



## Stretching into the Shadows

### Unlikely Alliances, Strategic Syncretism, and De-Post-Colonizing Yogaland’s “Yogatopia(s)”

In order to de-post-colonize yoga, it is necessary to excavate deeper into the source of its nostalgic mood and narratives through understanding the “Vedic God,” which through discursive, symbolic, and affective realms is promoted and shared by the global wellness tourism industry, the Indian state, and the Hindutva *parivār*. By analyzing the intertextuality inherent in the creation of shared narratives and heterotopic spaces, and by anchoring these polysemous images that relate to ideal, yogic “ways of life,” we begin to understand how the rarefaction of complex signs occurs through commodification. This enables perceptibly seamless intermingling of meanings and identities through the sharing of factoids. It includes the sanitizing of Hindu supremacist ideology through promotion of a banal, affective, and tacit endorsement of “soft Hindutva.” This allows for unwitting support by global yogis through various heterotopic spaces, such as yoga festivals, social media groups, casual conversations, and in institutionalized pedagogical material of yoga teacher-training manuals.

Keywords: global yoga—spiritual tourism—Hindu globalism—Vedic God—religious nationalism—heterotopia

While myth and memory conventionally serve to preserve identity and provoke bonding through the evocation of a shared cultural heritage, these can also be used as political weapons to impose a hegemonic memorial narrative that seeks to privilege a narrow vision of specific historical events. (Menon 2016, 161)

Over the past twenty years, I have lived and worked in several countries while engaged in various capacities within the trans-global yoga and wellness tourism industries. An equally affectionate and pejorative metonym for the global yoga industry is “Yogaland.” A casual internet search of the term will elucidate its ubiquity. This euphemistically emic description refers to the glocally imagined yoga community or tribe. In many ways, Yogaland is a metaphor—or rather, a psychological entity that exists in the minds of those who describe their yoga tribe as such. Yogaland exists in the social imaginary landscape through imagined, possible, idyllic representations of what the world could be, which are mapped onto the different “-scapes” that surround us. Søren Askegaard and Giana Eckhardt (2012, 45) explain how the global “consumptionscape” consists of interweaving economic, technological, and cultural flows. This facilitates yoga becoming a fashionable practice, resource-management technique, health practice, limitless number of market-oriented consumer products and lifestyle choices, instrument for cultural domination, and symbol of national heritage. Yogaland is a utopian-inspired meta-space where life is celebrated and yoga-inflected lifestyles are promoted as antitheses or temporary respite to perceived disenchantment, as well as the paragon of moral-political economies that can help with climate action (see McCartney 2018, 2019a). Regardless, Yogaland is physically found, at least temporarily, as a commodified yoga festival in Belgium (“Yogaland,” 2019). These experiences—as a consumer, precariat employee, proletariat business owner, and now as an academic—provide me with a between-worlds perspective related to the imaginative consumption of global yoga.

Having been introduced to the benefits of modern postural yoga as a child, by the age of twenty I was already teaching a few weekly classes of *hathayoga* and meditation. During these formative years, I uncritically consumed the stories from my teachers and believed that Sanskrit had a very real and sacred power to it. After graduating from a bachelor’s degree in archaeology, I spent the first of the next several years in India engaged in committed study. Initially convinced of the

transformational power of Sanskrit and yoga, the cognitive dissonance<sup>1</sup> that grew through my time in various ashrams became, in the end, all too much to bear. Not only did I personally come to loathe my own positionality; the hypocrisy, spiritual bypassing, pathological altruism,<sup>2</sup> and gaslighting/manipulation that exists in larger games for accumulation of symbolic capital in charismatic authority culture; and the commodification and othering of indigenous knowledge, I also began to understand how people are enculturated or groomed into ways of thinking and being that are quite often imbued with ethno-nationalist ideology of Hindutva, or Hindu supremacy (McCartney 2017a, 2018). This relates to how power and privilege are involved in the troubling dynamics found within the commodification of spirituality, which privileges blissful states of mind and avoidance of pain over engaging in social activism (Sherrell and Simmer-Brown, 2017).

These experiences have left an indelible impression, which has evolved into an academic study seeking to understand the global yoga industry and its connection to wellness and spiritual tourism, the economics of desire, and the politics of imagination (McCartney 2019b). Much has already been said on the connections between the history of modern yoga and globalization. So, too, plenty has also been said about Hindu supremacy and globalization. However, there is conspicuously little discussion of the *trivenī-saṅgam* (tripartite confluence) of yoga, globalization, and Hindu supremacy. Further, through building on my earlier work (McCartney 2017b, 2017c, and 2017d), within the context of a theory of constructed emotion (Barrett 2017) and narrative economics (Shiller 2019) this article explores the epidemiology of Yogaland's dominant narratives in relation to the blending of fact, emotion, and self-interestedness.

As well, based on a longitudinal study spanning close to two decades, this article explicates the ways in which non-Indian consumer-converts of yoga potentially become enculturated into banal, affective, vicarious support and tacit endorsement of Hindutva through the coercive consensus-building involved in adopting a yogic way of life, which we can understand as fundamentally involving a Brahminical Sanskritic epistemology (ways of knowing) and soteriology (religious ideas of salvation). This filter orients the individual's experience of one's own yoga journey and also how to creatively imagine India, its history, and its citizens. If we are to de-post-colonize yoga in any meaningful way, we must excavate deeper into these social worlds to uncover the interconnectivity of the subtle threads holding them together in relation to our own implicated subjectivities. It is not enough to decolonize yoga from its colonial roots, perceived white supremacy, and capitalism—it also needs to be de-post-colonized from its self-appointed, post-colonial handlers and concomitant “saffron supremacy” (i.e., Hindutva) as well, such as Rajiv Malhotra (2018). Decolonizing yoga will not be successful if the colonially constructed, neo-Romantic, neo-Orientalist-imagined narratives that rely on appeals to mystery, purity, and tradition continue to be used by the Indian state through its tourism board (Ministry of Tourism 2019), non-state Hindu supremacist organizations, or the generic marketing of yoga-inspired tourism through the yoga industrial complex (i.e., big business) (Miller 2016). How can any decolonizing occur if the legitimizing strategy of the post-colonial discourse consists of the

colonial constructs that are simultaneously being torn down? It is both ironic and eerily uroboric. There is a particular magical realist form involving an under-appreciated dialogic play of irony, which can be understood as a post-colonial re-territorialization of knowledge and identity through the transcultural frame of globalized yoga (Takolander 2018; Yadav 2016).

