

Between tradition and change: appropriation dynamics and integration processes of Hinduism in Argentina

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Abstract Hinduism has been defined from different perspectives as a belief system, a collection of philosophies and practices, and an umbrella term for a mosaic of religious traditions. Native to India, it has a strong historic tradition and a dynamic and expanding present. In this article, the author explores the process of appropriation of Hinduism in Argentina, pointing out that beyond its frequent association with the New Age movement, the arrival of the Hindu world-view dates back to the beginnings of the 20th century. It connected to spiritual searches of elite groups and would later spread to a larger and more diverse part of the population. At present, the notions of Hinduism support some of the most chosen disciplines of the current alternative field, which is a result of the advent of the New Age movement, the process of globalization, and a new perspective about health and well-being in Western societies.

Keywords Hinduism · Tradition · Appropriation · Argentina

Introduction

In this article, the development and impact of Hinduism in Argentina are analyzed in the context of an increasing interest in the studies of new spiritual and religious horizons that emerge from migrating currents, international missionary activities, and the importation of spiritual methods and ideas from far-off and distant countries (Usarski 2017).

It is in this sense that this article aims to focus on the description of the different moments that, since the beginning of the 20th century until the present, can be identified as factors contributing to the spread and current development of Hinduism

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in Argentina. It is also important to highlight that the establishment of its practices and knowledge as something that seems common to the times can be associated with Hinduism's links to the New Age movement ideas, the emergence of new subjectivities, and the disconnection between the experience of the sacred from religious institutions and its specialists. In this regard, the religious field analyzed from today's perspective requires leaving aside the inflexible divisions between individual affiliations common to previous times and thinking about the contexts in which new borders are revealed, where that which is popular, massive and educated dissolve, thus pulling down the limits that separated different groups.

New ways of relating to the sacred are also revealed. These are defined by posing relations to the sacred that are strictly personal and, in a wide sense, are not mediated by institutions (De la Torre 2006) or an election for privatized religion practices (De Michelis 2009). De la Torre et al. (2017, p. 189) have described this phenomenon as "out-of-the-box ways of practicing different types of deinstitutionalized spiritualities." In these experiences, the searches for meaning, new lifestyles, and ways of treating illnesses and pain are central.

Hinduism in Argentina

One of the first questions that must be clarified is what we mean when we talk about Hinduism. In this sense, it seems interesting to take up the perspective of different authors, who during the last decades have focused on the need to deconstruct the essentialist views around Hinduism. Such views presented it as a reification of multiple religious traditions in a single homogenous culture. In a fascinating book, edited by Frazier (2014), new visions of Hinduism are presented, distinguishing the complexity and consistency of the different linked religious cultures, which we refer under the same label (p. 1). The category of Hinduism, presented uncritically, runs the risk of making us persevere in the repetition of a Western construction that does not recognize the historical dynamics and political processes that have influenced and contributed to the formation of diverse realities.¹

Thus, we understand Hinduism as a set of traditions and cultural heritage of India. The diversity of belief systems, philosophies and practices have a significant historical tradition and a dynamic present in an expansion, which can be understood regarding a religious imaginary (Flood 2003, p. 200) and from which various groups borrowed to craft new religions forms. In other terms, Hinduism could be defined as an umbrella term for a mosaic of religious traditions, as has been noted by Jacoben (2009).

The transformation processes present in this millenary belief system took place mainly in India, and they also did in the territories and regions where Hinduism was appropriated, redefined, and disseminated. From India, Hinduism has been adopted and appropriated in far-off regions foreign to its original geographical location. Unlike other religions or philosophical systems, such as Buddhism in Argentina (Carini 2005; Gancedo 2012) or in Brazil (Usarski 2002; Pereira 2008), Hinduism has not been linked to the migration processes of its adherents to reach new territories (Field 2001).

¹ For further development of this aspect, read Pennington (2005) and Halbfass (2013).

