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Decolonizing Yoga: Beyond West and Non-West

Iyengar Yoga in Contemporary Mexico

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Dominga Puga

Committee in charge:

Professor David Pedersen, Chair
Professor Suzanne Brenner
Professor Aftab Jassal

2024

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University of California San Diego

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Decolonizing Yoga: Beyond West and Non-West

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Dominga Puga

Master of Arts in Anthropology

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Professor David Pedersen, Chair

This thesis contributes to the fuller project of decolonization by focusing on the development of Yoga in the 20th century and up to the present. The essay considers understandings of Yoga that reinforce the dichotomous West/Non-West image of the world. It develops new research on contemporary yoga in Mexico to show the limits and distortions of this appearance. The research focuses on ensembles of yoga practices, understood as a domain of relational interaction and change, rather than as a finished form of either non-Western or Western (translated) provenance. From this perspective, we better appreciate that overcoming the unevenness and constraints of any relation come out of the relation itself, rather than from one pole.

INTRODUCTION

The project of ‘decolonization’ has been extended beyond the specific historical era of nation-state formation in the aftermath of European colonialism to now include the challenge of getting beyond dominant assumptions about reality, how we live it, how we know it, and why or to what ends. One set of answers to these questions has been identified as a ‘Western’ worldview. Since the 20th century, the discipline of Anthropology has had a self-identified tradition of attempting to counter “Westernism” and the dominance of its worldview by seeking to produce careful understandings of the ‘non-West,’ figuratively translating it so that it can be for more widely recognized and appreciated.

Scholars have begun to recognize that this basic image of a separate and discrete ‘West’ and ‘Non-West,’ regardless of privileging one or the other, is not a neutral objective rendering of the world. Instead, it is an ideological formation that hides a continuing history of jointly asymmetrical development -relational interaction defined by qualities of exploitation, domination, and control. ‘Decolonization’ in the fullest sense entails getting beyond the dichotomous West/Non-West framework itself, not simply balancing one pole against the other.

This thesis contributes to the fuller project of decolonization by focusing on the development of Yoga in the 20th century and up to the present. The essay considers understandings of Yoga that reinforce the dichotomous West/Non-West image of the world. It develops new research on contemporary yoga in Mexico to show the limits and distortions of this appearance. The research focuses on ensembles of yoga practices, understood as a domain of

relational interaction and change, rather than as a finished form of either non-Western or Western (translated) provenance. From this perspective, we better appreciate that overcoming the unevenness and constraints of any relation come out of the relation itself, rather than from one pole.

Chapter 1 YOGA, WEST AND NON-WEST

For many people, the word yoga relates to an ancient spiritual practice from India, performed today mainly as a bodily practice widely spread in the Western world. But, without ignoring the influence of the Indian tradition over this spiritual and physical practice, what turns it into an interesting contemporary phenomenon is the evolution and adaption of its practice towards Western needs and identities. This is due to the interaction of Western individuals interested in Indian religions and westernized Indians over the last 150 years (De Michelis, 2005), and related to that, the exponential increase of the visibility of this practice in the Western world.

Even though it is an evolving process, we could say that this became a possible form of practice in the Western world during the second half of the nineteenth century as a product of ‘the post-Enlightenment crisis of Christianity, the emergence of strong esoteric currents (Theosophical Society) and the dissemination of knowledge about these subjects fostered by the diffusion of printing and literacy, matched by the growing popularity of ‘self-help’ culture’ (De Michelis, 2018:5). In this evolving process, it's important to mark as a key character Swami Vivekananda and his presentation in the Parliament of Religions of Chicago in 1893, who brought together the South Asian and Western esoteric trends which formed the foundations for transnational modern yoga (De Michelis, 2005) becoming one of the most popular icons of spirituality in Asia, America and Europe (Singleton & Byrne, 2008). ‘During the second half of the twentieth century, the modern worldwide expansion of yoga started in earnest, progressing from

popularisation (1950s to mid-1970s) to institutional consolidation (mid-1970s to late 1980s), to acculturation (late 1980s to date)' (De Michelis, 2018:5)

To comprehend this phenomenon, exploring the evolution concerning the understanding of the body and health in yoga is fundamental, especially considering the predominance of the physical aspect in modern versions of yoga, which has even led to its classification as Modern Postural Yoga (De Michelis, 2005; Singleton, 2010). This is a rather interesting phenomenon when we consider that originally, yoga was developed as a spiritual technique, where practitioners aimed to attain liberation through recognizing the distinction between *purusa* and *prakriti* (interpreted as soul/spirit and materiality). This recognition allowed the soul to disidentify with matter, thus halting the cycle of reincarnation (Eliade, 1969, Saizar, 2009). Therefore, while there were techniques to maintain a healthy body, health was not the goal; rather, it was to achieve a state that would allow access to higher states in which neither health, nor the body would be elements to consider.

Yet, today's yoga is mainly postural, which has opened the question of why and how this aspect of yoga, the asanas, gained such a predominant space. The work conducted by Mark Singleton in his research on different yoga postures, known as asanas in Sanskrit, is particularly interesting (2010). In his study, Singleton demonstrates that, although references to these postures can be found in classical yoga texts (Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita and Siva Samhita), their importance is rather marginal and more geared towards maintaining a healthy and long-lived body, with the ultimate aim of

achieving spiritual liberation. Furthermore, the repertoire of postures is limited and doesn't explain the variety of postures found in contemporary yoga studies. Singleton discovered that many of these postures were inspired by Western physical practices, which had been introduced to India due to British colonization and were subsequently adapted in the context of the Indian Renaissance as part of the process of creating a modern and autonomous image of the country (Singleton, 2010). Many authors have explored yoga's significant role in the nation's reconstruction process as a response to the traumas endured during colonization (Alter, 2004; Singleton, 2010; Sjoman, 1999).

Crucial in this modernization process has also been translating yoga into scientific and medical terms. We could say this process began in the 19th century with S.C. Vasu (1884-) and his brother Basu, who, according to Singleton (2010), made the earliest attempt to translate yoga into scientific language, thereby creating the conditions for the emergence of the medicalization of hatha yoga in the 20th century (Singleton, 2010). Another key figure worth mentioning is Dr. N.C. Paul and his book "A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy," which Singleton considers the first attempt to relate hatha yoga practice and theory to modern medical science. This treatise garnered the attention of Europeans in certain circles (Walter's 1893). However, this was just the beginning, the breeding ground for the growing rationalization of yoga that exploded during the 20th century.

Many authors have pointed to Kuvalayananda as one of the main protagonists of this endeavor (Alter, 2004; De Michelis, 2005; Shaw & Kaytaz, 2021; Singleton, 2010).