Not only have I witnessed this process of yoga consumers becoming enculturated into affective, banal support of Hindu supremacist-lite “ways of life,” I have personally experienced it. I have felt the lure of the amiable and benevolent narratives made by many people to share in an often unnamed yet normativized ethno-nationalist political theology, which is now euphemized through the ubiquitous term, *sanātana dharma* (“eternal way of life”).<sup>3</sup> It is naturalized especially through the affective discourses of gurus, and indirectly through naive yet charismatic global yoga teachers, who do not seem to have much appreciation for the socio-political tensions of Indian society. Instead, regardless of for-profit or charitable status, many seem blissfully unaware. It seems difficult to appreciate that people who are supposedly experts on yoga and who have spent decades traveling to and often living in India could be unaware, at least to a certain degree, of the socio-political quagmires that exist.

The answer is that there is a preference for the shared narrative, which is an escapist, utopian representation of timelessness, holism, harmony, health, deep ecology, community, cooperative internationalism, and well-being that is presented as authentic and ancient as well as hip and contemporary (see Jacobs 2016, 39; Gautam and Droogan 2018, 18–19). The overlapping rhetoric used to entice consumption of yoga tourism is equally shared by the Indian state and the yoga industrial complex. Yoga’s share of the “Incredible India 2.0” \$20-billion tourism opportunity is significant (World Economic Forum 2017). Moreover, in my ethnographic research I see the same logic repeated across casual conversations, both online, in yoga classes, at yoga events, and in the teaching of the next generation of yoga instructors through multi-modal analysis of teaching manuals.

The ambivalently banal rhetoric of the yoga industrial complex seamlessly merges with “soft Hindutva rhetoric” of “yoga diplomacy” (see Martin 2015; Desai 2015; Tandon 2016), which is part of the Indian state’s domestic, regional, and global soft power ambitions to achieve great power status and become the “world guru” (see Singh 2014; Press Trust India 2014; Pant 2015; Ramachandran 2015; Gautam and Droogan 2018). The question is: how does the unsuspecting yoga tourist and serious spiritual seeker tell these competing ideologies apart—especially when they often use the same texts and verses to justify similar social orders (*varṇa-āśrama-dharma*), moral ideals (based on *suvarṇa* “upper-class” ideals), and utopian aspirations of creating a better world through yoga and a yogic “way of life”?

Therefore, through studying the legitimizing communication strategies; authenticating marketing rhetoric; behavioral consumption practices; and the discourses, sentiments, and narratives of various social actors through multi-modal analysis, media-specific analysis, cyber-ethnography, and participant observation at yoga-related events over the past several years in Europe, Australia, India, and Japan, this analytical blind spot is examined in relation to how these different

worlds merge through the localizable power of heterotopic spaces<sup>4</sup> that intersect within symbolic and discursive realms.

To appreciate how the branding of India relies upon creating emotional resonance and brand favorability through affective, pre-cognitive meta-communicative strategies that rely on the automatic and instantaneous actions through implicit learning to store perceptions and concepts (Heath 2012), we journey down to the liminal, emotional, and psychological parameters of the “nostalgic mood” shared by global yogis and Hindu exceptionalists. This rests upon the oblique relationship between yoga, health, deep ecology, and the culture of Hindu fundamentalism. It occurs through the overlapping of heterotopian ideals that typically restrict uncritical introspection of various intersections between the social worlds outlined above (see Alter 2004; Boym 2001; Grainge 2002; Jain 2011; Jameson 2010; Levitas 2016; Smith 2008).

The idea of a “Vedic society” is commonplace (Dasa 2015). So too is its representation as a locus of wisdom, wellness, spirituality, and sustainability that embodies, perhaps, the “perfect place to find inner peace” (Govardhan Ecovillage 2019), which, according to RSS (*Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsevakā Saṅgha*, National Volunteer Corps) leader Mohan Bhagwat, should be conserved (Indo-Asian News Service 2017). This is also known as the “Vedic Way of Life” (Swami 2018).<sup>5</sup>

An ubiquitous example of the popular dissemination of even earlier pre-Vedic appeals to tradition and mystery is located in the *Yoga Journal*, in which, we are told, “Traditionalists trace the roots of modern Sun Salutations back to rituals called Namaskars performed more than 3,500 years ago,” and that “The earliest archaeological evidence of yoga culture was depicted on seals of Harappan [*sic*]” (Michalopoulos 2019). Richard Rosen, in another sun salutation–focused article in the *Yoga Journal* (2017), makes the binary complete by disambiguating the difference between a “traditionalist” and a “skeptic.” While the former believes in deepest antiquity of the “moving meditation,” the latter’s focus is the early twentieth century and the Raja of Audh, who is considered as the inventor and disseminator of *sūrya-namaskāra* (Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016). Regardless, the binary leads to cultivation of affect that can see people categorized as “anti-national” and “Hinduphobic.” This has led to assertions by prominent politicians that people against saluting the sun should not only leave India but also drown in the sea (Hindu Times Correspondent 2015).

Drawing upon Keith Hebdén’s (2011, 3) work on Dalit Christian theology, we can name this archetypal sign that fosters the nostalgic mood pumping the imaginative consumption of yoga. Regardless of whether people acknowledge this, within the global yoga consumptionscape all iterations of yoga-inspired lifestyles evolve out of, and conflate with, the “Vedic God” through the tacit or explicit deference to the static and monolithic representation of Vedic culture. Hebdén explains that, even though the groups that propagate Hindutva ideology are heterogeneous, they have a shared identity through the common aim of reviving Hinduism through creating the Hindu *rāṣṭra* (nation).

Yoga and the Sanskrit language are central to the Indian state’s agenda to accumulate symbolic prestige and cultural capital, which it subtly imposes through a

hubristically narrow neo-Hindu interpretation of *sanātana dharma* that privileges the hegemony of Brahminical Sanskrit Hinduism, while at the same time appearing to advocate for liberal appeals of anti-Brahmin and anti-caste sentiment through the balanced role of the “knowledge specialist” across a variety of heterogeneous spaces. Linked to this is what Christian Lee Novetzke (2011) explains as the pre-modern historical precedent of the “Brahmin double,” which is a discursively constructed symbolic “Brahmin” doppelgänger that deftly deflects and diffuses criticism while enabling the charismatic Brahmin, as the keeper of “sacred knowledge” (epistemic capital), to appease both liberals and conservatives (McCartney 2017a, 2018).