As an echo of what was happening in Europe and the USA (De Michelis 2009; Hanegraff 1996), the arrival of this group of religious traditions from India to Argentina dates back to the beginning of the 20th century in association with spiritual searches of small elite groups. It would initially be a phenomenon limited to elite groups and spread to a greater diversity of the population, as one of the effects associated with globalization, communications, transport, and technology, a phenomenon that has also been described for the case of modern yoga by De Michelis (1995, p. 243).

The imaginary and the narratives associated with the Age of Aquarius contain an important amount of references to various notions of Eastern roots. There is reference to a future Edenic stage in which man would reach a new consciousness of greater union with the universe and with other human beings, which would transform the dominant status quo (Hanegraff 1996, p. 10), and would group, in a flexible way and changing, ideas of the sacred proper to Hinduism and other Eastern belief systems.

A narrative around the human being and its place in nature and the universe was constructed. We can define it as a syncretic narrative regarding Pye (1993), as one containing multiple possibilities in coherent tension. In this perspective, in a dynamic and a continuous process of appropriation and change, certain ideas are mentioned that refer to an Eastern tradition and that appear as key to reading and the foundation of diverse alternative disciplines. Human existence is thus defined as a moment in a temporal line much broader than a lifespan; the lines of the individual are erased, and the human being is, in each life, a permanent potentiality of liberation of the pain of existence. A key word in this narrative is the idea of karma, broadly defined as the consequence—positive or negative—of past actions, or better said, actions in past lives. Olivelle (1996, p. xvii) defines karma as follows: “The concept of karma holds that according to the degree to which an action fulfills the dharma of the agent, it creates equal reactions affecting his or her rebirth in subsequent lives.”

Even though the expansion of Hinduism has been a permanent process since its beginnings, it is evident that from the mid-20th century onwards, it has increasingly been appropriated in the West by people from an urban and Western culture who, without leaving their traditional belief systems behind, most of the times, adopt and partly redefine the ideas, practices, and world visions of Hindu philosophies. This phenomenon has frequently been associated with the existence of the New Age movement, counter-cultural in its origins, which borrowed from the East a vision of the human being and its place in the universe completely different from the Judeo-Christian views, philosophies, and morals dominant in the West.

These ideas that circulate, and that come into play within the context of New Age and globalization, show signs of having gone through processes of resemantization, appropriation, and variation since their arrival in the West. The blend with a world-view that considers human actions in moral terms of good and evil, the individual logic of a unique and eternal spiritual entity, although associated with a unique body, and the impact of Western medicine’s biological principles (Sarudiansky and Saizar 2008; Saizar 2009), among other aspects of the receiving culture, have generated mixtures and changes in the original notions. According to De la Torre and Mora (2001), it is possible to think about this in terms of “religiousness that creates a mystical-esoteric nebulosity,” with a flexible and fluctuating nature, not institutionalized, which constitutes a network of networks that, by rejecting the regulations of religious institutions, encourages the principle of individual sovereignty (2001, p. 117).

Authors such as Silva da Silveira (2005) and Newcombe (2009) show the existence of transformation processes inside Eastern world-views, in what they call twin-track transformation processes caused by globalization and the impact of Western culture upon the East. They also show the existence of a transnational neo-Hinduism manifested in a phenomenon of the flow of redefined knowledge between the East and the West, which results in a profound and collaborative transformation between both cultures. Nevertheless, there are significant continuities in the object of traditional and current Hindu practices, even taking into account socio-historical transformations and reconfiguration processes (Lieberman 2008). As Wright (2008, p. 96) points out, all socio-cultural systems are fusions of previous forms, like a constant spiral, incomplete and endless.

The development of Hinduism in Argentina

Hinduism has increasingly achieved higher visibility and presence in the context of the different belief systems within the sacred field, which constitutes the range of religions and spiritual practices in Argentina since the beginnings of the 20th century up to the present. Since its arrival, it has undergone many transformations, both about the object of its demand and about the social field of its spread.

To understand the impact of Hinduism in Argentina, it is necessary to recognize the relevant part yoga plays. This discipline is present in all branches of Hinduism and has been the privileged vehicle—but not the only one—of the spread of its notions within the Argentinian society.

