritual) friend.

That the emphasis of this story is on friendship is not only clear from the tale itself. The frame story explains that the Buddha told the story of the hare after having finally persuaded an errant monk to separate himself from his family and practice properly in the forest: while the hare in the story is the Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be), the human ascetic is identified as a past-life of the errant monk. The Buddha concludes his story of the past with a teaching:

> In this way, monks, you should train: "We will dwell as good friends, good companions, good associates, not evil friends, evil companions, evil associates."

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[5] This is a fairly common motif in *jātaka* stories. See discussion in Appleton 2017: ch2.

[6] This transmission of the story is also represented by Haribhaṭṭa's *Jātakamālā* 4 (Khoroche trans. 2017: 33-39), and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (Panglung 1981: 45 [213,1,7]).

[7] A sincere statement of truth, according to a motif present in a range early Indian literature and particularly prominent in *jātaka*s, has the power to affect the laws of nature or attract the attention of the gods.

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Immediately after this comes the exchange with Ānanda, in which the Buddha declares that good friendship is the entire religious life, and goes on to explain that he himself is the best of all friends, as he helps beings to achieve awakening.

There is a striking tension in this story between the benefits and dangers of human company. The errant monk must be separated from the close associates of his lay life (though nothing is said to suggest they are specifically *bad* people), and made to go and practice in the forest, with the Buddha as his spiritual friend. Likewise the hare sees the danger in his friend giving up his renunciate life, and hence proves his own friendship, in part through a sincere (yet somewhat ironic) declaration of the delight he takes in solitude. The idea of the "holy life" (*brahmacariya*) is one of chastity and of separation from loved-ones. Indeed, the idea that friendship is half the holy life occurs to Ānanda when he is "here alone and solitary in retreat". It would seem that good, virtuous and spiritual friendship is something of particular value to renouncers, who are deliberately cut off from wider society, and provide guidance to one another instead. As such, this message about friendship might seem limited to a monastic audience, ready to revere the Buddha as best-ever guide, and encouraged to treat their own teachers with respect. Nonetheless, the benefits of friendship seem to apply more broadly, with even the friendship of animals (albeit in extraordinary form, as a past-birth of a *buddha*) being lauded as a potential source of support and guidance.

Avadānaśataka 40:
The Story of Subhadra

The other *Avadānaśataka* story that is explicitly told in praise of "good friendship" is the story of Subhadra, which forms the last of the ten *jātaka*s in the text. It is a complex tale, with two embedded past-life stories, one about the Buddha's own past-life rescue of Subhadra-as-deer, and the other told to explain why Subhadra became the Buddha's last personal disciple. The first of these, which is the *jātaka* proper, tells of how the Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be) was leader of a herd of deer, and helped his herd escape hunters by making his own body into a bridge across the water. After all his herd seemed to have escaped, he carefully checked the shore, and found one young deer left behind. After carrying him to safety, he made an aspiration to buddhahood and died. The metaphor of the Buddha helping his followers across the turbulent waters of *saṃsāra* to the further shore of *nirvāṇa* is clear here, and the Bodhisattva even looks around thinking, "let there be nobody else who has not crossed over". However, it is the leadership and self-sacrifice of the Bodhisattva that is prominent, rather than any notion of friendship.

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It is the second past-life story that more clearly has friendship at its heart. This story is set in the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, one of the *buddha*s of the past, and concerns one of his monks, also his nephew, called Aśoka (not to be confused with the famous Mauryan emperor of the same name). Aśoka doesn't really bother to practice hard, perhaps feeling a little complacent as the nephew of the Buddha. However, when he hears that his uncle is about to enter *parinirvāṇa* (that is, to die for a final time), he is very distressed that he has wasted his chance to really progress. He is too far away to reach the Buddha before his death, and so a tree-deity helps him with her magical powers. On hearing one final *dharma*-teaching, Aśoka achieves awakening as an *arhat* (awakened disciple), and hence becomes the last person to achieve awakening before the *parinirvāṇa* of Kāśyapa Buddha. The tree-deity, moved by this, declares her intention to one day be the last disciple of the (then future) *buddha* Śākyamuni. This, the frame story makes clear, she achieves in her rebirth as Subhadra, the final personal disciple of Śākyamuni Buddha (the most recent *buddha*, usually referred to simply as "the Buddha"). Subhadra's conversion by Śākyamuni Buddha on his deathbed is also included within the tale.

As with the story of the hare, the Buddha concludes the story of the past with an instruction to his monks to train as follows: "We will dwell as good friends, good companions, good associates, not evil friends, evil companions, evil associates." Directly after this Ānanda interjects with his well-intentioned misunderstanding of the extent of friendship's relevance to the holy life, and is corrected. This is the end of the fourth chapter of the text, and the ten *jātaka* stories therein. Friendship is therefore the concluding teaching of this section of the *Avadānaśataka*, and we see that even the friendship of a tree-deity can bring dramatic results. Once again, it is the monks who receive the instruction to cherish friendship, but once again we can see the potential ramifications for all Buddhists, or indeed all beings. The idea that the teaching can apply on different levels is reinforced by the way the chapter, and indeed the text as a whole, works on several levels.

Levels of teaching in the *Avadānaśataka*

The two teachings on friendship in the *Avadānaśataka* appear in the fourth chapter, also known as the fourth decade, since each chapter contains exactly ten stories. The ten stories of the fourth decade are ten *jātaka* stories, that is to say past-life stories of the Buddha, and all are set in times of no past *buddha*s. Ten other *jātaka*s set in times of past *buddha*s, and demonstrating the karmic rewards of serving such supreme beings, occupy chapter 2, while the other decades present stories of predictions to future buddhahood

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(chapter 1) or future pratyekabuddhahood[8] (chapter 3), or the past life stories of *arhat*s (chapters 7-10), and the deeds that lead to rebirth as a god (chapter 6) or hungry ghost (chapter 5). As such, the overriding focus of the text is karma and its multi-life results.