Kuvalayananda was a yogi himself, convinced by his own experiences of the results and benefits of yoga, and he was fully engaged in translating yoga into a scientific language. Initially, this initiative commenced as a nationalist endeavor amidst the Indian Renaissance, aimed at fashioning a new image of Modern India. As Alter underscores, it evolved into a transnational aspiration to globalize yoga, employing Western science as a lingua franca.

In 1964, to advance his yoga research, he founded the Kaivalyadhama Health and Yoga Research Centre in Lonavala. Alongside this initiative, he also established a journal called "Yoga Mimamsa" to publish the results of his yoga research. Within the research center, a laboratory was set up to systematically quantify the physiological effects of yoga on human subjects as they engaged in practices like asanas, pranayama, kriya, and other techniques. The findings from these experiments served as the basis for therapeutic recommendations at the Kaivalyadhama Health and Yoga Research Centre and continue to underpin various therapeutic claims associated with yoga. Thousands of additional clinical studies examining the impact of yoga on various bodily systems and specific diseases have followed on those first experiments (Alter, 2004; Shaw & Kaytaz, 2021).

It is intriguing to note that, while this process bears a striking resemblance to the Weberian rationalization processes undertaken in the West (Weber, 1976), where these researchers sought to explicate the practice of yoga in rational and scientific terms, seeking to objectify and measure its somatic processes, the initial impetus stemmed from personal and individual experiences, imbued with the yogic imaginary, rather than from

the realm of science. In fact, Kuvalayanandas intention wasn't to reduce yoga to anatomy but to use modern science to reveal the power of yoga (Shaw & Kaytaz, 2021), offering 'a global modernity rooted in the subtle body' (Alter, 2004:78). Through the global reach of science, the foundation was laid for the design and dissemination of modern yoga as we know it today (Alter, 2004).

The evolution of yoga as a therapeutic practice has manifested differently in various countries. For instance, in India, it was championed by figures such as Gandhi as an alternative to the biomedical system (Alter, 2000) (which, incidentally, was one of the most significant aspects of colonization in this country), not only as a decolonizing gesture but also as an acknowledgment of the needs and capacities of the nation, where a substantial portion of the population lacks access to biomedical services. Therefore, alternatives of more natural healing methods that empower individuals, especially impoverished populations, seemed appealing (Alter, 2000, 2004). This has led to the current situation in which India has a Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) dedicated to the research and promotion of Yoga and Ayurveda as traditional alternative therapies (Newcombe, 2020).

In other geographical regions, such as Europe and the United States, the conceptions of health and yoga were more closely associated with preventing certain ailments through physical practices and healthy lifestyles (Lucia, 2020; Newcombe, 2019; Wildcroft, 2020). Nevertheless, there are also examples of the use of yoga as a therapy, where the elements, especially the asanas and the breath, are presented as tools

that can heal specific symptoms and diseases (Alter, 2004; Hauser, 2021; Iyengar, 1979; Saizar, 2009)

While, since Kuvalayananda, the race to scientifically validate the therapeutic properties of yoga has only increased, not only in India but also in other countries, primarily the United States, when evaluated through the lens of a systematic review aimed at assessing clinical effectiveness and safety, the quality of the supporting evidence appears to be subpar. This is primarily attributed to the limitations posed by small sample sizes and the challenges associated with controlling variables that could potentially introduce bias and hinder the generalizability of the findings (McCall et al. 2013; Shaw & Kaytaz, 2021). This has led to claims that ‘despite thousands of articles seeking to validate yoga scientifically, there is no conclusive evidence that yoga is necessarily safe and beneficial to health (Broad 2012; Goldberg 2016). Rather, the modern construction of yoga as a system for health and well-being, along with attempts to demonstrate its efficacy in terms of medical science, supports a widespread belief that yoga is good for you, bodily, emotionally, and morally or spiritually’ (Shaw & Kaytaz, 2021:286).

Certainly, if we consider that science is the only practice participating in the enactment of objects into lived reality (Mol, 2022), yoga is then relegated to the realm of beliefs. However, several authors within science studies (Latour, 1987; Haraway, 1991; Mol, 2002) have questioned this primacy of science, indicating that it is merely one form of enacting objects in lived reality (Mol, 2002).

Thus, various scholars have explored yoga as a practice that, in conjunction with other practices and objects, produces a particular type of body and ideas about the health of this body. Some examples are the analysis of the production and reproduction of yogic therapeutic landscapes in the world space (Hoyez, 2007), the relation between the branded conceptualization of yoga as a health practice, the embodied experiences of practitioners, and to the socio-cultural contexts in which practitioners and their practices are embedded (Ben Hamed, 2021), how discourses about yoga, health, and specific ideas about the body converge to form a personal endeavor aimed at reshaping the self to conform to a particular ideal of what a body should look like or represent (Campeau-Bouthillier, 2021), and using the concept of "health imaginaries", how the use of yoga asanas is rationalized in different geographical and therapeutic settings, particularly concerning varying conceptions of the human body. This approach reveals how cultural and geographic factors influence the interpretation and application of yoga postures (Hauser, 2021). 'Although health-oriented yoga practice may provide reference points for the negotiation of collective identities or a social movement, any conclusions in this regard would require further information about the respective local environments: personal viewpoints, preferred interpretative frames, forms of social distinction, health politics etc... any understanding of yoga (therapy) is situated, and has its own premises, objectives and politics'. (Hauser, 2021: 313)

Thus, the effort to comprehend its local adaptations in relation to its therapeutic and healing applications becomes even more pertinent. Central to conceptualizing yoga

as a health practice is the dynamic evolution of practitioner's motivations and their perception of the benefits derived from yoga as they progress through time. A contextual perspective unveils subtleties and intricacies, allowing us to comprehend the ways in which yoga assumes the role of health practice, contingent upon the individual's reasons for practicing, the purpose behind their practice, and the manner in which they engage with yoga (Shaw & Kaytaz, 2021). Although science has not yet conclusively proven the effectiveness of somatic yoga techniques as healing tools, the accounts and narratives of numerous personal experiences invite us to examine this phenomenon closely. This, perhaps, will enable us to formulate the right questions and thus understand this alternative or complementary path to healing.

