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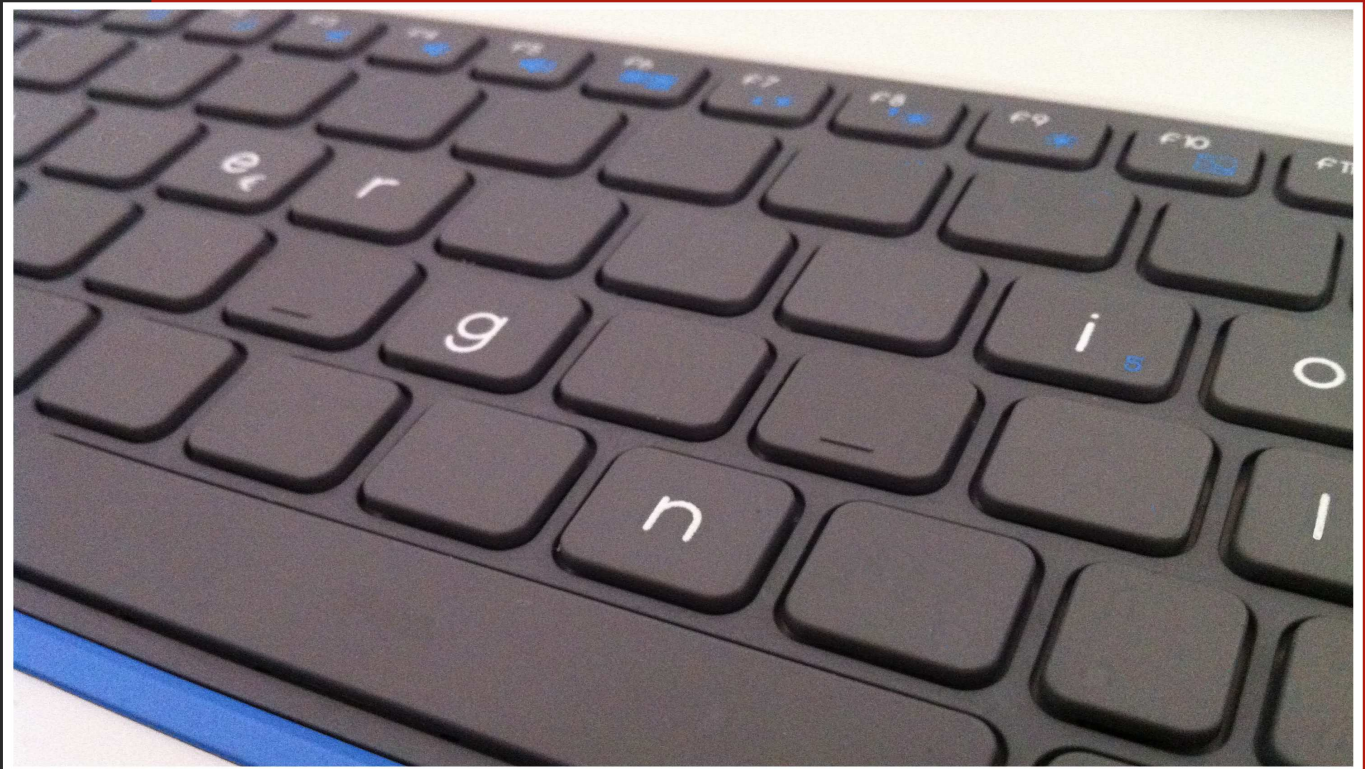
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Trans-European Adaptations in the Diamond Way: Negotiating Public Opinions on Homosexuality in Russia and in the U.K.

B. Scherer

Abstract

This paper focuses on a Neo-Orthodox Tibetan Buddhist movement's shifting trans-European positioning on the web and in its media self-representation with regard to public discourses around homosexuality. The analysis presented also proves methodologically relevant, exemplifying through reflexive ethnography how outsider/insider scholars can manoeuvre religious politics.

As a global movement of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, the Diamond Way of the Danish lay teacher Ole Nydahl has been particularly successful in its proselytising efforts throughout Eastern and Central Europe. Previous research has noted the selectively socially conservative and mildly homophobic tendencies of the Diamond Way (Scherer 2011; 2013).

In the trans-European context, from Russia to the U.K., Nydahls and the movement's mild homophobia/strained LGBT-neutrality appears to draw public criticism for either being too pro-LGBT or too anti-LGBT. The investigation highlights the shifting public perceptions and socio-religious political frontlines in Russia and the U.K. and reveals a pattern of opportunism and (non-)negotiating public opinions.

Keywords

Tibetan Buddhism, Diamond Way, Buddhism in Europe, Trans-national Buddhism, Buddhism and Homosexuality, Buddhism in Russia, Buddhism in the U.K., Insider/outsider and double exclusion (ethnographic methodology).

1 Introduction

This paper presents comparative case studies of (non-)negotiating public discourses and online presences in a New Religious (Buddhist) movement, the somewhat controversial Diamond

Way, a contemporary convert and now second/third generation movement of the Tibetan Karma Kagyu (bKa' brgyud) school, led by Lama Ole Nydahl. I employ methodological pluralism including historical and anthropological ethnography, auto-ethnography, netnography and discourse analysis. The analysis is supplemented by methodological reflections, which necessarily locate the researcher in relation to their subject in aid of ethnographic authenticity and transparency; these considerations prove relevant for the wider field of study and supplement the methodological parameters which I have outlined previously (Scherer 2009) in relation to research on the Diamond Way. The current study builds on my previous analyses of the movement's negotiation of globalization, tradition and modernity (Scherer 2012a); and, in particular, on the Diamond Way's approach towards gender and sexuality/-ies (Scherer 2011). In this context, I have already presented a first case studies of the Diamond Way's usage of the internet and new media in relation to queer Diamond Way followers (Scherer 2013). In the following case studies I want to draw attention to the shifting national discursive contexts of this transnational movement; the challenges they provide; and the solution strategies employed.

