



Early Latin American Esoteric Yoga as a New Spirituality in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

This article seeks to present the history and influences of the first characters of yoga in Latin America. There is a research gap on Latin American yoga between the years 1900 and 1950, when no Indian yogi had yet arrived on the continent. This insulation, rather than delaying the advent of Yogic religiosity, brought about problems and unique solutions that five key figures sought to answer, offering a certain uniqueness to the establishment of Latin American yoga. I have chosen Katherine Tingley, Cesar Della Rosa, Leo Costet, Serge Raynaud, and Benjamin Guzman as main precursors, for they were the first to introduce, in their own ways, proto-yoga in Latin America. But unlike Europeans and Americans, who in the same period received their first yogic instructions from the hands of Indian yogis, Latin Americans created their own explanations, without instructions from Indian yogis. Latin American yoga may be similar to American and European yoga when comparing the yogic teachings taught in institutions, the therapy given in hospitals and in health posts, and connections to signs in other religions. However, Latin American yoga is unique because of the influences of symbolic exchanges of the aforementioned yogis during a movement that had been building since 1900.

Keywords Yoga · Religion · Meditation

Introduction

Yoga in Latin America has undergone many changes, as it has in other countries, especially in relation to theosophy, physical education, biomedicine, and the capitalist consumer economy (Singleton 2005). Among Latin Americans, what modern scholars

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call the Modern Postural Yoga (De Michelis 2004) has emerged, allowing for an understanding of current yoga as a kind of bodily religious practice (Jain 2014). However, unlike in Europe and the USA, Latin American yoga has amassed different socio-religious influences, which has in turn generated singular explanations and symbolic exchanges (Simões 2015a). As an example, we can highlight the yogic representation *Caminho do Coração* (Awaken Love), by Brazilian swami Prem Baba, that blends Hindu elements with Amazonian shamanism (Simões 2015b); the International Yoga Federation, founded in 1934 in the Uruguayan capital and 2 years later launches the first Latin American training school of “yoga teacher”; and the president and founder of the Cuban Yoga Association, professor Eduardo Pimentel, the “grandfather” of Cuba yoga who claims that Cuban yogis, due to the economic embargo and the sociopolitical adversities people on the Caribbean island must face daily, have developed a greater yogic notion of detachment.¹ In each case, we see Latin America’s unique socio-economic landscape, as well as the great potential the region holds for cultural and religious exchange.

All these approximations have weaved a dialog with earlier yogis that has left a legacy among Latin Americans yogis who nowadays organize hundreds of training courses for new yoga teachers. These instructors from the most diverse spiritual backgrounds have been working not only in the spaces traditionally established for their ritual practices, but also in schools, hospitals, health centers, mental health clinics, prisons, and gyms all over the continent.

In academic literature, however, there is insufficient research regarding the religious influences on Latin American yoga, especially when we consider the period dating back to before the arrival of Indian yoga institutions themselves (Simões 2015b). What I seek to emphasize in this article is the presence of yoga among Latin Americans before the advent of the first Indian yogis in the 1960s and 1970s on the continent (Saizar 2018).

Wright (2008), in his anthropological work, explores what he calls “peripheral religions” in Latin America, investigating particular groups (Rosa-Cruz, Spiritists, Marian cults, and Santo Daime) that are thought of as the “forgotten sciences.” Latin American religious narratives, as the author places, would be “creative dogmatic re-elaborations” of the dominant religions, especially the Christian religion. Wright’s article corroborates with our idea that the “reinvention” of yoga in Latin America 1900–1950 is a unique contribution and not established in the literature. It is important to point out that the religious field of Latin American yoga is still developing today. However, long before the first Indian Yogic institutions were established in the 1950s,² yogic thinking had existed in Latin America since 1900.

In this article, we will concentrate on the historical, social, political, and religious influences on yoga in Latin America between the years of 1900 and 1950. We will focus on this initial phase, beginning with the arrival of yoga, interwoven with European esotericism and the popularity of Christianity throughout Latin America.

¹ See interview at <http://cubawellnessadventures.com/interview-with-eduardo-pimentel/>, read on May 31, 2018, at 12:54 p.m.

² As an example, we could mention the yoga school *Self-Realization Fellowship* de Yogananda in Mexico in 1950, of the International Society of Divine Realization of Devanand Sarawati in Nicaragua in 1970, or the *Bihar School of Yoga* of Sivananda in Uruguay, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Cuba, and Puerto Rico between 1971 and 1977.

The understanding of yoga in Latin America and its uniqueness is spelled out through the five key characters previously mentioned. These are the individuals who will foster the therapeutic idea of yoga practices, as well as syncretism with the soteriological proposal of yoga and Catholicism. Nonetheless, the perspective of yoga as a transformative agent in schools and yoga and meditation as a sort of “tool” of increasing human performance will take shape, especially when we analyze the schools of Raja Yoga of Tingley. This will also be seen in the institutions of Leo Costet (Expectant Church), Serge Raynaud (Universal Great Brotherhood), Benjamin Guzman’s Suddha Dharma Mandalan, and the Cesar Bandio yoga federations. In all of them, the main influences of Latin American yoga are in a state of incubation. These include (1) yogatherapy, (2) syncretism and Catholic messianism, (3) the growing number of “training schools” of yoga teachers, and (4) yoga as a potentiator of “human performance,” whether it be in school, companies, and other sectors of society.

Biographical Sketches

Katherine Augusta Westcott Tingley

Katherine Augusta Westcott Tingley was born in New York/USA in 1846 and was educated in Montreal, Canada. After being professionally trained as a social worker, she began working for state institutions. She moved to New York City in 1894, where she met one of the founders of the Theosophical Society.

Her biography, written by adherents of Theosophy, reveals an idealistic woman, who went beyond theory. In 1895, a harsh dispute between W. Judge and Annie Besant led to the split of the Theosophical Society. After the passing of Judge in 1896, Tingley took over as the leader of the North American Section of the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society. A few years later, she published a New York-based Theosophy that dissented from Annie Besant. From that point, she began a journey that would foster and forge her activist spirit through the foundation of the International Brotherhood League and the Summer Home for Children in New Jersey. She also founded a home for orphaned children in Point Loma, California, and a few children’s schools. Tingley’s establishment of the Raja Yoga Academy in Havana, Cuba, in 1900 provides the first institution promoting yoga teaching in Latin America. Although she was not physically present at the Cuban Raja Yoga school, her work continued with the help of her book, which guided teachers and educational staff (1922). In her book, Tingley reports on the work she and her team have done and on how the Raja-Yoga Academy vision was maintained.

The Havana-based Raja Yoga Academy was founded on Tingley’s principles, but she started a number of new initiatives throughout the remainder of her life. Tingley believed that spiritual and social transformation could only be achieved through educational reform, and when she moved to New York City, she worked with prisoners and the destitute. She also created a field hospital to treat the wounded veterans of the Spanish-American War. In 1913, she founded the Parliament of Peace and Universal Brotherhood. A few years later, in 1919, almost as a “branch” of the Raja Yoga Academy, she established the Theosophical University in San Diego, California (Greenwalt 1955, p.163). At the end of her life, she expanded her summer schools

for children in Europe, on the island of Visingsö, Sweden, where she passed away in 1929. This may perhaps suggest that she has established more contact with the European theosophists. This is reflected by the way she perceived yoga, similar to the ideas of A. Besant.

Cesar Della Rosa Bendió

Yogi Della Rosa (1901–1955) was born in Italy in 1901. His biography is narrated in an almost mythical form by his Latin American disciples. They say he traveled to India, Nepal, and Tibet and was a direct disciple of Ramana Maharishi while on a spiritual pilgrimage through the East between the years 1924 and 1939.³ None of these facts, however, could be verified outside of the scope of their religious and social microcosms.

As with almost all our early representatives of Latin American yoga from this period (1900–1950), Della Rosa's life narratives are nebulous and controversial. We know he always called himself a direct disciple of Ramana Maharishi and a friend of Sivananda.