Yoga in the East, in the context of Hinduism to be more precise, is regarded as an ascetic discipline, a practice that lets humans discern what is real from what is unreal, what is eternal from what is perishable, and what is immovable from what is temporary, thereby achieving freedom from karma and, thus, freedom from the cycle of rebirths. Differences found in the many branches of Hinduism do not imply significant or major differences in the way of conceiving yoga which, as Field (2001) indicates, is one of the unusual ways—along with Tantra and Ayurveda—that draws attention to physicality because, in general, Hinduism shows an interest in transcending it.

A significant aspect is to consider that the versions of yoga—even in their differences—to which we will refer, are located within the framework of what different authors have called modern yoga (De Michelis 1995, 2009; Mallinson and Singleton 2017). That is those versions that emerged from the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century. De Michelis (2009) observes that “Modern Yoga is used here to signify those disciplines and schools that are, to a greater or lesser extent, rooted in South Asia cultural contexts and more specifically draw inspiration from certain philosophies, teachings and practices of Hinduism” (2009, p. 19). The author points out two events that can be interpreted as the symptom of a cultural trend that began at the end of the 19th century: the foundation of the Theosophical society in 1875 and Vivekananda’s participation during 1893 in the Parliament of Religions (1995, p. 243).

Many of the Hindu world-view concepts, which in turn support the practice of yoga, have been appropriated, redefined, and even put into practice outside its original world-view contexts as part of an Easternization process that started in the beginnings of the 20th century and continues to the present. This process has had varied moments, with

instances of higher and lower development, visibility, and transcendence (Saizar 2015a). Indeed, the New Age movement promoted the beginning of mass dissemination of many Hindu concepts (Saizar 2015b) which, even in their transformation, can be traced in the current alternative imaginary among the explanations and thoughts of urban Western culture individuals who have found in this perspective the possibility of having contact with the sacred without the need of intermediaries or religious institutions (De la Torre 2006; Hasselle-Newcombe 2005). It also promotes an ideal of well-being and individual self-knowledge that does not require leaving aside or entirely modifying a person's life conditions (Hoffman 2002) and where the search for meaning, new lifestyles, and ways of treating illnesses and pain is central (Saizar 2009).

The entrance of yoga to Argentina has to do with a previous course that occurred in Europe and the USA, of which De Michelis gives an account in excellent work, by marking the key points of the history of modern yoga (1995). In Argentina, Hinduism went through an appropriation process affected by certain events that, even though they were neither decisive nor explained per se each stage of the process, have enabled it. Each of these moments has specific and distinctive features that, taken as a whole, help to understand the process that generated a new way of looking at the world and the human race, a way too different and even contrary to the Judeo-Christian paradigm in the Argentine tradition. Each moment is part of a continuum that cannot be understood without the existence of the prior one and which needs certain distinctiveness to be analyzed. An outline with the description of each of these moments is offered next, bearing in mind that, like all classification, it schematizes processes and limits the description of the margins that could exist between each one. It is, in this sense, an attempt to bring to light the traces Hinduism has left in the Argentine culture since the beginnings of the 20th century until today.

The arrives of Hinduism and the enchantment of elite groups

At the end of the 19th century, a highly sophisticated esoteric field was formed, made by a mix of esotericism from Europe, among which were spiritualists, theosophists, Rosicrucians, anthroposophists, and Gnostics, all representatives of modern esoteric currents (Bubello 2010). This process was, in fact, an urban one, mainly centered on specific groups of intellectuals and artists, most of whom belonged to the upper class and were in search of new ideas and practices. There was a feeling of enchantment with Europe and with the USA, both of them considered as the high scale of progress and civilization. So, in this context, Hinduism arrives in Argentina as a part of spiritual searches by an elite group. It is in this sense that the arrival of Hinduism in Argentina is different from the appearance of Buddhism in the same country (Carini 2015; Gancedo 2015). The same happened in Brazil (Usarski 2002) as well as the arrival of other religions or forms of worship that were brought into the country by different migrating groups, as is the case of the Catholic tradition (Cerutti and Pita 1999).

