Research Article

THE FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND ETHICAL SELF THROUGH CELIBACY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDONESIAN BUDDHIST AND CATHOLIC NUNS

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Received 4 May 2025; Revised 28 June 2025; Accepted 29 June 2025

Abstract

Background and Objectives: The opportunity for women to actualize themselves in non-domestic and masculine spheres, like religion, has become more accessible nowadays. Women are fully permitted to commit themselves to God's path by living a celibacy life even though they need to deal with several challenges. As highlighted in this research, Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns had to face a difficult life path before they were firmly engaged in their new identity in monastic life. Their holy aspirations to achieve the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey as nuns conflicted with the socio-cultural values deeply embedded in Indonesian society, which define the ideal female figure. Briefly, this study investigated how Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns confronted their changing identities and negotiated multiple tensions to maintain their commitment and self-agency by devoting their lives to religious orders.

Methodology: This research employed a qualitative method as a suitable approach to gather more comprehensive data on the personal journeys of Buddhist and Catholic nuns. It involved in-depth interviews with several Buddhist nuns from Tantrayana-Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Malang Regency, East Java, and Catholic nuns from the Order of St. Francis in a church in Semarang City, Central Java. By comparing the two traditions of women's celibacy across different religions through a phenomenological approach, this study explored the gradual transformation of women who aspired to become Buddhist and Catholic nuns, starting from the mortification phase, through desocialization to the resocialization phase, based on Erving Goffman's concept of total institution.

Main results: As a voluntary total institution, the monastery implied a subtle distinction from the involuntary total institution-the mortification phase is not portrayed as a loss of selfhood but rather as a manifestation of devotion for the nuns. Moreover, fellow ascetics are not seen as new authority figures but rather as guides who support them amid the upheaval of shifting identities. Other research findings showed that both Buddhist and Catholic nuns also experienced difficulties from internal forces. They encountered in-between situations during the mortification phase since they had to drop their old identities that had been embedded for years. With help from religious

viewpoints, they managed to get through this phase by reinterpreting their previous social roles and integrating them into their new identities.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This research explored the application of Buddhism in contemporary contexts, integrating modern scholarship with traditional Buddhist knowledge to cultivate wisdom and morality within the Buddhist framework. There are many Dhamma lessons to be learned from the struggles that women faced in fully engaging spiritually through joining the sangha (Buddhist Religious Community) as nuns. Under pressure from the socio-cultural environment, they had to redefine their social and spiritual roles wisely by practicing anatta (Selflessness). This is indirectly related to the concept of tanha (Attachment), which is represented as the cause of dukkha (Suffering) and must be renounced by Buddhist ascetics to ease their spiritual path toward achieving bodhi (Enlightenment) and vimoksha (Liberation from the Cycle of Birth and Death) easier. Furthermore, karuna (Compassion) served a vital function in connecting existing identities with new ones rather than eliminating the former.

Conclusions: The presence of other monastic members is crucial for Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns. They work as a support system in maintaining religious agency through celibacy and navigating the dynamics of identity change. The social roles attached to old identities could be reconciled by combining them with spiritual roles through reinterpretation in the framework of religious teachings (Idea of Karuna and Serving God), forming a unified personality of Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns.

Keywords: Tantrayana-Tibetan Buddhism, Catholic, Women's Agency, Total Institution, Identity

Introduction

Women and religious institutions were often portrayed in a misogynistic relationship, where women were usually perceived as a threat, as well as the lack of opportunities for the involvement of women in religious agendas. These attitudes were inseparable from the patriarchal culture that influenced the form and configuration of some religions, so spiritual discourse is only discussed in masculine spaces (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). For instance, the role of God as the creator was mostly represented in the male body, while women preferred to be assigned maternal status. This male dominance then puts women in an inferior status whose bodies were consistently disciplined (Foucault, 1991), so they stay in line with their predestined roles, not only in the societal but also in religious realms. The expanded arena of sexism was almost inevitable since the relationship between religion and culture was reciprocal in the circle of mutual influence (Sinclair, 1986).

Nevertheless, the existence of gender inequality in religion has not stopped women from self-actualizing their beliefs. Furthermore, women could also express their agency by externalizing religious teachings through their obedience and acts of devotion rather than being perceived as a form of submissiveness and false consciousness. This was demonstrated by Saba Mahmood (2005) ethnography of Egyptian Muslim women, which showed that the women's piety movement in

Cairo during the 1980s was a manifestation of pious self-cultivation triggered by the consistency of deliberate embodiment practices.

Rinaldo (2013) also shared a similar standpoint through her research on Indonesian Muslim women and her concept of pious critical agency, which referred to "the capacity to engage critically and openly with interpretations of religious texts," and pious activating, which is "the capacity to use interpretations of religious texts to mobilize in the public sphere." These ideas should be interpreted as a critique of secular-liberal groups who assumed that agency was always about the battle over freedom; on the other hand, it could also be about religious acts or the 'doing' of religion (Avishai, 2008).