Having spent considerable amounts of time in many ashrams across North India, I personally met the disguised banal and affective sentiments of Hindu nationalism (as opposed to Indian nationalism) of several gurus and their disciples. This includes the non-Indian converts who quite often unwittingly accept the truth claims about the “natural order” made by their hosts as inherently true.

There are many ways in which Hindutva rhetoric is sanitized and mainstreamed. This is particularly relevant when considering its intersection with the globalized, neo-liberal consumerscape of Yogaland. Hindutva apologetic rhetoric is typically mainstreamed through the performative tropes of outrage and offense regarding the public representation of Hinduism (see Anderson 2015). Through the term “neo-Hindutva,” Edward Anderson explores how the *Hindutva parivār* (Chitkara 2003) has grown beyond its original institutional and ideological boundaries in this globalized and digitized world to infiltrate other social worlds. Similar to Christophe Jaffrelot (2017a), who discusses how digital technology and online mediums enable the deterritorialized diffusion of Hindutva ideology, we stumble across a very subtle yet complicated entanglement of desire and imagination related to our understanding of the *de facto* relations between the seemingly incommensurable worlds of Hindutva and global yoga.

Therefore, this brief but suspiciously critical “hermeneutic of resistance” explicates the social, political, and theological parameters involved in generating legitimacy for various actors within the global wellness industry and its subordinate spiritual tourism and yoga industries. According to the Global Wellness Institute (2018), wellness travel “is associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one’s personal wellbeing.” The \$4.3-trillion global wellness industry uses the current catchphrase “transformative travel” to capitalize on this fast-growing \$650-billion niche-specialty market. Today more than ever it is important to understand this industry, because it is under-represented in critical scholarship. This is surprising, since wellness tourism has a compound annual growth rate of approximately 8 percent; is expected to grow exponentially beyond 2025; is the fastest growing sector of the global tourism market; and Asia is the region where this growth is happening the quickest (Global Wellness Institute 2018).

This article charts a course through the “shadowlands of yogatopia” by analyzing the intertextuality (the relationship between texts) inherent in the creation of shared narratives and heterotopic spaces. By anchoring these polysemous images that relate to ideal, yogic “ways of life,” we begin to see where several possible

meanings intersect and allow global yogis to unwittingly lend tacit support to Hindutva (see Barthes 1977, 39; Allen 2003, 84). This builds directly upon Jaffrelot's (1993, 517) invented traditions sub-category, namely "strategic syncretism," which relates to the syncretic adoption of "cultural values from groups perceived to be antagonistic to the Hindu community and [is] strategic because it seeks to dominate 'others' in terms of prestige as well as on a concrete socio-political plane."

In the first part, we discuss the project of de-post-colonizing yogatopias. In part two, we explore the concept of the "saffron zone" in relation to the marketing of yoga. Part three draws upon the previous sections and focuses on a case study, the International Yoga Festival in Rishikesh.

#### DE-POST-COLONIZING YOGATOPIAS: THE BEGINNING

Farah Godrej (2016) suggests that through a creative reading of certain texts central to the global yoga imagination the subjective agency of the global yoga consumer can possibly subvert the governmentality of the neo-liberal agenda to create docile consumers. This sounds similar to Andrea Jain (2012, 30), who discusses the dual ideal of the ascetic and healthy body and refers to Peter Berger's (1979) pluralistic consequence that he calls the "heretical imperative" of being able to choose. Kalim Siddiqui (2017) explains, however, that Hindutva relies heavily upon neoliberalism to not only reinvent India but also normalize the global perception of the India it imagines the nation (and world) should become. In similar ways, Priya Chacko (2019) discusses how a Hindutva agenda is legitimized through its promoters, who consider how their ethno-nationalist project represents the most reliable model for not only social transformation and protection of (Hindu) society but also economic development. Therefore, within a globalized context, perceptions of Hindutva gain further normalcy through being linked to the Hindu nationalist concept of a self-regulating, ideal, individual consumer who is disciplined by market citizenship and inspired by forms of charity and "pious neoliberalism" (see Nanda 2008).

Just as Godrej's discussion does not factor in how Hindutva uses neo-liberal processes and the popularity of yoga to achieve its goals, Anderson, Jaffrelot, Chacko, and Siddiqui also do not discuss how global yoga fits into the equation. Even though the ways in which Hindutva is legitimized and the global imagination of India are understood as essentially more Hindu through the processes of globalization (Nanda 2009), discussion of the ways in which all of these forces converge within the yoga industrial complex is minimal (see Gautam and Droogan 2018; Lucia 2018).

Amanda Lucia (2018) discusses how an individual's participation in yoga can lead to more exposure to proselytizing spiritual and religious rhetoric, which is both subtle and overt. Scaffolding onto Lucia's missiological framework, namely the way in which people are converted, which also explores the operations of political proselytizing that is misrecognized and essentialized as spiritual discourse, it becomes clear how narrative threads are woven into the discourses of gurus and charismatic yoga teachers, which are then affectively embedded into the hearts of

global yogis in the formal pedagogical domain of *satsaṅga* (McCartney 2017a). It is in the ritualized public domain of *satsaṅga*—which is where the performativity of contemporary Hinduism’s aesthetic devotionism facilitates the ecstatic, collective, effervescent nature of the public performances of *bhakti* (devotion)—that the transmission of affective nationalism can occur (see Skey 2009; Slavtcheva-Petkova 2014; Antonsich and Skey 2016; McCartney 2017a, 2018, 2019b; Novetzke 2007). This is catalyzed by the indelible disintellectual logic of this pedagogical domain that teaches the audience how to feel, rather than how to think critically (McCartney 2017a). Therefore, as a global yogi’s interest grows and they begin to consume more seriously a yoga-inspired, spiritually oriented, leisure career and lifestyle (Stebbins 2014; Patterson, Getz, and Gubb 2016), their potential exposure to Hindutva ideology also increases, through: the shared narratives, practices, and mythology that drive the anti-modern and anti-intellectual impulse; the sense of re-enchantment that yoga advertising promises; and the preference for a deep (i.e., Dharmic) ecology that is blended with pseudo-scientific, epistemically relativist, New Age, neo-paganism (see Nanda 2004; Jacobsen 1995, 219; Strauss and Mandelbaum 2013; Scheid 2016), which I describe as the “Saffron Zone.”

