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Power and Acculturation

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Abstract

In the 21st century, many ideological movements that seek to break down social barriers have emerged as promising engines with positive social outcomes. However, it may be difficult to understand how these philosophies evolve and incorporate themselves into contemporary religious practices. Organized religious systems have a unique responsibility to uphold the integrity and truthfulness of their traditional views without compromising their ability to adapt to changing social contexts and conditions. The Magnolia Grove Monastery in Batesville, Mississippi publically aligns itself with egalitarianism, environmental activism, and gender equality. It is a community of monastic disciples to Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh. Nhat Hanh has been a prominent figure in activism and progressive Buddhist thought in the 21st century. To understand how these residents, most of whom are Vietnamese immigrants, synthesize their traditional beliefs with progressive political movements can reveal the mechanisms behind cultural diffusions in societies heavily influenced by acculturation. Two key questions guided my research: (a) How is the social hierarchy manifested in a religious community dedicated to social equality and (b) How do acculturative pressures shape beliefs and practices in a transplanted religious community. Using a mixed methods approach, ethnographic data was gathered to illuminate the dynamics of acculturation and social hierarchy. Interviews, ethnographic mapping, and participant observation have been used to collect the data necessary for answering the research questions. Living at the monastery for four weeks, friendships were made and informants were utilized to better disseminate the information gathered.

Research Questions

The 21st century and the handful of precedent decades leading up to it have changed the way humanity relates to itself. This is undoubtedly due to the technological advances that have facilitated and expedited our ability to travel, our methods of collaboration, and most importantly, our means of sharing information. Globalization (the spread and integration of ideas, items, and behaviors across international boundaries) has intensely changed the way that human beings acquire their worldviews. Acculturation (the adoption of cultural aspects outside one's own) is no longer solely found between the physical encounter of different and distinct cultural representations, but rather can manifest through various, different mediums (e.g. the Internet, literature, and television).

However, it may be difficult to understand how transplanted ideologies and worldviews incorporate themselves into foreign social dimensions. This is due to the fact that all societies, regardless of the impact of globalization upon them, are in a state of constant flux. Thus, social institutions, like organized religion, can be of particular interest when attempting to dissect how acculturative pressures modify, support, or antagonize traditional views within a belief system. Organized religions have a unique responsibility to uphold the integrity and truthfulness of their long-established views without compromising their ability to adapt to changing social contexts and conditions. Ethnographic research can illuminate these processes in religious communities that attempt to adopt emergent social reflections yet strive to retain their traditional religious views and practices.

The Magnolia Grove Monastery in Batesville, Mississippi publically aligns itself with egalitarianism, environmental activism, and gender equality. According to Dr. Mark Miller, who frequents the monastery, the denomination of Zen to which the monastery belongs, the Order of Interbeing, emphasizes "engagement with real-world problems, both personal and social" (Miller, 2014). Adhering to the Plum Village Tradition founded by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, Magnolia Grove draws retreatants and lay visitors to the center usually through the founder's popularity in the West. The monastery is noted for its acceptance of people regardless of nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, or religious background.

Yet, the monastic community also endeavors to salvage and maintain their traditional identity as clerical adherents of the Buddhist religion,

which has existed for over 2,500 years. While inclusivity and cooperation are highly valued virtues to the community, it is still of utmost importance to be the embodiment and continuance of the Buddha's doctrines. Understanding how these residents, most of whom are Vietnamese immigrants, incorporate their traditional belief systems and cultural practices into foreign social contexts can reveal the mechanisms behind cultural diffusions in societies heavily influenced by acculturative pressures. Two key questions guided my research: (a) How is the social hierarchy manifested in a religious community dedicated to social equality, and (b) how do acculturative pressures shape beliefs and practices in a transplanted religious community?

Setting

Batesville, Mississippi is approximately an hour south of Memphis, Tennessee and has a population of around 7,500 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Most of the town's residents with whom I interacted could tell me the location of the monastery in the town but nothing more than that. Although the locals did not know much about the monastery or the monastics living there, they spoke with a subliminal sense of pride about having such an anomaly within their borders. There are thousands of small towns in Mississippi, but how many have an exquisite Buddhist monastery that people visit from all over the world just a couple of miles up the road? The majority of the Batesville population includes Protestant Christians with conservative ideologies. So, the most obvious question that proceeds from the Batesville setting is "How did a Buddhist monastery end up in this part of the world?"

Magnolia Grove Monastery is situated in the countryside of Batesville. It takes about 10 minutes of driving alongside crop fields and untamed land before one reaches the premises. There are no street lights, public buildings, or heavy traffic within the surrounding area. No cellular service has decent signal in the area (some have none), and if people wish to use the Internet, they must receive permission from the monastery's administrative office. The monastery is surrounded by forest from all angles except one: a small road, which is itself flanked by trees 200 yards on the other side.

There are five buildings on the premises where most social interaction occurs. The male dormitory, the female visitor dormitory, the

female monastic dormitory, the kitchen and dining hall, and the meditation hall are places where residents interact on a daily basis. Conjoined in one building, the kitchen, dining area, administrative office, and tea room mimic the structure of a soup kitchen. A large kitchen with a walk-in freezer and multiple cooking stations is connected to a dining area with enough tables to seat around 150 people. Located in the center of the premises, it is seen as a place of functionality for the people who reside there. Various chores might be completed within the building such as cooking, cleaning, or administrative work. With low-hanging ceilings, rugged white walls, and furniture reminiscent of what would be found in a department-store breakroom, the atmosphere of the facility communicates utility. With the exception of the tea room, the message that the structure conveys to its inhabitants is "You are here because you have something to do, now get on with it." The fading smell of steamed rice and seasoned vegetables lingers in the dining hall. The kitchen contains humidity and heat from the sinks and restaurant-sized dishwashers that outweigh the weather on any given day. The administrative office is positioned between the dining and cooking area and is used to collect retreatant applications, pay bills, and for other administrative tasks. The office is typically manned by monastics of the community who are fluent in English. Monks and nuns who possess the skills necessary to haggle with bill collectors represent the community to outsiders over the phone, computer, and other means of communication.

It is important to note that while the tea room is seen as a place of quiet conversation and relaxation, the tea room is connected to the administrative office through a door and sliding window. Moreover, walking through the tea room is the only way to access the dining hall. The dining hall has its own doors, but they are kept locked most of the time. The community's protocol seems to encourage traffic through the tea room to possibly prevent superfluous interaction or privacy.

The female guest dormitory is separate from the nuns' living quarters, unlike the male residence. The male residence is used by both monks and male retreatants. The male retreatants' rooms are located on the opposite end of the building from the monastics, and the areas are separated by a wall, essentially splitting the house for both parties.