In contrast to the past, global modernization altered the face of religious conservatism, with women's involvement in religion becoming more visible today (Spielhaus, 2020). This phenomenon demonstrated that more women are showing their total pious agency. Since Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, the opportunity for Indonesian women to completely renounce worldly pleasures for religious and spiritual growth was likely limited and only possible through the existence of monastic systems in Buddhism and Catholicism. However, by living celibacy life separately in monasteries, the femaleness of Indonesian ascetic women was frequently questioned by most people who were still heavily influenced by socio-cultural expectations about gender roles.

The idea that women were commonly associated with natural attributes in the domestic area, such as giving birth, nurturing, and caring (Ortner, 1972), was also embraced by many Indonesians with similar perspectives about traditional women's roles that were identical to dapur/kitchen (Cooking), sumur/water well (Washing), and kasur/bed (Serving the Husband). This view was thus reinforced by government regulations on ideal Indonesian women's behavioral norms through the doctrine of ibuisme negara/state motherhood (Suryakusuma, 2021) and the nuclear family model during the New Order era (Koning, 2004) until the establishment of the law on motherhood obligations (UU KIA) in President Joko Widodo regime.

With all the pressures, the potential emergence of doubts or burdensome feelings on the chosen life path was unavoidable in the journey of ascetic Indonesian women. As a person who was committed to being free from material things and worldliness, the roles and practices related to sex, procreation, and marriage are strongly prohibited, which could be seen as a form of rejecting motherhood by being selfish (Park, 2002) or even unwomen (Gotlib, 2016). However, these difficulties did not always deter women from wanting to be nuns, even though they may have had conflicts with their closest family members.

Conversely, not all women who were motivated to be celibate experience the same difficulties. In more religiously oriented families, full blessings were given effortlessly, and the choice to live a celibate life was even honored (Gil, 2008). Besides indicating one's totality in the spiritual aspect, it was also considered a sign that God actively came and chose them among millions of believers. Specifically in Buddhism, it was perceived as good karma accumulated in past lives. Nevertheless, there would be a tendency to blame themselves for being 'different' among Indonesian women in general as long as the image of the ideal femaleness had not

changed. Furthermore, it would take a greater commitment for women to be fully devoted to the spiritual path as the challenges emerge from multiple sides.

The tension between self-autonomy and the urge to fulfill societal expectations presents dilemmas for Indonesian ascetic women, often imprisoning them in the liminality of the social transition, which was the most critical and transformative stage in a rite of passage (Turner, 1969). However, the decision to live a monastic life required them to adjust their habits, behavior, and values through religious teachings while staying in the monastery, which was a type of institution that met Erving Goffman's (1961) criteria for a total institution. In his book titled "Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates," he developed the concept of the total institution for places where large numbers of people in similar situations, isolated from the broader society for lengthy periods, coexist in a closed and tightly controlled environment. He also emphasized that total institutions like asylum, prisons, and military compounds have always attempted to erase prior identities and replace them with a new identity based on the institutional role, which looked similar to the ascetic women experienced in the monastery.

By using Erving Goffman's approach of the total institution, this article specifically examined the flux of intersubjectivities of Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns, mainly concerning: 1) How Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns experienced their transitional flow of identity transformation after joining a monastery gradually starting from mortification, desocialization, and resocialization, as stated by Goffman; 2) Identification of the personal hardship faced by Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns, where their spiritual agency tend to clash with the socio-cultural and state values, and 3) Exploration of diverse viewpoints in a total institution phenomenon like a monastery, which they voluntarily entered to gain enlightenment and closer to God, totally different with Goffman's case study in asylum.

In the spirit of novelty, while previous research has mostly supported Goffman's notion that the force of changing identity is associated with the loss of personality and individual degradation, the research findings in this article may offer a more positive tone and a distinctive feature of the total institution concept. To put it briefly, this article explored Goffman's conceptual possibilities for comprehensively analyzing how these women navigate life experiences, culture, traditions, and other knowledge gained from their initial socialization agents (e.g., family) into the virtuous calling journey of devotion to God.

Objectives

This study investigated how Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns confronted their changing identities and negotiated multiple tensions to maintain their commitment and self-agency by devoting their lives to religious orders.

Methodology

This research on the lives of Buddhist and Catholic nuns was conducted using qualitative methods and a phenomenological approach, which supports the exploration of individual experiences through multidimensionality, including emotional responses, personal thoughts,

the dynamics of interconnected-experiences, and bodily sensations (Groenewald, 2004) Specifically, this research examined deeper into women's involvement in religious practices, regarding how women's perspectives and adaptations in transitioning to a celibate life based on their respective religious traditions. To address the question above, the investigation in this research primarily focused on comparing two specific types of celibate women, Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns, who were chosen using a purposive sampling method with the detailed criteria as below: Representation of aspirant nun and fully ordained nun, have minimum one year joining in the monastic and give consent to the sharing of their data. These criteria were established to collect reliable data that accurately depicts all phases of the total institution. From the filtering process, there were five interlocutors met the criteria and agreed to be involved.