Cesar Della Rosa, however, was the first in Latin America to think of yoga in its modern terms. He will be responsible, as we shall see, for founding two yoga federations in South America. His biography states that he was a pupil of the Frenchman Korneiz, a well-known French astrologer. Korneiz began to take an interest in yoga in the late 1920s and went on to publish books on yoga and health practices in 1936 (Descamps 2011, p.55–57; Joseph 2017). With this piece of information on Master Della Rosa, we can conclude a great deal about Kerneiz's influences as well.

Kerneiz was a reader and student of German professor George Bühler (1837–1898), a recognized intellectual, Sanskrit expert and author of several books on the Indian scriptures. One of Bühler's best known works was *The Sacred Books of Hindus*, published in the late nineteenth century (Descamps 2011, p.55). Because of this influence, Della Rosa's yoga is much more European-based than Indian, as his disciples believed.

Cesar Della Rosa landed in Uruguay in 1934. While it is unknown why he specifically came to Uruguay, Uruguay was receiving a significant number of migrants from Italy at this time. The Italian influence was so great that in 1920 José Serrato, a first generation Italian, was elected Uruguayan president by direct vote.

After a few years in the country, Della Rosa founded the Uruguayan Yoga Federation. He worked at the Federation for more than 20 years, organizing training courses for new yoga teachers throughout both Uruguay and Argentina. During these years, his best-known yoga students were Margarita Fanny, Fátima Escala, and Carlos Ovidio Trotta. Della Rosa passed away in the Uruguayan capital city of Montevideo, in 1955. His successor, Carlos Trotta, was one of the individuals responsible for bringing yoga to Brazil.

Leo Álvarez Costet de Mascheville

Leo Costet de Mascheville (1901–1970) was the son of Albert Raymond de Mascheville (1872–1943), also known in esoteric networks as Cedaïor. The

³ <http://www.escuelainternacionaldeyoga.biz/fundador.html> accessed on Jan. 24, 2018, at 1:21 p.m.

Mascheville family migrated from France to the Argentinian capital of Buenos Aires on February 25, 1910. Leo Costet's father, Albert de Mascheville (Cedaïor), founder of the Expectant Church and initiated in Martinism, believed that his esoteric mission should be continued in the "New World" for a "new race" that would emerge (Cedaïor 1919, p.4–7; Irigoyen 2004, p.13–14).

Considered the second patriarch of the Expectant Church, Leo Costet traveled to Argentina, Uruguay, and around Brazil with the purpose of establishing the bases for the doctrine of his father. In 1928, there is the autobiography of Leo Costet, who had received a "revelation" that made him drop everything, what he called the "Continental Crusade of Peace", traveling on an expansionist mission by South America of the Expectant Church in the name of the "Truth of Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi," as he himself describes it in his book (Sevananda 1986). In this pilgrimage, Leo Costet found the headquarters of the Expectant Church in Brazil and idealizes the bases of his yoga school, Sarva Yoga, with a strong therapeutic influences of yogic practices. In the 1960s, after initiating and influencing several native South American yoga teachers, Leo Costet moved to a farm in Betim, MG, Brazil, where he passed away in 1970.

Serge Raynaud de La Ferrière

Serge Justinien Maria Raynaud (1916–1962) was born in France on January 18, 1916. It is unknown why he later adopted the surname La Ferrière. Serge Raynaud claimed to have earned many academic qualifications and esoteric initiations, but this cannot be verified (Siegel 2014). It can be confirmed that he studied Astrology and practiced as an astrologer in Paris. According to his wife Louise, her husband revealed "a great power of synthesis," suggesting that he would not have "created" anything, but "synthesized" all the knowledge that he came into contact with in life (Id., p.284).

His desire to travel to South America arose years earlier 1947, when he and his wife watched a film about Peru. Their initial idea was to go to the Peruvian capital, but by the end of 1947 had traveled to New York and, after a few weeks in the USA, arrived in Guatemala to permanently settle in Caracas, Venezuela's capital. His biography recounts that in his esoteric and astrological studies he acquired knowledge about the possible second coming of Jesus Christ for the new millennium (the transition from the astrological age of Pisces to that of Aquarius). He later came to the conclusion that he himself was the new Messiah and that the South American continent would be the place on Earth where this New Age would thrive (González-Reimann 2014). At the end of 1947, he traveled with his wife from France to New York and, after spending a few weeks in Guatemala, he then settled in the Venezuelan capital. His intention was to spread his messianic message through the *Great Universal Brotherhood* or through *The Mission of the Order of Aquarius*, an esoteric order he founded in Caracas.

In mid-1949, Serge Raynaud traveled to New York to give some lectures and then proceed to India. During this visit, according to his institution (Great Universal Brotherhood), Serge Raynaud was given the initiatory name of Mahatma Chandra Bala by two swamis (Sri Swami Guruji and Swami Navaratman). Raynaud inaugurated the first seat of his esoteric order and an ashram in the Venezuelan city of Maracay, in 1948, and offered free classes. Years later, in 1958, David Ferriz Olivares, one of Serge Raynaud's disciples, founded another branch of the Great Universal Brotherhood in the

Colombian capital. In 1956, Serge Raynaud returned to Nice, France, where he died in 1962 at the age of 46.

Benjamin-Guzmán Valenzuela

Benjamin Guzmán Valenzuela (1895–1984), the only key figure native of Latin America, was born in Santiago, Chile. He must have entered a teenager to be a member of a Theosophical association and with 22 years old was in charge of organizing its library. In mid-1915, he came across a copy of *The Theosophist*, a magazine in which there was an article by Swami Subramanyanda on SDM (Suddha Dharma Mandalam, also known as the Cosmic World Governing and Guiding Body). Sri Subramanyanda's articles sought to differentiate the teachings of the Theosophical Society from SDM and contained descriptions of rituals to be performed as well as restrictions related to the specific level of development of the disciples:

Although the training is based entirely on Suddha raja yoga, it is necessary to observe certain simple rites on specific occasions, in the form of fire or water oblations. The fortnight ending with the full moon of Vaishak (May) is, for example, a period for strict observance of such rites. This period is especially chosen because it is on the day of the full moon of May that the White Brotherhood bestows special blessings on the world, so it is expected that on this occasion the members of the Organization make preparations and adopt the most receptive attitude possible, so they may be enabled to receive the blessings, as it is written in the following verse, which can be found in the book titled *Anushtana Chandrika*⁴.

After reading the article, Benjamin Guzman then wrote a letter to the swami pleading to be bestowed with the SDM spiritual order's first level of knowledge. After 6 months, he received a response with recommendations of books and specific rites he should perform to begin his spiritual training. For a period of almost 10 years (1915–1923), B. Guzman was introduced to yogic knowledge directly by an Indian leader—a unique case in the context of Latin American yoga. However, it was much later, only in 1965, that Sri Janardana, an Indian SDM yogi, visited Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil, blessing disciples and founding ashrams in the continent. Benjamin-Guzmán died in 1984 and left all of his assets to the Chilean SDM organization.

But unlike Argentinians, Brazilians, Uruguayans, and Venezuelans, who were initiated through the hands of non-Indian yogis, Benjamin-Guzmán was the first Latin American to obtain yoga training directly from an Indian master. This case is all the more unique because his entire initiation occurred without the physical presence of his master, who corresponded through handwritten letters from India between 1915 and 1918 (Schulz 2017), a “new model” of *parampara* (master-to-disciple teaching) in Latin American fashion.

⁴ Accessed <<http://www.universidadedocoracao.com.br/index.php/rss-da-univerdade-do-coracao/item/148-uma-organizacao-esoterica-na-india-artigo-i>> on Dec 6, 2017.

Influences of Latin American Yoga

Theosophy

Theosophy, which was Tingley's philosophical and spiritual basis, is the synthesis of a wide range of very ancient knowledge. *The Secret Doctrine*, the main book of this religious movement, was written by M. Blavatsky in 1888 and propelled the movement onto the global stage. The book brings together the wisdom of Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism (with particular reference to the Patañjali).