#### THE SAFFRON ZONE AND THE MARKETING OF YOGA

At yoga festivals and events there is a mingling of well-intentioned yoga industry leaders sharing stages with Hindu exceptionalists. This is often camouflaged through the appearance of renunciation and a pious disposition. This, in the eyes of the unwitting global yogic audience members, tacitly legitimizes the aspirations of Hindutva exceptionalists. However, just because an event has a yogic theme, this does not preclude it from controversy and other unintended consequences. For example, while presented as a celebration of sustainable living, a 2016 yoga festival, the Art of Living’s World Culture Festival, was such an unlicensed fiasco that it adversely affected approximately 170 hectares of fragile ecosystem along the banks of the Yamuna river; experts say it completely destroyed the riverbed (Jacobs 2016; Parekh 2016). Equally problematic is Jaggi Vasudev, otherwise known as Sadhguru, who is considered to be “Hindutva nationalism’s in-house mystic and cultural icon” (Choudhury 2019). He is embroiled in controversy regarding theft of Indigenous cultural knowledge and land grabbing that affects animal corridors (Subhashini 2017).

I refer to this social domain in which coercive enculturation occurs as the Saffron Zone. This is where yogic ideals from Brahminical Sanskritic Hinduism and New Age spirituality merge with Hindutva ideology; together they are seamlessly propagated through the rhetoric of charismatic authority figures who engage in anti-modern myth-making related to symbolic nationalism (restorative nostalgia) and dreams of another place or time (reflective nostalgia) (see Boym 2001, 130).

The pursuit of the idyllic good life during this post-secular age is typified by the middle-class adoption of certain yoga-inspired lifestyles. These are imaginatively consumed within the heterotopic spaces of coexisting multiple modernities that form the core expression of New Age romantic themes and the consumptive cap-

italism of “spiritualities of life” (see Heelas 2008; Possamai 2017). Yogic-inspired utopian concepts are compressed into static, monolithic signs and become tangible and localizable through such enigmatic phrases as the “yogic way of life” or “yoga lifestyle.” These conceptually premise a reconstituted imagining or mythical reconstruction of an ahistorical “pure Hindu nation” through the Vedic Golden Age, which sits at the heart of Hindutva’s ethno-political theology (see Racine 1983; Udayakumar 2005; Jaffrelot 2017b, 160; Jaffrelot 2017c; Siddiqui 2017, 156).

Lucia’s (2014, 223) discussion of the ways in which modern gurus purport to represent their own versions of ancient and “authentic” Vedic tradition as a solution to the crises of and disenchantment with modernity actively promotes a nostalgia based on a return to reconstituted forms of tradition, which is propagated through the media (Niemeyer 2014). Jaffrelot (2011, 314–15) explains how, for the Hindu nationalist or Vedic cosmologist at least, the Vedic Golden Age is a “civilizational founding moment that simply has to be revived,” which, ironically, is clearly an invention that obfuscates how its underlying values used to increase consumption are strategic transplants from Western individualism. Also, global promotion of the aim to return to an imagined, reconstituted Vedic Golden Age represents a sanitized, ecumenically millennial belief in the temporal framework of Hinduism’s four-tiered eschatology (theological doctrines relating to the end times), which has also inspired previous iterations of a militant spiritual nationalism (Urban 2011).

One notable case is Baba Ramdev (2009), who has tied together his vision for the Indian nation and world through a type of yoga nationalism/fundamentalism (Mahendru 2010). This involves recruiting the global, docile, consumer-citizens of Yogoland, whom he believes will help to transform the social fabric and moral fiber of the world; because, as he asserts, yoga’s global role is as the only solution to all the problems individuals and societies face (Sarbacker 2014, 481–89). This, combined with the blending of biomoral consumerism through yoga; Ayurveda; nationalism; and the biopolitics of local, alternative medicine aims to generate prestige for India on the global stage (Khalikova 2017).

It is often thought that Ramdev’s appeal and fanbase is decidedly *desi* (Indian); however, he appears to have a global following that includes: 9.9 million followers on Facebook; a global television viewership of 80 million people in 157 countries; 2.5 million YouTube subscribers with 95 million views; 667,200 Instagram followers; and 1.91 million followers on Twitter (Ramdev 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d; Thapa 2017; Williams 2017). However, it is difficult to say how many of these subscribers are not fake “subscriber bots.” Moreover, he is not without controversy, as even B. K. S. Iyengar finds Ramdev’s idiosyncratic style of yoga problematic (Dasgupta 2011). Plus, he makes unethical claims that his brand of yoga can cure AIDS, cancer (Rao 2018), diabetes, and homosexuality (Press Trust India 2015a). He also promises the guaranteed birth of male children with one of his products (Daily Bhaskar 2015). He also wants to build an army to protect core Indian values (Nair 2011) and aims to create a Vedic (i.e., Hindu theocratic) India and Vedic world (Vedic India Foundation 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Ramdev is a controversial figure, of that there is no doubt. Yet his cross-over appeal to a global audience is



Figure 1. International Yoga Festival Poster and Baba Ramdev (Parmarth Niketan 2018).

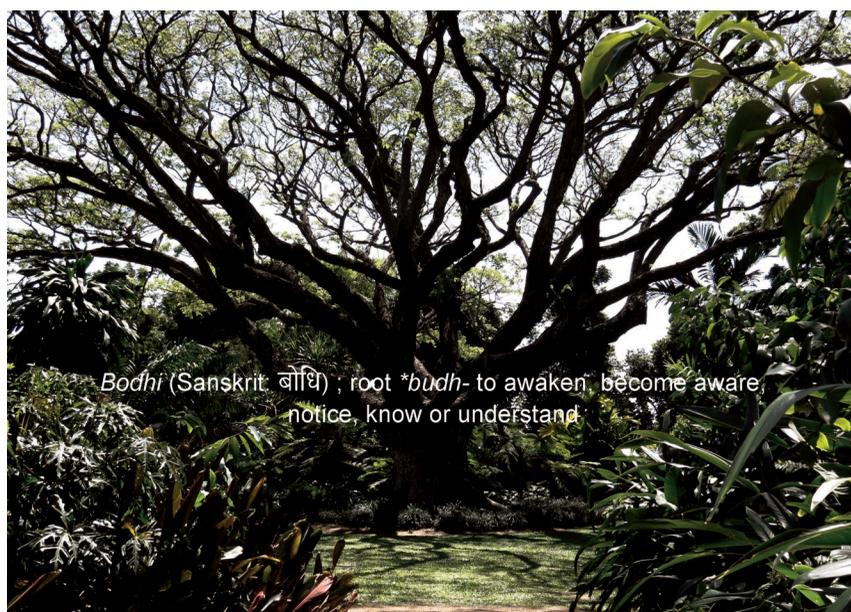
evidenced by his participation at international yoga festivals, like the annual event in Rishikesh, India, at the Parmarth Niketan Ashram (figure 1), in which he legitimates and authenticates through his cameo appearances, by being front and center on the poster with the founding patron of the event, Swami Chidananda. We will come back to this festival in the next section.