In an initial stage, Hinduism—understood as a group of philosophical, cosmovision, and religious notions rooted in India—arrives in Argentina along with small social and economic elite groups. They brought Hindu gurus as part of their spiritual searches and a particular appeal for an imagined East—exotic and faraway—to which ancestral wisdom was attributed and which offered something different from Judeo-Christian religions, which made it possible to renew the experience of spirituality in the West.

There are some cases, such as Ricardo Güiraldes, that reference individual experiences in the territory of India itself.² The author of *Don Segundo Sombra*, an internationally renowned piece of gaucho literature, publishes *El Sendero (The Path)* whose subhead reads, “Notes on my spiritualistic evolution in view of a future.” The text, which consists of poems and prose written between 1915 and 1927, was edited in 1932. Most works present in the book address different aspects of Eastern philosophies and spiritual orientations, in particular, those of India, for which Güiraldes showed great sympathy: yoga, Brahmanism, meditation, and contemplation. In the text, the author compares some Hindu notions with the perspective of Western writers and thinkers, although not organically. Güiraldes addressed his spiritual search based on Vivekananda’s book *Raja-Yoga*, a seminal work that contains most of the themes which would be later elaborated by several types of modern yoga schools, as De Michelis (2006, p. 701) noted. Like Güiraldes, other contemporary thinkers would travel to India motivated by an interest in delving into different philosophical and spiritual experiences.³

Members of these elite groups were involved in spiritual searches in the philosophical frame both Hinduism and esoteric traditions. An apparently common situation in those days seems to have been gurus were invited to stay in the country for months. They were asked to teach the principles of Hinduism and offer their spiritual advice as well as their guidance in the practice of meditation and yoga or the debate on sacred texts. Some of these specialists remained in Argentina and started their own schools simultaneously creating new cohorts of specialists who identified their own practice and theoretical basis with the lineaments of their teachers. This phenomenon seems to have been repeated in other countries within the region. In the case of Brazil, Hoffman (2002) emphasizes the important part teachers Swami Vivekananda and Soyen Shaku played in the passage of Eastern culture into the West. The impact of their works enabled the establishment of the first Vedanta Societies and Zen Buddhist centers in the USA in the beginning of the 20th century. Carini (2005) points at Taisen Deshimaru, a Japanese teacher who, once settled in Europe, started different Buddhist Zen centers and whose impact in Argentina was spread by teacher Stephan Thibaud, an old disciple of his.

The arrival of Hindu philosophies along with teachers or India’s travellers marked this period. That elite group’s members were searching for new ways to understand the human being, unique views about spirituality and well-being. Born and raised in Catholic settings, they were anxious for a more comprehensive perspective of the universe and the role of the humanity.

Jesuit priest Quiles and Hinduism from a Catholic perspective

Bearing in mind that Argentina is a country with deeply Catholic roots, it is important to consider the perspective and discourses that the Catholic Church and its representatives have adopted in the face of oriental practices. In this sense, one of the first

² Personal communication of Mercedes Güiraldes.

³ As Puglisi notes (2016 p. 199) during a visit to India, Adelina del Carril—Güiraldes’s wife—had an interview with Sai Baba in 1948 in Puttaparthi. She was working on translate to Spanish some sacred Hindu texts while his husband learned about spiritual practices.

factors in the broader spread of Hinduism and yoga and meditation practices that enabled the incorporation of other social environments—the so-called middle class of Catholic tradition—was Jesuit priest Ismael Quiles' (1906–1993) translations of many Hindu sacred texts, adapting them to the ideas and practices of Catholicism. As a result of his stay in different religious centers in India, his work retrieves those concepts of Eastern disciplines that, in his judgment, would allow Catholics to adopt a practice that regarded the body as a container of the sacred. Quiles pointed out that the specific contribution of yoga and Hindu ideas, which join the Christian mysticism and asceticism, results in the development of certain techniques pertaining to mental concentration and the use of the body so that it will help fulfill the freedom of the spirit (Quiles 1989).