Yogaśāstra was termed Raja Yoga under the same umbrella.⁵ The theosophical perspective in the interpretation of Patañjali's Yoga Sutras has been well documented by academic research (Jain 2014, p.4). Thus, our first character of the initial stage in Latin American yoga, Katherine Tingley, drew on the yogic texts already interpreted through the lens of Theosophy to expose and diffuse their teachings. Tingley worked to spread the teachings of the yogic texts in the formation of a new society in Latin America, the so-called Raja Yoga Academics.

The school founded by Tingley in Havana, although influenced by elements that do not belong to the "traditional" yoga as we understand it today, can be considered the first experience of a "yoga" in Latin America. Tingley's yogic proposal and her Cuban schools created an essence of a certain "spiritual crusade" in the dissemination of yoga with the ideology for the realization of the "Fullness" that each human being carries "innate" within. The Raja Yoga of the Tingley schools is imbued with the religious conviction that there is a "perennial harmony" that we already are and even absent from bodily practices proper; the school content included the teaching of the spiritual principles that in all the yogic organizations later on they will also. That is, a yoga "detached" from Hinduism as an institutionalized religion, and much more closely related to a "universal religion," just as Swami Vivekananda stated the yoga in his book *What Is Religion*, published in the end of the nineteenth century.

In every religion, apparent contradictions and perplexities mark but different stages of growth. The goal of all religions is to realize God inherent in the soul. This is the only universal religion [referring to raja yoga]. (Vivekananda 2007, p.63).

When, by analyzing his own mind, a man comes face to face with something which is never destroyed, something which is, by its own nature, eternally pure and perfect [the Self], he will no more be miserable. All misery comes from fear, from unsatisfied desire. When a man finds that he never dies, he will then have no more fear of death. When he knows he is perfect, he will have no more vain desires. And both these causes being absent, there will be no more misery; there will be perfect bliss, even in this body. (Vivekananda 2009, p.8).

The implantation of the Theosophist *raja yoga* schools in Cuba by Tingley may have drawn inspiration from the educational models that had already been developed in India as the *Brahmo Samaj* was created in 1828 by Ram Mohan Roy and other *Renaissance*

⁵ See Judge (1912). *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*. Pasadena/CA: Theosophical University Press Edition.

Indians. In this way, the search for a synthesis between Indian and Christian religiosities, brought by Tingley, did not originate with Theosophy, but of the Indian yogis themselves of the late nineteenth century. However, because of the late arrival of Hindus in Latin American soil (Saizar 2018), Katherine Tingley may be credited as being the first individual to anticipate a certain Renaissance spirit common to many modern yogis (Farquar 1915).

Christian Messianism

Like K. Tingley and her raja yoga school in Cuba or Della Rosa and his yoga federations in Argentina and Uruguay, Leo Costet is known for systematizing his vision of yoga (Sarva Yoga) through the Expectant Church in Brazil. Leo Costet arrived in Latin America when he was only 9 years old. From an early age, and with the influence by Martinist religious thought of his father, he believed himself to be one of the people responsible for spreading the messianic ideas of the arrival of a “new race” among Latin Americans. All these ideas are condensed under the aegis of the Expectant Church as a new messianic-based religion, and based on *Vayu's Book of Laws*, written by Costet's father, Albert Mascheville, otherwise known as Cedaïor.

The book was written in 1919, when historical events converged in Europe. The end of the first Great War, the consequent Treaty of Versailles, and the nationalist waves in Germany and Italy, in addition to the Civil War in Spain, and the effects of the Great Depression in Europe all influenced *Vayu's Book of Laws*. Alongside these events in Europe, Albert Mascheville was also a witness to the processes of decolonization around the globe, in particular the Indian social, political, and religious movements that followed decolonization and pushed stronger independence from England. It is safe to assume a scene of social, economic, and political insecurity among Europeans. It is not strange, therefore, to witness the emergence of a religious movement such as the Raja Yoga schools of Tingley, the Expectant Church of Costet, and, as we shall see next with Serge Raynaud, the project of the Great Universal Fraternity, in this socio-political context.

In the synopsis of volume I of the aforementioned book, Leo Costet once again writes about Master Philippe:

In fact, it not only provides the reader with the most direct, practical and transcendental of the teachings on ‘HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN’, but also reveals mysteries of the court, world politics and the hidden influences that the mystics, both individually and through certain notable associations of INITIATES, of which many were also “real” by occupying the throne of powerful Empires or Monarchies, have had in all times and places (Sevananda 2007).

Another narrative, which impressed Leo Costet and repeatedly appeared in his publications, was the “scientific” speculation of the animal magnetism by Franz Mesmer and the vital fluid or “breath.”⁶ Costet even compared them to the concept of *prana* in

⁶ See BAIER, K. (2013) Mesmeric Yoga and the Development of Meditation within the Theosophical Society. In: Theosophical History. *A Quarterly Journal of Research*. Vol. XVI, Nos. 3 and 4 (July–October 2012, published in December 2013) 150–161.

yoga. Throughout his texts, he seeks to justify the ancestry of the laying of the hands as a form of healing in Egyptian and Christian religious writings: “I lay my hands on you, Osiris, for your good and to make you live” (Sevananda 2007, p.14). At the peak of his career, when the Expectant Church headquarters had already been inaugurated in Brazil and new disciples arrived to receive his instructions, Leo Costet gradually developed a yoga with outlines of a more defined healing/therapy body religious practice (Sarva Yoga). This practice fostered the beginning of Brazilian yoga in the 1950s with Gal. Caio Miranda and Hermógenes.

What is common among our founders at this early stage, perhaps because of the lack of Hindu organizations on Latin American soil, is an attempt to legitimize their yoga teachings through strong Christian appeal. S.Raynaud, for example, understood traditional religions, including Hinduism, as decadent (Raynaud [sem data](#), p.14). For him, Yoghism would be the means of implementing and diffusing the spiritual healings of Christ. He spent a significant portion of his book justifying his use of the term Yoghism, a neologism he created to demonstrate that even the yoga of Indian origin was being divided into various sects. This, he claimed, was creating harmful division and failed to promote the union that the term itself (yoga) designates: “bhakti- yoga, jnana-yoga, laya-yoga, hatha-yoga and raja-yoga were being interpreted erroneously” and creating sectarianism, just as traditional religions did (Raynaud, undated, p.27).

Raynaud’s biography tells of his meeting with the Master Della Rosa and the French Constant Kerneiz (or Felix Guyot). Whether this occurred physically or symbolically, Raynaud’s narratives inspired by Kerneiz undoubtedly created a fascination with yoga in the life of the former. It is here where the biographies of these two important figures in the contextualization of yoga in Latin America intersect.

According to his wife Louise, Serge Raynaud’s contact with the Italian Lanza del Vasto exerted a profound influence on him. Del Vasto was a disciple of Indian nationalist religious leader Mahatma Gandhi. Louise once commented in an interview that, upon seeing Lanza del Vasto return from India with a robe, Raynaud immediately told himself that “he wanted to be like him!” (Siegel 2014, p.278). Serge Raynaud sought to set up a communal social experiment that would create an ideal society of nonviolence and political and social autonomy in Latin America.

But this vision was much like that of Lanza del Vasto, who in 1948 proposed an alternative lifestyle in what he called the *Community of the Ark*, located in a small town in the south of France. But according to Serge Raynaud’s biography (written by Pamela Siegel⁷), he was impressed not only by the robe and the ideals of social transformation of Lanza del Vasto, but also by an encounter with the mysterious Sun Wung Kung (1875–1961) in Paris in 1947, before traveling to Latin America.⁸ This meeting was essential because Serge Raynaud interpreted the words of the old sage—“you have the mark”—as if he, like the “New World” messianic narratives of Albert and Leo Costet de Mascheville and their expectant religion, would be an Avátar (Siegel 2014, prologue note written by Soun-Woun-Koun).