The most impressive feature on the land is the meditation hall. It is a giant, wooden structure that covers over 10,000 square feet of land. The ceiling, walls, and floors are all made of the same natural and unpainted

wood, which radiates the reverence for nature. The smell of freshly sawed wood and incense fills the air from the tops of the high-vaulted ceilings to the silence that hangs in the open space below. Every long wall contains a glut of glass door openings and glass windows, showing off the dark forest setting in the background. The building is nestled in the back of the monastery grounds, and behind the hall is a walking trail through the woods. At the top of the hall is a circular, stained-glass mural. It depicts the Buddha placing his hand empathetically over the earth. Another mural of equal size, is at the opposite end of the meditation hall and depicts an Asian lamp surrounded by the words "mindfulness," "concentration," and "insight".

With an altar located on the opposite end of the entrance, most visitors are shocked to see that instead of a Buddha statue being raised and centered, there is a unique arrangement of orchids, flowers, and aesthetic stones. This is to symbolize that meditation and contemplation are not just Buddhist practices. The space is meant for holiness, silent reflection, scheduled morning and evening meditation sessions, and contemplation. The hours of the day that fall in between the monastic and retreatant's scheduled activities can be enjoyed in the meditation hall.

Most foot traffic occurs on stone walkways that connect all the buildings. The sidewalk-like paths keep mud and grass off the shoes of the inhabitants, since buildings are on average 100 yards apart from each other. Crepe myrtles and magnolia trees line the paths leading from one edifice to another, with random boulders or stones placed sporadically along the way. The rock structures have Zen phrases or quotes from Nhat Hanh etched into them in the distinct calligraphic handwriting that serves as a trademark for his ideology. Toward the center of the site is a large, hanging bell raised upon a shrine-like structure near the edge of a lotus pond. This is a common feature among Zen temples and is used for liturgical and time keeping purposes (Kuzunishi, 1972, p. 99). The lotus pond is covered with lilies, lotus flowers, and wild grasses. Hovering over the edge of the pond is a huge statue of Avalokitesvara, the androgynous and symbolic personification of compassion. The rest of the property is made up of dense patches of trees with undergrowth, healthy and well-kept lawns, wooden cabins for visiting couples and families, a couple of tool sheds, and a small bookstore for visitors. The bookstore is filled with books (almost entirely) written by Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddha statues, incense holders, and framed

calligraphy for those who wish to take a material piece of the monastery home with them.

While Magnolia Grove is the home monastery for many monks and nuns, monastics frequently travel to different monasteries for various reasons. The Order of Interbeing frequently schedules tours and pilgrimages in various parts of the world, promoting the practice of mindfulness and gaining experience through their own spiritual paths. Therefore, it is difficult for outsiders to know how many monastics consider Magnolia Grove their home monastery. A significant portion are from Vietnam and have to return to their homeland after a certain period of time. Others have relocated to Magnolia Grove from other monasteries within the denomination. Similar to the movements of military personnel, monastics may ask permission to relocate or be selected by the Order of Interbeing to change monasteries due to the needs of the organization.

During my stay, there were six monks and 12 nuns present who were considered true residents of the center. As mentioned earlier, the monks shared a building with the male retreatants, as their living quarters were separated by a wall that split the building in half. I was not allowed to see the inside of their rooms, except by looking through the large windows that I passed on the way to my room. They resembled college dorms in size, layout, and amenities (with the exception that they were organized, clean, and uncluttered, unlike the collegiate stereotype). Understandably, I was not allowed to observe or go near any of the female living spaces. However, unlike the males, the nuns' living space was a separate building from the female retreatants' quarters. As it was explained to me, the nuns' dormitory had its own meditation hall (also open to female retreatants) in the downstairs portion. At first glance, this could be perceived as if the nuns had more gender-claimed space than their male counterparts. However, one must consider that when meditation sessions, dharma talks (sermons), or other activities are segregated by gender (which occurs about twice a week), the monks use the large meditation hall while the nuns use the dormitory meditation hall (which is an eighth the size of the main meditation hall).

Background

To understand the mechanisms behind how the Buddhist religion evolves and navigates anomalous social settings in its present mode, it is

necessary to understand the historic and cultural contexts from which it first took shape. At its most basic identity, Buddhism is a dharmic religion. Dharmic religions (Hinduism, Jainism, etc.) are a category of belief systems that share a common ideological ancestry and spiritual goal, which is *enlightenment*. To fully grasp dharma (truth) is to overcome the ego and free oneself from the impediments of ontological ignorance.

Traditionally, Buddhism is believed to have been founded by an ascetic renunciate named Siddhartha Gautama. Born into the warrior caste of ancient Vedic society nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas around 563 B.C., Gautama was said to be born into a noble family and raised in lavish settings (Sangharakshita, 1970, p. 3). Not much can be said about his life outside the Buddhist narrative with historical certainty. However, legend has it that Siddhartha, at some point in his early adulthood, disavowed his luxurious status and became a wandering mendicant. After many years of ascetic disciplinary practice and studying under different gurus, Siddhartha achieved enlightenment and came to embody and know the answers to life's existential secrets and more importantly, the nature of suffering. From that point on, he was considered the Buddha (the Awakened One) and decided to share what he had learned with his previous ascetic contemporaries (Sangharakshita, 1970, p. 15).

According to Buddhist orthodoxy, the basis for the Buddha's enlightenment was the realization of *dependent origination*: the idea that all phenomena, both conscious and non-conscious, arise in conjunction and interdependence with all other phenomena (Johansson, 1969, p. 63). Because everything is contingent to everything else, all objects of perception are void of an intrinsic identity and therefore reflect the mark of *sunyata* (emptiness). This realization deduces three fundamental teachings of all Buddhist philosophy and practice: *anatta* (the absence of a self or soul), *anicca* (the transient nature of conditioned phenomena), and *dukkha* (the suffering innate in unenlightened experience). According to the Buddha, suffering is the result of clinging to objects of perception. All unenlightened sentient beings attach to and identify with objects, ideas, and circumstances which, due to the nature of reality, are always in a constant state of change. Our inability to cope with the impermanence of the universe results in our dissatisfaction with it. Therefore, to achieve enlightenment, we must let go of our desires for consistency and enter into an embodied expiration of all ignorance. This state of being is referred to as *nirvana* in dharmic terminology (Robinson, 1970, p. 25).

Enlightenment, however, could only be achieved through renunciation, meditation, and adherence to the Buddha's dharma. Therefore, the Buddha established the first monastic congregation, under his instruction, to follow his path towards salvation. His first disciples were five ascetics with whom he had practiced before his enlightenment (Humphreys, 1951, p. 34).

After the establishment of the first *sangha* (Buddhist community of practice), his following grew to thousands; he became well known, and his reputation as a spiritual leader spread throughout all the land. He preached and debated with other spiritual leaders, gave instruction to lay people in the villages he passed through, and even counseled local rulers and kings. Yet, one of the most revolutionary aspects of his ministry was the ordination of women into his monastic following. Nonetheless, monks and nuns were segregated in both practice and physical location, they were forbidden to interact with each other, and nuns were given more monastic rules than their male counterparts (Humphreys, 1951, p. 38).