The idea of karma is, in one sense, an important leveller. All beings are affected by karma, as karma is an impersonal natural law that governs our experiences within the cycle of rebirth. According to Buddhist karma theory, good and bad are universal ethical principles, based upon the motivation or intention behind the deed, as well as the deed itself and the doer's feelings about it afterwards. An action motivated by greed, hatred or delusion is bad and will have bad karmic results, while an action motivated by generosity and kindness, and underpinned by wisdom, will have good karmic results. This will be the case regardless of whether or not the doer is a Buddhist, a brahmin, a hare, a tree-deity, or even the king of the gods. Karma is, one might say, the ordinary experience of all beings, whether or not they are aware of it.

A particular interest of the *Avadānaśataka* is in how meritorious action (or good karma) affects beings as they progress towards the highest goal of awakening. Karmicly potent deeds – such as making an offering to a past *buddha* and making an aspiration to a future attainment – are celebrated parts of the multi-life stories of all three types of awakened beings, namely *buddha*s (more correctly: full and complete *buddha*s), *pratyekabuddha*s and *arhat*s.[9] Indeed, the karmic levelling includes tales of the very humble past lives of figures who eventually go on to achieve the highest Buddhist goals. A gardener's simple gift of a toothpick to the Buddha (that is to say, Śākyamuni Buddha, the Buddha of our time) leads to a prediction of future pratyekabuddhahood, for example (story 29), while the toothpick itself spontaneously develops into a tree, in a demonstration of the Buddha's supernormal powers. Meanwhile another gardener's gift of a lotus to Śākyamuni Buddha (story 7) leads to a declaration that he will become a full and complete *buddha* in the future; meanwhile the lotus grows to the size of a cartwheel and floats mid-air above Śākyamuni's head. Such stories emphasise the benefits available to the most ordinary of people making the most ordinary of gifts, as long as they are made to the extraordinary recipient that is the (or a) Buddha.

In the fourth chapter, however, in which both friendship stories are found, the simple deeds of the past are gone, and so is the miracle-working Buddha of the present.

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[8] That is to say, awakening as a "solitary" or "independent" *buddha*. Like a full and complete *buddha* such as Śākyamuni (whom we refer to as "the Buddha" though he is only one of many) a *pratyekabuddha* realises the truth himself. (They are always male.) Unlike a full *buddha*, a *pratyekabuddha* passes out of the world without much consequence, neither founding a monastic community nor making known his teachings. Such a form of awakening is only available in times between the dispensations of full *buddha*s. See Appleton 2019a and b.

[9] See previous note for the difference between a *buddha* and *pratyekabuddha*. An *arhat* achieves awakening thanks to the teachings made available by a *buddha*.

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Instead, we find a rather humble Buddha nonetheless telling stories of his extraordinary past-life achievements. Recall, for example, how the Bodhisattva-hare's self-sacrifice illuminates a story of the Buddha helping a monk renounce properly, while the Bodhisattva-deer's self-sacrifice illuminates the Buddha's final act of conversion. In another story we discover that the Buddha's immunity to the mild illness troubling his monks results from a past life in which he jumped off his palace roof in order to be reborn as a great curative fish, then allowing himself to be eaten alive by his citizens as medicine to cure a plague (story 31). Similarly, when the Buddha teaches his monks and layfollowers to value the *dharma*-teaching, he illustrates this with stories of how, in past lives, he jumped into a fire or fed his son to a demon in exchange for the only single paltry verse of *dharma* then available in the world (stories 35 and 38).

The chapter thus has a very different framework to other parts of the text, yet it maintains the overall concern with karma. Indeed, the stories suggest that, if even the Buddha cares about his own karma, then surely we all should too, regardless of our status and progress on the path. Two further stories particularly emphasise this message. In story 34 the Buddha offers to help a monk who is struggling to thread his needle for sewing up his robe, a deed which would be recognised as generating merit (good karma). The monk:

> became agitated and quickly seized the Blessed One's [Buddha's] hand and placed it on his own head. He said, 'Blessed One, this hand of yours has accumulated generosity, good conduct, forbearance, vigour, meditation and wisdom during three incalculable aeons.'[10] And then the Blessed One said, 'I am eager for merit, monk. I have a taste for obtaining merit, monk, such that I am never satiated.'

The past-life story he then tells illustrates the strength of his commitment to karmic merit, since it recounts his willing gift of his own flesh. As he points out to his monks, what is the marvel in valuing karmic merit now, when he has eradicated greed and hatred completely and achieved buddhahoood? Even in the past, when he was imperfect in his knowledge and had not yet eradicated greed, he gave up his own flesh and even his life. Meanwhile in story 39, the Buddha is halted by a line in the sand drawn by someone who claims that the he owes him money. As the story of the past reveals, the Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be) had offered surety to the man for the gambling debt of a friend, but failed to pay it. The Buddha explains:

[10] In other words the six "perfections" (*pāramī*) necessary for the achievement of buddhahood. In Pāli/Theravāda tradition there are ten.

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> 'Thus during my transmigration I experienced endless misfortunes concerning my wealth, and even now my completely awakened buddhahood is obstructed by him. For thus, monks, entirely black deeds have entirely black fruits, entirely white deeds have entirely white fruits, and mixed deeds have mixed fruits. Therefore, monks, having cast aside black deeds and those that are mixed, one should direct oneself to performing deeds that are wholly white. And one should strive to avoid taking what is not given, such as was his fault. In this way, O monks, you should train.'

The message seems fairly clear: If even the Buddha has to deal with effects of his actions, then we should all be very careful about how we behave, and pursue only wholly good deeds.