This research could be categorized as a multi-sited ethnography as the study was conducted in more than one different space (Falzon, 2009). The first approach involved observing the lives of a group of Buddhist nuns who joined one of the Tantrayana-Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Malang Regency, East Java, in 2020. Observing and interviewing continued with periodic annual visitations until 2023. Furthermore, the second approach, from the Catholic nuns' perspective, was conducted between April and November 2024. Participatory observation and in-depth interviews were conducted with nuns of the Order of St. Francis in a church in Semarang City, Central Java. The instrument for observation and interview was arranged and categorized into the phases of entering a total institution, as described by Erving Goffman (1961): Mortification, desocialization, and resocialization. The locations of the monasteries and churches, as well as the authentic identities of the interlocutors in this research, were anonymized at their request and to protect the privacy of their backgrounds.

Results and Discussion

In his book, as stated below, Goffman (1961) outlined his thoughts on the structure of total institutions, as well as the processes and implications experienced by individuals when entering a separate environment from the broader community for a certain period and together. The term 'total' used by Goffman has specific meanings. Firstly, it refers to all aspects of life being performed at the same place and setting. In addition, the term 'total' also refers to the way each member's daily life was carried out in a group setting, where everyone was treated similarly and required to participate in the same activities together. Moreover, all activities within the institution were strictly scheduled and regulated by a centralized authority, and the entire series of activities must be conducted to fulfill the institution's purpose. Overall, the total institution aims to radically transform all its members through customized arrangements within the environment.

When one enters a total institution, Goffman (1961) described the experience as the beginning of "a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations and profanations of the self." They must live by a different logic from the secular and undergo an extreme phase of resocialization through self-isolation in the monastery, or what Goffman called the "mortification of the self" phase (1961). Freedom, individual rights, privacy, and personal ownership were stripped

away institutionally, like an inmate, as part of the essential aspects of the mortification process. Such a situation could systemically lead to the destruction of the self, beginning with the initial shock period and denial of embracing a new identity due to being liminal.

During the mortification period, individuals often lose self-autonomy and a sense of being overwhelmed as they have to abandon what they had long been accustomed to. This phase could be easily passed with encouragement for individuals to desocialize and unlearn old systems of norms, values, behaviors, and habits, marked by their success in reassembling themselves to integrate with the inmate culture. Individuals were now exposed to new standards and required to apply and commit to regular training, also known as the resocialization phase. All processes passed through by Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns that had been examined will be explained in detail based on the framework outlined below.

1. The Monastic Rule as A Systematic Removal of Previous Identity

The desire to enter the path of asceticism began with the separation of living from family life to a total institution with a new group of people. The splitting not only happened physically but also in the mental sphere. They must be prepared themselves to be alienated from the outside world and the secular worldview, losing their previous values. To create the docile body, surveillance and the use of power in the form of regulations were necessary to uniformly bind each member in the same manner as the ascetics (Foucault, 1991). For example, there were 10 sila (Moral Conduct) that all aspiring Buddhist nuns in the Tantrayana-Tibetan tradition must implement in their daily lives, including: 1) Trying to practice to avoid killing; 2) Trying to practice to avoid stealing; 3) Not having sexual intercourse; 4) Trying to practice to avoid lying; 5) Trying to practice to avoid consuming substances that can weaken consciousness; 6) Not eating afternoon; 7) Avoiding dancing, singing, and seeking entertainment; 8) Avoiding luxurious beds/seats; 9) Practicing avoiding the use of flowers, perfumes, cosmetics to beautify oneself, and 10) Practicing avoiding receiving gold/silver (Including Money) for personal use.

The form of the *sila* mentioned above was a derivative of specific instructions on the stages of preparation for ordination as Buddhist monks and nuns, as outlined in Buddhist teachings by the Dalai Lama, which divided into three stages (Ven. Thubten Chodron, 2019). The first stage was to reduce attachment to life. The second stage eliminated desire and attachment to samsara (The Cycle of Life). Moreover, the third stage involved eliminating self-cherishing. These were the primary spiritual goals to be achieved by Tantrayana-Tibetan Buddhists, who not only focused on personal enlightenment but also strived to help and be useful to other beings in achieving perfect enlightenment together.

The act of reduced exposure to worldly things was not only associated with material possessions but also with behaviors that could lead to attachment to oneself and certain emotions. For instance, a shaved head in Buddhist monk and nun groups represented the rejection of one's ego and a sense of purity (Khumairoh, 2022). Especially among women, hair is a public symbol, often likened to a crown and a symbol of beauty and femininity. Thus, taking care of the hair might be considered a violation of the *sila* and a self-attachment act through styling one's appearance.