Although it is hard to gauge the exact extent of the Diamond Way's following, I had previously estimated the number of its members and sympathisers at approximately 15,000-70,000 (Scherer 2009, pp. 25-26) or approximately 50.000 (Scherer 2013, p. 145) in 600+ groups and centres worldwide. However, taking into consideration the relatively small amount of larger centres and the high frequency of smallest (three to six persons) groups, an estimate of around 25,000 followers and sympathisers in total appears to be more probable. The movement is quite visible in Central and Eastern Europe where it sometimes appears to dominate the regional and national discursive space of Buddhism on the contemporary transnational religious/spiritual marketplace as its web presence indicates (see below Parameter 1). In 2007, the Diamond Way consolidated its continental European presence by establishing its first transnational centre as the headquarters of the movement: the so-called Europe Center, near Immenstadt in the German Alps (<<http://www.europe-center.org>>).

As a New Buddhist movement, the Diamond Way revolves around its founder, the Danish Hippie-turned-Lama (Tibetan Buddhist teacher) Ole Nydahl (born 1941). His spiritual conversion, career and mission is remarkable, particularly because of the identitarian emphasis the movement places on the constant writing and rewriting of Nydahl's (auto-)hagiography, or (rang gi) rnam thar in terms of the Tibetan Buddhist literary genre (Scherer 2014). Nydahl, together with his late wife Hannah (1946-2007), encountered the previous head of the Tibetan Karma Kagyu school, the Sixteenth Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje (1924-1981) in the late 1960s and early 1970s; Nydahl's life narration subsequently constructs him as the first western student of the Karmapa hierarch (a contestable claim) and as one of the most successful propagators of Tibetan Buddhism in the West/global North in general. It has been noted in previous research (Saalfrank 1997: 224-228;

Scherer 2012a) that the movement can be meaningfully described as neo-orthodox (or better: neo-orthoprax), using Peter Berger's definition of neo-orthodoxy as "the reaffirmation of the objective authority of a religious tradition after a period during which that authority has been relativized and weakened." (Berger 1980: 79): Nydahl is – in social and, selectively, in religious terms – a conservative propagator of Tibetan Buddhism among western lay converts (and now second generation convert Buddhists); his trademarks are a combination of charismatic self-stylisation and grandeur; old boy's charm; and most importantly a superficially modernist hybridisation and packaging of orthodox (or better 'orthoprax') Buddhist content, which at times uneasily masks many traditional pre-modern features and the tendency to inscribe Tibetan Buddhist orthoprax devotion for the teacher into an uncritical personality cult and imitation of the teacher's habitus (Scherer 2011, pp. 94-95). Consequently, Nydahl's charisma, socially conservative political views, and life style have drawn criticism for propagating a "life-style Buddhism." (Ruch 2006); his broad, hyper-social and sometimes hedonistic appearing packaging of Tibetan Buddhism for a mainly privileged following (=white, heterosexual, abled-body/body-normative, young-to-middle aged, middle-classed) earned him the criticism of propagating a sort of "Buddhism light" (see Scherer 2009, pp. 35-38). However, the complexities of Tibetan politics in exile around the Karmapa controversy form the decisive discursive context of much sectarian Nydahl criticism: Nydahl is a stark supporter of the late 14th Shamar Rinpoche's claimant to the title of the 17th Karmapa, i.e. the Karma Kagyu lineageholder, HH Thinley Thaye Dorje. Thaye Dorje counts on the support of approximately half of the Tibetan and a majority of Non-North American Karma Kagyu Buddhists. However, some European and most American Karma Kagyu followers, including many sectarian US-academics, support another claimant selected by the 12th Situpa. In a curious and slightly ironic display of unity, this Karmapa candidate, HH Orgyen Thinley, was accepted by both the Chinese government and the Tibetan government in exile (Scherer 2009, pp. 28-29). A further important contextual factor motivating criticism of Nydahl is constituted by zealous "cult"-watchers who exhibit questionable and rather un-nuanced approaches to New Religious Movements such as ex-cult-deprogrammer Rick Ross and his web blog and forum (formerly using the URL <www.rickross.com>, the blog was recently rebranded as <<http://www.culteducation.com>>); or, in the German speaking context, the conspiracy theorists Victor and Victoria Trimondi (<<http://www.trimondi.de>>)¹ and a few Christian cult watchers (Sektenbeauftragte) and their theological helpers: in their criticism these critics have clearly demonstrated a distinct lack of sufficiently nuanced understanding of Tibetan Buddhism (see Scherer 2011, p. 93)².

1 Victor and Victoria Trimondi (pseudonym of Herbert and Mariana Röttgen) understand themselves as investigators of the "dark sides" of Tibetan Buddhism and, more recently, of Buddhist-Fascist conspiracies; for a critical academic evaluation of their key premises and claims see Schlieter 2008.

2 Examples are polemical publications such as Schmid 1998 and Ruch 2006; Chryssides (1999: 342-365) provides a fair overview and critique of counter-cult movements.

2 Ethnographic reflexivity: the outsider/insider hermeneutics and an auto-ethnographic disclaimer

(Auto-)Ethnographic reflexivity is a constituent factor in any anthropological or sociological research approach (cp., e.g., Coffey 1999). Consciously or unconsciously biased, partisan and/or questionable scholarship is usually enabled by the lack of transparency of the academic(-cum-stakeholder)'s reflexive locus in the discourse. Writing on Buddhism as a scholar-cum-practitioner, it is tempting to ignore the methodological dilemma known in cultural anthropology as the insider-outsider problem (McCutcheon 1999). The problem can also be construed along the line of the 'Theology' vs. 'Christian Studies' (as a sub-discipline of Religious Studies) divide (cp. Freiburger 2000). Some efforts have been made to explore 'Buddhist Theology' or even 'Dharmology' (Jackson and Makransky 2000). Ruegg (1995) argues for the priority of an emic approach in Buddhist Studies when he states

For my part, I am inclined to think that the approach to the understanding and analysis of our sources must initially be what has been termed "emic" rather than "etic." That is, in the first instance, an effort has to be made, as far as is possible, to determine how the categories and terms of a culture relate to each other structurally and systemically, and so to place ourselves within the cultural contexts and intellectual horizons of the traditions we are studying, making use of their own intellectual and cultural categories and seeking as it were to "think along" with these traditions. This is much more than a matter of simply developing sympathy or empathy, for it is an intellectual, and scientific, undertaking (p. 156).