As is probably already apparent, the training instructions that end each story of the *Avadānaśataka* give us an interesting insight into what the tales are intended to communicate. Although they are always directed at the Buddha's monastic community within the text, the instructions in the fourth chapter of the text offer very basic teachings suitable for any audience. In addition to the two that focus on living as good friends, there are two about the importance of valuing the teachings, two about giving gifts, two about cultivating compassion and loving kindness, one about caring for one's parents, and the gambling debt story with its general lesson about karma and the importance of not stealing. As we have seen, these general lessons are demonstrated by some rather dramatic past-life stories, including tales of the Bodhisattva's bodily sacrifice, but also by the more relatable actions and situations that lead the Buddha to tell the story of his past life in the first place. As such, we are all part of the audience for the stories, and we all have something to learn from both the ordinary and the extraordinary events within.

What seems to be presented in the fourth decade of the *Avadānaśataka*, then, is a deliberate contrast between the extreme virtue of the Bodhisattva, and the humility and mundane goodness of the resultant Buddha. In taking such an approach, these stories differ from others in the text, where mundane acts in the past – such as offering food to a past *buddha* – contrast with the supernormal powers and experiences of the awakened Buddha of the narrative present. But like this other framework, the stories of the fourth decade use the tensions and contrasts creatively, to allow audience members to relate to different possible deeds and their likely results, and to balance complete awe at the Bodhisattva-become-Buddha with their own more modest aspirations.

By playing with these different levels of teaching and behaviour, the compilers of the *Avadānaśataka* leave room for all audience members. We can all aspire to help others,

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to value our parents, and to cultivate the sorts of friendships that lead us (or our friends) to become better people, such as my own friendship with Peggy. Maybe, one day in the distant future, such good deeds and good friends will eventually contribute to our own achievement of awakening, and meanwhile I hope that I have many more opportunities to enjoy Peggy's friendship in future rebirths.

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Mediumship as Ordinary Experience: An anthropological discussion of ordinary vs non-ordinary – What is the difference?

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Introduction

In 2004, shortly after I had moved to Oxford, Peggy introduced me to the work of Alister Hardy and the Religious Experience Research Centre. At first sight this might seem strange as I had studied religions with non-ordinary experiences for years, and my alma mater was the Philipps-University in Marburg, the home of the Rudolf Otto archive and its unique collection of religious artefacts founded by Otto. Otto is still seen as one of the founding fathers of the study of religious experience and his famous publication *The Idea of the Holy* still sparks controversy. One would assume therefore that I was very familiar with the study of religious experience. However, my research did not focus on experience itself but as part of rituals and performances as is usually the case in anthropology. While trance, shamanism, and mediumship are indeed anthropological topics, the focus is on the activities, their functions for the participants and their place in society. But having moved to Oxford and changed discipline from anthropology to the study of religions, I decided to use the time at the University to start new research on spirit possession and trance which would focus on understanding the *experience*. Therefore I followed Peggy's recommendation and looked into the work of the RERC. Several years later, after having moved to Wales, where the RERC had moved, I even became director of the RERC, a position that Peggy herself had held for many years. I can even say that Peggy, who had guided me during my years at Oxford, put me on the path to stepping into her shoes so many years later.

My connection to the RERC derives from my research into mediumship religions. From an anthropological perspective, spirit possession and trance are the core practices of many, if not all, African derived religions, my main research area. In my PhD I avoided

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an engagement with the experience although the thesis focused on two vernacular religions with different forms of mediumship. As I wrote in the introduction to my thesis, any research on mediumship requires that we are willing to step out of our familiar world and into the world of spirits and orishas - like the children in Narnia stepping through a wardrobe, we need to change our perception of reality (Schmidt 1995: 11). Despite my statement of the need for open mindedness, my thesis focused on questions of identity and gave less attention to the experience itself. My later research followed the same pattern. While my fascination grew steadily, I analysed my research data with regard to migration, gender, performance, cultural theory and more – but still stepping away from an engagement with experience. My move to the UK changed my perspective and my many conversations with Peggy over the years helped me to realise that my fascination with experiences such as spirit possession and trance opens a new path of enquiry.

However, Peggy's interest is on ordinary experience while I study what I describe as non-ordinary experience (Schmidt 2016). The term 'ordinary' refers to two different aspects, both of which will be discussed in this contribution to Peggy's Festschrift – firstly, the experience of 'ordinary' people (as distinct from charismatic religious leaders) and, secondly, the categorisation of the experience as ordinary (not 'spiritual' or 'religious' or 'non-ordinary') by those experiencing it. A linked issue is the place of the experience; whether they have to take place in a specific setting. Under Peggy's guidance the Religious Experience Research Centre continued to collect accounts of the experiences of ordinary people with a power beyond themselves , with the transcendent, with God or whatever they call the divine, according to Alister Hardy's original initiative. The archive contains accounts of experiences during a walk outdoors, in nature, while listening to the radio, or while reading a book. While some refer to an experience in a religious setting such as a church, most recall experiences in ordinary, non-religious settings that had an impact and sometimes profoundly changed their lives.

For anthropologists there is no question that the experience of ordinary people is our focus. However, the experiences I encountered during my research took place in rituals. Most communities even argue that one should not allow the manifestation of an *orixá* (i.e., an African spiritual entity worshipped in the Americas) in an ordinary environment as the human medium needs protection that can only be provided within a specific setting and by the community. I once observed such interference myself. It took place in New York City, during a theatre performance of a group of Haitian musicians and dancers. One of the dancers who was also a mambo, a Vodou priestess, suddenly changed her behaviour from dancing gracefully to behaving unexpectedly. I was told later that she experienced the approach of a *lwa* (i.e., a Vodou spirit). Her assistant immediately jumped up from his seat in the front row of the audience, walked onto the

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stage and ordered the master drummer to change the rhythm in order to prevent the full manifestation of the spirit. While music, dance movement, costumes and so on seemed as in a ceremony, the setting and the body of the medium were not prepared for the incorporation and it had to be stopped (Schmidt 2008). The medium – as well as the audience – could have come to harm if the manifestation had been allowed to continue.