According to the Pali Canon (the oldest Buddhist scriptures), the Buddha died at the age of 80 after eating food that made him ill. After informing his followers of his upcoming death, his adherents begged him to tell them how they should continue after his passing and to reveal to them who should be their new leader. The Buddha told them that his doctrines would be the authority and that all followers must be a refuge to their selves (Thomas, 1975, p. 146). According to the scriptures, his last words were, "Now then, monks, I address you; subject to decay are compound things: strive with earnestness" (Thomas, 1975, p.153).

The sangha he had founded continued to grow and flourish in a nonsectarian manner. However, shortly after the Buddha's death, the sangha began to hold a series of councils in which the parties would discuss, deliberate, and authenticate the Buddha's dharma to firmly establish apodictic Buddhist practice due to various degrees of doctrinal interpretation emerging within the tradition (Gard, 1961, p. 21). While the exact reasons and circumstances are still unknown and debated, one of these schools of thought began to produce a set of *sutras* (Buddhist scriptures) that were quite distinguishable from the beliefs of their contemporaries around the first century B.C. (B. Suzuki, 1959, p. 10). These writings reflect the earliest emanations in what is now called Mahayana Buddhism.

Unlike the modern form of their conservative counterparts, the

Theravadins, Mahayana Buddhists emphasized an intuitive and mystical approach to enlightenment rather than analytical speculation and orthopraxy (B. Suzuki, 1964 p. 11). To further facilitate their move away from strict adherence to scriptural and sectarian authority, the Mahayanists developed a different way to understand the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha). Gautama was not merely a man of great wisdom in their eyes. He was the incarnation of an omniscient and supernatural Buddha that dwelled in different realms of existence before his decision to spread the true dharma in our world (Hopkins, 1921, p. 320). To others, he was an embodiment of a *dharmakaya* (body of truth) that transcended his life and death, and the spirit of enlightenment from which he operated could not be compartmentalized and contained within an institutional belief system. Its joy and insight could emerge in the lives of all beings, even in the present (D. Suzuki, 1963, p. 255).

Because of its progressive ideology, Mahayana Buddhism was easily spread, and its teachings and practices traveled on the backs of its adherents to many parts of Asia. Mahayana Buddhism became a dominant religious practice in lands such as Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. The more orthodox school of Buddhism, Theravada, took hold in the lands that are now Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. (D. Suzuki, 1963, p. 3). Piggybacking off the great influence that China had in the East, Buddhism also became widely practiced in countries heavily influenced by Chinese culture such as Vietnam.

In 130 A.D., letters from a poet–official mentioned Buddhist monks in a manner that indicated that they were an accepted part of the social landscape in China (Wright, 1959, p. 21). As sects of Mahayana Buddhism multiplied amongst the Chinese, some of them became heavily influenced by many domestic Chinese belief systems. Zen Buddhism (or Chan Buddhism in its proper Chinese context) emerged out of a synthesis of Buddhist monasticism and Taoist thought. While some philosophical antagonisms existed between the two overlaid religions, the similarities between many basic ideas of Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism allowed for a great deal of syncretism in the primordial forms of Zen Buddhism (Dumoulin, 1963, p. 55). As Alan Watts wrote in his bestseller *The Way of Zen*, “The origins of Zen are as much Taoist as they are Buddhist” (Watts, 1957, p. 3).

Zen Buddhism is very unique in the spectrum of Buddhist tradi-

tions. It could be considered the most mystical wing of Buddhism because of its emphatic focus on non-duality and enlightenment being an intuitive experience. Zen (in its monastic form) has absolutely no established doctrines on deities, ceremonial rituals, beliefs about life after death, or the presence of a soul (D. Suzuki, 1964, p. 39). This does not mean that Zen Buddhists do not participate in or cherish religious rituals, study Buddhist scriptures, or hold many personal views in regard to the afterlife, but rather it is understood that all of these personal preferences and organized practices do not facilitate achieving enlightenment any more than eating an apple or using the bathroom. In the spirit of Zen, a person who has never heard of the Buddha or his teachings can stumble upon enlightenment while having his or her morning cup of coffee just as easily as devout Buddhist monastics who have studied the dharma every day of their lives. To the Zen Buddhist, emptiness penetrates everything, including Zen Buddhism. As the famous Zen Master D.T. Suzuki (1964) wrote in *An Introduction to Zen*,

> "If I am asked then, what Zen teaches, I would answer Zen teaches nothing. Whatever teachings there are in Zen, they come out of one's own mind. We teach ourselves; Zen merely points the way. Unless this pointing is teaching, there certainly nothing in Zen set up as its cardinal doctrines or as its fundamental philosophy" (p. 38)

Thus, we have a form of Buddhism that is centralized upon practice, not abstraction, as the means of achieving understanding. In Zen, we are not lacking in enlightenment; we already have it. The Buddha did not become something more than we are in our present form. There was no ontological transformation between who he was as Siddhartha and who he became as the Buddha. Therefore, we already are the Buddha; the practice is to experience this truth and epitomize this intuition. As Sohaku Ogata (1959) wrote,

> "If you want to seek the Buddha, you ought to see into your own Nature, which is the Buddha himself . . . If, instead of seeing into your own Nature, you turn away and seek the Buddha in external things, you will never meet him" (p. 62)

Because of this, the path of Zen was considered a "special transmission outside the scriptures" and a "transmission of mind by mind" (Sasaki, 2009, p. 79). This necessitates the student/master relationship that is central to Zen monastic practice. Thus, a Zen monk sees the Zen master as the ultimate symbol of authority (Watts, 1957, p. 163).

By the 20th century, Zen Buddhism had become a popular alternative religious practice and philosophy for Westerners who had become disenchanted with their Abrahamic religious upbringing. In the 1950s, influential writers and beatniks, like Alan Watts, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, injected Eastern philosophy and Zen into counterculture circles by writing novels, poetry, and philosophical works with explicit Buddhist underpinnings. Ever since its introduction in the Western world, practice centers have multiplied and attracted more followers.

One of Buddhism's most prevalent realms of application in the modern world is in psychological and behavioral therapy. *Mindfulness practice* (paying non-judgmental attention to present-moment experiences) is a meditative technique that has been used by Buddhist devotees since the beginning of the religion. The technique is elaborated upon by the Buddha in a discourse recorded in the Pali Canon called the *Satipatthana Sutra*. It is a fundamental practice of Buddhist monasticism and recently has grown in popularity among lay followers and non-Buddhists alike. As psychiatrist and scientist Dr. Daniel Siegel (2007) noted in his work, *The Mindful Brain*, "Studies have shown that specific applications of mindful awareness improve the capacity to regulate emotions, to combat emotional dysfunction, to improve patterns of thinking, and to reduce negative mindsets" (p. 6).