Chapter 2 LOCALIZING YOGA

But talking about localization is not a neutral conversation, as studies on yoga have indeed been localized. The problematic aspect of this issue is ‘where’. A ‘where’ that has been mentioned in this article when indicating that the phenomenon of modern transnational yoga has been mainly studied in first-world countries such as the US (Jain, 2020; Lucia, 2020; Singleton & Byrne, 2008), England (De Michelis, 2018; Suzanne Newcombe & Karen O’Brien-Kop, 2020; Wildcroft, 2020), Germany (Hauser, 2021; Strauss, 2005) and France (Ben Hamed, 2021; Ceccomori, 1996; Hoyez, 2007).

This focalization on the US and European countries has led to even affirmation that modern yoga is mainly an “anglophone phenomenon” (Singleton & Byrne, 2008) characterized by the development and influences in those countries, thus making invisible the expression and specificities of this phenomenon that is also widely spread in other regions. A substantial group of scholars, under Suzanne Newcombe’s and Karen O’Brien-Kop’s guidance, has acknowledged this. By publishing the "Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies," which gathers articles on anthropological research on yoga and meditation in various countries, they have issued a call to expand research on transnational yoga to other regions (Suzanne Newcombe & Karen O’Brien-Kop, 2020). The goal is to understand how this phenomenon localizes in different cultures.

In line with this, authors like Amanda Lucia have criticized the cultural appropriation of this practice, associating it with images of white, slim, healthy, feminine bodies adorned with

neoliberal products (Lucia, 2020). Thus, despite the expansion of yoga as a transnational phenomenon, many communities have felt excluded from these practices (Berger, 2018; Klein et al., 2016; Lucia, 2020). In response to this, authors like Cara Hagan, Melanie Klein, and Chelsea Jackson Roberts have used the concept of "Decolonizing Yoga" (Hagan, 2021; Klein et al., 2016), aiming to disassociate this practice from hegemonic and healthy bodies to give voice and representation to other bodies that also engage with and benefit from this practice.

An example of underrepresentation has been the extensive region of Latin America. Despite the widespread diffusion of modern yoga in this region, this phenomenon has been scarcely studied. The primary research has been conducted in Brazil (de Barros et al., 2014; Siegel, 2020; Simões, 2022) and Argentina (D'Angelo, 2016; Hers, 2019; Saizar, 2009).

Some authors have specifically explored the relationship between yoga and health in Latin America. Examples include the study of yoga as a complementary therapy in Argentina (Saizar, 2009), the examination of this practice in the context of various therapeutic journeys (Idoyaga Molina, 2007; Saizar, 2009), the perceptions of yoga leaders regarding the potential contributions of yoga to the Brazilian National Health System (BNHS) (de Barros et al., 2014), as well as the discourses of international health organizations regarding yoga as a tool to address crisis situations, particularly in the context of the confinement resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic (D'Angelo, 2021). However, in this subfield, there is again a shortage of research in this specific geographical area.

In taking up these issues, I aim to contribute to the ongoing efforts of decolonization (Hagan, 2021; Klein et al., 2016) and localization (Hauser, 2021; Shaw & Kaytaz, 2021; Suzanne Newcombe & Karen O'Brien-Kop, 2020) through the exploration of yoga is encultured in Mexico. With this, I'm aiming to expand the conversation about the multiple bodies that are enacted and articulated in contemporary societies through the assemblages of practices in the search for well-being and health in a diverse and multiple post-colonial world.

Chapter 3 THE MULTIPLE AND YOGA

In the field of anthropology, numerous authors have endeavored to comprehend the embodied experiences of illness and healing, exploring the diverse ways in which these experiences manifest across various cultures and epistemologies (Biehl, Good and Kleinman, 2007; Csordas, 1994, 1999; Kleinman, 2020; Lock, 2018; Young, 1976).

Despite this diversity, during the past two centuries, biomedicine has been the predominant lens for understanding the body, health, and disease; consequently, its techniques are the preferred method for healing (Lock, 2018; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987). However, this dominance is a relatively recent phenomenon. In 19th-century France, for example, science became the most powerful tool for establishing ‘The Truth. (Good, 2012; Lock, 2018; Michel Foucault, 2012). As an epistemology, it possesses distinct characteristics that set it apart from other systems, including the standardization and normalization of the body, the definition of disease as something biologically/physiologically based, and the over-reliance on empirical methodologies in the diagnosis and treatment of disease (Good, 2012; Lock, 2018; Michel Foucault, 2012).

This biomedical monism has been questioned not only by the different embodied experiences but also by the bodies where those experiences are embodied. Bodies that, following Mol (2002), are multiple. They are multiple because of the different practices that enact different bodies into a lived reality, leaving out the existence of other bodies. Thus, the ontology of the bodies ‘is not given in the order of things, but that, instead, ontologies are brought into being,

sustained, or allowed to wither away in common, day-to-day, socio-material practices' (Mol, 2002:7). The body then, is an event, a moment of ontological coordination (Mol, 2002; Langwick, 2011).

Biomedicine, then, is just one of the practices that enact certain types of bodies—and the diseases that affect those bodies. But alongside biomedicine, there have always alternative medical practices, often referred to today as 'complementary medicine'; practices that cannot be ignored, as people worldwide extensively utilize them (Cant, 1998; Idoyaga Molina, 2007; Langwick, 2011; Lock, 2018), thus enacting different materialities related to body and disease (Mol, 2002; Langwick, 2011).

Following Mol, Langwick (2011) explores how the conceptualization of the body and the recognition of bodily threats pertinent to contemporary therapeutic approaches (encompassing both biomedicine and traditional/alternative medical systems) emerge through practical application. She elucidates, 'the processes through which diverse knowledge-production practices produce their objects of knowledge, and in the case of therapeutic knowledge, which is implicitly interventionist, it refers to the practices through which therapies produce the objects in which they intervene' (Langwick, 2011:159). For this purpose, she uses the term objectification to describe a way a range of entities and gestures (that) are brought together to shape a vague mass of threats into manageable trajectories, to identify stable actors, and to establish objects of therapeutic intervention' (Langwick, 2011:172). In this context, she proposes a method to discern the nuances of the relationship between traditional and modern medicine in practice. This relationship is not necessarily founded on oppositions or translations; rather, it manifests through

intricate adaptations and negotiations among diverse medical practices. Thus, her focus lies not in describing ‘a plurality of healing practices (that is, many types of healing) but instead looks at the times and ways that healers, clinical practitioners, government bureaucrats, medical scientists, and patients implicate the modern in the traditional, the clinic in the home of the healer, science in the nonbiomedical, and vice versa. Postcolonial healing incorporates the traditional and the modern in flexible ways at a range of levels.’ (Langwick, 2011:236). Thus following the enactment of multiple bodies (Mol, 2002).