⁷ Pamela Siegel is a PhD (2010) and a postdoctoral fellowship (2014) in Collective Health from the State University of Campinas/Brazil. It is located at the interface between Psychology and Collective Health, with experience in clinical, community, and social psychology, and in the third sector, working mainly in the area of alternative, complementary, and integrative medicines and qualitative research in health.

⁸ Besides Serge Raynaud, Serge Beucler also wrote about master Sun, in the magazine *Nouveau-Planète*, number 23, 1971, p.131. The French title of the article is “Sun, um maître errant.”

Suddha Dharma Mandalam

Information collected by his own disciples—and verified by me, especially the letters he exchanged with Indian yogis—reveal that Benjamin Guzman, from Chile, received his yoga initiation through swami Subramanyanda of the yogic order Suddha Dharma Mandalam—SDM (Janardanam 1936, p.335, p.337; Dasa 1995, p.10–16). After a period of extensive teaching relationships, he was given the initiatory name of Sri Vájra Yogi Dasa in 1923 and was authorized to find and disseminate the secret teachings of SDM throughout Latin American countries. He was the first Latin American to be officially legitimized by a tradition of Indian yoga.

He studied at a Catholic school and, according to his biography edited by the Chilean section of SDM, “he stood out since his years as a young man for his inclination towards religious investigation.” As a Catholic student, he knew the biblical texts, the catechism, the writings, and lives of the Catholic saints (Dasa 1995, p.10). It is also said that he became involved with hypnosis and spiritism and had “extraordinary experiences in his journey, such as the materialization of objects and wound healing” (Id.). In addition, as it could not be otherwise, Benjamin’s biographical book closes with a painting by him of the image of Jesus, “the result of a spiritual experience” (Id., p.29).

The Catholic influence on the first Latin American yogi to be appointed representative of an Indian institution on the continent proved to be important, as it transformed many of the Indian SDM signs into Christian elements. An example of this can be seen in a series of Catholic-inspired prayers that Benjamin wrote, such as *Venga Tu Reino*:

The Spirit of God is always in the whole Universe, this being his Eternal Kingdom. This Kingdom of God is the Supreme Consciousness of His Almighty Power, grasped by the Higher Self of the human being. St. Teresa of Jesus (The Moradas, Chap. 4) said that this presence manifests itself as Power, like a fountain or stream of water that rises or springs from the depths of the Soul and penetrates the whole body with its Glory (Dasa 1995, p.21).

It is interesting to note the appropriation of Catholic elements here. Benjamin uses Santa Teresa de Jesus (or Ávila) as a symbol of the “manifestation of Power” that SDM yoga comes to reveal. This Catholic tone permeated his whole life and even influenced the way Latin American SDM disciples interpret the traditional Indian scriptures.

Yoga was one of the narratives that these leaders could express the hope of building an idyllic place in Latin America where a “new race” of men and women will be born to “heal” mankind. In Paris, for example, the Société d’Études Atlantéennes (Society for Atlantian Studies) was created, which in 1927 began the publication of the specialized magazine *Atlantis* (Rivet 1948, p.382). These societies may reflect the similar recurring thought of a “new spirituality” that influenced all our key-person characters. There is no nonsense here, but the promise of a new world to emerge, idealized by a founding myth. Yoga was one of the narratives that our characters used, and long before the first Indian yogis visited the continent, yoga in Latin America was acquiring the characteristics of a new religious movement.

Means of Dissemination of Institutional Ideas of Latin American Yoga

Cuban Raja Yoga School for Children

The Cuban Theosophical Society is old and is still active. Founded in 1893 by Juan Jose Jiménez y Serrano, it had more than 600 members in 1915 and was the basis for the dissemination of theosophical ideas in many Latin American countries such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico. Tingley's Cuban Raja Yoga School opened with more than 200 students in early 1902. According to Greenwalt (1955, p.145), the Cuban Raja Yoga Academy would have been funded initially by Walter T. Hanson, a successful manufacturer of American cotton goods, and received an approximately 20-acre donation in the environs of the Cuban capital, Santiago, by the Spanish beverage and adept executive of Theosophy, Emilio Bacardi Mayor (Greenwalt 1955, p.147). This funding demonstrates an involvement and confidence on the part of Cuban society in the implementation of the educational project with the principles of "Raja-Yoga" by K. Tingley.

Tingley's raja yoga schools for children aimed, according to their observers, at restoring the "lost mysteries of Ancient times," based on a highly spiritualized intent based on awakening "true human dignity" (Fussel 1998). The proto-yoga taught here did not resemble the instruction of psychophysical and respiratory postures that denominate today as modern postural yoga (De Michelis 2004). Tingley's raja yoga was inclined more towards a teaching perspective based on a modern, non-dualistic religious-philosophical view of the world, even as modern raja yoga's own conception is still being researched (Jain 2014, p.4–5). Hence, Tingley's Raja Yoga Academy was an institution where the unitary concept of the body, mind, and spirit formed the teaching basis:

The children in the Raja-Yoga school at Point Loma begin in their tender years to encounter themselves in their efforts, in their mistakes, in their disappointments, without fear of punishment. They begin to realize that knowledge is within, that the glory of God is within, that the divine life is within, and in the simplest possible way they move towards it, just as they would towards a flower in the garden. (Jones and Ryan 2007, p.448)

The quote above shows the children were encouraged to find themselves *in their faults and discontents*, without fear of punishment.

Nor can we move away from the spirit of forgiveness, because it comes right out of our divine natures. It breathes the Christ-spirit, it takes us away from our personality and our selfishness, and we have no more time to think of our wrongs. We ourselves, rather, must become an example to humanity so as to challenge all thinking people to a deeper and more profound conception of life. Remember that they themselves are essentially divine, splendid qualities are sleeping within them. No matter how great worldly success or scholastic attainment are, there must come that inward consciousness of divinity, best expressed in the spirit of loving and forgiving. When this is done, we shall know the meaning of eternal love, of eternal justice, and of the sacredness of marriage. (Tingley 1927)

Tingley disseminates Neo-Hinduism beliefs and charitable principles with the notion that all human beings should be regarded as “essentially divine,” rather than bearers of any “original sin.” Therefore, her proselytizing proposal of her own raja yoga is aligned with edifying a “new” spirituality that is meant to rescue our human “true dignity” (Fussel 1998). The yoga whose dissemination in Latin America Tingley pioneered does not position itself as either totally Hinduist (the theological basis of yoga) or exclusively Christian, but as something in between.

This positioning between a Christian and Hindu yoga is also reflected in the idea of a “holistic education” for children, which includes the use of art to accelerate spiritual learning. Tingley also stated that a familiarity with the practice of yoga could boost “the development of the qualities of the soul, of character building and the attainment of self-control”. These developments form the basis of the Raja Yoga Academy (Tingley 1927).

Della Rosa’s Training of Yoga Teachers

Della Rosa, some decades after the Cuban experience, disseminated his work through training schools in Uruguay and Argentina. He, unlike K. Tingley, used adult education, in order to train new teachers of his yoga in Buenos Aires and Montevideo. While the other characters of this historical period may have “trained” yoga teachers too, this happened more by living with the master than a true intention to promulgate his “yogic school of thought,” as Della Rosa did. As soon as Della Rosa came to Uruguay and established Yoga Federations in Uruguay and Argentina, he published editorial publications and spreads and organized study groups.

But unlike K. Tingley, who had a quick transition, even with the symbolic legacy she left, the recognition that Cesar Della Rosa acquired among the yoga circles in South America is undeniable. For example, the Brazilian Society of Integral Yoga and the Uruguayan and French Yoga Associations still consider him as a kind of “patron” of Latin American yoga. This connections with the French Association occur because, according to the Integral Yoga Society, which is connected to the Indian Sri Aurobindo via Della Rosa, Della Rosa was the son of Italians and French and lived in France until adolescence, traveling later to India, where he was initiated into yoga.