The idea of the body as the temple and the container of the sacred, i.e., the soul in the Christian world-view, is represented from the notion of care and cleaning of that container through the practice of Hindu disciplines. Quiles wrote and published *Qué es el Yoga (What is Yoga?)* after staying in India for several months. In this book, he highlighted the important role yoga practice plays regarding body and mind care, describing it as a millenary experience that produced findings and interesting experiences that are worth being taken into account and valued in the context of Catholicism. He defined yoga and its practices as the possibility of acquiring a discipline that allows the freedom from all hindrance that enslaves the soul and takes away its power, happiness and divine dignity. In this sense, the practice of meditation and asanas⁴ are not contradictory with a Catholic lifestyle.

Among other multiple activities associated with the diffusion of oriental philosophies, Quiles established the bachelor's degree in Eastern Studies at the Universidad del Salvador, which later resulted in an additional technical degree in Yoga. His contributions redefined specific Hindu ideas regarding Catholic ones. Some examples of changed ideas are those related to the cycle of rebirth or samsara (as opposed to the Catholic concept of a unique and immortal soul connected to a perishable material existence), the idea of ignorance as opposed to the Catholic sense of good and evil, or that of loyalty and understanding our neighbor. During our fieldwork, many informants told us about the importance of the readings of Quiles' texts in their personal and professional trajectories, in the sense that they introduced a view of acceptance and legitimacy of yoga practices. At present, Quiles' texts are still essential reading, research, and discussion material among students and graduates from the technical degree in Yoga and the bachelor's degree in Eastern Studies at Universidad del Salvador.

The arrival of the new age movement: private and institutional practices

Since the mid-1960s until the end of the 1990s, a unique phenomenon occurred in Argentina which meant the spreading of Hindu notions to wider audiences, thus lifting the restriction that linked it to social sectors of higher income and educational levels.

⁴ In a general way, asanas are the most known aspect of the practice of yoga. Asanas are corporal positions combined with a different kind of breathing and performed in individual use or series. Their names are associated morphologically to animal behavior, objects, elements of nature, and moments of the human life cycle.

Along with the New Age movement, concepts, ideas, and practices of Eastern philosophies would emerge in the middle classes who were trying to find different ways to achieve good health, well-being, and a spiritual search, escaping the institutional frames of Catholicism and a rigid education.

This spreading process can be analyzed through the development of two groups. On the one hand, individual paths were spurred by individual searches and the participation in groups of people with a similar range of interests. On the other hand, the establishment of different institutions offered Hindu practices to the general public.

Study groups of Eastern philosophies

In a social context of professional middle classes profoundly moved by the New Age ideology,⁵ some study groups were formed in the 1960s in the city of Buenos Aires. Their main objective was the exploration of new disciplines that would enable the quality of life to improve, counteracting the negative effects of an education that was thought of as strict and a lifestyle perceived as void of contact with nature and the spiritual essence of humans. Men and women belonging to social groups of high income and good education led these groups. The attendees were men and women with similar characteristics: they were in their 40s, most had a professional career, and all had been raised in Catholic families and schools.

Some of these attendees would later start schools and practice centers in different New Age disciplines. Among them, the most popular were Río Abierto (Open River), Gimnasia Expresiva Rítmica Yoga (Expressionist Rhythmic Gymnastics Yoga), and Arroyo (Brook). In those places, a multiplicity of techniques of Eastern and Western roots were used in the context of different workshops that combined physical techniques with breathing ones, group and individual meditation, and reading sessions on both traditional Hindu texts and texts written by authors whose ideas shared the early beginnings of the New Age movement. They would also receive visits of Hindu teachers who had become well-known lecturers, like Swami Shami Prevanandha who came to Argentina in the 1970s.

It was from these study and practice groups that many yoga specialists who currently organize their workshops and who teach new specialists emerged. Others decided to continue their spiritual search and, having practiced yoga, later looked into different alternative therapies through courses, seminars, and workshops organized by foreign or local specialists in a circular movement in which participants exchange their roles from teachers to students, and vice versa, a typical feature from the New Age movement (Carozzi 2001). Years later, these people specialized in other Eastern medicines, such as reiki, acupuncture, or feng shui, and launched into other methods which, despite the fact they originated in the West, comply with Eastern philosophical frameworks, such as healing touch or the Alexander technique.