Nevertheless, despite of the setting during which the experience takes place, my focus, along with that of Peggy, was on the experience of ordinary people. The Caribbean immigrants in New York City I worked with were indeed ordinary people. They struggled with money, children, relationships, health as well as political insecurity. However, I agree with Peggy that in study of religion and in particular in the study of religious experience their experience is often overlooked, or, as Johnson declared, research about their experience is 'hopelessly inadequate' (1964: 96). Peggy's attention towards ordinary people reflects a critique made by Rainer Flasche against early historians of religion such as Rudolf Otto but also Friedrich Heiler and Gerardus van der Leeuws. Flasche argues that these scholars distinguished between two different kinds of religions, "Gelehrten-Religion" and "Religion des Volkes", which one could translate as 'elite religions' and 'vernacular traditions' (Flasche 1991: 251). For Flasche the distinction reflects the ethnocentric attitude towards religion in the first decades of the 20th century which impacted on the development of the study of experience. Peggy's efforts to increase the attention given to the study of the experience of ordinary people can also be seen, therefore, as part of the ongoing de-colonization of our disciplines. However, as I will demonstrate below, there is another genealogy of the study of experience that anchors it in the experience of ordinary people. It derives from early anthropology, an area often overlooked by scholars today. Following Peggy's interest, in the first section of this article I will look at the contribution of two early scholars in the field. I will start with Robert Ranulf Marett. Marett, an early Oxford anthropologist put the study of experience and emotion of people at the core of early anthropology. Comparing his work with Rudolf Otto's approach, I show that theologians such as Rudolf Otto attached 'religious' to 'experience' and made it "special" and as a result distinguished these experiences from ordinary experiences.

The second factor is the categorisation of experience as ordinary (as distinct from religious or non-ordinary). Most of my interview partners in my research area differentiate between 'religion' – in most cases Catholicism – and their daily practice of 'serving the spirits'. While the latter can also be seen as religious or spiritual, some interview partners went further. Some of the Kardecists I spoke with describe themselves as non-religious. For them, their practice of communication with the spirits of the deceased is a 'technique' that has nothing to do with 'belief' or religion. While the French founder of the movement,

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Allan Kardec, described his teaching in line with early Christianity, before the corruption of Jesus' teachings by the Church, many Latin American Kardecists today focus more on the communication or healing, and less on Christian ideals. A common feature of Kardecism and African derived traditions is therefore the reluctance to describe their practices as 'religious', though from an academic perspective they are based on 'belief in the power of the spirits and the deities'.

These problems with academic labelling have preoccupied me for a while. How can I discuss forms of Brazilian mediumship when practitioners themselves do not use the term (see Schmidt 2021)? After struggling with academic concepts for a while, I began describing their experience as 'non-ordinary' in order to avoid the trap of identifying them as 'religious' or 'spiritual'. For me the label 'non-ordinary' serves as an umbrella for all kinds of experiences, whatever the categorization. I also put forward the idea of 'provincialising mediumship' to widen the understanding of what we call mediumship (Schmidt 2016b). However, is this label fair to the experiencer? Or am I still stuck in Western classifications? In the second section of this article I will discuss my research on mediumship within the wider debate of ordinary experience. Following Peggy's approach, I will ask whether a categorization of mediumship as an ordinary experience could increase our understanding of the practitioners' point of view. I will embed the discussion within anthropology, in particular within Hallowell's concept of 'other than human persons' and Ingold's critique of agency. In the conclusion I will come back to the wider discussion of ordinary and reflect on its theoretical and methodological importance.

The Study of the Experience of Ordinary People

The early anthropologist Robert Ranulf Marett (1866-1943) put emotions and experience at the heart of his approach to religion. "I hold that religion is, psychologically regarded a form of experience in which feeling-tone is relatively predominant" (Marett 1906: 267, quoted by Bengtson 1979: 652). Consequently he wrote in a later article that "I have not sought to explain so much as to describe ... how it 'feels' – to live in such a wonder-world" (Marett 1909:xxiii, xxviii, quoted by Bengtson 1979: 650). Despite having succeeded Edward B. Tylor as Reader of Anthropology at Oxford upon his retirement in 1910 and becoming later the first chair of social anthropology at Oxford (in 1934) until Radcliffe-Brown took over the duties, Marett is often overlooked in historical overviews of early anthropology. However, this neglect does injustice to his contribution to the development of the discipline. Even more he is usually overlooked when discussing early contribution to the study of experience, perhaps because he was not interested so much

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in religious experience but in ordinary experiences. Even in my own contribution to anthropology of experience (Schmidt 2016) I did not mention him but started with a much later anthropologist, I.O. Lewis. However, in this article I want to correct this oversight and show that Marett's work represents the link between early anthropology and the study of experience.

Different from Tylor who defined religion as belief in spirits, Marett described religion in relation to emotion. He used the term *awe* to express this fundamental feeling within religions that "drives a man ... into personal relations with the supernatural" (Marett 1909: 13, 15, quoted by Bengtson 1979: 652). This feeling motivates people into action and he wrote, in the language of his time, "savage religion is something not so much thought out as danced out" (Marett 1909: xxxi, quoted by Bengtson 1979: 652).

Every scholar of religious experience will immediately see the link between Marett's ideas and the theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) as both based their approach to religion on experience. Otto even referred to Marett explicitly as the one who "more particularly comes within a hair's breadth of what I take to be the truth of the matter" (Otto 1929: 15, n. 1, quoted by Bengtson 1979: 656). However, for Otto religious experience was *sui generis* and the most important form of experience. Marett rejected this notion and suggested, as Bengtson writes, "that 'awe' may be a compound of natural feeling such as fear, love, reverence, etc. (1932, 1933a). The experience is conditioned both by 'antecedent historical conditions' and 'psychological conditions operating here and now' (1920b:127)" (Bengtson 1979: 656). Marett's use of the term experience is therefore much wider than Otto's. Instead of limiting it to religious experience and the experience of religious people, Marett did not distinguish between religion and ordinary experience; and he also did not single out religious people. As an anthropologist he was interested in the experience and emotions of ordinary people.