Mindfulness techniques are designed to deconstruct our inner dialogues and conceptualizations by paying attention to raw experience and "accepting whatever is there" (Gunaratana, 2011, p. 149). According to Dr. Ellen Langer (1989), we cease to be mindful when we form mindsets upon encountering something and then cling to those ideas when we reencounter the same thing later (p. 22). As a testament to the movement's increasing public validation, members of the Armed Forces have recently begun implementing mindfulness-based exercises into their training regimes to build resilience to stress (Mind Fitness Training Institute, 2014).

However, the implementation of mindfulness has not been a movement solely contained in clinical settings. Mindfulness has also been viewed by many as a way for society to combat the adoption of increasingly fast-paced and stressful lifestyles. One of the most well-known figures of the mindfulness movement is Thich Nhat Hanh. Nhat Hanh has been a prominent figure in peace activism, mindfulness practice, and progressive Buddhist thought in the 21st century. He has been called the father of

engaged Buddhism, a form of Buddhist practice that emphasizes participation in social justice and peace activism (Sieber, 2015).

In 1967, Nhat Hanh was nominated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for a Nobel Peace Prize for his continued efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the war in Vietnam. Yet, his outspoken opposition to the war and all its belligerents led to his exile from the country. After being banished, he relocated to France, where he taught Buddhism at the University of Sorbonne, Paris (plumvillage.org). In 1982, he founded Plum Village, a large and active monastery located near Bordeaux, France (magnoliagrovemonastery.org). Plum Village served as his base of operations and continues to be the headquarters of his monastic organization, the Order of Interbeing. As the popularity of his writings and teachings gained momentum in the West, the Order of Interbeing spread to other parts of the world. In the United States, there are three monasteries that practice in the Plum Village tradition under Thich Nhat Hanh.

In September of 2002, Thich Nhat Hanh and a group of his disciples visited Memphis, Tennessee during a tour they had scheduled for the United States. The "Peace Walk" demonstration attracted many visitors and practitioners. The group conducted a mass walking meditation to demonstrate an aspect of the practice of mindfulness. The presentation in Memphis had such an effect on some participants that a small group of Vietnamese Buddhist practitioners in the Mississippi area decided to pool their resources in an attempt to establish a nearby center for mindfulness practice. In 2003, Ben Ho, his wife Hai Le, and five other Vietnamese families purchased 120 acres of land in the countryside of Batesville, Mississippi. It began as a practice center for lay people until improved development of the land led a group of nuns from Nhat Hanh's monastic organization, the Order of Interbeing, to come and establish it as an official monastery in 2010 (Goetz, 2012, p. M5).

Methods

To gather my data, I designed a research model that took a mixed-methods approach. The mixed-methods approach has been described as "an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research; it is the third methodological or research paradigm (along with qualitative and quantitative research)" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 129). Depending on the type of data one wishes to gather, the mixed-meth-

ods approach is viewed as a more holistic, responsible, and productive research paradigm in many fields of the social sciences. I used participant observation, unstructured and informal interviews, ethnographic mapping, and literature reviews composed of different forms of secondary data (information gathered by other researchers for their own purposes; Schensul, 1999, p. 51).

I resided at the monastery for a little over four weeks in an attempt to subvert my status as an outsider as much as possible. I wanted to become a regular face for the time that I was gathering my data. I endeavored to limit the amount of influence my presence made so as not to interfere with the authenticity of my primary method of data collection: participant-observation. As defined by Johnson and Sackett (1998), "Participant-observation places the ethnographer at the scene, where a combination of direct observation and interview provide the evidence from which rich ethnographic accounts may be constructed" (p. 301). However, the practice of participant observation is not without its dilemmas. The presence of the ethnographer will always have an impact upon the social space that he or she is studying. However, obtaining objective points of view is not the sole purpose of the method. According to anthropologist Dr. Julian Murchison (2010),

> "Some ethnographers have found that their most important insights have emerged when they have chosen or circumstances have forced them to abandon their practiced, objective stances. The element of personal experience and social or cultural empathy can be very powerful to the ethnographer." (p. 85)

During my time at the monastery, I took on a secondary status as a retreatant, and I participated in the daily schedule assigned to lay guests. I ate with the community, worked and helped prepare meals, did various chores when asked (sweeping, replacing light bulbs, etc.), meditated during sitting or walking meditation sessions, and participated in communal conversations about practicing Buddhism. Also, I joined in during sporadic periods of play. If the daily schedule for monastics and retreatants was lax for a period, the community might have decided to play a game of volleyball or soccer, in which I would gladly take part. During these experiences, I asked questions, took field notes (both written and on a voice recorder), and recorded others' perspectives as well as my own. This allowed me to preserve the impressions and potential insights that emerged during my experiences.

The second most important tool in my data collection was interviewing. The two kinds of interviews that I used were *informal* and *unstructured*. Dr. Bernard Shaw (2011) defined informal interviewing as being "characterized by a total lack of structure or control. The researcher just tries to remember conversations heard during the course of a day in the field" (p. 156). When I was in a position in which taking field notes was either impossible or impractical (such as having wet, soapy hands while washing dishes), I made mental notes of conversations that took place between monastics or retreatants and myself. I might have asked, "Are some places on the rack where dishes are set to dry labeled in English to help the non-English speaking monastics learn English or for English-speaking guests to know where their washed utensils properly go?" While this method of interviewing gave me a great deal of information on its own, I also used it as a catalyst for the questions that I would ask during the second kind of interviewing technique I used: unstructured interviewing. Unstructured interviewing is a type of interviewing in which one sits down and hold an interview about a specific topic or focus. As explained by Shaw, "Both of you know what you're doing, and there is no shared feeling that you're just engaged in pleasant chitchat" (p. 157). Unstructured interviews are not characterized by having a set of predetermined questions, established by interviewer, in which the interviewee's responses focus on a specific question to which the ethnographer wishes to have a specific answer. While this may appear to have no sense of orientation in data gathering on the surface, Mark Vagle noted (2014),

> "I think it is a myth that the unstructured interview technique is "wide open" and without boundaries or parameters. To the contrary, this technique starts with a clear sense of the phenomenon under investigation and the interviewer needs to be responsive to the participant and the phenomenon throughout" (p. 79).

I conducted eight unstructured interviews during my time of data collection at the monastery. I interviewed monks, nuns, male retreatants, and female retreatants. The major focus of my interviews included monastic life, influences from Western culture, and power. The interviews typically ranged from half an hour to an hour. I scheduled times and days to sit down and talk with each participant so as not to interfere with possible pre-existing plans. I also employed the use of a translator outside the monastery in case some recruited monks and nuns did not speak English well enough to participate. I recorded six out of the eight interviews with a

voice recorder on my mobile phone and took written notes for the remaining two. Lastly, I informed all participants that if I asked a question or went into an area that the participant did not feel comfortable answering, they did not have to respond.