In the account of their experiences, yoga appears as an initiation practice, as an approach to other ways of understanding the world, the cosmos, and the role human beings play in it. The notions learned in these reading sessions and debates on Hindu traditional texts would become part of a larger narrative in which concepts of Catholic morality and the biomedicine perspective of the biological body would be combined in

⁵ For a deeper analysis of New Age in Argentina and its developments, see Carozzi (2001).

a dynamic game of variations, appropriations, and redefinitions. Practitioners—specialists as well as users—base their ascription of the origin of these concepts to a historical tradition on the idea of an identity remote in time and space that guarantees the cultural and symbolic value of the present (Wright 2008, p. 88) and which shows the emergence of processes of cultural creativity and reinvention of traditions (ibid.).

Schools devoted to teaching and practicing Hindu disciplines

By the 1980s in Argentina's main cities, many schools where yoga classes and the possibility to conduct teacher training courses appeared. They also offered a series of activities related to reading, singing, drama, cooking, and meditation, all in the context of Eastern philosophies—and mainly Hinduism. Most of these schools are still working nowadays, some more prominent and visible than others. The list of schools is long and varied, so only those that repeatedly appear in the career accounts of practitioners and that have a stronger impact and longer tradition will be mentioned.⁶

The Indra Devi Yoga Foundation, established in Buenos Aires in 1982, follows the teachings of Eišenija Pēterson, known as Mataji Indra Devi, a Lithuanian woman who arrived in Argentina in the 1980s. She enjoyed valuable friendships with well-known Eastern figures in the West, such as Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sai Baba, and acknowledged the paramount importance of her prolonged stay in India had had in her training as a teacher.

Since then, the Indra Devi Yoga Foundation is one of the most renowned yoga schools. Although it specializes in Hatha yoga, it also offers yoga teacher training courses, beginner courses, prenatal yoga, yoga for teenagers and young adults, and yoga for children. At the same time, it offers a set of variations belonging to several aspects of Hinduism: Shantala, focus and concentration, and Mantra courses. The practice of meditation ascribes to the framework of yoga, defined as “art and science of life,” and is linked to the possibility of connecting with and joining the sacred. All courses can be taken at the school or can be taught in companies and institutions or as home tutoring. Indra Devi attendees have different ranges in ages, gender, and social groups. Activities are respectful of practitioners' beliefs, and there is a possibility of combining them with Hinduism without any contradiction.

Sathya Sai Baba—born and deceased in Puttaparthi, India—was a spiritual leader who called himself an avatar, which is to say, a divine incarnation. His teachings were based on some Hindu religious elements and different rituals of his region. The Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization was created in Argentina in 1967 and formally established as an institution in 1982. Meanwhile, some registers indicate the first contact between Argentinean people and Sai Baba occurred in the 1940s (Puglisi 2012), as stated previously. Nowadays, there are more than 30 centers throughout the country, mainly located in the capital city of Buenos Aires. Their activities focus on the promotion of devotional and spiritual practices, the study of sacred texts, and several

⁶ As a reviewer suggested, it would be necessary pointing out the development and importance of Hare Krishna movement in Argentina. By the moment, there is not a specialized investigation about it in Argentina, but in the region, there are some impressive contributions, such as Bahamondes González and Alarcón (2015) in Chile and Da Silva and Silva da Silveira (2015) in Brazil.

social events. One of the primary goals of the institution is about dissemination of the ecumenic discourse of Love transmitted by Sai Baba (Puglisi 2016).

Regarding the kind of practice offered, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization gives great importance to the body-spiritual practices (Viotti 2015, p. 18) in which the development of breathing and corporal movements are essential; it is a kind of practice that we could define as a postural and meditational form of yoga, in terms of De Michelis (2009).

Created by Professor Ada Albrecht in Italy and Argentina in 1981, the Hastinapura Foundation offers a large variety of activities that go beyond meditation or yoga courses. These range from sacred drama and devotional music to phytomedicine and Eastern philosophy. Apart from schools located in cities, Hastinapura also owns farms where some of its permanent members live and develop their activities in closed communities where Hindu traditions, from diet to obligatory meditation, are more strictly followed than in the urban practice centers. Although Hastinapura students, encouraged by their yoga teachers, actively participate in different activities, such as sacred drama and Eastern traditional music, they do not partake in everyday life in the communities that are reserved to a minority adherent of the movement.