Yoga and Sanskrit are elements in a cultural war and clash of civilizations, which are part of a trans-cosmopolitan dialogue (see Guest 2009; Jauhari and Sanjeev 2010; Pilon 2016). While parochialism exists, Narendra Modi argues, publicly at least, that yoga is decidedly not Hindu. Instead it is framed as a global movement (Gowen 2014a, 2014b; Hindustan Times Correspondent 2016). Appeals to purity, tradition, and ultimately authority are other ways in which Hindutva is mainstreamed within the marketing rhetoric of Yogaland. However, this universalization of yoga is as much a political maneuver as it is a marketing strategy. To appeal to a global market, the Indian state presents yoga as a global, apolitical, and non-religious cultural product, while it relies heavily on an unstructured “spiritualized” rhetoric for cross-cultural and cross-denominational appeal. The Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) explains how “yoga is an invaluable gift of ancient Indian tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature and a holistic approach to health and well-being” (Ministry of AYUSH 2016). However, there are many other voices, including the head of the World Hindu Council (Vishva Hindu Parishad), Praveen Togadia, who asserts that (modern) yoga is more than either a secular or Hindu construct but, rather, a “Vedic” phenomenon (Press Trust India 2015b).

Sanskritized tropes are mined by the global yoga industry to create memes that are used to authenticate “traditional” and even “heretical” yoga lifestyles; yet, they continue to either directly or obliquely rely upon the same axiological foundation (i.e., value set) that privileges a narrower, monolithic, and essentialized (read Hinduized) yogic history and identity. Meera Nanda (2009) explains this is exacerbated via India’s relationship to globalization that increasingly simplifies Indian history and markets India as inherently Hindu.

Take the following examples. (1) Molly Ginty (2018), writing for the popular *Yoga Journal*, explains how “only correct pronunciation will help you and your students tap into the consciousness of Sanskrit—and glean the full benefit of its energetic vibrations.” (2) The far-right-wing Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) claims that “Sanskrit was the only language of the entire universe,” and that it has been “created by God for the benefit of the entire human race” (Hindu Janajagruti Samiti 2018). (3) The Arya Sanatan Vaidik Hindu Dharma (ASVHD) asserts that “Sanskrit is considered to be the oldest language in the world, being at least 6,000 years old,” and “only Sanskrit can provide the vocabulary that could express the totality of the Divine experience” (ASVHD 2018). (4) Rosen (2005) writes in the *Yoga Journal* that in order to gain more legitimacy as a yoga teacher, one should understand that “Sanskrit is considered a divine language—spoken by the gods and capable of connecting mere mortals with the transcendent Self.” In figure 2, example (5) demonstrates how Sanskrit can take center stage in legitimizing identity and invoke the nostalgic mood through a deep (Dharmic) ecological aesthetic. While the Bodhi House was still open for business, it offered coffee, vegan food, yoga, and an organic day spa. The slogan it uses in its communication strategy includes the definition: “Bodhi; \*budh- to awaken, become aware, notice, know or understand.”

Figure 2. The Bodhi House homepage.<sup>6</sup>



The final example is worth quoting at length. (6) The co-founder of Samskrita Bharati (SB), Chamu Krishna Shastry, asserts that the role of Sanskrit and yoga in assisting India's rise in global status is as follows.<sup>7</sup>

By 2050 the world's *Dharma* will be the Hindu *Dharma*, which is the *Dharma* that is taught in the Sanskrit language. The state of the society desired by *Dharma* will again be everywhere in the world. The “*Dharma*-[based]-civilization” will come again, it will be accepted by all the people. One should get ahead for the preparation . . . with the preparation for this day. After 2025 its beginning comes, the beginning of the new time-period will come! At the time (*tasmin kāle*), when (*yatra*) the beginning of the renaissance of the tradition of Indian people taught in Sanskrit will be executed, he (*sah*), who (*yasya*) combines both, viz. the modern knowledge and the old [equals Dharmic knowledge], will take up the leadership over the life of the society, the life of the kingdom (i.e. country), of the world. (Manthan Vichar 2015)

Perhaps it is not clear, but the *Yoga Journal* is probably the most widely read monthly yoga publication in the world. According to their 2017 Media Kit (*Yoga Journal* 2017), they have: 1.8 million-plus readers; 99,000 tablet readers; 14 million page views on yogajournal.com; 3 million unique visitors; 3 million-plus hits on social media; and 700,000-plus email subscriptions. According to the 2016 Yoga in America Study that the *Yoga Journal* and Yoga Alliance co-commissioned, 61 percent of yoga teachers and trainees reported that the *Yoga Journal* is their primary source of information about yoga (Yoga Alliance 2016, 56; *Yoga Journal* 2017).

The *Yoga Journal*, clearly, is quite influential; yet there is a deep editorial problem regarding the level of nuanced understanding of yoga's history and socio-political context that sees many articles misrepresent facts with factoids (rumors that grow through repetition and become “real” and “true”). More worrying is how the rhetoric, as shown above, displays high levels of parsimony with groups like the HJS, ASVHD, and SB, which are all unapologetic promoters of Hindutva.

Yet globally yoga is commodified into various modes and employed as a rational technology to counter disenchantment while also fulfilling the middle-class aspiration to improve the self, community, nation, and world. Take, for example, Vikasa Yoga's teacher-training manual, which describes their “yoga vision” through first asking the reader: “Interested in changing the world?” It follows this up by explaining that through yoga people are “given the knowledge to become more mindful, conscious beings, to inspire and empower them [future students] to create a happier, healthier life for themselves and others” (Vikasa Yoga 2016, 113). The irony is that the multibillion-dollar global yoga industry is modeled on the logic of neoliberal ideology, which the Indian state blends with the guru-devotee relationship in the pursuit of certain ends (Gooptu 2016; Copeman and Ikegame 2012).