While Scholars-cum-practitioners dominate the academic discourse in some parts of the world they are also subject to academic suspicion by seemingly more objective 'outsider' scholars (who in turn regularly fail to disclose any personal religious affiliations themselves). As Baumann (1999) summarises,

The self-confessed Buddhist scholar-practitioner seems to be a particularly North American phenomenon. In contrast, most scholars studying Buddhist texts, histories, and social realities in Europe or Australia deliberately avoid admitting publicly that they personally might be Buddhists. One reason for this is the underlying assumption that too close an alignment with the studied object might intrude upon the scholar's so-called "objectivity" and "neutrality." Personal convictions and academic investigation are seen as different spheres which, for scientific creditability, need to remain apart. Having gone beyond such constructed polarities, scholars in the United States and Canada have stepped up and increasingly in recent years have declared quite frankly that they are followers of

some Buddhist, Hindu, Baha'i or other religious tradition. The dichotomy of "insider versus outsider" has been replaced by the blurring of boundaries to "insider and outsider (p. 25).³

This "blurring" has become an important (auto-)ethnographic topic in the study of contemporary Buddhism(s). For example, the British scholar-cum-practitioner Henry (2006) has given a lucid rationale of his ethnographic research on Contemporary Buddhism in the U.K.:

It should be noted here that as author I am also a supporter of engaged Buddhist practice, being a practitioner/researcher (not uncommon in the study of Western Buddhism). I therefore present myself as such for the sake of reflexive validity in the work carried out, and in the context of identifying my own position as an insider researcher in adopting support for a style of Buddhist practice that suggests both insider and outsider at a number of different levels. At the level of a practicing Buddhist and as an engaged Buddhist I am obviously an insider. However [...] the multilayered nature of the practitioner/scholar is to be read in the context of, in my own estimation, the "content specific" area of research which, in my own case (and for others), works at varying levels (pp. 5-6).

Moreover, other scholars are making convincing arguments for a supersession of the insider-outsider divide in favour of that very blurring, the view that everybody is a co-participant in the formulation of a narrative about religion (Knott 2005, pp. 245-246). The practitioner-friendly Buddhist Studies of Naropa Institute (now University), founded by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in Boulder, CO, is an example of the – reflected "blurring of divisions" (Goss 1999, 2000; Midal 2004, pp. 251-258; Bye 2005).

In the past, my own research on the Diamond Way has drawn critical attention by non-academic opponents and followers of Nydahl alike. Additionally, I have occasionally encountered curious double exclusion: being subjected to discriminatory suspicion both in the academic world and in the ethnographic 'field.' In academia this manifested both at my own institution and in parts of the continental European Religious Studies community;⁴ in the field, at the end of 2011, despite strong criticism of my person and research by some Nydahl opponents, my academic view on the Diamond Way has let to me being declared not much short of a *persona non grata* within the movement itself.

3 For further reflections on the scholar-cum-practitioner issue see Gross (2000) and the essays in part four ("The Scholar's Place in American Buddhist Studies") of Williams & Queen (1999: 157-261).

4 In 2009, a zealous Christian colleague reported me anonymously to my Dean and the central Human Resources department under the allegation that my research on Nydahl would bring the university into disrepute; however, after a formal investigation and after the involvement of the unions, I was completely vindicated; the colleague, however, was never disciplined and I never received an apology. Already in 2005 an Erasmus bilateral between my British and a well-known German university was blocked by the German side. The responsible German professor explained rather conspiringly to his disappointed student that the reason for letting this opportunity drop was my connection with Nydahl (sic!).

Hence, my disclaimer as insider and outsider, as a scholar and a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, should be helpful for anyone who wishes to contest or validate the balance of my research outputs; acknowledging Bourdieu's (1992) emphasis on ethnographic reflexivity, the disclosure should make any 'hidden ethnography' transparent, albeit perhaps for the prize of leaving me, the researcher, yet again open to (further) challenge (cf. Blackman 2007, p. 701). In Religious Studies, creating transparency; accounting for ethnographic bias; and challenging the myth of the seemingly completely objective outsider entails most crucially the disclosure of the most pertinent cultural habitus (Bourdieu 1992) - the researcher's own religious affiliation.

Since the late 1990s, I have been fortunate enough to receive many Buddhist teachings and transmissions from prolific Tibetan (Sakya, Nyingma and Kagyu) masters and, most recently, also from Newar Vajrācāryas. My rapport within the field is helped by my personal connection to HH Thinley Thaye Dorje (one of abovementioned claimants to the title of the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, the Karma Kagyu lineage holder); since 2000, he has been and remains my main Tibetan Buddhist teacher.⁵ From Lama Ole Nydahl I have received teachings on Phowa ('pho ba, saṃkrānti, transferring of consciousness) in 2000. Additionally, between 2005 and 2011, on Nydahl's invitation, I have been occasionally teaching myself in Nydahl's centres around the world as a scholar-cum-practitioner. This insider position has furnished me with unprecedented ethnographic access and privileges. As many constructive theologians and 'scholars-cum-practitioner' I have regularly found myself in an ethnographic state of identitarian fluidity between observer-participant, necessarily oscillating between insider and outsider and/or inhabiting hybrid and/or liminal spaces of ethnographic privilege and internal voice and visibility. In this context it is important to acknowledge that scholars of any religious tradition are not static focal points themselves (cf. Tweed 2006, p. 8), but are continuously changing themselves and always and necessarily co-shaping the very discourses they study and analyse. Still, the observer/participant/co-shaper tension and the struggle to maintain authenticity and integrity as both ethnographer and Buddhist thinker & teacher has resulted in my current, slightly eccentric liminal state: I am viewed as a friendly abject in the Diamond Way and a suspected sectarian analyser of a controversial contemporary Buddhist movement in a (now decreasing) part of academia. Perhaps, inimical double exclusion can be an indication of fairly balanced (and thus non-partisan) scholarship?

5 As explained above there is a schism in the current Karma Kagyu school about the identity of the 17th incarnation of Karmapa hierarch; I refrain from any political judgement about - or disrespect to - the other Karmapa claimant, HH Orgyen Thinley.