During the first week of my stay at the monastery, I created a map of the premises by hand that included rich descriptions of sensory experiences as one moved through the site and documented the foot traffic that occurred on a daily basis. This technique, called *ethnographic mapping*, serves as a way to "record and confirm identified spatial-social patterns" (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013, p. 113). Dr. Julian Murchison (2010) defended this technique: "The scope of human movements can be highly variable, but most human beings move through space in ways that are culturally influenced and, as a result, important to the ethnographer" (p. 131). After making a hand-drawn map and recording notes about movement and sensory input, I synthesized it with an overhead view of the premises from Google Maps. This allowed me to get a correct scale and more realistic spatial depiction of the property without drowning qualitative descriptions of the space.

Finally, I reviewed and gathered literature pertaining to the discipline of anthropology, historical and contemporary Buddhism, Magnolia Grove Monastery, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Order of Interbeing. I searched for peer-reviewed articles written about Magnolia Grove Monastery so that I could understand others' experiences at the site. This was supplemented by a small amount of archival data that featured articles about the monastery from the town of Batesville. The monastery kept copies of magazine articles and newspaper exposés that local reporters and journalists had published about the site and were more than willing to allow me to make copies. I also researched the history of Buddhism and how it has evolved and split into different schools of thought so that I could better grasp the religion and worldview of the people I was studying. More importantly, I wanted to understand how Thich Nhat Hanh's brand of Buddhism differed from others and how a place of practice in his tradition landed in a small town in rural Mississippi. Lastly, I searched online databases for academic publications on the anthropology of power, social hierarchy, communal living, monasticism, and research methods for ethnographic work.

After I finished gathering all forms of data, I took field notes

collected on-site, transcripts from interviews, selected passages from the collection of literature, and ethnographic maps and began to analyze them. I searched for relevance to my research questions. I coded each piece of data as either being RQ1, RQ2, or RQS. RQ1 and RQ2 corresponded to the primary research questions I formulated prior to the research. RQS was a code designated for information that could have pertained to both RQ1 and RQ2. I then used other codes to organize my data into subgroups under phrases like "power" or "harmony." Due to the qualitative nature of my research methods, I coded the material as explained by Saldaña (2009) in his work, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). After all data had been categorized according to their relevance, I looked for patterns in the data that allowed possible explanatory models to emerge. After coding the data and categorizing them according to the method I used to obtain them, I related the information from one set of data to another in hopes that both would substantiate each other and allow me to make reasonable propositions. This method of corroborating results from one kind of data by results obtained from a different kind of data is called *triangulation* (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013, p. 113).

Power Relations

In keeping with the traditional Buddhist monastic form of communal decision making, Magnolia Grove practices procedures that were scripturally founded in early Buddhist history. The *sanghakarman procedure*, as it is called, is outlined in the Pratimoksa. The *Pratimoksa* is the set of rules and vows that guide Buddhist monastic behavior. While there are many versions of the Pratimoksa depending on different schools and traditions, all have a form of the sanghakarman procedure to help facilitate the governmental aspects of a monastic community. Sanghakarman is a Sanskrit word meaning "the action of the community" and dictates how sanghas should hold meetings and make decisions as a unit (Nhat Hanh, 2003, p. 53). While the rules and regulations of how to correctly conduct a sanghakarman meeting can be tedious and irrelevant to the purpose of my research, one feature is strikingly important: All ordained members of the sangha must have an outlet for their opinions to be acknowledged. When a sanghakarman meeting is held, members must sit in a circular formation and not be out of one arm's distance from each other. This is

to ensure that the physical structure of meeting reflects equality and that no present members are positioned in a way that their voice is out of the hearing range of others. In some ways, the sanghakarman is a democratic procedure, and in other ways, it is not. It is democratic in the sense that it formalizes and solemnizes all members' opinions and votes. It constitutionally protects their right to express themselves through certain outlets. However, it is not democratic in the sense that it requires unanimous agreement on matters of concern for the community to go forth with action.

For example, let's say the majority of the community favored the idea of renovating a facility on the premises although they had a very constrained budget due to other projects. A sanghakarman procedure might be called for the monastery to decide whether they should go through with the project. One member may strongly disagree with the way the community is handling the purse and oppose the renovation. While every other member of the community may vote to renovate the building, if one single monastic does not agree, the sanghakarman is at a standstill and further action cannot be taken. Before a subsequent sanghakarman takes place on the same matter, members of the monastic community will talk in group and individual settings to try to convince the opposing parties and hear their point of view. However, if the member will not budge and no common ground can be made, the opposing member risks expulsion from the community. This is done to ensure ideological harmony amongst the community. To practice and grow spiritually as a sangha, the community must not be at odds with each other. This principle of harmony has been perceived as the foundation for a Buddhist monastic community to properly function. During my interviews and interactions with the monks and nuns at Magnolia Grove, I always asked "What is the most important thing to a sangha". Without hesitation, the answer I received was always the same: harmony.

As an actualized example of this form of constitutional decision making, I spoke with a member of the sangha who had recently left Magnolia Grove because of opposing views regarding the community's public services. Brother Strength had been a monastic in the Order of Interbeing for 12 years. He spent the last two of those years at Magnolia Grove. Being a veteran who served in the War in Iraq in 2003, he decided to become a monk after suffering from PTSD from his combat experiences. He is an

American citizen who was brought up in a Buddhist family in California. I met Brother Strength during my first couple of visits to the monastery in May 2015. When I returned to the monastery in late June 2015 to conduct my research, he was not there, and I asked the others where he had gone. They told me that he was pursuing other interests in helping people and gave me his contact information so that we could talk. When I spoke to Brother Strength about why he left the monastery, he told me that his plans for working with veterans was at odds with the goals of Magnolia Grove. He told me that the statistics regarding suicide among veterans was alarming and had motivated him to try and share the practice of mindful meditation and dharma in hopes that it would help them as it had helped him. He told me that while the monastic community seeks to help all who are suffering, they are extremely cautious about getting involved with government organizations because they do not want their concern for veterans' health to be perceived as supporting military causes. The following is a part of a discussion we had:

> **Brother Strength**: I wanted to work with veterans and the sangha didn't agree with my future plans. But we are supposed to be practicing engaged Buddhism. I didn't feel that me staying there was an engaged calling. People needed me.
> **Me**: Do your brothers and sisters at Magnolia Grove consider you disrobed?
> **Brother Strength**: Some don't. Some feel that I betrayed the sangha.
> **Me**: Is there any tension between you and Magnolia Grove?
> **Brother Strength**: As I am told, they don't condone my actions, but they support me on a personal level. They want the best for me.

I asked one of the middle-aged nuns who spoke English well, Sister Light, if the community really would expel a monastic over such a dilemma.

> **Me**: What if a community member will not relent and insists upon voting in opposition to other members of the gathering. Will they really be expelled?
> **Sister Light**: Harmony is the most important thing to our community. If someone can't agree then… (she shrugged her shoulders slowly and spoke in a tone as if to confirm what I had presupposed).