Global yogis typically demonstrate what we might consider an escapist preference to imagine movement of their secular yoga bodies through the “power of self-transformation” (*Yoga Journal* 2018). As Askegaard and Eckhardt (2012) and Shameem Black (2016) discuss, the popularity of yoga is as a transformative technology that has an ability to transform the body through the “technology” of yoga, or rather, the “science of spirituality,” which is employed as a means to navi-

gate the perceived perils of the 21st century. On the live feed from the 2019 International Day of Yoga event at Parmarth Niketan we can view Rishikesh-based yoga guru, Anand Mehrotra, explaining that yoga is “the supreme systematic technology to realize peace,” and that “sustainable change has to start with the individual” (Parmarth Niketan 2019, at 58–60 mins.). The narcissistic project involving the vaguely referenced and colloquially translated Bhagavadgītā-inflected<sup>8</sup> definition of the yoga “journey of the self, through the self, to the self” is recruited into the neo-liberal imperative of self-improvement (Black 2015). Aadil Palkhivala (2017) explains how “Discovering our dharma is the most important step in our life.” Another example explains how:

Yoga is changing the world—one dedicated yogi at a time. These videos prove that if you believe you can change . . . change will come. Through determination and hard work you can transform, not only your body through yoga, but also your mind-state, emotional well-being and entire life.

(Urban Wellness Magazine 2015)

As Lucia (2018) cogently analyzes, this impels global yogis to local and distant “sanctuaries” and “oases” at local yoga studios, festivals, and meditation retreat / yoga teacher-training courses. This yoga “journey to self” involves traversing along an axiological path where the shadowlands of global yoga have grown beneath a new range of values, and where it is difficult to tell where Brahminical-Sanskritic Hinduism, New Age spirituality, global yoga, and Hindutva merge, seemingly like tectonic plates.

Due to the historical height and sociological complexity of these conceptual “mountains,” many shadows are cast down into the valley below. Like an oasis in the distance, as the global yogi travels along this spiritual-secular path, the epistemological horizon of perception is distorted from the shadows produced by the material force of the imagination and refracted by the goal-seeking aggressive projections and affective narratives of others (see Brennan 2004, 109), as well as the anti-modern / pro-nostalgic impulse to preference a previous “golden age” as tangible now or in the not-too-distant future. This means that the larger consequences of yoga’s “journey to self” are obfuscated, ostensibly by self-interest, which makes critical reflection even more difficult. This also makes the shadows real. In a sense many aspirants unconsciously bypass these less-than-well-lit-paths through a preference for the perceptibly sunnier side of the spiritual journey, which terminates at the yoga-inspired heterotopias I refer to as “Yogatopias” (see Fox, Cashwell, and Picciotto 2017, 285).

The aim in the final section of this article is to demonstrate how all of this comes together through the case study of the International Yoga Festival.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL AND INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOGA

The International Yoga Festival is an annual event held in Rishikesh, India (see International Yoga Festival 2017). The 2018 version was the 29th time this event has been organized on the banks of the Ganges river. The patron of this event is Swami Chidananda Saraswati (born 1952). He is the president and spiritual head of

Parmarth Niketan (International Yoga Festival 2018a, 2018b). This event is quite popular. In 2018, there were approximately two thousand participants from one hundred countries. However, the 2018 festival was mired in controversy. One reason is that it used the Uttarakhand Tourism Board's symbol without permission, while a similar Rishikesh-based yoga festival, ironically organized by the Uttarakhand Tourism Board, occurred during the same week. Also, key dignitaries like the Dalai Lama cancelled at the last minute (Gusain 2018; Statesman News Service 2018; Times News Network 2018). In the first few minutes of the opening address at the 2017 festival, Swami Chidananda introduced India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, via a satellite link. He described Modi in the following way: "Instead of becoming a monk, he became the yogi Prime Minister of India." This is because he "immersed himself in the yoga and the *sadhana*." And, as the "divine Prime Minister," who has a "divine plan" due to a "divine design," Modi "became the yogi Prime Minister of India" (Parmarth Niketan 2017).

Chidananda then made affective, nostalgic, theological appeals to textual authority through referencing verse 2.50 from the Bhagavadgītā: *yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam* ("the perfection in action is yoga"), which essentially equated Modi with the protagonist of the story, Arjuna. Chidananda continued by qualifying Modi's moral virtuosity:

And, he is the man of action. He is the man of perfection. He has a vision. He has a mission. And he has a wisdom. Not only for this nation, but the entire world. Because, he believes we are one family. We are all interconnected. One family. Today, the world needs one powerful thing. That is yoga. And, the music of peace, the music of love, the music of harmony. The world needs today. And that is, only can come through yoga. Yoga is the way. Yoga is the way.

(Parmarth Niketan 2017)

While it is possible to virtually do "Yoga with Modi" (see figure 3), Swami Chidananda made one final appeal to have "Modiji" attend the 2018 event:

Let us honor our Prime Minister. Our divine Prime Minister. Thank you, thank you, thank you, yogiji, Prime Minister of India. But, I want one thing more. He is, today, as a virtual Modiji; but, next year, we want on the banks of *Ganga*, not only virtual Modiji, we want real Modiji. Real Modiji, here on the banks of *Ganga*, on the banks of *Ganga*. We love Modiji, we love. We love Modiji.

(Parmarth Niketan 2017)

By this the enthralled crowd of international yoga pilgrims were whipped into an ecstatic, collective, effervescent frenzy, which culminated with them rising to their feet, chanting repeatedly in unison, "Modi, Modi, Modi, Modi." This is, perhaps, one of the more poignant examples of how the consumer of yoga and the neoliberal ideology of the Hindutva-inspired Indian state converge and seek Vedic-inspired ways of living through the affective political theological nostalgia of a charismatic authority figure.

At the time of writing, by the 5th International Day of Yoga in 2019 the total number of pledges to make "YOGA an Integral Part of my Daily Life" had reached 7,699,604 (see figure 4). However, it is really worth pausing to consider just what



Figure 3. Yoga with Modi (Modi 2018).