3 Parameter 1: The Diamond Way online and its media discourses

Media representation is a crucial factor in spiritual self-marketing (see, e.g., Hoover 2006). Just as many other convert Tibetan Buddhist movements, the Diamond Way successfully uses its internet presence for identitarian cohesion, presentation, in-group services, and proselytising. Dedicated web, streaming and social media teams are implementing Nydahl's public relations' efforts. While the transnational movement is represented by the URL <<http://www.diamondway-buddhism.org>>, the Diamond Way has successfully secured generic and national internet presence by obtaining URLs such as <<http://www.buddhism.eu>> (links to <<http://www.diamondway-buddhism.org>>); <<http://www.buddhism.org.uk/>> (U.K.); <<http://www.buddhismus.de>> (Germany); <<http://www.buddhismus.org>> (Switzerland); <<http://www.buddhismus.at>> (Austria); <<http://www.buddhism.it>> (Italy); <<http://www.buddhismus.sk>> (Slovakia); <<http://www.buddyzm.pl>> (Poland); <<http://www.buddhism.ua>> (Ukraine); and <<http://www.buddhism.ru>> (Russia) (all as viewed on 21 July 2014). This current web presence of the movement indicates its claim to represent Buddhism in a much broader sense than only one particular sub-school of Tibetan Buddhism; in that way the Diamond Way's web presentation is more aspirational than factual in terms of hegemonic discourses.

From the very early days of email and the World Wide Web onward, electronic newsletters (DWBN -Diamond Way Buddhism Network; starting 1994 as Karma Kagyu Buddhist Network) have been sent out to followers of Nydahl. Since 2002, Nydahl's teachings around the world are being live-streamed on the web to subscribed members of Diamond Way groups (<<http://www.diamondway-teachings.org/transmission.html>>). A dedicated YouTube channel exists since November 2008, which provides tailor-made teachings of Nydahl on various topics (<<http://www.youtube.com/user/BuddhismDiamondWay>>).

However, the Diamond Way has been rather cautious in the area of social media: in reaction to increasing online criticism of Nydahl and the movement, Diamond Way followers are admonished to be mindful of conducting themselves in a good style on all social media and to prioritise personal contact to other sangha members and the teacher(s). A dedicated, closed Diamond Way social media trial since 2007, <<http://virtualsangha.ning.com>>, has not been very successful (Scherer 2013, pp. 147-150).

4 Parameter 2: The Diamond Way and homosexuality

As mentioned above, in previous research I have analysed gender performance and identity, sexual ethics and sexualities in the Diamond Way (Scherer 2011); I presented further ethnographic evidence in a case study of queer Diamond Way followers (Scherer 2013). On this basis, Nydahl's and the Diamond Way's view on homosexuality can be summarised as follows:

Although the Diamond Way can be classified as a “world-affirming” movement according to Wallis' typology of New Religious Movements (Anderson 1994, p. 152), it is not an easy place for lesbians, gays and bisexuals (and trans*, intersex, querying and queer subjects). While Nydahl embraces (hetero-)sexual activity as a means to bring happiness to others, clearly minoritising and mildly homophobic attitudes prevail within the movement. This is unsurprising given traditional homo- and transphobic attitudes in Tibetan Buddhism(s) (see Scherer 2011); and given Nydahl's personal hetero-machismo and hyper-masculine gender performance. In his own teachings Nydahl has adapted from openly homophobic in earlier years to his current position of strained neutrality. Essentially Nydahl pleads stunned ignorance on homosexuality when he states “homosexual relationships I cannot fathom” (Nydahl 1996, p. 30).⁶ He opines that homosexual relationships are “not advised” in Buddhism since “they seem to bring more suffering, disease and disturbing emotions than normal [sic!] relationships” (Nydahl 2001: 20 tr. Scherer).⁷ Still, Nydahl is clearly attempting a certain degree of neutrality when he states that “the Buddha was wise enough to broadly steer clear of our bedrooms” (Nydahl 2008a, tr. Scherer).

I have several bisexual and gay students and I have also blessed several couples for a fulfilling life together. How they have fun with each other in detail, I will better leave to them themselves. They are often gifted people, but their life is not easy. There are strong jealousies, and actually I suspect that same-sex love often strengthens the ego(-illusion) (Nydahl 1997, p. 32, tr. Scherer).⁸

As demonstrated in my earlier research, Nydahl's teachings continue to betray hetero-sexist ignorance (Scherer 2011, 2013).

6 A Polish edition appeared the same year in *Diamantowa Droga* 15 (Winter 1996), <http://diamentowadroga.pl/dd15/milosc_i_partnerstwo>, accessed 6 June 2011; the English version was reprinted in *Buddhism today* 14 (2004), 37-40 (quotation on p. 40).

7 “Man empfiehlt sie nicht im Buddhismus. Sie scheinen mehr Leid, Krankheit und Störgefühle auszulösen als normale Verbindungen.” The interview was translated e.g. into Danish for *Buddhisme i dag* 19 (2001), 20-30.

8 Ich habe mehrere bisexuelle und einige schwule Schüler und habe auch mehrere Paare für ein erfüllendes Zusammenleben gesegnet. Wie sie sich so in Einzelheiten miteinander vergnügen, überlasse ich ihnen lieber selbst. Es sind oft begabte Leute, aber ihr Leben ist nicht leicht. Es gibt starke Eifersüchteleien, und eigentlich hege ich den Verdacht, daß Liebe mit seinesgleichen oft egostärkend wirkt.

5 Case Study 1: The Diamond Way on homosexuality in Russia

The Diamond Way has developed a strong following in Russia ever since Nydahl started his missionary activities in the Soviet Union in 1988. There are currently a staggering 80+ centres and groups across Russia under the umbrella of the Russian Association of Karma Kagyu Buddhists (Российская Ассоциация Буддистов Школы Карма Кагью, <<http://www.buddhism.ru/onas/almaznyi-put-v-rossii>>), since 2011 Российская Ассоциация Буддистов Алмазного Пути Традиции Карма Кагью (Russian Association of the Diamond Way Karma Kagyu Tradition); this umbrella association is a state recognised ‘pan-Russian traditional religious organisation’ / ‘общероссийская традиционная религиозная организация’. The legal recognition of Buddhism as an indigenous religious tradition in the Russian Federation in 1998 meant that the Diamond Way was able to avoid many difficulties that other Neo-Eastern traditions have been facing in Russia in their missionary attempts.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union the Russian Orthodox Church has become a major political factor in Russia with 74% of the population identifying as members of the church in 2012 (Rees 2013). The Russian Orthodox Church is known for its notorious anti-LGBT stance and the role it played in the introduction of the 2013 anti-gay propaganda laws. In propagating Christian Orthodoxy as Russian National Identity, the Church has also become a fierce defender of the orthodox Christian ‘soul’ of Russia – counter-proselytising and attacking the spread of other Christian denominations and non-Christian religions.