Another way that leadership arises at Magnolia Grove is through seniority. All monks and nuns are required to show respect to those monastics that have been ordained for a longer period of time. As stated in Nhat Hanh's (1997) manual on monastic training and living, *Stepping into Freedom*,

> "When a senior monk or nun walks past, stand to one side, join your palms, and bow your head. If you overhear elder monks or nuns arguing, silently withdraw. When someone who has been ordained longer than you is being reprimanded by your teacher, silently withdraw" (p. 40)

While I did not observe this specific practice of bowing to senior monastics or moving out of the way when one walks by, novices did ask for advice and guidance from the elder monks and nuns on a regular basis. If there was a question they could not answer, or a situation they did not know how to resolve, they sought the counsel of the elders.

Two elder nuns were of specific utility in these areas. Sister Patience and Sister Clarity both had been ordained for well over 15 years. Sister Patience had been a medical doctor in the United States before her ordination, and was accustomed with the English language and American culture. Sister Clarity did not speak English well and preferred to communicate through her novice nuns and monks to outsiders. Because of this, the mandates from Sister Clarity that I encountered were always through third parties. However, Sister Patience seemed to have more sway during my stay at the site. She seemed more outgoing, involved, and approachable than many of the monastics residing there. She had written and published books about her life as a doctor and nun. Because of her familiarity with the cultural contexts of the West, I felt the presence of Sister Patience's leadership more than Sister Clarity. I knew that Sister Clarity did hold sway in matters because of her seniority, but Sister Patience seemed to be the resource that the majority of monastics and visitors used.

Yet, the principle of seniority seemed more like a rule of thumb than an unwavering law. There was a deviation from the formal and established ways that monks and nuns maintained influence at the monastery. The monks and nuns who were most accustomed with the English language and American culture seemed to be put into positions of authority more than those who were not acclimated to Western society. This was due to the fact that one of the missions of the monastery is to be a meditation practice center for visitors and lay people. Being located in the United States, the majority of the retreatants are Americans. In keeping with the goal of trying spread the mindfulness practice to Western communities around them, Magnolia Grove offers a daily program of practice for its visitors that require English and an understanding of American culture to effectively conduct.

For example, *dharma sharings* are scheduled meetings in which one monastic sits with the retreatants at a designated time to discuss meditation, Buddhist philosophy, and individual struggles in a group-therapy format. During my stay at the monastery, I participated in around six dharma sharings. Every single session was held by a monastic who spoke fluent English. Sister Breathe, Sister Light, and Brother Wisdom always conducted the sessions. All three of these monastics spoke excellent English and had lived in the United States for many years prior to their ordination. None of these monastics were elders, yet they were consistently put into positions of authority with the retreatants. Additionally, because their skills were needed for the community to achieve its mission of being a practice center for outsiders, the more their abilities were in demand, the more often they would be allotted power. As the adage goes, "The one who holds the key is closest to the door." As an example of how the ability to speak English is valued among some of the monastics, and others feel it is impractical, interviews with different monastics concurred with my findings.

> **Me**: Do you think the monks and nuns who don't speak English are at a disadvantage to the ones that do at Magnolia Grove?
>
> **Brother Strength**: Yeah, absolutely. Plus, take into consideration that some of the monks and nuns who don't speak English have recently relocated here from Vietnam. They are uneducated and many of them have the mentality that they don't want to learn English because that requires classes. They may not have the confidence to do it. Others have the mentality that it is a waste of time because they cannot stay in the United States that long before they have to go back.

What Brother Strength felt was somewhat different from what Sister Flower had told me in an interview with a translator while we were sitting in the meditation hall. She was in her late 20's and seemed to be more congenial toward me than many of the other monastics who did not speak English fluently.

> **Me**: Do you think the monastics here want to learn English, even if they are leaving soon?
>
> **Sister Flower**: It depends. The monks and nuns around my age, of course! You can use English anywhere in the world. It is very useful. But the older monks and nuns are more interested in spiritual practice. As they get older, they go more inwards.

Acculturative Pressures

The Order of Interbeing has a desire to spread the practice of mindfulness and meditation to outsiders in broader cultural contexts. Therefore, Magnolia Grove strives, to a certain extent, to mold its environment and its practices to be palatable to both Western and Eastern frames of mind. The practice of Buddhism, as taught by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, should be void of nationalistic tendencies, cultural identities, or dogmatic ideologies. Nhat Hanh sought to establish a spiritual practice that any person could appreciate and engage in, regardless of their cultural, religious, or political alignments. As a nun told me while we were carrying vegetable scraps to a compost pile after dinner, "Something is not true because it is Buddhist, it is Buddhist because it is true". The practice of Buddhism that is envisioned by the community is one that frees the practitioner from ideas altogether, rather than replacing them with more radical and novel propositions.

Many things that would be commonplace features in most other Buddhist places of worship are absent and/or presented in a different way at Magnolia Grove. For instance, it is typically customary for Buddhist temples and monasteries to have a shrine room with a large and impressive Buddha statue centered against the wall in the back of the room. This space can be shared with the meditation hall (also quintessential) or be in a separate room altogether. Nonetheless, this feature is standard for most Buddhist places of practice. In Magnolia Grove, this is not the case. There are miniature Buddha statues for sale in the bookstore and some medium-sized statues placed around the edges of the forest surrounding the monastery, but the large meditation hall is without it. Being the largest and most elaborate site on the premises, the meditation hall serves as the focal point of religious practice for the site. In the hall, there is a shrine adorned with a floral arrangement of bonsai trees and beautiful orchids but no statue of the Buddha. I asked a monk named Brother Wisdom about this unorthodox attribute of Magnolia Grove. He explained it by telling me,

> "If you look deeply into a flower, you will see that Interbeing. The mother earth, rain, the sun. And we look at it…and it's very fresh… And when we bow we are saying 'That's the Buddha nature'. Because you're not suffering, you're not thinking about past or the future. You're in the present moment, so in that moment…You are the Buddha. You are enlightened".

However, there is a large, stained-glass mural centered at the top of the

wall above the shrine depicting the Buddha holding his hand over an image of Earth. Thus, there is some Buddhist imagery in the meditation hall, but the lack of a statue could reflect an acknowledgement of the Western hesitation to prostrate to foreign religious icons.

Another set of unorthodox amenities of the monastery are the availability of couples' cabins for people to share with their significant others on retreats. Unlike the regular dormitories for retreatants, these cabins are some distance away from the rest of the facilities. They are quaint, unfurnished, one-room structures around the size of a tool shed with two twin beds on opposite walls. It should be noted that the space did not encourage romantic contact between the residents. However, in trying to adapt to Western cultural normativity, the monastery did not want to scare away potential visitors by forcing them to share their conjoined personal space with outsiders in the regular dormitories. Brother Strength told me that this is absolutely unheard of in other Buddhist traditions and denominations. Retreats are typically centered on letting go of ideas of personal space and attachment, as opposed to Magnolia Grove's practice of accommodation.