It can be said that Della Rosa inaugurated the first training courses to train new yoga teachers with the ideology that he defended. He was perhaps inspired by early models already taking place in India. These models, such as the Yogendra Yoga Institute in 1917/India, the Yogananda Self-Realization Fellowship in 1920/USA, and the Swami Kuvalayananda Kaivalyadhama Institute in 1924/India, sought to promote his own “yoga school.” The reach and “demand” of the teachers who participated in the training courses for new yoga teachers of yoga of Della Rosa is not well known. However, much of the teachers of this period would go on to spread yoga across other Latin American countries. That was the case of Carlos Ovidio Trotta, who in the mid-1940s founded in Rio de Janeiro the Brazilian Association of Yoga Teachers, the Brazilian Yoga Federation, the Argentine Federation of Yoga, and the Latin American Yoga Union.

Esoteric and Syncretic Publications

Between 1942 and 1948, alongside yet another of our exponents from this period of Latin American yoga (the Frenchman Leo Costet de Mascheville, whom we will see

next), César Della Rosa set up another vehicle for promoting yoga: the Independent Group of Esoteric Studies (GIDEE—*Grupo Independiente de Estudios Esotéricos*). Working alongside other pioneers of Latin American proto-yoga, he launched the magazine *La Iniciación*, which played a role in spreading the institutional yoga Della Rosa sought to expand. There are no written accounts of the “training” of the new yoga teachers, but we know they were in-person and involved all sorts of hybrids with Hindu, Egyptian, and European esoteric spiritualities (such as Freemasonry, Rosea-Crucis AMORC, and Martinism).

The first issue of the magazine *La Iniciación*, for example, received the title “To all those who have tired of learning, and who wish, finally, to know,” with a summary that describes several esoteric subjects like Martinism, Astrology, and yoga. The opening theme addressed by Della Rosa discussed what he denominated as the *Mudra Yoga Principles* (Della Rosa et al. 1945, p.11–14). In this article, Della Rosa describes the mudras as not only secret symbols, but “ancient Sanskrit characters of magical efficacy” (Id., p.12).

The ancient Hierophants of Egypt, the Priests of all Religions, the Initiates, Cabalists, the Lamas of Tibet, etc., also spoke, through the mudras, a mystical and symbolic language. The Catholic Church itself employs certain magical signs. The Popes receive, at the transmission of their high hierarchical rank, a true collection of mudras that will help them transmit the blessing. (Id.)

From his very first publication, Della Rosa did not shy away from conveying a yoga full of a magical and secret force, which he was revealing to the interested public. He also fostered the convergence of the “yoga symbols” (or yoga mudras) with the Catholic institutions so as to legitimize his discourse.

Leo Costet (Sevananda) coexisted with Della Rosa in Uruguay and Argentina between 1942 and 1948. He later broke away from this and embarked on a journey to expand the ideals of the Expectant Church of her father (Cedaïor). The seat of the Expectant Church in Rio de Janeiro/Brazil was established at that time with a yogic ashram and an Essene monastery. There were also very well-organized, institutional guidelines of “apostolic succession” intent on anticipating the arrival of a new race of humans, as described by Leo Costet in a magazine he edited in 1945 in Montevideo:

In reality, we are witnessing a grand spectacle of Nature. While on the one hand there is the collapse of civilizations and peoples, and major changes on the Earth’s surface are causing such seismic movements, a new continent is emerging close to us, and the sufferings of all nations bring to our shores families of the Old Continent.

By recommendation of his master, Cedaïor called the race that will populate the Pacific Continent the Olympic Race, because it is “there and in her that all the powerful Entities that once formed the Olympus of the various past religions will reincarnate”. In it, which will be called the Great Race, all the Adept Masters will return. Apostles and Great Initiates and that race will represent a higher and more beautiful expression of human life (Lorelair 1945, p.4).

We can consider Leo Costet, of France, as one of the first to establish yoga as a system of healing and therapy in Latin America. In the synopsis of the book in which Costet writes about the life and work of his father, he describes miracle cures performed by his father as akin to those of Jesus Christ:

By the miracles reported and explained here, including the resurrection of the dead, the return of lost faculties and many others, Master PHILIPPE is revealed to us in the work as THE GREATEST SINCE JESUS. And although the content of the original French book (our first volume, in this edition) is enough to PROVE such an affirmation, it is nevertheless a joy for the Brazilian public that the second volume was written by Sri Sevânanda Swami, direct heir of the tradition of Papus and of PHILIPPE, as reported in the work. (Sevananda 2007, p.3).

The Expectant Church, a religious institution created by Costet's father, was inspired by spiritual instructions of a supposed Indian master and yogi. The cosmology of this Church was a strong influence on the life of Leo Costet and would greatly mark the therapeutic verve that he wove into his yoga teachings. *The Vayu's Book of Laws*, for example, written by Leo Costet's father, is rooted in the therapeutic principle, "rescued" of the Essenes, specifically those related to healing by the laying on of hands (Cedaïor 1919).

Costet inherits the influence of his father and takes it upon himself to spread this mission throughout Latin America. The purpose of his mission was to announce his role as the movement's main representative and to announce his concept of the "new race" within Latin America. Once again, as in the life and work of the key figures of Latin American yoga, it is possible to realize the closeness of Leo Costet's yogic propositions with Christian scriptures:

In its doctrinal aspect, it is already clear that all the Gospels are accepted by the Expectant Church. However, in Latin America its rituals are always Christian-based (Essene), with an Eastern base complement. The coming of Maitreya, the next manifestation of the Christ Spirit for the coming age, has already been known and spread in the East for many decades; and in the West it has been much commented upon.

The various races have had successive revelations, each of which has generated multiple religions as is the case of Buddhism, divided into so many sects or schools. And of Christianity, divided into Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodox and countless Heterodox, all perfectly Christian as well!

The broad Expectant position thus makes this the Church of all religions, or rather of all the cults which make up the Universal Religion (Id.).

Another person to influence of "yoga-therapeutic" Leo Costet was his father's spiritual mentor, Master Philippe de Lyon. History tells that Master Philippe was born in France and as a child, according to Leo Costet himself, impressed everyone with his spiritual healing powers by practicing the laying on of the hands. M. Philippe is presented to his Brazilian disciples by Leo Costet as an "extraordinary" and "accomplished" being, a

man who possesses trans-physiological powers. The young Costet used to associate M. Philippe with the reincarnation of Jesus Christ—something that echoed throughout all his life. Jesus Christ would even be presented as Costet’s greatest religious reference and disseminated among the heirs of the yoga organization he founded, *Sarva Yoga*.

Yoga “Churches” and Yogic Healing

At this point, the yoga therapeutics thoughts of Leo Costet and Serge Raynaud converge, because he writes a book unusually titled *Yug, Yoga, and Yoghism*, in which he sums up the teachings of Patanjali and his Yoga Sutras. Moreover, he makes a critique of the existing yoga models and suggests uniting them all under the umbrella name of “Yoghism.” Yoghism is what Raynaud understands of his yoga as being a sort of perennial religion, for he states that “There are no immutable religions (...) only YOGHISM remains UNDISTURBED throughout the centuries.” (Raynaud, undated, p.16).⁹ Raynaud regarded yoga as a distinct religion, a sort of unification of all others, very much the New Age style that all our other key figures mentioned so far.

In Raynaud’s discourse, the most evident effects of yoga lie in its health benefits “proven” by science, which have had a great impact on the dissemination of the practice through Latin America:

Little by little in the Western world, official medicine recognizes the benefit of asanas, and numerous medical journals and scientific bodies have disseminated publications related to hatha-yoga. (Id., p.43)

The seven major chakras are these nerve-fluidic centers, exact reproductions of the seven plexuses well-known to the occultists, and are the subtle effluvia of the seven main glands called endocrine.