Already in 2000, Gronik, an orthodox anti-cult activist from Sevastopol, attacked the Diamond Way (and more generally all forms of Tantric Buddhism) in a blog as the “Diamond network of Darkness”, i.e. “Алмазные сети тьмы.” The Russian Orthodox Church’s opposition to the Diamond Way has been continuing until today with marginal success; in one fairly recent example, the Kalingrad city council refused a public space to the Diamond Way after a Church-led campaign (Klops.Ru 2012). Still, since the Diamond Way is protected legally as a traditional Russian religion, Orthodox attacks often had to focus on Nydahl himself. Among the first Russian semi-scholarly criticisms of Nydahl ventured in 2002 were his Hippie-style, ‘free love’ (свободной любви) approach to (hetero-)sexuality’ (Balagushkin 2002, pp. 157-158). Soon enough, Russian orthodox counter-cultists followed suit. In 2004, Deacon (Диакон) Mikhail Plotnikov presented a highly polemical report on Nydahl at a conference on “Totalitarian Sects and the democratic state” in Novosibirsk (Plotnikov 2004). In his anti-cult pamphlet, subsequently published online at counter-cult website of the St. Alexander Nevsky cathedral, Novosibirsk (<www.sektoved.ru>), Plotnikov tries to demonstrate that the Diamond Way is, indeed, a totalitarian sect; according to him, Nydahl not only propagates ‘free love’ (свободной любви): “He [sc. Nydahl] has also deemed various forms of sexual perversion, including homosexuality, as appropriate for Buddhists

(Различные формы сексуальных извращений, включая гомосексуализм, он также считает приемлемыми для буддиста).” Here, Nydahl – not exactly known for LGBT-inclusion – is depicted as too gay-friendly. The background for this remarkable assertion can be found, indeed, in a moderate opinion on homosexuality by Nydahl in the Russian context, which had been published on the Russian Diamond Way website from mid 2003 until 1 July 2009 (see <http://web.archive.org/web/20081230172242/http://www.buddhism.ru/teach/ole-love_sex.php>, viewed 21 July 2014). The website featured an interview with Nydahl from 1993 on ‘Love and Sex’ (о любви и сексе) conducted in Siberia (Nydahl 1993) and was published in Polish translation seven years later (Nydahl 1999; very similar to Nydahl 2003: 107-108). In this interview, Nydahl stated:

I myself am heterosexual. We have a couple of gay men and lesbians. At first I thought they were very funny. But after a while I found that our sexual life is not the most important thing in life. It seems that this is one of many factors in our life. If someone does not know anything about a topic, it seems strange to him. There are some of my disciples, who are gay or lesbian, and they have told me how they feel, and I found that only a part of them is different from everyone else, and everything else is the same. In general, the Buddha says that homosexuality comes from the fact that in a past life someone behaved badly towards the opposite sex. And those who complain too much about either men or women in this life can become like this in the next one (tr. Scherer).⁹

This statement is generally neutral although it reproduces some unfounded prejudices not backed by any traditional Buddhist source and attributes them to the Buddha. Nydahl goes on to replicating the offensive stereotyping and rhetoric of the early-AIDS panic:

9 Я сам гетеросексуален. У нас есть пара гомосексуалистов и лесбиянок. Сначала мне казалось, что они очень забавны. Но спустя некоторое время я обнаружил, что сексуальная жизнь не является определяющим всего остального в жизни. Похоже, что это один из многих факторов в жизни. Если человек не знает чего-то - ему это кажется странным. Те мои ученики, кто является гомосексуалистом или лесбиянкой, рассказывали мне о том, как они это ощущают, и я обнаружил, что только одна часть их отличается от всех остальных, а все остальное такое же. Вообще, Будда говорит, что это происходит от того, что в прошлой жизни это существо плохо отзывалось о противоположном поле. И те, кто слишком много жалуются на мужчин или женщин в этой жизни, могут получить проблемы в следующей. The Polish version (Nydahl 1999) reads: Sam jestem więcej niż zdecydowanym heteroseksualistą, ale jest wśród nas para homoseksualistów i lesbijek. Na początku wydawało mi się, że są bardzo śmieszni, jednak po pewnym czasie zauważyłem, że życie seksualne nie jest decydującym faktorem w naszym życiu - jest tylko jednym z jego aspektów. Jeśli czegoś nie znamy, wówczas często wydaje nam się to dziwne. Owi homoseksualni uczniowie opowiadali mi o tym, w jaki sposób odbierają świat i swoich partnerów. Wówczas zauważyłem, że tylko jednym aspektem osobowości różnią się od innych ludzi, natomiast cała reszta jest taka sama. Budda mówił, że taka tendencja jest skutkiem złego wyrażania się o przeciwnej płci w poprzednim życiu. Ci więc, którzy zbyt często narzekają na mężczyzn albo na kobiety w tym życiu, mogą mieć problemy w przyszłym.

In addition, I would like to add to this issue [sc. the issue of prostitution], that today we have to be very careful about AIDS. The easy days are gone, and we need to completely avoid anyone who has had contact with Africans or black people; who had contacts with injecting drug-addicts; and with homosexuals (tr. Scherer).¹⁰

This very interview came to the attention of an orthodox cult watcher in April 2009; it was quoted as evidence for the Diamond Way's 'pro-gay', i.e., in the cult-watcher's reading, pro-'perversion' (извращение) stance. Nydahl's opinion featured in a fierce anti-Nydahl attack on the "Missionary apologetic project 'to the truth'" website (<<http://www.k-istine.ru>>) written by Maxim Stepanenko (Максим Степаненко), the then head of the Missionary Department of the Tomsk archdiocese (Stepanenko 2009).¹¹ This archiepiscopal anti-cult project had been targeting among others Hare Krishnas, Sahaja Yoga, Seven Day Adventists and Mormons. The context for the attack against Nydahl and the Diamond Way was a Buddhist cultural festival and exhibition in the Tomsk museum, which run from mid-October to mid-November 2008 and which had been co-organised by the Tomsk Diamond Way centre (established 1999; see Malakhat'ko 2011, pp. 56-57); the archdiocese had been vocally protesting against this festival, with Rostislav, Archbishop of Tomsk and Asino, warning his orthodox flock not to participate in the activities of the Diamond Way (Rostislav 2008).