Otto, on the other hand, while interested in the experiences of ordinary people, categorised them as religious and defined it as the feeling of awe and fear in the presence of God (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*). His opus magnus was *Das Heilige: Über das irrational in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (1917) [published in English under the title *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*] in which he described in detail the uniqueness of religious experience. Referring mainly but not exclusively to Christian and Jewish rituals that inspired the feeling, he argued repeatedly for the need of special tools for the understanding of religious experience. Despite good sales figures, the book received a mixed reception which reflects the scepticism towards the study of religious experience. Otto even became concerned that the offer of a chair in Systematic Theology in 1917 would be withdrawn because of the immanent release of his book. He wrote in a

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letter "Ich rechne, daß, da ich durch mein Heiliges in Marburg wohl einigermaßen unmöglich geworden bin, Wobbermin, der so wie sie der Nächste sein würde, hinkommen würde" (letter to Hermann Multert, quoted in Kraatz 2014: 3, translated as "I believe that I am probably unacceptable in Marburg due to my The Holy and that Wobbermin who is probably the next on the list will come to Marburg"). But his concern was wrong, and Otto was appointed to the chair at the University of Marburg. Despite a difficult relationship with his fellow theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth, Otto managed to make his mark at the university. When the University of Marburg celebrated its 400th anniversary in 1927, Otto succeeded in his effort in establishing the Religionskundliche Sammlung as a university institution outside any faculty constraints. His passion for non-European religions and their material objects led to the inflammatory description of the collection as Otto's *Götzentempel* made frequently by students of Bultmann and Barth who dominated theology. Steven Ballard argues that "one of the most fundamental grounds of disagreement between the theological position of Otto and that of Bultmann and Barth (a controversy which still divides Christians in these early years of the twenty-first century), lay in the very different estimations which were made of the status of the other great world religions in relation to Christianity" (2000: 5). Despite being a Lutheran theologian Otto did not see the Christian revelation as qualitatively unique, which was the common position in theology at his time. Instead he followed Friedrich Schleiermacher's position who had argued that the "feeling of the infinite" was present in all religions. Ballard even argues that Otto's principal aim in the book was "the desire to demonstrate the autonomous nature of religion, and to ground this in an empirical study of religious experience" (2000: 43).

However, Otto's understanding of the empirical was rather limited. For Otto "the sensus numinis has an objective epistemological function ... and the subjective and the objective aspects of religious experience can be distinguished" (Ballard 2000: 43). But Otto did not ground his ideas on evidence, as pointed out by J.M. Moore in his critique of the book: "Otto writes as if a feeling of immediate presence were sufficient evidence of true presence, but this is by no means the case. ... a feeling, however vivid, cannot guarantee the validity of an inference" (Moore 1938: 92-93, quoted by Ballard 2000: 43). Instead Otto grounded his argument on a form of "independent religious value-judgment" (Davidson 1947: 42, quoted by Ballard 2000: 44-45). In Otto's words: "There will, then, in fact be two values to distinguish in the numen; its 'fascination' (*fascinans*) will be that element in it whereby it is the *subjective* value (=beatitude) to man; but it is 'august' (*augustum*) in so far as it is recognized as possessing in itself *objective* value that claims our homage" (Otto 1932: 52, quoted in Ballard 2000: 45). The problem is that for Otto, "the experience of the numinous carries with it its own 'Wahrheitsgefühl'" (Ballard

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2000: 48, the term could be translated as 'feeling of truth'). His passion to establish religion on unique, autonomous grounds puts him at odds with academia. While his attack on the reductionist approach to religion makes him so popular among some, it also influences any Otto reception. "As a phenomenologist of religion, he cannot do other than interpret the signs of the Holy without noticing the similarities that present themselves. As a Christian theologian, however, a major item on his agenda is to demonstrate, through a process of comparison and contrast, where certain religions (and here we cannot help but think he has Christianity principally in mind) are superior to others" (Ballard 2000: 137).

Marett on the other hand was an empiricist in an anthropological manner._He taught his students the value of fieldwork, the encounter with people, and the importance of academic rigour. He even saw anthropology as biological science and presented himself often as a "child of Darwin" like his predecessor Tylor and other contemporaries. However, different from Tylor, Marett divorced evolution from the idea of progress (Bengtson 1979: 647). "It is the mark of a crude evolutionism to assume that more complex stands for better all around. So let us as far as we can be content to note that the mental life of the simple society is different from that of the complex society, without being necessarily better or worse on that account. Everyone of us is after all a potentiality of opposites" (Marett 1924: 38, quoted by Bengtson 1979: 648). Throughout his work Marett insisted repeatedly that while evolution implies the process of becoming more complex, we do not know whether "man has done well to abandon the simple life", and he continued that "this is a question of life, not of fact" (Bengtson 1979: 648 with a quotation from Marett 1934:36). Hence, for Marett progress is not necessarily universally unilinear, and he insisted we should disdain from making value judgements but focus on ethnographic facts.

And here lies Marett's importance. I put Marett even on a par with Edith Turner whom Fiona Bowie describes as the key figure in the (alternative) experiential lineage of anthropology (2016: 26). While Bowie highlights the similarity between Andrew Lang, a contemporary of Marett, and Turner due to their position towards the ontological question whether the spirits are real, I see a stronger trajectory between Marett and Turner as both place the study of experience within the academic world on empirical grounds. Marett's effort also led him to the understanding that cultures are equally valid. As Bengtson writes, Marett insisted that "the 'savage' is neither more nor less religious than the 'civilized'" (Bengtson 1079: 653, referring to Marett 1936: 166).