Similarly, Buddhist monks and nuns tend to wear simple robes with minimal ornamentation as a symbol of frugality.

Other rules were similar and created a practice that, for the most part, remains the same in the Catholic nun community. There were three rules, known as kaul (Vows), in the Catholic nun community. The first was the vow of chastity, which required nuns not to marry during their lifetime. Second, the vow of obedience means that nuns must be submitted to the authority given by the Church and the monastery. Third, the vow of poverty required nuns to live and not be tied to worldly things. The three vows symbolized that the nun had dedicated her entire life to serving God and others. The Congregation of the Order of St. Francis specifically sets five phases that aim to make prospective nuns get to know themselves and their vocation. It began with the aspirant period, followed by postulates, novitiate, and junior years, during which various learning activities guide the nuns to the final stage of taking perpetual vows.

Aspirants began to experience the transition from a profane to a sacred life during the aspirancy period. The decision to join a congregation and a monastery means that the aspirant had committed to leaving behind their past life in society and family. Turner (1969) referred to this as a separation phase, marked by the individual's detachment from their previous social status and identity. The appearance and adornment that used to identify themselves must also be dropped. Goffman (1961) stated that when entering a total institution, individuals are likely to lose the personal belongings, habits, and attitudes they have been accustomed to, resulting in personal disorientation. The first step in getting to know the life of a nun was to live in a monastery together. The yellow habit (Nun Dress) and slayer as a hair cover began to be worn as a new symbol of identification for aspiring Catholic nuns. Rules and regulations within the monastery were also set to provide boundaries with life outside the monastery.

2. The Process of Destroying the Old Self

In an interview with Yuni (32 years old), a woman from Medan, she began her journey to become an aspiring Buddhist nun while still studying in Bandung. As a commitment to entering the ascetic life, the new monastics were expected to be obedient to the Vinaya, the disciplinary rules and ethical guidelines for monks and nuns, thereby creating a harmonious and conducive environment for spiritual practice. Yuni was quite surprised by the Vinaya rules, which required her to shave off her head by the sangha (Monastic Community) chief, and this act symbolized the beginning of the phase of mortification. A sense of fear came over her, especially regarding the opinions of their friends and teachers on campus about her appearance. With the maroon robes, she came to campus every day using angkot (Public Transportation) and slowly grew accustomed to it, no longer caring about the judgment of others. "I have no right and no ability to control other people's thoughts... what is in my control is my mind. So, that is all I can do to maintain my commitment as being a Tantrayana-Tibetan Buddhist nun," Yuni said when asked about her strategy to respond to the reactions of the surrounding people.

With her friends supporting her chosen life and teachers appreciating Yuni's commitment to the ascetic path, she felt at ease and readily reintegrated with society. Her peers also understand

that they can no longer invite her to karaoke, one of the stress-relieving habits they used to do together, so they eat together instead. Despite having a good friendship life, she still did not have her parents' blessing. Being born into a Chinese-Indonesian family, the presence of children is considered important, especially the first male child, who is often seen as the heir to the family and clan.

On the other hand, there was also a stigma attached to monks; They were perceived as living a life of begging instead of being able to support themselves. The Vinaya rules also prohibited Buddhist monks and nuns from owning private property, which was usually earned through work. Exchanging labor for money was considered a sign of attachment to the world rather than a symbol of self-reliance and achievement. Thus, Buddhist ascetics would depend on the support of the devotees and their families. This made it difficult for Yuni's parents to accept their daughter's choice, so when she returned home, Yuni often wore a wig and temporarily removed her robe with the approval of the sangha chief.

In Goffman's case study on asylum inmates, he observed how a person enters an environment characterized by control and regulation, which could give rise to an individual's sense of self but increasingly erode it. Goffman considered the imposition of institutional authority and the repression of individual expression through standardization and uniformity as dehumanizing because they lead to a loss of autonomy in each resident. However, such arrangements were necessary so that inmates could be labeled and categorized as 'normal' or as someone who met the institution's ideals, according to its own indicators and standards of objectivity. In this case study, regulations such as Vinaya (Disciplinary Rules and Ethical Guidelines for Buddhist Ascetics), sila (Moral Conduct), and kaul (Vows by Catholic Religious Members) became the standard for assessing whether they had fulfilled the expectations of the monastic community.

The portrayal of the mortification of the self-phase, as described previously, tends to negate individual agency and generalize the stressful situation that everyone experiences due to feelings of helplessness when entering a total institution. On the other hand, a monastery was specifically categorized as a voluntary total institution. In this institution, individuals voluntarily joined a group that controlled nearly all aspects of their lives, but they retained the freedom to leave at any time (Sundberg, 2015). In short, the nature of membership in a monastery was a choice, not a forced one, as in an asylum. Thus, the disciplining of the body and the reconstruction of subjectivity were consciously considered personal efforts to improve oneself as a holy person and servant of God, unlike what Foucault (1991) said, as a form of top-down power based on violence. As Yuni stated in the interview session, the obligations to shave her hair, wear a robe, refuse to work, and give up her biological functions were not seen as a loss of bodily authority, even though there was an initial cultural shock. On the contrary, she felt proud of her ability to reject worldly things by behaving appropriately as an ideal Buddhist nun-to-be.