However, the negotiation extends beyond the dichotomy of traditional and modern, as both categories are questionable in a world where everything is interconnected and mutually affected. The traditional has also been exported and adapted under the umbrella of complementary therapies, often through translation into biomedical terms (Lock, 2018). However, discussing translation is not the most suitable way to refer to the interaction between these therapeutic alternatives, as each practice also retains specific knowledge and materialities. Thus, to address the established relationship among different therapeutic ecologies, it seems more appropriate to speak of the ‘assembling of diverse therapies and the knowledges, practices, desires, and medicines of which they consist’ (Langwick, 2008: 428). An assembling capable of articulating the multiple body (Mol, 2002; Langwick, 2008).

A paradigmatic case in this regard is the already described practice of yoga as a therapeutic technique; a technique that, as we know, represents in itself a complex assemblage of ‘knowledge, practices and desires’ (Langwick, 2008). This references the history of the modern version of yoga, which, between the 19th and 20th centuries, largely in response to British

colonization and the Western influence it brought, embarked on a modernization project under the umbrella of Indian nationalist movements. Through a blend of tradition and science, a new model of yoga emerged, where practices aimed at purifying the body for the liberation of the soul were translated into scientific and medical terms to gain validation and be exported to the Western world (Alter, 2000, 2004; Singleton, 2010). Where it continues evolving and adapting, thus creating a myriad of localized and enculturated versions.

For this reason, we proposed the use of those medical anthropology concepts in order to give a different frame to understand the localization of yoga. Using the concept of body multiple (Mol, 2002), objectification (Good, 1994; Langwick, 2011), as well as the concept of articulated bodies (Langwick, 2008), will allow us to observe this localization on the bodies themselves, and the complex melt of modern imaginaries, exotic promises, desires, pains and healing that are experience and embodied on those bodies.

Chapter 4 SPIRITUALIZED BODIES, EMBODIED SPIRITS: YOGA IN MÉXICO

Yoga and Mexico

Notable work about yoga in Mexico has been done by Adrian Muñoz, who has attempted to construct a history of yoga in Latin America, specifically focusing on the localized establishment of this practice in this country (Muñoz, 2020). Similar to other countries in Latin America, the development of yoga in Mexico is not directly tied to traditional yoga in South Asia but is more or less influenced by North American or European developments (Muñoz, year: 345). The introduction of Eastern philosophies in general, and yoga in particular, in Mexico, is primarily attributed to the strong cultural exchange between this country and France during the 19th and 20th centuries. Significant figures in Mexican history, such as Francisco Madero, one of the leaders of the Mexican Revolution, and later Jose Vasconcelos, one of the main intellectuals involved in the country's reconstruction and modernization after the Revolution, were in contact with these philosophies and played an important role in their political inspiration (Muñoz, 2020, 2021).

Regarding postural yoga, two notable figures can be highlighted in the introduction of this variant. One of them is Serge Raynaud de la Ferrière, a French self-styled spiritual leader and philosopher, founder of the Great Universal Brotherhood (Gran Fraternidad Universal or GFU). To promote both 'exoteric movement' and 'esoteric elevation,' the GFU established ashrams, with yoga being one of the main tools for this purpose (Gutiérrez Zúñiga 2015: 2). While this initiative began in Venezuela, the GFU was highly successful and soon took root in

other countries, notably Mexico and Costa Rica (Muñoz, 2020). A second figure is Indra Devi, the only female disciple of Krishnamacharya, a key figure in the creation of modern yoga in India (Muñoz, year). A third important route of entrance has been the cultural and educational relation between Mexico and the US, in this case, specifically in the artistic scenario. In fact, many of the most practiced postural yoga's in Mexico today came from Mexican dancers who went to study abroad, principally in Chicago and New York, where they found yoga to later imported to Mexico City (Larios, 2022).

Thus, like elsewhere, yoga in Mexico is primarily postural (Muñoz, 2020), making it a practice highly related to the body and its health. As elsewhere, It is a practice that has been influenced by processes of colonization, modernization, and localization. A practice that has been transmitted and articulated through bodies (Langwick, 2008). A practice that I joined in Mexico to observe, to listen and to embodied.

Yoga in Mexico

Transported to a space between Mexico and India, that's how I felt upon arriving at the venue for the Iyengar Yoga Convention in Querétaro in the year 2023. A colonial-style hotel surrounded by gardens with tropical plants and peacocks, gradually filling up with over 300 Mexican Iyengar yoga practitioners who traveled from different parts of Mexico, and even from Canada and the US to practice for five days under the guidance of Abhijata Iyengar. She is the recent leader of the international community of the Iyengar method, one of the main branches of modern postural yoga, created by Abhijata's grandfather, B.K.S Iyengar.

Mexico and India. I am not the first to establish this comparison. The initial encounters between Mexico and yoga took place in this scenario of idealization and exoticization, where Mexico appeared as the Other, as an exotic and natural place reminiscent of certain territories in India. As Adrian Muñoz shows in his research about the history of yoga in Mexico (Muñoz, 2020), this was also perceived and expressed by prominent figures in the development of yoga in Mexico (and the world), such as Yogananda, one of the key Indian gurus involved in the diffusion of yoga in the West, during his visit in 1929, as well as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, one of the most relevant institutions in the dissemination of yoga in the West. Today, the blend of warm weather, tropical landscapes, exotic birds, Sanskrit words, aromatic and spicy food, and the physical proximity of bodies make me and also many of the participants connect with those experiences and perceptions recounted several years ago. Experiences that, as Abhijata has stated on various occasions, *make her feel as if she were in India, as if she were at home.*

However, this India-Mexico relationship included a third party, which was mentioned several times by the participants. Here, I'm referring to the United States, with which Mexico maintains a complex geo-political relationship, which, in a way, is reflected even in the dynamics and relations of this transnational practice. While many of the yoga teachings have been received from the United States, there is a constant critique of how this country understands and practices this method, as well as the community that forms around it. The practice of yoga in the United States is perceived by Mexican practitioners as a reflection of aspects of the culture of this country and, thus, as a standardized, rigidized, and individualized activity, as we can see in Andrea's words:

It has a lot to do with very American systems. Americans tend to standardize. So when you want to standardize a method, like yoga, it needs to be done in a certain way if you want it to have this umbrella that encompasses everyone. But in standardization, you lose a lot of information, right? And I think what I interpreted from Abhijata is, let's not lose the other parts that yoga has. It's not just rigidity. We need certain requirements to be met to know that we are talking about the same thing. But in that, you have to play, and it's very difficult for Americans because they are very rigid and the kings of standardization. And that means that A is only A. So they don't let you play with this, so when they tell you to be more flexible, it's like, 'how much?' and how far is flexible, and how far am I deviating from the method, it's complicated, right?