This and similar attacks led to a change of the Russian Diamond Way's web-presentation; the above quoted statement by Nydahl on homosexuality was removed timely after the attack; as of now (21 July 2014), homosexuality is not mentioned on <<http://www.buddhism.ru>> anymore. Sex is mentioned only cursory, and only by reiterating Nydahl's basic condensation of sexual ethics to bringing mutual happiness (Nydahl 2009a) and his expectation that his students to have "a healthy, not frustrated view of sexuality (Nydahl 1998a)" or, in the Russian version, "здоровым, не поврежденным взглядом на сексуальность" (Nydahl 1998b); it is interesting to note that the Russian translation implies damage (повреждение) rather than frustration (разочарование), fitting better into a discourse that constructs perceived sexual deviance as a corruption rather than a mental blockage. At no point in this talk does Nydahl elaborate what a healthy view of sexuality entails.

10 Кроме того, я хочу добавить к этому вопросу, что сегодня нужно быть очень осторожными со СПИДом. Легкие дни прошли, и нужно совершенно избегать любого, кто имел контакт с африканцами, с черными людьми; кто имел контакты с наркоманами, которые занимаются уколами, и гомосексуалистов). The Polish text reads: Chciałbym też powtórzyć jeszcze raz to, co już powiedziałem wcześniej - dzisiaj trzeba bardzo uważać na AIDS. Bez troskie czasy minęły i trzeba naprawdę unikać tych partnerów, którzy mieli kontakty z Afrykanami, narkomanami biorącymi narkotyki dożylnie i homoseksualistami.

11 After Stepanenko made similarly zealous, yet apparently more controversial comments on single-motherhood, Archbishop Rostislav relieved Stepanenko from his position was relieved of his duties on 24 December 2013 (*Interfax* 2013).

Corroborating these findings, Nydahl's teachings in Russian translations available in printed form provide a rich archive for the negotiating of public discourses and the national adaption of this transnational movement in Russia. Among Nydahl's books in Russian language are two large volumes of Question-and-Answer-books, compiled from lectures in Russia between 1997-2000 (Nydahl 2008b) and 2004-2008 (Nydahl 2009b). Appealing (un-ironically?) to Russian national sentiment, the thick-paged tomes are entitled 'The Profundity of the Slavonic Mind.' Both volumes contain numerous questions on love and relationship issues, such as 'what can I do when I am in love with a married man?' (2009b, p. 216-17) to 'I am always horny? What can I do?' (p. 213).¹² Only one singular question in each volume deals with homosexuality. The books are interesting in this contexts, as they show already a slight change of tone in the attitude towards homosexuality between 1999 and 2005 (i.e. the time before the Stepanenko attack), which might reflect the increasing need to negotiate Russian public opinion.

The singular statement in Vol. 1 reproduces the question of a Russian student to Nydahl at the Phowa (conscious dying meditation) course in Novosibirsk, August 1999: "Ole, I'm gay. What is the reason of this phenomenon? What can I do using this state, for the good of other beings?" (Nydahl 2008b, p. 283; tr. Scherer).¹³ Nydahl's answer can be read as attempting a compassionate advice to a gay student:

Well, if you are looking for a partner, we have a group in Germany, where women gravitate towards women and men towards men. If you do not have a partner and you feel lonely, you could find a partner there! The reason for this [sc. homosexuality] is the aversion to the opposite sex. For example, if in this life I'm always going to complain about women, then I block my own openness to women. Then maybe in my next life I'll hold hands with another man - and the other way around. That means, if we do not like the opposite sex, then we seek out our own sex. That is the Buddha's explanation. It can also change during the course of one life. [p. 284] If you want my opinion on this matter, I do not think that it is something terribly important. I do not think that sexual orientation is a decisive factor in one's life. This is just one of many factors that make up the human personality. If people do not feel bad and do not cause anybody harm, I wouldn't give it much thought. Of course, if people suffer, they should get help, but otherwise - let them live their lives. If they are adults, if they are not chasing kids, and so on, then, in my opinion, it is none of my business. (Nydahl 2008b, pp. 283-284; tr. Scherer)¹⁴

12 In his answer Nydahl jokes, the student should open a single-ladies-club before he continues (jokingly?) with biological gender stereotyping, saying that men want sex under 30, women after 30 – hence the young man asking should look for women over 30.

13 Оле, я гомосексуалист. В чем причина этого явления? Что я могу сделать, используя это состояние, для блага других существ?

14 Что ж, если вы ищете партнера, то у нас есть группы в Германии, где женщины тяготеют к женщинам, а мужчины - к мужчинам. Если у вас здесь нет партнера и вы чувствуете себя одиноко, вы могли бы найти партнера там. Причиной этого считается неприязнь к противоположному полу. Например, если в этой жизни

This answer is clearly intended as neutral and supportive, yet it remains offensive and problematic by its pathologisation of homosexuality and the mentioning of ‘child-chasing’ which constitutes the homophobic standard conflation of paedophilia with homosexuality etc.

The answer in the second volume, posted in March 2005, at a course focussing on the life and teachings of the Tibetan Kagyu founding father Marpa Lotsawa (lo tsā ba, ‘The Translator’, 1012-1097) in Uljanovsk, is shorter yet:

I have no experience with same-sex relationships. But I have observed other people and I can give some advice. In any non-traditional relationship the emotions tend to be stronger, especially jealousy and pride. This may be the result of pressure from the outside world or due to the extreme inclinational nature of such people. When I was younger, I thought that sexual orientation is the most important factor in the formation of the character. But I don’t think so anymore. It is just one of many factors. Intimate life should be a personal matter. For Russians, by the way, this area is much more personal than in many other countries. In this regard, you have a good style. You do not pay too much attention to the rumours; this gives you the chance to focus on more important things. (Nydahl 2009b, 216; tr. Scherer)¹⁵

Although still exhibiting strained neutrality, the answer remarkably makes a reference to the allegedly ‘Russian’ sentiment of privacy to oppose gay visibility. So, in other words, it’s more or less alright to be gay in the Diamond Way, but do not talk too much about it as not to draw too much criticism: a Diamond Way variation of a Don’t Ask Don’t Tell-policy.