3. Separation from the Outside World and Longing for Autonomy

Obedience must already be demonstrated during the period as aspirants, such as not owning personal valuable materials, including communication devices that connected them with

their families and communities outside the monastery. Various schedules had also been systematically established to organize their entire lives within the monastery, including the duties and responsibilities they would undertake as part of the congregation. Thus, aspirants must be prepared to relinquish their previous rights and freedoms, such as ownership of personal belongings and the freedom to make life choices. Although they entered the monastery with no idea of what specific duties they would have in the future, in the end, their inner motivation led them to continue their calling as nuns

Nevertheless, the physical confinement in the monastery became the essential mortification phase that appeared concretely as the spatial separation between ascetic women and other believers, including families. This was required to maintain the sanctity of monastic life from being contaminated with the profane world (Weber, 1994). Such distancing simultaneously activates the social control system, as anticipation of resisting anything that could disrupt and threaten life in the monastery, including the commitment of prospective ascetics to the monastic life (Douglas, 1970). In other words, ascetic women performed not only social distancing but also affective distancing, which was arranged through the existing physical and symbolic aspects of regulation.

An interview with Sister Maria (22 years old), a junior sister, revealed that the stage of adaptation to the monastery environment was contentious for her. Although she had received support from her family since joining the monastery, she still remembered the atmosphere in her house and the sense of warmth and togetherness they shared. "I always remember watching television with my siblings in the living room and family dinners together. Those routines were taken away from my daily life, and it felt so strange," Sister Maria said when talking about day-to-day activities with her family in Surakarta. Committing oneself to becoming a nun was not only about separating oneself from one's origin environment but also about letting go of collective habits. The life of a nun requires to limited access to worldly things, such as consuming entertainment and not being attached to family.

Adjusting to a new environment did not always go smoothly, as Sister Viana (56 years old) said. She often felt incompatible with the personalities of her fellow Catholic nuns when they lived communally. "I once wanted to leave because of the difficulties of living together. There was also the problem of envy and other such issues, but God still held me," said Sister Viana. Adaptation to the new environment was a big challenge for Sister Viana. This experience even made her want to leave the monastery life. Moreover, the congregation's rules increasingly limited her life choices. When reflecting on her life's calling, Sister Viana realized that the rules established to shape her to fit the vow of obedience she had pledged. Ultimately, the regulations led Sister Viana to return to her devotion to God.

As mentioned earlier, one's motivation for entering a total institution affects how inmates perceive the established authority. As a voluntary total institution, the authority established within the monastery ultimately fosters loyalty among the nuns. Obedience was not only about following existing rules to be perceived as appropriate to the standards set but also involved

thoughts and feelings. According to Sundberg (2024), "monastic obedience not only refers to external behavior but also to an inner state."

4. Liminal Condition in the Transformation of Social Roles

The religious life that ascetic women led forced them to be separated from the world of the laity and trapped in a phase of liminality (Turner, 1969). As stated by Antony and Robinson (2023) regarding the lives of celibates, "their life on but away from earth is a mirror, albeit inadequate and poor, of the divine life they seek to realize in full-on death." This indirectly affects the social roles that were previously performed and must be rearranged and renegotiated, especially within the main family environment. Specifically, in Buddhism, the practice of anatta (Non-self) and the renunciate ideal required the practitioner to transcend personal and social identities, including familial roles (Collins, 1982). This is linked to the concept of tanha (Attachment), described as the cause of dukkha (Suffering), including attachment to the family, which could lead to obstacles to enlightenment.

As mentioned earlier, not all families could fully accept their child's celibacy decision, even though this choice was also believed to be commendable. Yuni's case proved that their social role had difficulty disappearing in reality, even though they had changed their status. Particularly in the Indonesian cultural context, there was no specific vocabulary referring to 'former children' or 'former parents.' This indirectly indicated that kinship relations between parents and children in Indonesia tend to be intimate and long-lasting (Geertz, 1961). The implication of such a relationship pattern was the expectation, especially for parents, that strong relationships between parents and children could ensure their well-being in old age, for example, by providing care and meeting living expenses (Frankenberg et al., 1999).