To some degree, Otto also expressed an openness towards other forms of experience, which put him at odds with fellow theologians. The encounters with other religions and experiences influenced him throughout his life. Already as a student, he studied, while visiting England in 1889, the Anglican High Church and later the Greek

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Orthodox Church while visiting Greece in 1891 and 1895. In 1895, he travelled to Egypt where he studied the Coptic Church as well as had his first encounter with lived Islam which he continued to study in 1911 while travelling in Northern Africa. Even more influential was his first Asian journey in 1911/12 that took him to India, Myanmar, Japan, China and Russia. These journeys, which he continued after his move to Marburg, influenced his understanding of religion. Otto also studied Sanskrit though, according to a comment made by Kraatz, not very well (2014: 8). Nevertheless, the fact that he made the effort to study Sanskrit while most of his fellow theology students in Göttingen focused only on languages useful for the study of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and also that he travelled the world in order to encounter other religious traditions made him an exception at his time.

However, in his publications Otto referred mainly to religious personalities and the accounts of their experience instead of the experiences of ordinary people. For Flasche (1991) this distinction reflects the ethnocentric attitude towards religion in the first decades of the 20th century. When Otto argues for a universality of religious experience, he had in mind a Western concept of religion. Nevertheless, by putting awe at the centre of his ideas Otto presents an avenue out of the ethnocentric focus on belief in God as the fundamental concept of religion. Despite his own struggle with his theological understanding of Christianity as superior, Otto was in awe of other religious practices and showed us the importance of non-rational and personal experience. Marett, on the other hand, taught us that the study of experience and emotion can be empirically grounded. Instead of shying away to study something we cannot see, we need to overcome cultural bias by turning our attention towards the lived experience of people and see it as grounded in empirical verification. By emphasising the need of empirical encounters with people he put the study of ordinary people and their experience and emotions at the core of the anthropological field of religious experience.

Mediumship as Ordinary Experience

The term ‘mediumship’ embraces a range of practices commonly labelled as ‘spirit possession’ or ‘trance’. The body of the human medium becomes the vehicle for the communication between different realms, whether it is by incorporation or other techniques such as automatic writing or receiving messages from the deceased through hearing or seeing something non-ordinary. The incorporation of a spiritual or divine entity – usually labelled spirit possession – was often described in studies about African derived traditions such as Vodou in Haiti or Candomblé in Brazil with the metaphor of ‘riding a horse’ (e.g., Deren 1953). The *lwa* or *orixá* (also spelled *orisha* in English language

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publications) is the 'rider' that takes over control of the horse, the human medium. Agency is given in this case to the deity that is in control while the human horse is the instrument. Following this argumentation, Mary Keller (2002) argues that we need to take the agency of the deities into consideration when studying spirit possession. Criticizing the functionalistic approach that focuses on the functions of the practice for the medium or the society, she pushes for an understanding of spirit possession as a collaboration of the possessing agents and the possessed. Other scholars argue that the metaphor of 'being ridden as a horse' does not acknowledge sufficiently the agency of the medium by putting too much emphasis on the possessing entity. Roberto Motta, for instance, argues that mediums are not transformed to helpless victims but remain vital for the body trance, as he describes mediumship (Motta 2005). Supporting Motta's argument Mark Münzel compares mediumship with the performance of a dressage horse which the rider guides through the elegant and difficult routine: without the rider the horse would not accomplish its complex task as well as vice versa, without the horse the rider could not carry on (1997: 153).

Münzel's example of a dressage is similar to Tim Ingold's example of a kite with which he challenges the debate on agency. Ingold criticises the division between material and immaterial as a legacy of anti-idolatrous iconoclasm of the early Protestants. He argues that it is wrong to define animism "as a system of belief that attributes life and even spirit to objects that are ostensibly inert, [instead] animism is … a way not to thinking *about* the world but of being alive to it, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is in perpetual flux, never the same from one moment to the next" (2013: 214). He explains what he means by using the example of a kite. A kite is an inanimate object when being built indoors but becomes alive when taken out to fly. However, it would be too simplistic, according to Ingold, just to give agency to a kite because that would omit the wind and forget that it is "a kite-in-the-air". Ingold argues instead that "things move and grow because they are alive, not because they have agency" (2013: 219). For Ingold, "animism is about what it means to be alive to it [the world]. To be alive to the world is, in a word, to be *sentient*." (2013: 224).

And it is this understanding of being *sentient* that can widen our perception of mediumship. Mediumship involves encounters of human mediums with possessing entities such as spirits of deceased ancestors or divine entities that are also sentient, alive to the world though not in the sense that a human being is alive. The emic perception whether the experience can be seen as non-ordinary or as ordinary depends on the specific context. Practitioners of African derived religions such as Candomblé perceive the *orixás* as forces of nature. They reject notions that perceive possessing agents as

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singular entities as the *orixás* would have the power to destroy a human body if it acted singularly. Consequently, they oppose the description of their experience as 'incorporation' or 'spirit possession' as these terms diminish the quality of the *orixás* (see Schmidt 2016: 108-118 for further information). Even the term mediumship is not widely accepted due to similar arguments. The perception of the entities as forces of nature, to highlight the quality of multitude instead of singular, is also important as it explains why one *orixá* can manifest in different human bodies and different ceremonies at the same time and can even feature different characteristics.