Visitors and retreatants are allowed to come to and stay at the monastery most times throughout the year, but the daily practice schedule and activities differ greatly when a scheduled retreat is taking place. The dates for scheduled retreats are advertised on the monastery's website and usually include activities that are not a part of the regular schedule. An example would be the singing of *mindfulness songs*. These are songs, very simple in content and structure, that are sung in unison much like worship music in contemporary church services. Each participant is given a hand out with the song lyrics. An example of one of these songs is "I Like the Roses":

> "I Like the Roses"
>
> I like the roses, I like the daffodils.
>
> I like the mountains, I like the rolling hills.
>
> I like the twinkling stars when the sun goes down.
>
> Doo bi di doo bi di doo bi di…
>
> I like the rabbit, I like squirrel too
>
> I like bluebird, I like the roaming moose

I like all animals, all animals like me

Doo bi di doo bi di doo bi di… (plumvillage.org)

The tempo and feel of the music is similar to that of Christian hymnals. Even more, the songs are sung in between certain activities, akin to church services. While memorized Buddhist chants are typical for most other Buddhist traditions, singing as a religious practice is something unique to the Order of Interbeing and the Plum Village tradition. Western religious traditions usually incorporate music into their religious rituals and services. It appeared as if Magnolia Grove, and its denomination, sought to syncretize some of these customs with their presentation of Eastern spirituality.

As a sociopolitical reflection of Magnolia Grove's endeavor to appeal to Western prospects, environmental concern is a major point of interest and influence within the monastery and the Plum Village tradition as a whole. Nhat Hanh has consistently spoken about the need for humanity to understand the concepts of interconnectedness in order to reverse the process of global warming, soil erosion, and environmental degradation. In one of his books, *Love Letter to the Earth*, he stated,

> "We can't wait any longer to restore our relationship with the Earth because right now the Earth and everyone on Earth is in real danger. When a society is overcome by greed and pride, there is violence and unnecessary devastation. When we perpetuate violence toward our own and other species, we're being violent toward ourselves at the same time. When we know how to protect all beings, we will be protecting ourselves. A spiritual revolution is needed if we're going to confront the environmental challenges that face us." (Nhat Hanh, 2013, p. 28)

All meals at the monastery are vegan. They see the consumption of animal products as antithetical to their beliefs about compassion and their opposition to industries that harm the environment. Laminated leaves, flowers, and floral arrangements are common decorations in most of the facilities, and hanging wooden placards with statements such as "enjoy mother nature" can be seen painted in beautiful calligraphy around the premises. Before each meal is served, one of the monastics will recite an affirmation on a laminated sheet of yellow cardboard paper that encourages the participants to briefly reflect on how the Earth has brought forth the food about to be consumed. On the back of the stall doors of the bathrooms, a sign informs the user to not flush if one is solely urinating

because it is wasteful of energy and water. Sustainable living practices are ideal at Magnolia Grove, and many Westerners who seek a union between environmental justice and spirituality find Magnolia Grove to be place where their sociopolitical positions and spiritual practices can be merged.

The most significant way that the Plum Village tradition and Magnolia Grove Monastery create a bridge to outsiders, both locally and across the world, is through their unique use of spiritual parlance. Nhat Hanh has organized Plum Village's religious terminology in such a way that its tenets can better cross over onomastic and conceptual barriers rendered by external political, religious, and philosophical forums. As an example, Nhat Hanh realizes that the traditional Buddhist beliefs about reincarnation may come across as supernatural, kooky, or ignorant to outsiders interested in Buddhist practice. Nhat Hanh, in his writings and sermons, has expressed that reincarnation should be viewed as a continuance of our physical bodies from our biological ancestry, food consumption, and psychological influences. Therefore, we are reborn from the material of the cosmos, immaterially from our life experience and psychological conditioning. Some of the examples of the Plum Village tradition's rewording of traditional Buddhist terminology into more contemporary and relatable vocabulary are as follows:

- reincarnation = continuance
- dependent origination = interbeing
- nirvana = the ultimate
- enlightenment = insight

This use of language also played a part in their religious rituals. Before and after a period of sitting meditation in the meditation hall, monastics and retreatants would gently come to their knees and touch their head to the floor. This was not referred to as "bowing" at the monastery. Instead it was called "touching the earth." It was no longer seen as a form of prostration to the Buddhist religion, but rather an act of reverence for the planet.

Yet, this does not mean that traditional aspects of Buddhist thought are completely absent. Once, I was looking around the bookstore at the endless shelves of books written by Nhat Hanh, while one of the older nuns who spoke little English sat behind the cash register. We spoke as follows:

Me: Almost every single book in this store was written by Thich Nhat Hanh.
Sister Smile: Yes… he writes a lot for many people
Me: So, when are you going to write a book?
Sister Smile: (laughing) Many lifetimes from now. Hopefully, I'll still be a nun then.

Her answers caught me by surprise, and I began to wonder whether she meant "lifetimes" as an expression or in literal lifetimes that would infer beliefs about reincarnation. At first, I dismissed the idea that one of Nhat Hanh's monastic followers would be deviating from his ideas of Buddhist practice and belief when considering the strict adherence that Zen students are supposed to pay to their Zen Master. Yet, another incident arose that challenged my presuppositions about Magnolia Grove's residents. Sister Light wanted the other nuns and monks who were not fluent in English to learn the language. Twice a week, any of the monastics who were interested, or junior to her, would come to the dining hall to practice English with her and some of the retreatants as tutors. I volunteered, and most of the time that meant simply talking to the monastics so that they could practice conversation. One of the nuns, Sister Oneness, told me a story about when she first went to a monastery in Vietnam to ordain. She said that she drove through a dense forest late at night in a taxi and that the driver made her feel uncomfortable. She then told me that she began to pray to Avalokitesvara (the deity of compassion in Mahayana Buddhism). The story that Sister Oneness told me further validated that not all of Nhat Hanh's disciples strictly adhere to his philosophies.

Conclusions

Power is conditional at Magnolia Grove. It arises as it is needed and is dissolved when it is no longer required. As stated by Moisés Naím (2013) in his work, *The End of Power*, "Power is hard to measure. In fact, strictly speaking, it is impossible to measure. You cannot tally it up and rank it. You can rank only what appears to be its agents, sources, and manifestations" (p. 21). For the purposes of my research, power was useful in describing the relationships among people, places, and things rather than being something possessed by people, places, or things. Therefore, if a monastic were put into situations where power relations manifest more frequently, they can be described as being empowered more often rather than being powerful in a comprehensive sense. While the monastic con-

stitution of the Order of Interbeing establishes protocol for making communal decisions and seniority acts as badge for some monastics to have influence, the monks and nuns who speak English and have experience in Western settings use these skills as tools for earning sway and respect in many ways that, otherwise, may not have been possible. Thus, Magnolia Grove participates in a social hierarchy that allows individuals to be empowered when it is necessary without them becoming empowered in a comprehensive and consistent manner. Who is in charge greatly depends upon the conditions of the situation requiring governance.