In this context, the relationship and closeness between India and Mexico stand out in contrast to the United States, as can be seen in what Laura says:

Many teachers come to Mexico, especially from India, and they are extraordinary, each one better than the other. The community here is smaller, making it easy for them to come, and they like it because Mexico is like India. In terms of temperament, they feel much more at home than with Americans because here we are more open, more family-oriented. They come to our homes, you take care of them a lot. The food is very similar, and they really like the cuisine. What they don't like, at least those who have come, is those American things like, 'Don't touch them because they'll accuse you.' Oh, that's difficult for them because in India, they handle you, the way they grab you is quite intense. Obviously, nothing sexual, but in the USA, they have that issue, that trauma, a terrible distortion. Yes. They feel much more in their element, even being able to touch people.

Based on the similarities with India and the differences with the United States, as described by these Mexican practitioners, we can say that the practice in Mexico is more flexible, more community-oriented, and involves greater interaction among its participants. The body is not seen only as a personal instrument to be controlled and improved, but also as an object that can vary, that can be used in different ways, and that allows to connect, physically, with other bodies too. However, in Mexico, there are not only similarities and differences; there

are also unique adaptations and hybridizations. It was these adaptations and hybridizations that prompted me to continue asking questions.

Seeking to continue the conversations initiated in Queretaro, I made a couple of visits to Mexico City, as this city is home to most practitioners. Here, I attended three Iyengar Yoga centers where most of the people I meet at the Convention attended—one in the Condesa neighborhood, a neighborhood characterized by upper-middle-class residents and heavily gentrified by so-called digital nomads; another in the Polanco neighborhood, one of the city's most elegant areas; and a community parish center in Santa Fe, a neighborhood with high levels of vulnerability and crime, often referred to as 'the city's landfill' as it was built on garbage. The three centers are interconnected, as the first two are different branches of the same studio, and the third emerged from the initiative of practitioners from this studio with the goal of extending the practice to more vulnerable sectors. In this setting, a significant group of women has committed to this practice, many seeking to heal and alleviate physical ailments such as back and neck pain, as well as emotional situations such as depression, distress, and anxiety. Today, ten years since the start of this initiative, this group still receives support from the first center, but some students have become instructors themselves, leading classes for their community.

In these studios, I employed the participant observation method during classes, engaged in informal conversations with practitioners before and after sessions, and conducted semi-structured interviews with nine yoga instructors/practitioners. From these interviews, I got the quotations that I'm presenting in this ethnography but changing the names of the interlocutors in order to protect their anonymity.

While both these interviews and the observations gathered during the Querétaro Convention are not exhaustive, they have served as exploratory materials that have allowed me to identify that the practice of yoga in Mexico takes root in a particular way. This is because of its specific relation to two major institutions that had lead colonialism all over the world: the Catholic Church and Biomedicine. Institutions that had play a strong role shaping the understanding and experience of the body in Mexico. Without implying that these are the only distinctive features, they are considered interesting findings from this exploratory fieldwork, and they will be presented in the following section.

Yoga and Biomedicine

In conversations with these Mexican practitioners, the story of how they started practicing yoga was repeated over and over. The vast majority had come across this practice seeking physical healing—healing from chronic back pain, injuries, chronic diseases, or age-related conditions such as arthritis, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, Parkinson's, epilepsy, among others. They sought healing in a way different from what biomedicine proposed, which was the first system they had turned to and where they had not found the answers they were looking for to alleviate their ailments.

While the range of diseases is broad, and therefore the treatment offered by conventional medicine is also diverse, a general pattern emerges where these individuals reject two aspects of this system. On the one hand, they reject invasive and risky treatments, and on the other hand, they resist palliative responses to permanent ailments, with pain medications being the paradigm. It is worth mentioning that there is a third group that does not reject the biomedical system by

choice but due to a lack of resources. These are the situations that lead these individuals to question the biomedical system and seek answers in alternative therapeutic systems, like yoga. And they find them.

This creates an articulation between both systems, functioning as complements that provide greater autonomy to patients and more complexity in the understanding of their bodies and the processes involved in healing them. Thus, the biomedical body takes on additional dimensions, which will be described in this section.

An interesting case that illustrates the above is the story of Laura, who at the age of 40 began to lose mobility in her arms due to a condition called spondylosis. Biomedicine suggested a risky surgery as the solution, without which she would be sentenced to a life of pain treated with medicaments and increasing immobility. However, within the biomedical system, Laura was referred to yoga as a different solution. A solution that the doctors didn't really understand or explain but that worked. As she maintains: "Rawuajar is not a doctor; he is a direct student of Iyengar, an extraordinary teacher, and obviously knows all the therapeutic aspects of the world. He looks at you, and, you know, he can tell by just looking at you. He had a radiograph, and he made me do a series of exercises, not just what I'm telling you. It was like he came to Mexico every year and left me with the treatment for a year, and that's how he fixed me. I owe it to him. And now I'm doing very well."

This experience produced a change in Laura's perspective on the biomedical system, recognizing its limitations, which she describes as related to the understanding and knowledge it

has of the body: a body that is objectified and standardized under the figure of a perfect body, and thus treated to match this perfection.

They train them at the university to achieve perfect bodies, how those bodies are, well, the only tool is surgery, they don't know any other tool. So the yogis, have other tools to restore the body. Tools that doctors don't have... because they go to the cause of the damage. The doctors were only addressing my pain, which was not the cause. They were only focused on the pain, consistently through medicine, and if I stopped taking it, it didn't work because of the intense pain. So I believe that yoga definitely sees you as a whole and has wonderful solutions to alleviate those pains and address you to a certain extent.

Another interesting point to highlight in Laura's experience, which also reflects what many other practitioners share about their ailments and treatments, is the relationship with medications and the analogy and contrast established between them and yoga poses. An example of this analogy between asana and medication can be found in the words of Paula, one of the women at the center in Santa Fe:

For example, sirsasana enhances visual acuity and willpower. And sarvangasana, being the mother of all postures, brings you joy. So when I'm feeling down, I do sarvangasana, then you relax a lot, and as it opens your chest, you're upright, it's padrísimo. It has also helped me with gastritis. When I feel like I've eaten too much, I do supta badakonasana, and it feels so good. For me, it has helped with headaches too. I lie down in savasana, headstand, and it helps. I hardly take medications anymore. Yoga has helped me a lot.