From the discussion above, it has become clear that Nydahl and Diamond Way are navigating the Russian public discourse and opinions on homosexuality by including dominant homophobic sentiments regarding its pathology and its cognateness to paedophilia (1999); by appealing to

я всё время буду жаловаться на женщин, то я заблокирую свою собственную открытость к женщинам. Тогда возможна, что я буду держаться за ручку с женщиной в своей следующей жизни. И наоборот. То есть если мы не любим противоположный пол, то нас отбрасывает к нашему собственному полу. Такие объяснения дает Будда. Это также может меняться в ходе жизни. [р. 284] Если вы хотите знать мое мнение по этому поводу, то я не считаю это чем-то ужасно важным. Я не думаю, что сексуальная ориентация является решающим фактором в жизни. Это лишь один из многих факторов, составляющих человеческую личность. Если люди не чувствуют себя плохо и не причиняют никому вреда, то меня это мало интересует. Конечно, если они страдают, то они должны получить помощь, а иначе - пусть живут своей жизнью. Если они взрослые люди, не гонятся за детьми, и так далее, то, по-моему, это не мое дело.

- 15 У меня нет опыта однополых взаимоотношений. но я наблюдал за другими и могу дать кое-какие советы. В любых нетрадиционных отношениях мешающие чувства обычно сильнее, особенно ревность и гордость. Это может быть следствием давления со стороны окружающего мира или экстремальных наклонностей характера таких людей. Когда я был моложе, я считал, что сексуальная ориентация является самым главным фактором формирования характера. Но теперь я так не думаю. Это всего лишь один из очень многих факторов. Интимная жизнь должна быть личным делом. У россиян, кстати, эта область остается намного более личной, чем во многих других странах. У вас в этом плане хороший стиль. Вы не слишком обращаете внимание на слухи, что дает шанс сосредоточиться на более важных вещах.

Russian cultural sentiment of personal space and tacitness (2005); and then by reacting possibly hyper-vigilantly and - to a degree – opportunistically to outside pressure, by eliminating any expressions of (still mildly homophobic and strained) ‘neutral’ statements on homosexuality from its publicly accessible Russian language web presence (2009).

6 Case Study 2: The Diamond Way on homosexuality in the UK

The negotiation of the public discourse can be contrasted with a recent organizational and public relations’ issue in the United Kingdom, which pertains to the purchase of a property in Vauxhall/Lambeth (London) for purpose of creating a new Diamond Way UK headquarter and London centre.

In the U.K., the Diamond Way is a rather marginal group in the Tibetan Buddhist landscape which is being slightly dominated by the New Kadampa (Kay 2004, pp. 35-116; Bluck 2006, 129-151); additionally, there is a significant presence of Karma Kagyu groups and centres aligned with Samyé Ling in Scotland, the first Karma Kagyu centre in Europe (Bluck 2006, pp. 110-128). These Karma Kagyu groups oppose the Diamond Way’s alignment with Thaye Dorje as the 17th Karmapa after the split in the Karma Kagyu community about the Karmapa controversy in the 1990s¹⁶. Diamond Way Buddhism U.K. (DWBUK, <<http://www.dwbuk.org/>>, linking to <<http://www.buddhism.org.uk/>>) as of July 2014 has four centres (Brighton, Exeter, Liverpool and London) and 14 groups, mainly in the south of England. The Diamond Way in the UK is represented by a charity (registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales under charity number 1093406) that had been fundraising money for a new London centre since the mid-2000s. In 2011, the Beaufoy Institute in Lambeth was identified as a suitable object; the DWBUK charity bid to purchase this grade-two listed historic building, and subsequently applied to gain the planning permission, on which the sale was conditioned. Within the metropolitan religious landscape, the location of the prospect new DWBUK headquarters in South central London meant that three (rival) Tibetan Buddhist centres would be situated in close vicinity: only one km to the east, in Kennington, is the Gelugpa-affiliated Jamyang Buddhist Centre <<http://www.jamyang.co.uk/>>), the main centre of the Dalai Lama-supporting Gelugpa groups in the UK, founded in 1980 by the late Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa and connected to their Foundation for the Preservation of Mahāyāna Tradition (FPMT), from which the New Kadampa tradition of Geshe Kelsang Gyatso split (Bluck 2006, pp. 129-133); a 500 meters further to the east, in Walworth,

16 To my knowledge, the only other Karma Kagyu group active in the UK supporting Thaye Dorje as the Karmapa is the Dechen Community of the Sakya-Kagyü ‘ngakpa’ or non-monastic tantric master, Lama Jampa Thaye (<<http://www.dechen.org/>>).

stands the manor place dependence of Kagyu Samyé Dzong, the London headquarter of the rival Karma Kagyu groups affiliated with Samyé Ling, which itself lies a further kilometre to the east in Bermondsey (<<http://www.london.samye.org>>). In the past, Samyé Ling had vocally lobbied against the rival Kagyu groups affiliated with Thaye Dorje; for instance, at the visit of Thaye Dorje in London in August 2005, senior Samyé Ling officials and scores of Samyé Ling followers put pressure on the Anglican Bishop of London, not to meet Thaye Dorje at an inter-faith event (Petre 2005). In personal communications (December 2011), some DWBUK London members stated their expectations that Samyé Ling will forcibly oppose the establishment of the new London Centre.