Furthermore, it would be misleading to portray Magnolia Grove as a retreat center that seeks to Westernize. It is more appropriate to depict it as a monastery belonging to a tradition of Buddhism that seeks to blur the lines between Western and Eastern thought. As noted, some of the practitioners at Magnolia Grove did not adhere to the ideological renovations that Nhat Hanh advocated. However, Nhat Hanh does not demand that they conform to his ideologies like one would expect of the students to their Zen master. The Plum Village tradition seeks to develop a spiritual practice that is accessible to everyone. Retreatants can absorb what they see as useful and gently abstain from the beliefs or practices that they do not find convincing. Monks and nuns may develop their own areas of emphasis and are encouraged to be creative, as long as their beliefs or practices do not create discord within the monastic community. During my stay, I encountered Hindus, Christians, practitioners from other Buddhist traditions, and people who claimed no religious affiliation. I never felt that the rituals, activities, or practices were pushed upon me or any of my fellow retreatants. If we wanted to participate, then we could; if we did not, then we were asked not to disturb the others who did. Thus, Magnolia Grove is responding to acculturative pressures as needed, and it is very problematic to calculate due to the fact that every member of the community is responding to acculturative pressures in different ways and at different rates. For the monastics, such as Sister Patience and Sister Light, the process was a smooth one. For others, such as Sister Clarity, it could be difficult. As a whole, the community is acclimating to the macro-cultural contexts of West in a way that is pragmatic and productive for spreading its message of mindfulness, meditation, and morality. The most impressive way that this acclimation is fostered is through the use of a language that creates philosophical and cultural bridges, rather than barriers.

Discussion

When I observed that certain monks and nuns were put into positions of control more often than others due to their ability to speak English and understand American culture, Pierre Bourdieu's theories of symbolic capital and fields were practical in providing a theoretical language that better explained the processes of power dynamics at Magnolia Grove. In summary, Bourdieu theorized that a person's access to resources and power are dependent upon different species of capital that the individual possesses and uses. The different species of capital could be money, craft, body language, social networks, ethnicity, gender, and so on. The amalgamation and embodiment of these various forms of capital are referred to as one's *habitus*. When one enters a field (social landscape or forum) and interacts with others, the individual's habitus determines his or her mobility and status within that field. Magnolia Grove consists of many different, overlapping fields that the residents (both monastic and lay) must navigate every day. If a monastic speaks fluent English, then his or her ability to navigate the field of English-speaking retreatants is facilitated. If their mannerisms are familiar to Westerners and the way they communicate is comfortable, then they may have access to resources and power more easily than those who do not possess the capital to socially traverse that field. According to my findings, the rate at which one can be empowered is dependent on the situation that necessitates that empowerment. Sister Light was not an elder nun, but when she entered the fields in which seniority was not a required or relevant form of social capital, the resources that she could bring to the situation created a demand for her expertise and gave her a measure of independence and clout. The connection between utility and capital was elaborated upon by Bourdieu when he wrote, "As a fundamental operation of social alchemy, the transformation of any species of capital into symbolic capital, as legitimate possession founded upon the nature of its possessor, always presupposes a form of labor, a visible expenditure…" (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 299).

Sister Patience and Sister Clarity had both been ordained for over 15 years and were considered elder nuns at the monastery. Both had served at many different monasteries belonging to the Order of Interbeing, and both were used as mentors to the junior nuns and novices. Yet, Sister Patience was the one who always dealt with outsiders, such as me, and special projects that the monastery undertook. Because of her struggles

with speaking English, Sister Clarity could not hold dharma sharings, dharma talks, introduce herself to many newcomers, or extend her advice to retreatants. Sister Patience was a practicing physician in the United States before she was ordained. She gave anatomy lessons once a week to the monastics who were interested and used the dining hall as a classroom. She was the central pundit for a hired sculptor at the site who was building concrete statues of Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King, Jr. Sister Patience had published two books in English about her life that were found on every bookshelf on the premises. Of course, other factors that are outside my knowledge could explain Sister Clarity's lack of popularity. However, what is known from the data is that Sister Patience had certain forms of social capital that allowed her to rise in prestige among many of her contemporary elders. It appeared as if Sister Patience were able to provide resources to more dimensions of the monastery than those in her age group and of her status. This allowed her to be empowered more often.

Although Magnolia Grove has a certain set of power dynamics that can disadvantage some members of the monastic community more frequently than others, I never observed a monk or nun allowing social hierarchy to develop in a solidified way. I hypothesized that if individuals were placed in charge more frequently, then residues of that positionality would float into other social dimensions of the site. What if residents became so used to Sister Patience being the go-to person that when someone else should be consulted, she would be approached out of habit?

I propose that this state of balance is kept through the monastery's emphasis on practicing mindfulness. "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 2012). On the premises, there are electronic bells scheduled to ring at 15 minute intervals. Also, large bells are rung before, during, and after communal activities such as eating. When the bells sound, all who hear them will stop what they are doing completely and deliberately pay attention to the physical sensations of their breath and body. The goal of the exercise is to put a pause on the thinking mind. As the vibrations of the bell's sound dissipate, the community will gently go back to its task at hand. They attempt to let go of their inner dialogues and return to the present moment. It is important to remember that the goal of this exercise is not to enter into a trance of any kind. According to Buddhist philosophy, our endless cycle of thinking, judging, planning,

and worrying is the trance. When one releases these mental formations, reality emerges as a nameless, empty, and liberating experience. This practice allows participants to briefly enter into a space that anthropologist Victor Turner called *liminal states*: "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Since the community enters into this empty space several times a day, the psychological forces that give rise to egocentrism, suspicion, pride, and strife are mitigated at a collective level. As an illustration of how many times a day a resident will be exposed to this stopping and returning to the present moment, a schedule of times the bell would be rung is listed below.

- Morning Bell 5:00 a.m.
- Sitting Meditation Bell 5:30 a.m.
- Walking Meditation Bell 6:45 a.m.
- Breakfast Bell 7:30 a.m.
- "You may begin eating" Bell 7:35 a.m.
- Working Meditation Bell 9:45 a.m.
- Lunch Bell 12:00 p.m.
- "You may begin eating" Bell 12:15 p.m.
- Dharma Sharing Bell 3:00 p.m.
- Dinner Bell 6:00 p.m.
- Evening Meditation bell 7:45 p.m.

According to Turner, liminality fosters a sense of *communitas*, a sense of comradery and fellowship founded outside of social structure and hierarchy. This sense of togetherness is fostered by the practice of mindfulness at Magnolia Grove. As Turner emphasized, "Communitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom" (p. 113). Brother Strength's decision to leave the community is an example of how conflicts of interest can cause certain individuals to take a different path than the one of their ordination. Like any community, the sense of harmony or communitas is not consistent across all members of the community at all times. However, in the case of Broth-

er Strength, it was not due to a sense of feeling unwanted, unloved, or out of communion with their monastic brothers or sisters. Instead, it may be due to having a different vision of what should be of importance in the monastery's mission and purpose.

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