Thus, a combination is observed in using yoga as a treatment, where a comparison between posture and medications is established, attributing them to similar functions and making them interchangeable. This relationship is interesting, considering the development of this practice as a therapeutic activity, where one of the characteristics was the medicalization of the postures back in 19th century India, as mentioned in a previous section of this article. So, the translation of yoga into biomedical terms established back in India first allowed the validation

and spread of yoga as far as Mexico, where today it's being used to replace one of the main biomedical responses: the pharmaceuticals- an industry that is highly questioned. And the reason for the replacement is that, as Laura mentioned, medications are often used exclusively to reduce pain but not to solve the problem. In other words, the biomedical system, in many cases, functions as a palliative measure that generates dependence rather than a method of healing, especially in the case of chronic ailments or those associated with aging. And is a palliative measure with consequences since the secondary effects are well known.

Another case we would like to mention is the story of Daniela, a woman from the Santa Fe community, with advanced Parkinson's that has left her practically unable to lead an independent life. Since Daniela lacks the necessary resources to treat her illness, she is excluded from the biomedical system, and it is her community that responds by supporting her, primarily through therapeutic yoga sessions led by one of her peers, as we can see in Nina's words: "So I tell her, I'm not a therapist, a psychologist, one of those who give, a physiotherapist, I'm nothing like that D, but the little that I share with you is truly from the heart. And I love coming with you, maybe your illness, I don't know why, goes a little further back, or sometimes it advances."

This case illustrates another limitation of the biomedical system, which involves the exclusion of low-income communities. It also highlights another aspect of yoga as an alternative technique, presenting itself as a more affordable treatment that other members of the community can administer.

While, as we have mentioned, the majority of practitioners initiate their contact with yoga to heal physical ailments, one of the transformations that are observed is the understanding and management of emotions and mental health. This management differs from the way biomedicine responds to these situations, as the boundary between the body and mind is more blurred for these practitioners, where the body takes on a different role in understanding and responding to issues that biomedicine includes in the field of mental health. An interesting example is the case of Andrea, a yoga practitioner for whom this practice has meant significant emotional support during challenging moments in her life. Her narrative illustrates well this unique way of understanding emotionality and 'mental health' from the body:

What I find incredible emotionally about Iyengar yoga is that it provides very easy tools to connect because the first thing you connect with is the body. And you say, it's silly, you stretch your finger and feel your finger. And your attention is only on the finger, and only that you are extending the leg. And your mind is only in those parts of the body. But suddenly, it's like conquering the body. Because, to me, many times, I was a person disconnected from my body. I was someone who felt pain somewhere, and I would stay thinking that something hurts, something is bothering me, and I don't know exactly what. But since I started yoga, I began to distinguish what I feel, what bothers me, what is pain, what is discomfort. Generally, we don't feel the body. So you start connecting with the first layer, which is 100% physical, but then you start connecting with more things because then you start feeling the body where emotions are seen. You arrive feeling sad, and it hurts; I feel like the chest is closed, and I feel the chest is oppressed, and you know perfectly that it has to do with an emotional issue and not that the lungs are closed. It has to do with this emotional oppression of sadness. Or you feel this knot in the stomach that has to do with anxiety, with fear. So you begin to distinguish how emotions are manifesting in your body. And that starts with connecting first with the most physical part and then doing this introspective work.

Through the perception of the physical body, it is possible to begin perceiving other aspects of the body, in this case, emotions. What is interesting is that, unlike conventional therapies for mental health, yoga objectifies emotions in a particular way based on perception,

placing physical and emotional ailments on the same materiality plane. In yoga, emotions are embodied in the body, making it possible to recognize and work on them somatically.

Thus, the therapeutic techniques used to address physical ailments and emotional disorders are essentially the same: the asanas. This is an experience recounted by practitioners, but it is interesting to note that it aligns with the cosmology of yoga, where the physical body, emotions, and even thoughts are considered matter or praktri, in contrast to subtler elements like purusa. However, the value attributed to them does not stem from a connection with abstraction or concepts inherent to yoga philosophy but rather from the tangible experiences perceived by practitioners in their bodies.

It is within this real experience that the relationship these practitioners have with the practice undergoes a second transformation. While they do achieve physical and even emotional healing, what they find goes beyond that. With this, I'm referring to the fact that they also encounter certain experiences that they describe in spiritual terms, as can be seen in Andrea's words:

There are moments when you find that feeling of bliss, something you touch occasionally and not in every class, and not always. So for me, yoga is a practice through the body where I connect with myself. And in connecting with myself, it's from the body to my most emotional part, it sounds cheesy, but from the soul. It's where I truly find myself, like it's your home, your space; that, for me, is yoga. I know little about the philosophical aspect; we have studied it within the system, but beyond giving you the rhetoric of what they say, all of that, you end up feeling it in the body.

And thus, even illness and its healing take on a different meaning, as Ana, one of the most experienced yoga teachers in Mexico City, with considerable knowledge in the therapeutic

aspects of the practice, told me in one of our conversations: “According to the yoga sutras (it says), illness is one of the main obstacles to spiritual seeking. If something hurts, if something bothers you, you can't think of anything else. That's why Hatha yoga works on the body and seeks enlightenment, liberation through the body, first, by healing it. So, it says that healing the body through the practice of asanas is already a step towards spirituality, healing.”

This is something I also observed during the Convention, especially in two moments. In one of them, while we were performing one of the postures, keeping our attention on our bodies, Abhijata told us:

And if you don't know whether you're working on spirituality, what you're doing now, well, that is spirituality. Talking about chakras, nadis, the subtle body, is too abstract. That's why we need to talk about the body, the sensations of the body because that's something everyone can understand, not just philosophers or intellectuals. This is what Guruji (the name practitioners use to refer to B.K.S. Iyengar) wanted to rescue from yoga. Using concrete terms, using props, so that everyone can feel yoga, but this doesn't mean we're not working with a subtle body.

In this way, it's possible to distinguish how the body engaged in yoga combines a series of *materialities* with different properties. These include a physical body described as limbs, muscles, and bones, but also an emotional body and a spiritual body. Bodies that are shaped through asanas and the perception within these asanas. In short, bodies that articulate through the practice of yoga. However, faced with this, the question arises of the origin of these articulated materialities. To what extent are these materialities enabled by the already existing biomedical system, thus facilitating the introduction of yoga? And in relation to the above, is yoga an alternative or rather an iteration of a larger system? Questions that I open, but I will not be able to answer in this section.

Whatever the answer, we have observed a difference in the perception, in the feeling of these bodies. Thus as I've shown, for this group of practitioners, yoga is not relegated to merely physical practice, but also takes on spiritual undertones. Through this characteristic, interesting connections are established between this practice and Catholicism, one of the main religions in Mexico, which will be developed in the following section.