It is evident that in neuropathic cases the asanas have better effects, as well as for the cure of rheumatism, arthritis and everything related to the grand sympathetic nerve although in reality there is no limit to the curative possibilities of yoga, as it functions in the entire glandular system. (Id., p.44)

This rhetoric of legitimizing yoga in its approximation to Christianity as well as through conventional biomedicine, which many *Indian Renaissanceists* also valued (Simões 2015a), was widely used by Raynaud. His yogic proposal was to unify scientific and religious knowledge. The yoga therapeutic heritage of his Yoghism with Christian teachings and the hope for a “new world” would once again set the tone for the dissemination of yoga among Latin Americans. This dissemination is very similar to the Sarva Yoga messianism of Leo Costet’s Expectant Church.

Both the therapeutic legacy of yoga and the self-declaration of the chosen ones would be used by Latin American yogis 50 years later. One example of this is Prof. Hermógenes, who unified spiritist teachings with those of yoga (Hermógenes 2005), as

⁹ *There are no immutable religions; in all of them their primitive dogmas have been modified; in all of them a part of their teachings have been transformed. Only YOGHISM remains UNDISTURBED throughout the centuries.*

well as Master DeRose who, like Costet and Raynaud, inaugurated a “tradition” of yoga inspired by the supernatural (Simões 2011, 2015a). Another model worthy of mention is that of José Luis Pallavicini Norori, from Mexico, who set the basis for the Devanand Center of Meditation in Mexico City in 1974, with distinct Christian syncretic traits, just as our key figures had done more than 30 years before:

Christ will return to never leave again. (He) is an evolutionary state we reach when we illuminate the fifth Chakra. A sublime state of truth, Love, Harmony and Peace. We in this school, with the grace of our Beloved Master, are in a deeper state.¹⁰

Serge Raynaud’s contribution to Latin American yoga can be seen, above all, in his proximity with biomedicine, the translation of the Sanskrit scriptures of yoga into esoteric nomenclatures, and the organization of the chakras in correspondence with the endocrine glands and theosophist elements. (Alter 2004, p.49, p.60–62; Singleton 2010, p.29, p.32, p.50–52, p.149).

YOGHISM does not have these subdivisions that offer a nice little mixture of spiritual confectionery: it is ONE and ALL, a SYNTHESIS, and not an unpacking of tiny bundles tied with tags labeled “for intellectual people”, “for ladies of late affections” or “for gentlemen in search of novelties”! Yoghism does not exclude anything: it’s the diverse experiences that lead the student to the various states required for the final Enlightenment (Raynaud, undated, p.28).

How many good readers believe that Raja-yoga is described according to the individual opinion of Swami Vivekananda, or that the Bakthi is simply a devotional path without the physical presence of the Guru, or that Karmayoga is the simple activity without the Sacred Books being fulfilled in the candidate, or that the Jnani-yoga is nothing more than intellectuality and scientism, ignoring ay! Which implies the fulfillment of the prophecies, or of the sacred and environmental laws that are updated in the candidate according to their evolutionary scale (Id., p.583).

There is, as one perceives, a critique of Vivekananda’s interpretation of the Hindu scriptures on yoga, hence the inclusion of the “ism” at the end of the term. With this, Raynaud sought to expose his own yoga as a practice that “does not exclude anything.” He believed that the union of yoga that was being separated by a misunderstanding would only reside in his *Yoghism*.

Another main channel for the promotion of yoga in Latin American is contained in the interpretations of the Chilean Benjamin Guzman, from the secret SDM scriptures. It is said that the “Great White Hierarchy of the Himalayas” allowed this sacred knowledge to be revealed only in 1915 in India, after being stored for hundreds of years in a

¹⁰ <http://elmaestrodelpresente.org/actual-guru-devanand-elyo/> accessed on Jan 5, 2015. “Cristo voltará para nunca mais voltar. Cristo é um estado evolutivo alcançado quando se ilumina o quinto *Chakra*, um estado sublime de verdade, amor, harmonia, paz, nós, desta escola almejamos com a graça de nosso Amado Mestre de Luz, que está em um estado mais profundo.”

“hidden library” which they called Maha Guha. Here again comes the myth of the Latin American continent arising as a religious geography of “rescue” and “receiving place” of “sacred” teachings revealed in a “new era” that appears in the beginning of the twentieth century.

To a certain extent, Benjamin was “chosen” by an Indian Yogic institution to reveal their secrets in Chile, much like Leo Costet’s “call” to sow the “new race” stemming from the Expectant Church in Brazil, and the revelation of Yoghism to Serge Raynaud in Venezuela.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, the most influential legacy that the Tingley School’s raja yoga principle model left behind is the idea of introducing yoga practices and spiritual principles in educational institutions for children. A number of years before Rudolf Steiner inaugurated his teaching method with the Waldorf schools, Katherine Tingley already had similar models working in various cities around the world.

From the book, *The Splendor of the Soul*, that became a guide for teachers in her children schools, Katherine Tingley revealed, in the chapter titled “The sacredness of marriage and the real child,” her intent with the Raja Yoga schools as implemented in Cuba:

Boys and girls who are brought up in this way, with their thoughts rooted in the spiritual realities, will grow as the flowers grow, and by the time they have reached a point of decision, of selection of their life companions, they will act slowly and understandingly, thoughtfully and wisely and rightly. They will realize that human life, rightly understood and rightly lived, is joy, and that in order for this joy to be lasting it must be built on high principles. Our power of service to humanity, our real joy, happiness, depend upon the education of the spiritual side of man – especially of the child. (Tingley 1927)

Tingley believed in the formation of a new self-assured society deriving from the teachings of the Raja Yoga Academy. The understanding of a new reality based on the highest moral values was at the core of young children’s development. Tingley educated them as vehicles for expansion of this new spiritual consciousness.

With help from the skill of concentration, the students became practiced in silent, intense, efficient study. (Parsons 1998).

The idea of Raja Yoga is to make a perfect mental, physical and spiritual balance in the human system. We do not believe in prodigies. We strive to have the growth of the child in all its elements perfectly synchronous. (...) Tomorrow we shall give you an idea of what their mental training has been (Greusel 1907, p.43).

Therefore, it is licit to think of Tingley’s Raja Yoga schools as the first educational centers “contemplative silence” as a way of developing a certain conviction of the

presence of an innate divinity and “inner purity” in child development. Fundamentally, the school taught based on children’s creative development and was aimed at the children of Cuban Theosophists. The school grouped children together in houses of 6–12 with a difference of a maximum of 3 years. Each of these groups lived in the “group house” with a teacher or “Superparent.” The Raja Yoga Academy worked as a boarding school, so after the day’s classes, students returned to their group homes. There, the students spent time engaging in various types of community work, such as gardening, where they produced some of the food they themselves consumed, carpentry work, sports, the arts, and especially music (Small 2010, p.6).

The routine of Tingley’s Raja Yoga Academy began with 6 a.m. theater performances, with the whole community in attendance. Then, a meditative practice in silence and the recitation of “Theosophy classics” such as *The Voice of the Silence* and *Bhagavad Gita*. At 7 a.m., breakfast was served, where everyone was to eat in silence, much like yoga and Buddhist retreats, and classes began at 8 a.m. (Id., p. 7).

According to researcher George Thornton, the Tingley Raja Yoga Academy project was an arm of the International Brotherhood League, founded by Tingley when she separated from the Theosophical Society. That same year, she purchased the land at Point Loma/San Diego, which would be the first and largest school Raja Yoga Academy (Thornton 2010, p.01). In this way, even with the proposal of raja yoga diffused and combined with theosophical principles, the Cuban school of Tingley was born as a new educational proposal with a view to transforming society. More than that, by “preparing” a new generation of citizens, the philosophy of yoga permeated their ideas.