The process of acquiring of, and gaining planning permission for, the Beaufoy Institute was indeed accompanied by vocal protests; the focus of this opposition was concentrated on Nydahl as a person and included accusations of islamophobia; racism; and sexual relations with students¹⁷ as reported in the Lambeth Weekender (Welford 2012). While homophobia was not prominently among the accusations, the issue was nevertheless raised during the consultation period by concerned citizens in email list posts. These posts, which I have been given access to, refer to the abovementioned news article (Welford 2012) and further make an explicit reference to my article ‘Macho Buddhism’ (Scherer 2011) regarding Nydahl and homosexuality. Contextually, the posts make clear that being branded as homophobic in the UK and in particular in metropolitan London is clearly unhelpful to gaining planning permission in the light of the public and, more pertinently, the policy discourse regarding LGBT inclusion in the UK, such as the Equality Act 2010: this piece of legislation explicitly bans any discrimination based on sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services (<<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>>). Since my research was cited, the representatives of the Diamond Way London approached me for a statement as too neutralise the feared effect of my scholarly article. This was curious, since, as mentioned above, my scholarship had only four months before prompted the transnational Diamond Way to rescind my ethnographic privileges, rendering me little short of a persona non grata in the Diamond Way centres. Reflecting auto-ethnographically on this situation, I note that I felt a deep sense of irony and bafflement; and the need to weigh my conflicting feelings (the insider voice if you want) against my claim to provide balanced evaluations of a multi-layered issue in regional religious politics (the outsider voice).

17 It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse these frequent accusations against Nydahl; the islamophobia and racism criticism deserve a separate academic treatment; for initial evaluations and comments see Scherer 2009, p. 35; 2014, pp. 97 & 100; and 2013, 149; on the accusation of sexual relationships with students see Scherer 2011, pp. 89-91.

As a result of this reflexive process, on 11 April 2012, I did indeed send a statement aiming to clarify my view on homophobia within the Diamond Way and its relation to (and irrelevance for) the purchase of the Beaufoy:

It has come to my attention that parts of my research on the Diamond Way movement of the Danish Karma Kagyu teacher, Lama Ole Nydahl, are cited in a non-academic context and used to oppose the establishment of a Diamond Way centre in London. [...] Tibetan Buddhist schools and teachers (including the Dalai Lama) struggle with the traditional homophobic attitudes in Tibet. It is not surprising that Nydahl and the DW need to negotiate traditional teachings with contemporary equality and Human Rights discourses. [...]

If my article is used to oppose the establishment of a Buddhist centre then the same logic will need to lead to opposing the establishment of virtually any Tibetan Buddhist centre [...] This is, of course, absurd. [...] My article therefore needs to be read as a piece of academic criticism by a contemporary Buddhist thinker (Scherer 2012b).

Following on, a discussion between critical voices within the consultation process, the Diamond Way, and the responsible councillor ensued. On 17 April 2012, the critical blogger and Social Justice commentator Sean Creighton (<<http://historyandsocialaction.blogspot.co.uk/>>) published the result of these talks (Creighton 2012); in the statement quoted there, the DWBUK addresses the main criticisms of racism, islamophobia, and homophobia in this way:

Whoever comes to a Diamond Way Buddhist centre is welcome no matter what their personal background, ethnicity or sexuality, or views are as long as they have good social behaviour and of course respect all laws and local regulations and the right of others to adhere to other branches of Buddhism and other religions. (DWBUK, cited in Creighton 2012; emphasis in the original)

In the same post, Councillor Steve Morgan is quoted as praising the Diamond Way for its “willingness to join the Camden LGBT Advice and Safety Project.” (Creighton 2012). Clearly the homophobia issue was being put to rest.

Homophobia related protests did not appear to play any further role by the purchase opponents who included an action group called ‘Lambeth against Racism and Islamophobia’; in the final public hearing, the protests concentrated forcefully on Nydahl’s Islam criticism. The DWBUK were able to deflect these criticisms by presenting Nydahl as just one of the Senior Diamond Way teachers, who has made the undisputed critical remarks in a private, not official capacity (Lambeth Planning Applications Committee 2012, point 14.13 [p. 32]).

The Lambeth Planning Applications Committee granted planning permission on 10 July 2012 concluding

... [I]t is acknowledged that Mr Nydahl appears to hold some critical views. However on balance there is no evidence to demonstrate that these views are integral to the wider organisation or that the former Beaufoy Institute will be used for teachings which have an anti Islamic or racist agenda. (Lambeth Planning Applications Committee 2012, point 14.17 [p. 33])

The decision was critically received by a few media outlets including the South London Press (Morgan 2012) and Islamophobia Watch (Pitt 2012). Some Diamond Way members opined informally that the attack on the new centre was orchestrated by Samyé Ling, supporting the other Karmapa candidate; the conflict was interpreted as not really being about Nydahl and his controversial views but rather as an expression of exile-Tibetan religious politics.

7 Conclusion

The case studies presented demonstrate an interesting reactive negotiating of public opinions on homosexuality on the part of regional branches of the Diamond Way; the analysis proved also methodologically relevant, showcasing how outsider/insider (and outsider-ed insider) scholars can (or are forced to) manoeuvre religious politics; and it exemplifies one particular navigation of the aimed for ethnographic authenticity in face of the liminal or blurred researcher's subjectivity.

In Russia, the Diamond Way reacts to public discourse and opinions on homosexuality by adapting their web-presence and appealing opportunistically to national sentiments in order to prevent being seen as too pro-LGBT.

In the UK case, the Diamond Way movement has regionally reacted to the public opinion about homophobic discrimination by showing great effort to appear as LGBT-inclusive and friendly: its negotiating of public opinion included approaching a critical academic for a clarifying statement and issuing statements of LGBT-inclusion and the prospects of participation in LGBT outreach. However, the DWBUK only reacted (to a certain extent) opportunistically to concrete criticisms ventured during a public-legal consultation. It can be noted that the DWBUK is far from publicising itself as LGBT friendly, although, following the above-analysed PR situation around the Beaufoy, the Holborn London Diamond Way Buddhist Centre did, indeed, feature, albeit briefly, as a C.L.A.S.P. – Camden LGBT Advice and Safety Project – partner (Camden LGBT Forum 2012, p. 35). Negotiating public discourses has in this instance clearly meant a side skirmish in a larger

and much more substantial PR battle about successfully negotiating spatial and community acceptance.

It has become clear that Nydahl himself is generally acting clumsily homo-neutral betraying the mildly homophobic and hetero-patriarchal ignorance of his upbringing and of the transnational, traditional Tibetan Buddhist environment. As seen from the case studies, the regional Diamond Way organisations appear to react opportunistically to public opinions, by either avoiding being seen as pro-gay (Russia) or as anti-gay (UK).

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