Yoga and Catholicism

According to the 2020 Population and Housing Census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Inegi), the number of Catholics in Mexico represents 77.7%, making this country the second most Catholic in the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of the practitioners mentioned intersections, contradictions, and connections between this religion and the practice of yoga.

Most of the interviewed practitioners had a Catholic upbringing, which, among other things, contributed to shaping a certain perception of the body. In Catholicism, there is a clear distinction between the body and the soul, where the body corresponds to an inferior matter, often associated with notions of sin, especially in relation to sexuality. In this sense, Catholicism involves a kind of denial or suppression of the body, which was reflected in the words of several interlocutors when they said that before practicing yoga, they were "*disconnected from my bodies.*" To claim that one is disconnected from one's body, it's quite interesting if we think that being human inherently involves having a body through which one exists and acts. Ontology and praxis depend on this body. However, there is a significant fear associated with the sensory

aspects, leading to the disconnection these practitioners describe as being related to the perception of their own bodies.

During the interviews, I observed various ways in which this intersected with the practice of yoga, involving adaptations, negotiations, and sometimes contradictions.

The blurriness that allows the intersections not only arises from the perception during the practice but is also reinforced (and maybe provoked?) by a series of ritualistic and symbolic elements that exist on the border between the pagan and the religious. Examples include the invocation at the beginning, the worship of certain sages and gurus, and quotations from books such as the Yoga Sutra and Bhagavad Gita, etc. This, combined with the fact that various elements of the practice (at least in the Iyengar method) retain their names in Sanskrit, gives it a halo of exoticism in the Mexican context. From this, tensions arise that do not allow for reconciliation, in this case, between Catholicism and the practice of yoga. Unless some symbols are removed, as it can be seen in Laura's narrative about some struggles they have while doing the classes in the Santa Fe community center: "The priest in Santa Fe, do you remember he wouldn't let us say that these were yoga classes? It was gymnastics; he wanted us to call it gentle gymnastics or something like that. I opposed it and told him that we don't tell lies; you're a Catholic, and you teach that. He didn't care about the exercises; he didn't want us to say we were doing yoga, nor to chant OM, to avoid invoking the devil or something."

It's interesting to highlight the weight of symbols and how their presence or absence changes the definition of what a certain practice is. The physical practice wasn't problematic for

this priest; rather, it was the designation of it as yoga and the initial invocation. In fact, the physical aspect is valued by practitioners who have been raised within conservative Catholicism because, as mentioned, the body is something they try to disown, which, according to these practitioners, can sometimes have repercussions on their health.

And in Cocoyoc, it was very funny. She didn't use these words that I'm going to use, but he was watching what we were doing in this practice, us Mexicans, and he said, 'Everyone, in general, in the method, we ask you to compact the hips, squeeze the buttocks, and lower the coccyx. Mexicans, he didn't say they have tight asses, he didn't use that expression, but at the end of the day, that's what it was. For Mexicans, I'm going to give a different instruction. Relax the buttocks and lower the coccyx. These curious things tell you about the culture and the group. Indeed, we are tight. If there's a restriction in the hips, if there's a restriction here (pelvic area), we hold onto emotions. And we all have lumbar issues! I mean, everyone. But when she saw the bodies and saw the exercises, she said, these people have tight buttocks, they're not loose. Things that these characters see. What sensitivity! And if you think about it in terms of sexuality, yes, Mexicans are hyper-conservative. We are very tight. In the end, it's like a language that allows you to know other things. And in the body, you see many things. And yoga, through the asana of the body, provides a lot of information. The body is the one that speaks to you, but about what's inside.

Through the practice of yoga, it's possible to establish this difference between a tight body and a relaxed body, firstly. Since it's the practice that provides the perception to distinguish these properties in the body, offering a contrast to what would otherwise remain as the standard or the norm. But even more interesting is how, through this understanding of the body as an object that encompasses not only limbs and muscles but also emotions and even beliefs, it describes this body created from conservatism and religious ideas. This, in turn, allows it to be transformed through the perception of these muscles, emotions, and ideas as something tense, and then, through the asanas, to relax it.

An interesting example of adaptations and articulations is what Paula, one of the women from the Santa Fe Center who practices both yoga and Catholicism, shared:

"According to some people in my prayer group, sitting in Baddhakonasana or Padmasana¹ is considered bad because they believe that by having the legs apart, the evil enemy enters². They told me that yoga is a religion. And my husband said, 'Don't go changing to yoga.' And Teacher Laura says it's not a religion, it's a discipline. I say they get confused because we chant Om and the chant to Patanjali. Then I started reading, and Geeta in her book 'A Gem for Women' talks about yamas and niyamas as the 10 commandments of yoga. So, I said, yoga is a discipline, like Buddhism. It's not a religion. In fact, Guruji talks about God in his books! Nothing has entered me; I haven't felt anything. They say that posture, like, opens... it's ignorance. I tell my husband, if they are very Catholic, but I prefer to be here, doing this, nothing has entered me. I've been able to separate it. I keep going to church, I keep doing my yoga, my practice."

Paula's experience reflects the complexity of navigating the intersections between yoga and Catholicism, where she actively engages in both practices while acknowledging and addressing the concerns or perceptions of others in her religious community. As it is observed, yoga as a therapeutic practice intertwines with cultural elements inherent to Indian philosophy and this doesn't relegate it to merely a physical practice; it also alludes to spiritual and moral elements in Sanskrit (yamas and niyamas for example), which possess this halo of exoticism. Because of this, there is resistance from other people in this community. In response to that,

¹ postures with legs open

² By the evil enemy, they refer to the devil.

Paula articulates both practices in her body, with Catholicism encompassing belief in God and ecclesiastical practices, while also adopting yoga as a therapeutic practice that improves her physical and emotional health and brings about personal transformations. In fact, Paula translates elements of yoga into her own beliefs, assimilating the yamas and niyamas to the commandments and emphasizing that this practice talks about God, allowing her to accept it without challenging her religious beliefs. However, certain syncretisms and changes do occur, as seen below:

I would say Guruji, that the body is where your consciousness resides. I don't know what religion you practice, but in my case, I am Catholic. So when you go to a Church, you see the temple is clean, and on Sundays, people dress well because you're going to a celebration, to a banquet. In the same way, our body is a temple, and you wouldn't throw trash in the church. If you throw trash in your body, it's like the niyama that talks about tapas. When you overeat, it's the opposite of tapas. That's what I learned, oh, if I eat greasy food, my stomach hurts because it's not used to it anymore. I have let go of many habits. Before, I ate more; now, I limit myself. And that's thanks to yoga because when I bend in Uttanasana, you see that the little belly is not bothering me anymore.