The 58-year-old Buddhist nun, Betty, recounted the story of her first joining the sangha. She had to leave the career she had built for decades and, consequently, stopped supporting her parents. Before wearing robes, she was a career woman and took an important position in the company. Entering her late 40s, she was prompted to reassess her life's achievements. "I already have the money, so what else should I look for? If I want to get married, I think I am too old," said Betty. Living in abundance did not make her feel fulfilled, so she began to consider an alternative life that was more meaningful, such as taking on the role of a nun. However, she felt that giving up her belongings was easier than losing the relationship with her mother, whom she had lived with for so many years. Then, the extended family intervened to provide full support and convince Betty of her choice by guaranteeing her mother's needs while she lived separately in the monastery. Betty still felt emotionally attached to her ascribed status as a child. However, she now had to sit in a separate row from her mother, who was classified as a layperson during religious ceremonies, because she had achieved status (Linton, 1936) as a Buddhist nun through her efforts and routine ascetic activities at the monastery.

Betty's objection that she could no longer be devoted to her parents in its full capacity proves another reality of Ortner (1989) findings, which concluded that Buddhist monastic life was a form of liberation from existing hegemonic social constraints. Furthermore, in societies that were

still committed to customs and cultural values, becoming an ascetic could be seen as an act to escape from social responsibility. Instead of feeling liberated from the expectations imposed on them, Yuni and Betty experienced double constraints that came from both internal and external sides. The conflicts arose from their inner selves; They were trapped in the image of the ideal figure of women or children that they failed to present to the public.

This persistent and lingering feeling was experienced by the majority of the Buddhist nuns we interviewed. At first, Yuni realized that her parents would surely be disappointed because she could not provide them with grandchildren due to her decision to be celibate. So, she tried to excommunicate herself from her family, physically and mentally, in order to maintain the aspirations and spiritual goals as a nun that had been set in the crucial stage as an aspirant. "In the Vessantara Jataka, the Bodhisattva gives away his children and wife for spiritual matters, symbolizing a non-attachment act to family. This story eased my feeling of guilt about not being the daughter that my parents hoped for," said Yuni.

Nevertheless, the presence of a Guru or spiritual teacher, characteristic of the Tibetan-Tantrayana Buddhism tradition (Khu & Khumairoh, 2023), guided Yuni and Betty during their struggles with their relationship with their parents after choosing a path of celibacy. The Guru encouraged them to maintain a dual identity, still establishing filial ties to cultivate boundless karuna (Compassion) for all beings, including their parents. "I just know from our Guru there is an instruction to see all beings as our mother. It helped me to encourage a mindset of non-attachment to my family," said Betty, that now she could share the great compassion in the mother-child relationship with many.

The ambiguity felt by celibate women also arose when they fulfilled their roles within the monastery. The Catholic nuns were required to participate in domestic tasks, such as tending the garden, cleaning the chapel, and performing other household chores. However, at one point, they must be focused on their spiritual lives and let go of worldly matters. So, at the same time, they must juggle between two roles and also get busy with domestic work, as otherworldly women do. The transition to celibacy, which was seen as a release from the natural role of women, does not completely release nuns from domestic activities that are still assigned.

Being in two different priorities created difficulty within the nun, as experienced by Sister Viana. She was responsible for preparing food for the entire monastery while also attending mass every morning, working at the school, and praying together in the evening. "Perhaps at the beginning, I see these chores as burdens. Nevertheless, then I realized that all actions of the nuns are part of a life of vowed service to God and community," Sister Viana tried to hold on to St. Thérèse of Lisieux's view that emphasized even the smallest task could have spiritual merit when done with the right intention. Although Catholic nuns continued to perform domestic activities, there was a fundamental difference in the motivation behind this work. In the lives of laypeople, spiritual activities and mundane activities are considered two different aspects (Huls & Carm, 2021). In monasteries, achieving a spiritual level is not only accomplished through liturgical activities but also through engaging in worldly activities as a form of devotion.

5. Member Support on the Journey of Embracing a New Identity

Indoctrination must be presented in every institution to align one's attitude and character with what was formulated by the institution. Radical transformation could arise due to unlearned old values and norms as a logical consequence of changes in individual status and the success of adapting to new behavior sets. Each person's journey to be in stable new personhood after going through the phases of mortification and desocialization would undoubtedly be different from one another. Goffman stated that, in the isolation process, not only did the conversion process occur, but other potential responses, such as withdrawal, rebellion, adjustment, and unemotional behavior, were also not expected by the institution (Kemper, 2011). In this phase, individuals demonstrated their navigational power in their social world, particularly in the context of social institutions or moral careers (Goffman, 1959).

Since female ascetics entered the institution willingly, they already had an idea of what kind of behavior the monastery or church desired. Regulations limit their behavior, but in reality, some things may be unexpected and unanticipated, such as the case of the aspiring Buddhist nun Karina (32 years old), who has yet to receive the green light for her ordination. Her youth was spent half on the streets, where she demonstrated as a student activist, which contrasted sharply with the quiet and peaceful life she now leads in the monastery. With an assertive, cold, calculating temperament and a dominating masculine side of her, these innate characteristics were an obstacle to her being able to nurture herself to be more compassionate. In Tantrayana-Tibetan Buddhism, compassion was the primary asset that devotees must cultivate to liberate other beings from suffering and pave the way to enlightenment (Lama Zopa Rinpoche, 2010).

