

I intend to study the home and domestic religion of Newar Buddhists in the Kathmandu Valley, concentrating on the organization of space and the daily religious practices therein. Specifically, I intend to focus my research upon the relationship between two spaces, two rooms, that are integral to the archetypal traditional upper-caste Newar home. These are the *dyaḥ kvathā* or “god room,” wherein is kept the domestic shrine, and the meditation room. I argue that to study these two spaces will provide a significant and unexplored perspective on the relationship between the esoteric and devotional Vajrāyana Buddhism, followed for centuries by Newar Buddhists, and the Theravāda Buddhist movement that has been rapidly gaining ground from the latter half of the twentieth century. The analysis and comparison of these two domestic spaces has the potential to engage compelling dialectical oppositions, such as between the ritualized devotionalism of Vajrāyana Buddhism and the more aniconic and internalized piety of Theravāda, between tradition and modernity, between the public and private spheres, and between caste and class. I intend to explore my hypothesis that the appearance and new status of the meditation room in the Buddhist Newar home not only reflects but also fosters Theravāda values in a manner different than the public institutions. I would then question whether decisions surrounding the inclusion and use of the meditation room are made entirely for self-conscious “religious” reasons, or rather if they are made in order to conform with the new ideal of modernity, an ideal linked more to class than to caste. Supporting this hypothesis is my supposition that the difference between these two spaces may not be as stark as expected or prescribed; that the “domestication” of Theravāda (in both senses of the term) has been coloured by the devotionalism present in the *dyaḥ kvathā*; and vice versa, that this domestication has influenced traditional Vajrāyana practices and spaces. By comparing these two domestic spaces with their public counterparts (the older *bāhāḥ/bahī* (“monasteries”) and the newer meditation centers and Theravāda monasteries), I intend to also consider the conceptual division between the public and private spheres, and the unique influence of domestic spaces and practices on the formation of the individual.

Scholarly attention on Newar Buddhism has hitherto tended to focus on the great monuments, grand festivals, public rituals, and the organization of society. The comprehensive and influential sociological studies already published on the old Newar cities of the Kathmandu Valley, such as David Gellner’s *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest* (1992) on Lalitpur, and Robert Levy’s *Mesocosm* (1990) on Bhaktapur, touch cursorily upon the domestic lives of Newars. Likewise, the foundational studies of traditional Newar architecture, such as *Newar Towns and Buildings* (1987) by Gutschow et al., discuss vernacular architecture and organization of domestic space only in passing, as a small part of a larger survey of more grandiose buildings and urban planning. What is absent from these works is a sustained discussion on the role of domestic space and ritual for contemporary Newar Buddhists. With this in mind, I propose that a study of the domestic, private, and everyday lives of Newar Buddhists has the potential to offer fresh insights. In the words of Gérard Toffin, one of the most active scholars on Nepal, “the domestic habitat is the point of anchorage of the family group and lies at the centre of the various networks which constitute the very fabric of social life. It exercises a widespread influence on society as a whole and includes within its purview political, religious and economic phenomena, difficult for the ethnologist to ignore.” (*Man and His House in the Himalaya*, 1991, p.7). By ignoring the more prosaic quotidian aspects of religiosity, we ignore the larger part of the religious lives of Newar Buddhists and the environment out of which the individual member of this community arises.

I plan to undertake my field research not only in the traditional Newar Buddhist centres of Lalitpur and Kathmandu, but also in the recently built residential subdivisions into which many upper class (not to say caste)

Newar families are relocating. In terms of methodology, I intend to speak with the architectural firms in charge of these new neighborhoods and examine drawings of house plans to discover the choices Newars are making in designing their homes (a process I began in 2015). I will also conduct and record interviews with upper caste and upper class Newars, to hear how they regard the two aforementioned rooms and secondly how they use these rooms. Thirdly, I will be visiting in person as many homes and meditation rooms as possible, in order to analyze to what degree devotional vajarayanic practices have or have not carried over into these spaces. This data will then be analyzed, for families/houses, according to caste and class, and for individuals, according to gender, age, and profession/education.

My current interest in Newar Buddhist domesticity arises out of an independent research project that I carried out in Kathmandu in July-August 2015, under the supervision of Associate Professor Christoph Emmrich. I was fortunate to present the fruit of this research at a workshop on Newar Buddhism at the Department in September 2016. This occasion was the inaugural event in the series *The Newars and Their Neighbours*, held in honour of participants and Nepal scholars David N. Gellner (Oxford University) and Chiara Letizia (Université du Québec à Montréal). The project that I am proposing for the M.A. program is an extension and expansion of this earlier work.

The primary factor that has hitherto limited research along these lines is the redoubtable privacy and caste exclusivity of the Newar home. Although this exclusivity is perhaps not as strong as it once was, there remains a considerable challenge posed to the researcher who aims to make the home the environment of their study. During my first sojourn I of course met with this difficulty, and I came to appreciate the necessity of social contacts and language acquisition. Before my trip in 2015, I spent several months working with Professor Emmrich learning conversational Newar, the local vernacular of this group. To this, I added several weeks of intensive one-on-one study with a local language teacher in Kathmandu to acquire Nepali, the predominant language of public life. More recently, I have been participating in an ongoing weekly reading group of Old Literary Newar with Professor Emmrich and two doctoral students.

The study of Buddhism in Nepal, and amongst the Newars in particular, is a rather small alcove within the larger hall of Buddhist and South Asian studies. Within this small community of scholars, Professor Emmrich is a well published, highly respected, and very active member; and it is to continue my educational collaboration with him that I consider the Department for the Study of Religion to be the most suitable place for this intended area of study. Additional interlocutors at the Department include Amanda Goodman on Tantric Buddhism, Frances Garrett on Tibetan Buddhism, and J. Barton Scott on modernity and religion in South Asia. Furthermore, the "Religion and the Public Sphere" initiative directed by Pamela Klassen would be a useful forum for me to consider the interface between the public and private spheres and the conceptualization(s) and critiques of this dualism.

Having in mind both the need to improve my proficiency in the aforementioned languages and to expand my network of local contacts, I have made the commitment to travel to Nepal this January for an open-ended period of time. It is my hope and firm belief that this decision will make me as prepared as possible to take on the study of Buddhist Newar domesticity as the subject of my Major Research Paper for the M.A. Program at the Department for the Study of Religion.