One way to interpret this excerpt is to highlight what other participants have mentioned regarding the body within Catholic culture, where there is a neglect of the body stemming from a certain denial. On the other hand, as we know, the practice of yoga in its modern form places great emphasis on the body and how the work on the body holds spiritual value. Thus, it can be observed how Paula elaborates on the combination of both notions, transferring the concept of the numinous or sacred that she experiences in the temple, in the Church, to her own body. Since she already understands this experience of the sacred place/space and how they should be treated, this is transferred to her body. However, it is mixed with concepts from Hindu philosophy, such as tapas, which means purification. In terms of health, this generates greater awareness of the body and its well-being. The body shifts from being an ignored object or one that doesn't need to be respected or cared for to being an object that must be purified and cared

for to maintain good health. A good health that is not secular anymore but that has moral and even spiritual connotations. This also recalls something mentioned earlier regarding Abhijata's statements about how this bodily work of asanas is, in fact, spirituality, or Ana, when talking about the health of the body as a step to reach higher spiritual states.

It is not yoga or Catholicism, it is not body or spirit, but it is an articulation of the two, which adjusts to the cultural particularities and current needs of this group of practitioners. With this articulation, the body goes from being considered a prison of the soul, where both elements can be differentiated and therefore separated, to being an incarnation of this soul. Thus, while retaining this dualism of body and soul, the relationship between them is modified, no longer being conceived as two separate objects, but rather intertwined. Spirituality, thus, is not exercised despite the body, but rather through it.

Chapter 5 CONCLUSION

In the following article, we have explored how the practice of modern yoga represents a phenomenon composed of multiple adaptations, accommodations, and enculturations. While its origin dates back to pre-classical India as a philosophical system for achieving liberation, what we now know as yoga is far from that prototype. Instead, it presents itself as a complex assembly of Eastern and Western physical practices guided by anti-colonial and nationalist projects in 19th-century India. These projects succeeded in turning it into a hybrid of science and culture, spirituality, and medicine, ultimately providing it with a common language and catapulting it to multiple regions of the planet. Its hybrid and malleable nature has allowed it to continue adapting and enculturating in various regions, serving as a paradigmatic example of the post-colonial world we live in today.

Specifically, we have explored how this practice unfolds in the Mexican context, which differs from other regions such as Europe or the USA. In these cases, some authors have denounced a new colonization of yoga by these countries, appropriating its symbols with a marked tone of whiteness, consumerism, and individualism. Mexico, on the other hand, presents itself as a 'peer' to India, both members of the Global South, and making a difference, especially

between them and the US practitioners, thus reflecting other geopolitical tensions that go beyond yoga but are also expressed in this practice.

But descriptions fall short if only made based on contrasts, so in this paper, we have explored characteristics and adaptations specific to the localization of yoga in Mexico. Considering that, at least in this community of Iyengar method practitioners, the initial connection with yoga was due to health problems, we have observed how yoga interacts, complements, and sometimes questions the main medical system in Mexico, Biomedicine (Finkler, 2001), presenting itself as a mirror as well as an alternative to its limitations. These limitations include the exclusion of resource-poor communities, as seen in the cases of the women of Barrio de Santa Fe, the excessive use of medications and other techniques that anesthetize but do not heal the ailment, or even interventions whose invasion and risk are rejected by these individuals. All responses that view the body as a mere standardized object, for that reason, must be treated with standardized responses. Responses that, for my interlocutors, were not enough.

However, yoga not only questions this standardized and depersonalized way of treating the body but even its mere materiality. Yes, practitioners start the practice due to physical problems. But once they engage, it expands to include emotional and even spiritual aspects, changing these individuals understanding of their health, bodies, and selves. It is no longer just matter; it is also spirituality. However, by connecting with spiritual aspects, one enters a scenario in which, in the case of Mexico, due to the significant influence that Catholicism has exerted since its conquest and colonization, matter, the physical, the body, has little space since the body

is something to be tightened, closed, and denied. But through yoga, this body is re-sacralized, and the spirit is understood by these practitioners as something concrete and materialized.

In sum, the practice of postural yoga in Mexico interacts with two major institutions involved in defining the body in this country: the biomedical system and the catholic church. An interaction that, interesting enough, informs about the nature of this practice as something completely physical and not completely spiritual, but an articulation of both. A practice where the body becomes spiritualized and the spirit embodied. Concepts such as body and mind, health and spirituality, science and religion intertwine once again (Hauser, 2021), questioning the categorical binaries imposed by Western thought.

Final Remarks

We have concluded this article by discussing questioned binaries. However, weren't they already questioned long ago? Have we not traversed the history of the construction of yoga as a modern phenomenon to recall that, while proclaiming itself as an alternative to Western medicine, it used the methods and language of the latter to validate itself? (Alter 2000; 2004). And, even though it emerged in the West as an exotic spirituality closely associated with the New Age, several aspects were translated into concepts similar to Christian terminology? (De Michelis, 2005).

Is yoga truly an alternative? Or is it an iteration of this complex interweaving of processes that has been occurring since the 20th century? Is it accepted for its difference? Or for its similarity to familiar institutions and practices? In other words, are things really changing, or

are they just moving within a general framework that allows for differences within, but differences constructed with the same 'materials' albeit in different proportions?

Many questions whose answers do not find a place in this work. However, I would like to respond to them with the conclusion I wish to draw from this exploration. And it is the body. The hope that the body offers. The opportunity of sensations and physical experiences perhaps made possible by these institutions, but also made possible by its flesh, bones, and nerves. Let's remember that, for these practitioners, this entire experience began with pain. With a pain that served as the breeding ground for movement, questioning, and, in Mol's terms, the enacting of this 'new' body. A body that was enacted as a fixable object, a body that was enacted as a vessel, and a new body that was enacted by the pain and the (yogic) alternatives to heal it. All of them articulated (Langwick, 2008) to demonstrate that within globalization and institutionalization, new meanings, new versions can still be born from local and individual bodies.

While this exploratory work has allowed us to identify interesting particularities about the localization of the practice in Mexico, especially in its relationship with big colonial symbols such as the US, Biomedicine, and the Catholic Church, I would like to emphasize the limitations of this exploration once again. These limitations stem from the scope of the fieldwork as well as the focus on a specific method, the Iyengar method. Therefore, it is likely that there are myriad variations and subtleties in other methods and communities that could be explored in future research.

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