Karina was often compared to other aspiring Buddhist nuns who are considered capable of going through the resocialization phase smoothly. As a result, she often received warnings from her mentors, the already-ordained Buddhist nuns. Their presence helped the aspirants be more prepared for celibacy and guided them in entering monastic life. Sometimes, she felt uncomfortable with the sarcastic treatment of her mentors. "I was called too stubborn and difficult to manage, maybe because my feng shui (Chinese Geomancy) is the earth element. My mentor said I should often be playing in the water to be 'softer'..." Karina said with a laugh, describing the satire she received from one of her mentors. However, she began to feel that what her mentor told her was right and continued to train herself to cope with her aspirations as a Buddhist nun.

What Karina experienced to finally reach the resocialization phase, which involved reorienting herself to get back on track, was triggered by personal actions in the form of ego mortification (Chomczynski, 2017). The unpleasant experience of being perceived as having failed to stand up for her moral career then mediated the fear of potential stigma from members of the institution, thus successfully encouraging her to urgently find the proper image of herself that should appear to the public (Higgins & Butler, 1982). The presence of fellow female ascetics who acted as mentors proves that the concept of atomistic unity is also applied in the total institution of the monastery, where they, as members of the total institution, were bound in a social network through a hierarchical arrangement (Sundberg, 2015). The mentor also acted as an agent of

performative regulation, which is the emergence of a new form of power that operates when people "submit to the authority of an institution and internalize its values, but also monitor each other's conduct, sanction deviance and evaluate their progress in relative terms through mutual surveillance" (Scott, 2010). This reality made panopticon-style surveillance more duplicative, thereby minimizing the possibility of individuals violating the moral values associated with their new roles (Foucault, 1991).

The power that continued to degenerate in the monastery's hierarchical structure ultimately kept the set ideal form in place. In a Catholic monastic community, the provincial superior sister, as the highest authority, had the power to regulate and maintain the stability of all aspects of the congregation. However, the decisions made by the provincial superior are often not in line with the nuns' initial expectations of their role, as Sister Maria experienced. One of her motivations for joining the Order of St. Francis congregation was to pursue a career in the healthcare field as a nurse. However, in reality, she had to let go of her prior expectations because of the decision of the provincial superior who directed her to continue her studies as a Catholic religion teacher. "The authority for this study came from the leader... it is just like it is expected that a sister can do everything," said Sister Maria when asked about her choice of study. Although Sister Maria's role was not what she had hoped for, she still accepted and fulfilled the responsibilities assigned to her.

The congregation's policy of purifying vocational motivation played a role in suppressing self-interest by creating an act of obedience in Sister Maria. Based on the vows, novices were directed to relinquish personal hopes and desires in order to align with the goals of the congregation. The supervising sisters also assisted in aligning the novices' motivation with the congregation's goals, playing a crucial role in guiding them through the resocialization phase. Successful self-regulation was regarded as a sign of spiritual dedication, giving nuns a certain sense of moral worth (Claussen, 2004). The label of identity as a 'nun' that she now holds functions as a control over her actions, leading her to behave according to the directives and authority given, thus creating a looping effect. Through this circular process, the nuns' actual personal feelings may be crumbled, automatically placing them back into the setting of a total institution (Goffman, 1961), thereby establishing a continuity of life in the monasteries.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

Based on Goffman's ideas, which described the phases experienced by individuals in total institutions, the implementation in the case study of Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns can be illustrated in the following figure.