But unlike K. Tingley, whose passage and symbolic legacy she left behind are less notable, the recognition César Della Rosa gained from yoga groups throughout South America is indisputable. For instance, the Brazilian Society of Integral Yoga as well as the Uruguayan and French Yoga Associations still consider him a “patron” of Latin American yoga.¹¹ These connections with France occurred because, according to the *Integral Yoga Society*, which was part of the lineage of the Indian Sri Aurobindo via Della Rosa, this one was the son of Italians and French. He lived in France until adolescence, traveling later to India, where he had been initiated in yoga.

But the most impactful legacy Della Rosa left behind can be seen in the modern yogic institution that inherited his still effective ideas: the Brazilian Society of Integral Yoga (SBY):

The Brazilian Society of Integral Yoga is a school that specializes in *professional training in Integral Yoga*. We are a national reference, and the seat of yoga integral for all affiliated schools in Brazil.

Since the foundation of our school, our goal has not been limited to training teachers. *The mission* of the Brazilian Society of Integral Yoga *is to train future Masters of Integral Yoga*, creating new schools that will serve as a basis for the *propagation of a training course* focused not only on personal development but on social-global and collective development as well. (Malello 2018)

¹¹ <https://associationfrancaisedeyoga.wordpress.com/lassociation-francaise-de-yoga/> accessed on Dec 4, 2017, and <http://www.escuelainternacionaldeyoga.biz/pranachikitsa.html> also accessed on Dec 4, 2017.

It is evident that there is a concern with the proselytizing and expansionist approach of SBY. As their members say, their “mission” is to form “yoga masters” who will “create new schools” to “propagate” training courses. In other words, the focus is on spreading the “social-global and collective” development project that had been created and led by Della Rosa since 1934 in Uruguay and Argentina. He also influenced another yogi from this early stage of Latin American yoga, Leo Costet, with the dream of expanding the spiritual principles of his father’s Church.

The seat of the Expectant Church, with its Essene monastery and a yoga ashram, was one of the first experiments of a “yoga school” in Brazilians. The Church practiced with a perspective very much according to what we know today, with regular classes serving both the community and the initiates—something similar to what Serge Raynaud also does in Venezuela. The yoga perspective developed by Leo Costet in Resende, RJ, and Serge Raynaud in Venezuela, unlike Della Rosa in Uruguay and Argentina, however, greatly blended with the teachings of Jesus Christ. His perspective was also focused on spiritual therapy and the healing of the physical, mental, and spiritual bodies’ maladies. Their great intent, as a religious institution, lies in waiting—hence the derivation of the “expectant” name—for the new avatars or, as they themselves term it, the “new race” (Cedaïor 1919, p.4–7).

It is possible to affirm that the curative and therapeutic narratives Leo Costet described about his father, Cedaïor, and Cedaïor’s master, legitimized him as an “initiate” in the same spiritual therapeutic work that, at the same time, was beginning to emerge in the West, such as acupuncture and Do-In. He dedicated the final years of his life to the work of laying hands as a method of healing, especially among his Expectant Church disciples in the city of Resende, Rio de Janeiro state, Brazil.

It is a fact that the grand majority of representatives of the official medicine, of classic medicine still called "allopathy", distrust magnetism as much as magnetizers or other "healers", even when these are not charlatans. (Sevananda 2007, p.20)

The healer worthy of this name would be a possible aide if the doctor – and only him – deems useful to complete the classical therapy by another procedure, and this under his supervision, under his control. (Id., p.27)

Resende is a town perched on the Mantiqueira mountain range, at the convergence of three Brazilian states—São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais. It boasts many waterfalls, the Atlantic Rainforest, and the headquarters of the Agulhas Negras Military Academy, a college of higher education of the Brazilian Army. In fact, Brazilian yoga was heavily popularized by two military men who were directly influenced by the therapeutic works developed by Leo Costet’s Sarva Yoga. Both were members of European esoteric orders.

While conceptualizing, constructing, and initiating the activities of the Expectant Church with his priestly and community service structure, Leo Costet gave several lectures on yoga to members of esoteric orders in Brazil. During one such lecture, a general of the Brazilian army, the Theosophist Gal. Caio Miranda (1909–1969), was impressed by Costet’s yogic ideas. A few years later, after becoming thoroughly self-taught, Caio Miranda wrote the first Brazilian book of yoga, *The Liberation of Yoga*

(1960), making history as the first of its kind and influencing a whole generation to come.

In his book, Caio Miranda laid the foundations of what he calls *Laya Yoga*. This yoga consisted of a sedation technique of emotion, which could lead the practitioner to a state of deep relaxation. In addition, he spread the idea of the professionalization of the yoga teacher in Brazil, unlike the more mystical and monastic direction of Leo Costet (Sevananda).

However, it is with *Laya Yoga* that the results have been more surprising. This technique of sedation of emotionality and cessation of mental activity, used only for the attainment of higher states of consciousness, aiming at the spiritual self-realization of Being, has, in recent times, been considered by modern medicine and psychologists of whole world as the most valuable practice to date to overcome anxiety, insomnia and other depressive states or “overexcitation”. In this way, the experience of the East is added to the technique of our civilization, giving the tormented man of the Western world the intimate peace and balance so necessary to the daily toil of life. (Miranda 1960)

This *yoga therapeutic* discourse and the approximation with the ideals of Jesus Christ are legacies that Prof. Hermógenes, one of the most charismatic yogis in Brazil, would promote years later, gaining ground among Catholics in Brazil.

Another book preserving the legacy of yoga in Latin America with therapeutic focus was published by Benjamin Guzman and syncretized, equal to L. Costet and S. Raynaud, by esoterism, science, and Christianity. The important legacy of Benjamin Guzman was the spreading of Ayurvedic medicine among Latin Americans. Even today, many Ayurvedic teaching and treatment centers in Latin America are based on the SDM philosophy.

The SDM, however, never established any text about ayurveda, the body practice of yoga, or about Vedic astrology, specifically. Nevertheless, Benjamin Guzman was responsible for encouraging each adept of the Chilean esoteric order. He also encouraged the spread of SDM to other Latin American countries and dove into “technical-practical” areas for individual financial support. This original strategy allowed Latin American SDM, in addition to hybridism with Catholicism, to gain a foothold in Latin American societies as a place not only for “philosophical” teaching of ethical principles of Hindu inspiration but for “holistic spaces” service to the public not initiated to SDM.

The Catholic syncretism introduced by Benjamin at SDM was so intense that the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic saints are still regarded by many Latin American SDM disciples as “authentic” revelations of Indian yogis. Serge Raynaud, on the other hand, also draws comparisons in his book “Yoghism,” with biomedical physiology as well as religious writings. Throughout it, our author repeatedly compares passages from the sutras of Patanjali with verses from the Bible, Bhagavad Gita, and texts of freemasonry (Raynaud, undated, p.31). This attitude is not surprising, since he perceives himself as Jesus Christ on Earth. Therefore, nothing would be more “natural” than the “fusion” of all the religious knowledge that has ever existed.

Latin American yoga initially underwent an insulation process of roughly 50 years. This seems to have been due to a natural departure, perhaps due to the language barrier of Spanish and Portuguese rather than English, which hindered the arrival and

permanence of Indian gurus and consequently triggered the late establishment of legitimately Indian Yogic institutions in the region (Simões 2015a; Id., 2015b).¹² All this, however, did not prevent proto-yoga from spreading. On the contrary, it produced beliefs and enabled masters to arise and yogic schools to fuse with native and Catholic religious elements.