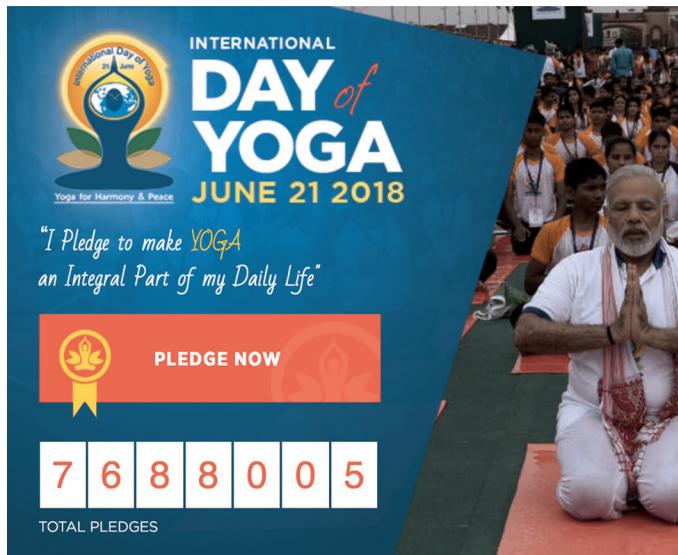


Figure 4. International Day of Yoga Pledges (Ministry of AYUSH 2018).

people are actually pledging to. It seems quite banal to pledge to make yoga an “integral part” of one’s daily life. But what does it mean, exactly? For most global yogis, this pledge is nothing more than a personal promise and cosmopolitan commitment to make the self and world better. Yet, there is much more to this. There is no coincidence or secret to the “integral” component of the pledge—at least for the insider. Two philosophers, Jacques Maritain (1936) and Deendayal Upadhyaya (1965; see Upadhyay 2017), wrote similarly titled treatises, namely “Integral Humanism.” While Maritain’s original title in French is *Humanism Intégral*, Upadhyaya’s Hindi title is *ekātma mānav-vād* (“integrated human-doctrine”). From a communal perspective they differ fundamentally; however, the general holism of integral humanist philosophy appeals to the individual concerned with globally ethical implications that result from globalization and the neo-liberal project (see Robertson 1992, 186). Globally, integral humanism is akin to a broader neo-pagan “religious environmentalism” and “Dharmic ecology” movement, which in

its Indian iteration is decidedly “Neo-Hindu” rather than genuinely “Vedic” (see Nanda 2004; Jain 2011; Scheid 2016).

However, Upadhyaya’s integral humanism is an evolution of an earlier Gandhian socialism that every member of Narendra Modi’s political party, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People’s Party), continues to swear allegiance to alongside Hindutva (Bibi 2014; Iwanek 2014; Puniyani 2006, 19). While integral humanism originated as an “alternative ethical and economic agenda from either centralized planning or its liberal critics” for the “purpose of formulating a culturally indigenous response to the critiques of capitalism and communism” (Abraham 2019, 16–20), these economic propositions of Hindu nationalism were unique, seeking a balanced and holistic development of individuals and society (Abraham 2019, 31). And the BJP appears to remain heavily invested in integral humanism: its website explains in its special integral humanism section that “According to the Article 3 of BJP’s constitution, ‘Integral Humanism’ is the basic philosophy of BJP” (Bharatiya Janata Party 2019a). However, related to the politics of economic growth, the BJP’s economic program has “turned a significant ideological corner from the economics of Integral Humanism to economic neo-liberalism” (Abraham 2019, 59). The “Modinomic” neoliberal reforms could not be further from the original ideals of integral humanism (Abraham 2019, 31).

This is perhaps why, since it was explicitly mentioned in the BJP’s 2009 election manifesto, integral humanism does not feature in the 2014 and 2019 manifestos (Bharatiya Janata Party 2009, 2014, 2019b). However, the 2019 manifesto does mention that “We will promote Yoga as a vital method to achieve physical wellness and spiritual rejuvenation across the globe and will continue to work towards training of Yoga practitioners. We will undertake a rapid expansion of Yoga health hubs, Yoga tourism and research in Yoga” (Bharatiya Janata Party 2019b, 36). Furthermore, Hindutva, rebranded as integral humanism, enables easier proselytization of English speakers. This is also achieved through the more recognizably palatable, euphemistic reference “Dharma” (Sen 2017; Varadarajan 2017), which plays a central part in any cosmopolitan discourse about yogic “ways of life” (see Palkhivala 2017; Dasgupta 2019).

The strange relationship between authenticity and commodification in relation to accepting or rejecting any sort of claim regarding the history of yoga and perceived authenticity of an “innovator” versus “traditionalist” perspective is deeply implicated in the branding and selling of yoga (Graham 2014, 86).

The *Way of Dharma* project organized by the Srijan Foundation claims that it “is a platform for spreading dharmic traditions and religions. Our goal is to make *Hinduism missionary*” (Srijan Foundation 2018, emphasis added). This organization makes no attempt to hide its Hindutva nationalism, particularly when there is a video in the bottom right corner of the homepage titled “Hindu Dharma and Nationalism” (Srijan Foundation 2017).

To bring all these synonymous concepts together, Gino Battaglia (2017, 10) explains that “Whereas Integral Humanism is India’s universal mission, it is the completeness of a civilization realized over millennia, and at the same time the remedy to rid humanity of its evils. Humanism seemed to oppose any form of

obscurantism, pointing at a truth which is deeper than any religion or any ideology. That is Dharma. Notwithstanding such humanism contains the presuppositions of a new intolerance and sectarianism.” With this now in perspective, it becomes quite clear what global yogis are actually pledging themselves to.

## CONCLUSION

The apothotic rhetoric of Swami Chidananda toward Narendra Modi demonstrates how the politics of Hindutva is legitimized and sanitized for consumption by global yogis. Upon watching this video of Chidananda’s apothotic introduction, one wonders how many of the international audience members and other presenters on stage are aware of Modi’s controversial past and links to the Hindutva *parivār*. And, if they are, how their participation in such events that openly support and promote at least a soft Hindutva is rationalized. Regrettably, only one of the presenters from the International Yoga Festival responded to my requests for a comment by stating that “There is a lot of bypassing going on, by everyone.” So, too, the banal nationalism deftly hidden in the International Day of Yoga’s pledge reveals another way in which Hindutva is sanitized, popularized, unwittingly consumed, and tacitly endorsed.