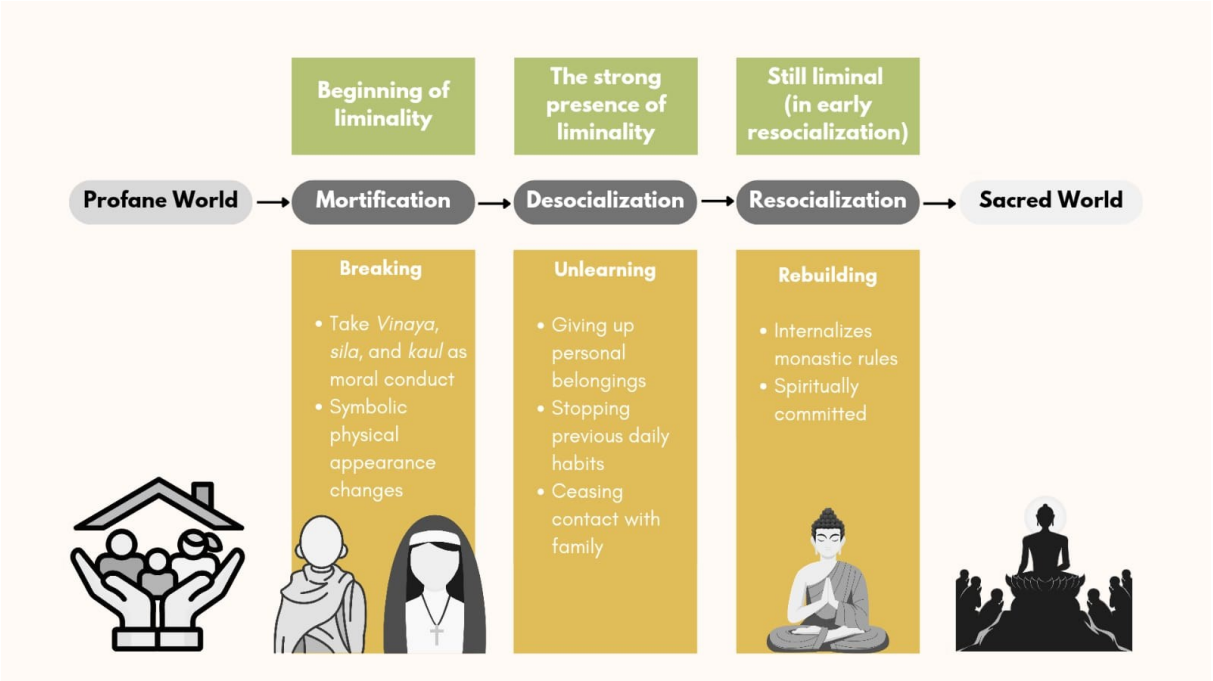

Figure 1 The Process of Entering a Total Institution (Monastery)

The initial phase of leaving the secular world was marked by systematic mortification and degradation ceremonies, as described by Goffman, represented by shaving the head, taking a vow, and wearing a robe. This sudden and drastic change was necessary as part of the process of destroying the old self-concept, triggering confusion and a degree of resistance against the new status. This is why the presence of other members of the monastery was so important from the start, as they helped them adapt and guide the new members back on track whenever they wanted to go back to their old selves In Figure 1.

After the desocialization phase, they were gradually forced to unlearn their old norms, values, and behaviors in preparation for resocialization with their new identities. The loss of their old selves left them in a liminal position, as they had not yet fully entered their new identities. For example, the confusion of Buddhist nuns in their social roles, as well as the domestic work that Catholic nuns must continue to face, leads them to interpret these roles and actions within a dogmatic and religious framework. Implicitly, the social and spiritual roles remained viable as they aligned with the objectives of the new identity and became part of the subjectivity of Buddhist and Catholic nuns (See Figure 2). This successful integration of the two personalities showed that the individual had entered a stage of resocialization, accepting their new identity and embracing a sacred life. Furthermore, these distinctive findings contributed to the understanding of the varying nature of total institutions, which are not always identical, particularly in voluntary total institutions.

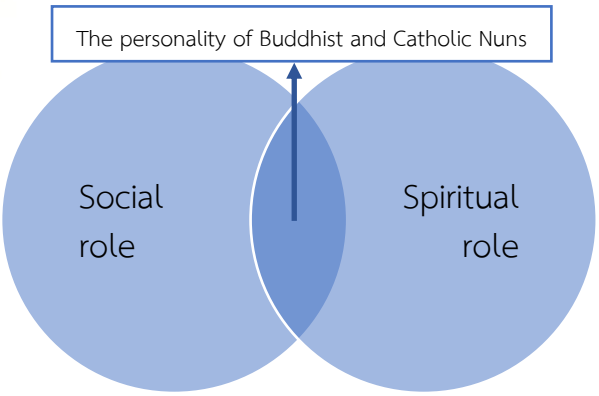

Figure 2 The Duality of Roles Buddhist and Catholic Nuns

Conclusions and Recommendations

There were some significant differences between the feeling of being imprisoned in self-imposed isolation from the ordinary world, as practiced voluntarily by ascetics, and the lack of freedom experienced by inmates in asylum, as studied by Goffman. Driven by desires and aspirations manifested through the agency of Indonesian ascetic women seeking the highest form of spiritual practice, they consciously accepted (Although there is Initial Shock, which is Natural) being homogenized with other members of the total institution to achieve a point of ideal perfection. The existence of the sacred community assisted Indonesian Buddhist and Catholic nuns in navigating personal dynamics toward a 'moral career' through monastic self-formation and a series of daily bodily techniques. The liminal condition that was previously seen as a challenge for ascetic women, forced to confront conflicting dualities of personality and identity in reconciling the physical and social bodies, was ultimately negotiable through religious doctrines. Given all the socio-cultural and internal pressures experienced by celibate women in Indonesia, providing them with greater opportunities can help normalize the presence of celibate women and reduce tension for them. Considering the limitations of this research, which only targeted ascetic women, it would be beneficial for future research to explore ascetic men, as they also face particular obstacles, especially in traditional societies.

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