DeRose Method arrived in Argentina in 1988. It is an affiliated branch from the one in Brazil whose founder claims to be the creator of a new type of yoga that ascribes, as he puts it, to the pre-classic line of Eastern yoga called *Swásthya Yôga*. DeRose, according to their institutional presentation, is “a proposal of behavioral refinement towards a good quality of life, good manners, good interpersonal relations, good culture, good nutrition, good physical fitness” (2004). It does not stick to any of the classic definitions of yoga nor to any of the branches of Hinduism. Some of the activities they offer are respiratory re-education, stress management, organic techniques that build up strength and flexibility, and procedures to work towards emotional relaxation and mental concentration. Since 2000 in Argentina, DeRose organizes an annual three-day festival during permanent members of the school participate and DeRose attends as a special guest and lecturer. There are yoga classes, debates, conferences, breathing, meditation practice, and group celebrations. As in electronic music festivals, there are music bands and DJs but alcohol, tobacco, and drugs are explicitly forbidden. The focus is on the healthy behaviour that practitioners could access through the *Swásthya Yôga* practice more than in the personal enlightenment or even a moral prohibition.

It is a particular characteristic of this school—which makes it different from the rest—to offer their practices to a population with specific features: fit young men and women who enjoy good health. In this case, yoga and meditation seem to be subsumed to the achievement of mental and bodily training, which enables a better quality of life and expanded self-knowledge. The DeRose Method, contrary to the other varieties, clearly rejects any reference to mysticism or philosophical precepts related to Hinduism; it prioritizes body care and training as a means to achieve a better quality of life (DeRose 2004).

Groups that focus on well-being and hiding philosophical and religious frame

In the last decades, some disciplines have arisen that are detached from any direct reference to Hinduism and intentionally critical of New Age ideas. These focus on achieving well-being beyond physical or psychological health, unrelated to the religion

of the practitioner, and they pose, vaguely, an offer to experience the sacred under the rubric of spirituality.

One of the most significant manifestations of this phenomenon is *The Art of Living*. Established in 1981 by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, it arrived in Argentina a few years later and is active in more than 150 countries. *The Art of Living* presents the activities (yoga, meditation, and breathing) from the perspective of their positive effects in biological terms mainly, although in psychological and social conditions as well. According to Vargas and Viotti (2013), it is a spirituality associated with effectiveness, comfort, positive thinking, and avoiding confrontation. *The Art of Living* promotes the continuous involvement in breathing and meditation techniques; some of which are surrounded by a certain secretive air to which only the more senior students have access.

Regarding with intentional hiding of philosophical or religious aspects, the presence of Hindu notions and specific practices like yoga, meditation, and breathing techniques seems subsumed under the institutional discourse, in words instructors use. When these notions appear, they do so superficially and to support the effectivity of the practice, which is presented to the audience using highlighting its profane aspects and associating its effectivity to notions similar to a scientific perspective. Concepts related to the Hindu world-view are introduced vaguely, at least about the school specialists' discourse.⁷ Some instructors use a vague idea of spirituality, connected with a conception of the "spiritual" as a felt connection with a non-mental and non-physical aspect of being. Other authors have described similar phenomena regarding subjectivization, believing without belonging (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) or as choosing to be spiritual but not religious (Davies 1994) as De Michelis pointed out (2009:, p. 24).

Conclusion

Taking into account that Hinduism is instead a category created by Westerners than a monolithic reality, crossed by historical and political facts as Pennington notes (2005), this article had the goal of analyzing the way has been developed this syncretic religious imaginaire as a complex and polymorphic entity called Hinduism. More specific, the article focussed on the appropriations processes in Argentina.