So far, I have approached mediumship as a non-ordinary experience and the possessing agents as 'divine' or otherwise 'special'. It reflects the position of practitioners of most African derived religions in Brazil who campaign for the recognition of their communities as religions. Although they have not yet been very successful with regard to the national census, their effort resonates with my treatment of mediumship as non-ordinary experience. However, the position of spiritist mediums is very different. Mediumship within spiritism includes a range of practices including automatic writing, seeing, hearing or sensing the present of spirits and other forms of communication. And this is the clue - spiritist mediums see their practice as forms of communication techniques, nothing more and nothing less. They reject the definition of their experience as non-ordinary, most even decline to link it to any religious or spiritual realm as for them the spirits exist, or, to use Ingold's term, are alive, just without a physical body (for now). A founder of a spiritist hospital in Brazil, where healers channel spirits of deceased medical doctors, challenged me various times in an interview and insisted that 'incorporation does not exist'. While he later acknowledged that he received instruction from his guardian angel via automatic writing, I struggled to understand his reluctance to use certain terms. Initially, I thought that the root of the problem was my language skills (i.e., my lack of sophisticated Portuguese). However, I realise now that the problem was my insistence on seeing the communication with the spirit realm as non-ordinary. Instead spiritists describe mediumship as a means of communication, a technique, which is perceived as ordinary, as normal. A medium becomes a vessel - like a telephone. Why was it so difficult for me to accept their definition?

When speaking to a non-academic audience, I am often asked whether spirits, *orixá*s and *Iwa* exist and whether it is really possible to communicate with them. I reply usually that as anthropologist I am not interested in these questions as they refer to the wider questions of what reality is and what truth is. But recent conversations have shown me that I am still avoiding the ontology of spiritual entities. As Bonnie Glass-Coffin points out, anthropologists are using cultural relativism to step aside from these core questions. By always contextualising experiences with non-ordinary reality anthropologists are still

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"domesticating and dismissing them, colonializing knowledge even as they claim to honour the truth of the Other" (2013: 117). My categorization of the mediumship experiences as non-ordinary is a reflection of my perception of the world and not that of the mediums. While some anthropologists such as Fiona Bowie and Charles Emmons (2014) go a step further and argue that spirits are also ontologically 'real' and the experience with them consequently empirically verifiable (Bowie 2016: 28-29), I seem to be unable to follow their lead. But I do not want to superimpose my perspective onto the practitioners. While I am unable to embrace the experience myself – perhaps incapable of doing so, I need to find a way to deal with this problem and take hold of a form of understanding by maintaining an academic stance that is based on empirical grounds, like Marett taught us so long ago.

Perhaps a way forward is for me the debate on personhood and agency within anthropology. I find in particular Irving Hallowell's insight into the Ojibwa worldview useful, in particular his phrase 'other than human beings'. Hallowell discovered that Ojibwa language makes a fundamental distinction between 'animate persons' and 'inanimate objects' however in a different way from that understood in Western societies. As Hallowell points out, not all persons are humans - since some persons are 'other than human beings':

> But if, in the world of a people, 'persons' as a class include entities other than human beings, then our objective approach is not adequate for presenting an accurate description of 'the way a man, in a particular society, see himself in relation to all else'. … It may be argued, in fact, that a thoroughgoing 'objective' approach to the study of cultures cannot be achieved solely by projecting upon those cultures categorical abstractions derived from Western thought (Hallowell 2002: 21).

Hallowell defines a person therefore as a larger category that includes all "creatures that communicate intentionally and behave relationally to others" (Graf 2017: 28). Hallowell's key point is 'social relations' between persons, human and other than human which highlights, as Graf summarises, an inclusive worldview in which humans share the world with other 'relational persons' such as "tree people, fish people, bird people, stone people" (2017: 28). Hallowell illustrates it with a story in which he asked an elder of the Ojibwa whether all rocks are alive to which the elder replied 'no, but some are' (Hallowell 2002 [1960]). The crucial aspect is the relationship between us and them. As Harvey writes, it 'is not "how do we know stones are alive?" but "what is the appropriate way for people, of any kind, to relate?"' (Harvey 2010: 20). And Hallowell goes even further

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because he relocates, as Morrison writes, "the religious in the actual relationships which constitute the everyday world" (Morrison 2000: 35). Hence, while for Hallowell the relations between persons (human and non-human) are core to the understanding, he takes them out of the religious realm and places them in the ordinary world.

I am coming back here to my initial critique of the early scholars in the field of religious experience. As I explained in the first section, my main critique against Otto and others is the classification of experience as religious – in the Western understanding of what religions are (or should be). This bias in favour of a Protestant form of religion led Otto to putting *numinous* on a pedestal, despite his fascination with other religions. It is also visible in William James' description of his own experience while walking in the Adirondack Mountains: "The streaming moonlight lit up things in a magical checkered play, and it seemed as if the God of all the nature mythologies were holding an indescribable meeting in my breast with the moral Gods of the inner life" (James and James 2008: 76). While my own argument was to widen the understanding of religious experience so open that it includes all different types of non-ordinary experiences, Hallowell's position of taking it out of the religious realm presents a cleaner solution.

To clarify – Hallowell does not write about belief system or religion. Instead he uses the term worldview and defines it as 'a relational way of being in the world', and, as Graf writes further, "relationships are seen as a matter of responsibility between humans and other animals, plants, and even cosmic beings who share the same world and have socio-religious motives towards each other (Morrison, 2000, p. 23ff.; see also Viveiros de Castro, 1998)" (Graf 1995: 96). In this sense spirits are sentient elements of the world, and, in the end, part of an ordinary experience. It does not matter that they lack materiality and cannot be seen in the same way as the rocks in Hallowell's example or the kite in Ingold's. As Hallowell explains so eloquently, it is not the rock itself, hence not the material aspect that has agency (… not every rock is alive, only the ones that talk back….). Ingold also challenges the assumption that all material objects have agency and insists that agency is linked to being alive to the world, being sentient. He argues that "the problem of agency is born of the attempt to reanimate a world of things already deadened or rendered inert by arresting the flows of substance that bring them to life" (2013: 219). Instead he focuses on the process of creating to the movement of building, to "flows and transformations of materials" (2013: 214). In this sense it is neither the human medium nor the spirit of a deceased medical doctor who treats the patients. Instead by working together they establish a relationship to the environment (e.g., of other humans) which puts in motion the healing. In this sense the mediums are similar to shamans who have to develop relations with animals in order to secure "the best possible benefits from this connection with the environment" (Hamayon 2013: 285). Of interest for