I argue that this historical panorama erected by Tingley, Della Rosa, Leo Costet, Serge Raynaud, and Benjamin produced “coincidences” currently observed within the socio-religious realm of Latin American yoga, which are listed below:

- 1) *Yoga in public and private schools*: There is a symbolic capital gain on the part of educational institutions when classes on meditation (the practical nucleus of yoga) are included in the curriculum. Yoga as a school discipline was first introduced by Katherine Tingley in 1900 in the Cuban capital, Havana. The pedagogical model of raja yoga she implemented anticipated these pioneering projects in schools and can be understood as a much reverberated pre-structure until today. This is the case of the Yoga Education Study Center of Brazilian yogi Maurice Salem in Rio de Janeiro:

The Yoga Education Center aims to study, investigate and develop pedagogical bases for the teaching, at any age, of methodologies, pathways and practices that stir human beings towards self-awareness. It is a research that involves professionals of yoga and meditation, education, psychology, physical education, psychomotricity and related areas of knowledge.¹³

In other words, the pedagogical model that Tingley implemented in 1900 in Cuba anticipates the “pioneering” of these projects in schools, such as Montessori and Rudolf Steiner (Small 2010, p.13–14). But we must consider how Tingley may have been inspired by the schools originating from Indian Renaissance “school” models, such as Brahma Samaj (1828) by Mohun Roy, Arya Samaj (1875) by Dayananda Saraswati, New Dispensation (1876) by Candra Sem, and Deccan Education Society (1884) by Lokmanya Tilak (Farquar 1915, p.29–73; p.101–128; Eliade and Couliano 2009, p.183).

Miriam Bieladinovich stated that there is “an agreement signed with the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires and we have been working for 3 years in public schools. Now we want to expand to the province of Buenos Aires and we are about to sign an agreement”, adding that “the project is directed to the most vulnerable schools. We understand that yoga has to be everywhere because every day more and more people need it, and we are just ready to do that.”¹⁴

¹² Yoga arrives in Latin American countries circa 1900, but the first Indian guru to settle here was Swami Saraswati Devanand Guru Ji Maharaj in 1970 in Nicaragua. He faced great resistance from Catholic forces (Simões 2015b).

¹³ Accessed <<http://www.yogaeduc.com.br/>>, on Jan 26, 2018, at 11:55 p.m.

¹⁴ Accessed <<http://elsolnoticias.com.ar/implementacion-de-yoga-en-las-escuelas/>>, on Jan 26, 2018, at 00:11 a.m.

- 2) *Therapeutic application of yoga*: In Brazil, for instance, yoga and meditation were introduced a few years ago as unconventional therapeutic practices into all public health services in the country by the Unified Health System (SUS). In addition, all major hospitals (even private ones such as Albert Einstein in São Paulo) currently offer basic yoga practices as integrative and complementary therapy.

In India during the 1920s, Swami Kuvalayananda introduced the same proposal when he inaugurated his Kaivalyadhama ashram in the city of Lonavla, and used yoga techniques for therapeutic purposes (Alter 2004, p. 73–108; Simões, 2012; Id., 2015a). Almost in the same period, between the years 1930 and 1940, Leo Costet and Serge Raynaud introduced the same yoga projects as a spiritual therapeutic option in Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela. In this way, we can affirm that Leo Costet and Serge Raynaud blazed a trail for the establishment of integrative and complementary medicine decades later.

The introduction of techniques formerly referred to as “healing” within medical institutions was already known as “alternative medicine” and “integrative and complementary” in the work of the Expectant Church in mid-1947 and among adherents of GFU of Serge Raynaud, long before any other personages. Even Benjamin Guzman with SDM encouraged his followers to work with yoga and Ayurveda to stay financially secure. Today (2018) in Brazil, in particular, the Ayurvedic therapist is a regulated profession and offers services for free in the main cities around the country.

These “new” initiatives combining allopathic medicine and yoga had been foreseen in Latin America, as we mentioned. In the Cuban capital, Yogi Eduardo Pimentel, one of the founders of the Cuban Yoga Association and a member of the Latin American Yoga Union, commented in an interview about the public and focus of his classes:

People who suffer from obesity, different types of addictions, osteo-muscular pains, asthma, stress, insomnia, sexual dysfunctions, psychological conflicts (divorce, the loss of a loved one, communication issues with offspring), come to us and we help them, through their own selves and potential, to find relief for many of their sufferings.

In Brazil, Prof. Hermógenes (1921–2015) is a reference to what he himself called Yoga therapy—though Cuba’s Eduardo Pimental also maintains the trend of associating yoga and healing. Since the beginning of the 1960s, their works have been based on the healing of stress and anger by yoga. The adoption of yoga practices (*asanas*, *pranayamas*, *kriyas*, and meditation) in major Latin American medical centers rests on the initiatives of key exponents such as Leo Costet and Serge Raynaud, who had already realized the dialectics between yoga, illnesses, relaxation, and spirituality long before mind and body international study centers were in place (see Benson 2000). These individuals anticipated decades before, the rethinking and confrontation of western medicine to the so-called “new medical rationales” (Siegel 2010).

- 3) *Institutionalization of the yoga(s)*: Today’s wide variety of yoga schools and organizations—those of Indian origin like *Vinyasa Yoga* of Krishnamacharya or *Kaivalyadhama* of swami Kuvalayananda, or the ones born in Latin American soil like *Swásthya Yôga* by DeRose, *Sattva Yoga* by Gustavo Ponce, or the Restorative

Method by Miila Derzett's—can trace their roots back to the initiatives of our pioneers, such as César Della Rosa's Integral Yoga, Leo Costet's *Sarva Yoga*, and Serge Raynaud's *Yoghism*.

Della Rosa in particular was the most concerned about the institutionalization of yoga and the professionalization of the yoga teachers he trained. He inaugurated various yoga federations throughout Latin America in the 1930s, anticipating the American Yoga Alliance, a current benchmark that was founded only in 1997.¹⁵ It is fair to say that Della Rosa pre-established the profession of yoga teacher in Latin America, inspiring new teachers in his regular courses.

- 4) *Indian legitimacy*: All of our pre-phase exponents of Latin American yoga were vouched for by some kind of Indian yogic initiation. However, none “legitimized” the process so vividly as Benjamin, who had been initiated, albeit by letters, by the Yogic order *Suddha Dhrama Mandalam*. It seems reasonable to say that he was the precursor of the search for recognition from an Indian yoga tradition/institution among Latin American yogis.

Still in the early 1920s, Don Benjamin was granted permission to establish the first Indian yogic institution in Latin America, which he founded in Santiago, Chile. Not only did he inaugurate something which is so common today (2018)—an official representation of a yoga school in Latin America—, but also he introduced the syncretism of yoga and Catholic signs. Then, Nicaraguan José Luis Pallavicini Norori (Sri Ramesh) followed suit. He was a disciple of the Indian yogi Swami Saraswati Devanand Guru Ji Maharaj, who arrived in Managua in 1970 and founded the Devanand Center for Meditation. However, although he was under the authority of an Indian Yogic tradition, Norori combined his master's Hinduist discourse with distinct Christian syncretic traits, as stated in one of this pronouncement:

Christ will return to never leave again. (He) is an evolutionary state we reach when we illuminate the fifth Chakra. A sublime state of truth, Love, Harmony and Peace. We in this school, with the grace of our Beloved Master, are in a deeper state

Brazilian Prof. Hermógenes also deserves to be highlighted. Even as a disciple of the Indian Sai Baba, he developed a vast literature bringing Christian teachings closer to those of yoga and was able to establish correspondences between certain theosophical concepts and those pertaining to yoga, Buddhism, and Christianity. His books *Yoga Path to God* (1975), *Overcoming* (1975), *Yoga, Peace with Life* (1978), *Invitation to Nonviolence* (1983), *God Invests in You* (1985), *The Essence of Life* (1989), and *Living in God* (1992) represent the syncretism that we want to reveal as a principle to Latin American yoga, in a dialectic perspective with the Christian thought used as a proselytizing vehicle (Simões 2015a; Id., 2015b). This article thereby sought to depict the starting point of the religious transplantation of yoga to Latin America through the history of five key figures. Although they have been forgotten by academic literature,

¹⁵ Accessed <https://www.yogaalliance.org/About_Us/Our_History> on Jan 27, 2018, at 01:27 a.m.

their many pioneering achievements continue to echo in the ears of contemporary yogis.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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