Studies that analyze the current field of alternative therapies and practices of Eastern origin usually associate the emergence of such disciplines with the New Age movement during the 1960s and 1970s as a result of a counter-cultural movement that led to a new way of looking at the human being and its place in the world. In this regard, New Age represents a counter-cultural movement that meant a break with the relationship between subject and religious institutions to access the sacred, a link that so far had been thought of as necessary. From this perspective, the New Age movement could be

⁷ During fieldwork, I interviewed some practitioners who revealed a perspective that was a little bit different. In these cases, the effectivity of the *Art of Living* method was related to the belief in energy, as in Power (van der Leeuw 1964). This energy is possible to manipulate and makes it possible to transform emotions, thoughts, and even natural states from negative to positive, i.e., from harmful and causing illnesses to healing. The energy, which can change from positive to negative and vice versa, is manipulated during the practices of rhythmic breathing and bodily movements, enabling the preservation and recovery of good health and quality of life to those who continue to practice.

understood as a wide framework of senses that cover all those disciplines and practices that would increasingly make possible a new way of understanding the human being and its relation to the universe. In other words, this phenomenon can also be understood in the context of an esoteric nebulosity according to Champion and Hervieu-Léger (1990), where different points of view would mix to assign new meanings.

Throughout the article, some of the different stages that show the development of Hinduism in Argentina have been exposed. Since the beginning of the 20th century until the present, Eastern philosophy has increased in size and impact while its connection to only one school has been blurred. Its use has diversified into being the support of multiple practices, and its world-view notions are more related to searches for well-being in a wider sense, rather than spiritual pursuits in a more transcendental sense.

Although the New Age movement provided with a base and support for spreading the knowledge of Hinduism, it is important to highlight that this philosophical framework arrived in the country before. Despite the fact that the ideology of the movement allowed the massive spread of its principles and some concepts central to its world-views—such as the ideas of energy, reincarnation, karma, chakras, and dharma—Hinduism expanded through different channels unconnected to the movement, diversifying as it was appropriated. Such is the case that even though many of the adherents of Hindu practices and philosophies can associate or also identify with New Age ideas, many others reject those links and prefer to be related to the legacy of traditions with such faraway and historic roots wholly detached from an ideology characteristic of the 1960s, which they find to be disrespectful of the “real” Hindu world-view. In this case, as in others, acknowledging that the acquired wisdom belongs to historical tradition guarantees the cultural and symbolic value of the present (Wright 2008). At the same time, the redefinition of its categories shows the appearance of processes of cultural creativity and reinvention of traditions. This phenomenon, where the old is appropriated but transformed according to the requirements of life nowadays, seems to be one of the keys to understanding the validity of these philosophies.

The spread and increasing popularity of some Hindu categories would start in the mid-1960s with yoga schools as an unquestionable means to help to spread some of these categories. The connection between practice and improving health and well-being increased the range of impact of Eastern philosophy significantly. After more than 100 years, many of the notions of Hinduism have become common words in the everyday vocabulary and have been through redefinitions, changes in content, and the addition of different logics, even to their origins, but it has been this phenomenon that made possible its spread. In the meantime, a particular selection process has taken place by which one part of the Hindu world-view has been privileged over others, prioritizing the adherence to the subjective aspects that gave rise to a specific practice and understanding of the self.

In Argentina nowadays, there are versions that are more respectful of the traditional framework and versions that are closer to the transformation processes in the East. It appears in different ways: as a philosophy and a spiritual perspective that makes the contact with the sacred possible and assigns meaning to human experience, as a bodily discipline related to well-being, as a practice with the aim of achieving and maintaining the balance between the energies of the person, and/or as an active therapy against illness and pain.

It is in this sense that instead of being a homogeneous and invariable body of knowledge and practices, Hinduism and its categories comprise a background, a network of senses about the world, which seems to be a source of reference for ancestral wisdom while enabling and including the experience of the sacred and making it possible to redefine life experiences and meaning of existence in the present West. In an age signed by the enthusiasm for different ways of self-knowledge and privatized religion's experiences, it is necessary to consider the role played by historical traditions. This process and the complexity of its development is a matter of interest because it allows us to understand the internal dynamics of the appropriation of a different world-view into new kinds of spirituality.

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