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my discussion of mediumship and the ontology of spirits is Hamayon's distinction between soul and life force which leads to her definition of spirits. The soul of any living being is located in the bones and nourished by the life force which is located in the meat (flesh) of the body. Life force is a substance that may vary in quantity and quality during lifetime and circulates between species to keep them living and animated. The soul, however, is according to Hamayon an individual entity that survives after death and can be reborn for a new life but strictly within the same human line or animal species. In order now "to enter into a relationship with a species it is necessary to address its 'spirit', a kind of generic soul not linked to any particular animal and therefore not concerned by the cycle of life and death" (p. 286-287).

Hamayon's description of life force echoes to some degree the concept of *axe* (or ashe) within African derived religions (Schmidt 2012). *Axe* within Candomble is the substance that varies in quantity throughout life and circulates not only between species but also between the realms. It is given by the divine while humans repay with sacrifices (Schmidt 2013). *Axe* gives and maintains life though it originates from the divine creator. Hamayon's distinction between a generic soul and the soul as individual entity is, however, different from the perception of spirits among Brazilian mediums. They argue it is possible to communicate with specific, individual spirits that can pass on their knowledge to the human world via various communication techniques such as automatic writing.

Where does this discussion lead me on my journey into a better understanding of mediumship? The relationship to the entities, whether they are African deities, spirits of deceased medical doctors, or guardian angels are crucial for all aspects of mediumship. The interchange of *axe* is at the core of African derived religions. Without it, life does not exist. But one needs to be grateful for it or fear the consequences. In this sense, following Hallowell's arguments, the spirits and *orixas* are alive, part of our shared environment. It does not matter that we cannot see them; they are persons (i.e., have agency) just like humans. However, they are not part of my world. Despite attending numerous rituals and appreciating the performance, I have not encountered them, I have not felt them. McClenon argues that "modern scientists tend to ignore the social reality of supernatural accounts" because our understanding of the supernatural is "shaped by the Western notion of nature and causality" (1995: 107-108). In this way, my understanding of reality is still based on the Western concept of seeing the world. However, is it really important to understand the experience of others or is it not more important to accept them? Josephson argues that "the religious studies is still haunted by the legacy of the Enlightenment in its rejection of 'superstition'. ... In defining religion in terms of monolithic essences (transcendent, sacred etc.), the discipline has historically produced a

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'remainder' of things that do not count as religion and are therefore outside our realms of inquiry." (2013: 339). I agree with his critique. I see the rejection of some beliefs and practices or the labelling of them as superstition or magic as relics of the ethnocentricity of our colonial past. As Marret had previously argued, we need to be open to study all experiences and all practices. There is no difference in value. The recent shift to lived experience (McGuire 2008) and the practices of ordinary people (Vásquez 2011) changes the way we study and teach religions. We stopped excluding experiences and teach students to apply their understanding of beliefs and practices to whatever community they want, including non-religious people. In this way, yes, mediumship is an ordinary experience for the people experiencing it. It is part of their daily practice like the spirits, deities and other "other than human beings" are part of their ordinary environment.

Conclusion: The Importance of Ordinary Experiences

I will end this journey with some last comments about the significance of studying ordinary experiences. When the topic of ordinary experience as the theme for the Festschrift was suggested I thought, well, I could write about non-ordinary experience in distinction to ordinary. However, the journey took me in a different direction. I realise now that my internal discussions with Peggy's ideas while working on this chapter directed me to a wider acceptance of mediumship as never before. On the one hand it is about the importance of studying the experience of ordinary people. Johnson had already argued in 1964 that "the experience of ordinary people (those who do not employ technical philosophers' theories and techniques) has been incorrectly observed and evaluated" (1964: 96) and Alister Hardy's focus was explicitly on ordinary people whose experience he collected, studied and presented in various publications (Hardy 1966, 1979). However, the classification of their experience remains a point of contention. How shall we identify the inexplicable, i.e. supernatural? Barbara Walker writes, that "Referring to something as "supernatural" is not to call it unreal or untrue" (1995: 2). She elaborates that the term 'supernatural' is: "a linguistic and cultural acknowledgment that inexplicable things happen which we identify as being somehow beyond the natural or the ordinary, and that many of us hold beliefs which connect us to spheres that exist beyond what we might typically see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. For some the supernatural is a natural part of life, and supernatural experiences not only are considered "normal" but, in some instances, are expected to occur, with personal attitudes and behaviors shaped and acted out on the basis of those expectations." (Walker 1995:2)

In this sense, mediumship, i.e. the communication across different realms, can be ordinary, part of the natural life. What becomes defined as ordinary or non-ordinary

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depends on the individual and the society as it is culturally specific (see also McClenon 1995:107). Walker also argues that these events might have an "other-worldly" quality but not necessarily an extraordinary quality for people (Walker 1995: 4). Following her argument David Hufford puts forward an “experience-centered theory of the belief in spirits” (1995:11). I am closing the circle here by putting forward the importance of anthropology of experience which is not impacted by questions whether spirits exist, mediumship is real and so on. While I still argue that the study of experience has to be grounded on empirical evidence, ‘rational and empirical grounding do not prove a belief to be true’ as Hufford writes; and he continues that “many false beliefs are rationally held on empirical grounds (e.g., the belief that the sun went around the earth, as held in antiquity), and many true beliefs are held without rational or empirical grounds” (1995: 18). I conclude with a final thank you to Peggy. She invited me to her home, she made me feel welcome, and she taught me the importance of ordinary experience.

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