The marketing of global yoga in relation to promotion of the ideal yogic disposition relies heavily upon the asymmetric power relations of the teacher-student / guru-disciple relationship, group think, and the disintellectual pedagogy of the *satsaṅga* domain, which teaches people how to feel by cultivating affect rather than cultivating critical minds. While there can be no doubt that some Hindu nationalists and, more broadly, the Indian state seek to capitalize on the popularity of global yoga, the global yoga communities are not monolithic and do not uniformly embrace or adhere to Vedic notions in the same way, if at all. At the same time, there are those that do embrace Vedic notions and identify in direct opposition to Hindu nationalist agendas.

Still, there are those that embrace all things (neo-)Vedic in concert with the Hindutva philosophy. These new Orientalists approach India from an absurdly reductive lens, as a land of devout temple-goers. They are typically clueless and disinterested about contemporary Indian culture; for many the only India worth engaging with is a mythical land that existed several thousand years ago, which will supposedly liberate them from the drudgery of middle-class existence. No wonder non-Indian Hindus are influenced by Hindutva rhetoric, since they would also like to turn the clock back five thousand years (see Zutshi 2017).

More work needs to be done on this topic to understand the potential ways in which the discrete ontologies (ways of being) and social worlds of global yoga and Hindutva merge and build upon a shared, anti-modern impulse that is synthesized with an affective, nostalgic mood and imbued with a deep ecological and neoliberal sensibility.

It is through the symbolic-discursive realm propagated by the Sanskrit episteme and shared utopian aspiration that builds directly upon yoga’s perceived power to transform the self, community, nation, environment, and world, which is neatly

packaged and commodified as a necessary component of neoliberal governmentality, that unwitting global yogis are groomed. This thoroughly utopian sentiment is part of an epistemic power stratagem used to further a set of interests in relation to scaffolding a particular arrangement of society that is, in this case, yogic (Scott 2010, 113).

The yoga industrial complex, the Indian state, and the Hindutva Parivar are seemingly disconnected groups of actors who rely upon the same narratives to promote their incommensurable worlds, which can—and do—form unlikely alliances. Yet, the linguistic, industrial, and cultural connections within the global network are clear. If we are truly serious about decolonizing yoga, then we must look beyond the narrative influence of capitalism’s white supremacy to the ways in which saffron supremacy is equally complicit in controlling imaginative consumption of yoga-inspired lifestyles. This is what it means to de-post-colonize yoga.

Finally, the original Hindutva political philosophy of Vinayak Damodar Sarvarkar (1883–1966) asserts that Hinduism is a derivative of Hindutva and does not allow for the embrace of non-ethnic South Asians as Hindu (*patr̥bhūmī*, or the fatherland argument), even if India could be argued to be their sacred motherland (the *mātr̥bhūmī* argument). Thus, we could consider that, since Hindutva is more than a religion and does not confine itself to adherents of the Hindu faith alone, one way to appreciate the phenomena discussed in this article is through a common nation (yogaland), common “race” (global yogis), and common culture (yoga-inspired lifestyles) (Sarvarkar 1942, 123). We might also choose not to take solace in the HJS’s assertion that “In the (soon to be established) ‘Hindu Rashtra’, all the subjects will be happy and blissful; and hence, it is a necessarily [sic] not just for Hindus, but for the whole of mankind.” How this will practically “facilitate propagation of Dharma (righteousness) throughout the world” is unclear (Hindu Janajagruti Samiti 2018). And, finally, we ought to take seriously these articulated aspirations and not dismiss them, out of hand or for some politically correct sentiment. This is because this might just be more than a euphemism. It might actually be a strategy to obfuscate an intention, not to convert *white* Hindus but to rule over them in “Yogastān”—which is a euphemism McCartney (2019a, 148) coined to describe the convergence of Yogaland with the ethno-nationalist preoccupation with a Hindu theocratic nation.

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## NOTES

1. The state of inconsistent thoughts often not matching what one is told or observes regarding justifications for certain situations and behaviors.
2. See McCartney (2019b) for an extensive overview of spiritual bypassing and pathological altruism within Yogaland. Spiritual bypassing enables tacit support through using spiritual practices to avoid dealing with uncomfortable personal feelings and social situations. Also, Barbara Oakley and colleagues (2012) define pathological altruism as an extreme form of compassion that allows people to bypass, ignore, or forgive all transgressions and failures of in-group members.
3. See Jamison and Witzel (2003, 4) for a discussion of *parātana dharma*.
4. The idea of heterotopic spaces builds on the utopian/dystopian binary. These spaces are neither good nor bad, but different. These “othered” spaces are social, discursive, institutional, and cultural spaces where ideas or groups have little perceived connections with one another; although they might appear contradictory and incommensurable, these “worlds within worlds” might mirror and contradict or support what is outside. See Foucault (1984) and Mead (1995, 13).
5. Regardless of who first coined the phrase, Gyan Prakash (2003, 44) explains that it was sometime during the nineteenth century that Indian religious intellectuals, principally in Bengal, began a reformatory process to reconstitute what they considered to be an original Vedic tradition. This bourgeois-inspired purge occurred to filter out the perceived impurity and backwardness that had supposedly crept into Hinduism (see Tambs-Lyche 2011). It was during the 1840s that the Brāhmo Samāj came to see the Brāhmo path as Dharma (morality) (Hatcher 2008, 57). However, it was the conservative Hindus (Dharma Sabhā) who objected to “the Brāhmo’s critique of idolatry and their explicit rejection of the myths and ceremonies associated with Puranic Hinduism” (Hatcher 2008, 28). One important point is that now, just like then, there are many different views on what constitutes, substantively speaking, a “Vedic way of life.” Regarding religious fundamentalism, we ought not to oversimplify through homogenization of discrete groups into a homogenous whole (see Bryant 2001, 268). What is agreed upon, however, is that a mid-nineteenth- and twenty-first-century, politically inspired Vedic theology is reconstructed and reconstituted from what Brian Pennington (2001, 581) explains as a “new age that required vigilance, strong leadership, and a sense of communal responsibility for the survival of Hindu dharma.” Neo-Hinduism or “Neo-Vedanta” refers to a renaissance intellectual-nationalist movement that implies a precolonial, unified cultural entity known as “Hinduism” (see King 1999, 94, 107).
6. The Bodhi House business is no longer operating. This includes the website, which was shut down during the process of trying to obtain copyright clearance to use the image. It became apparent to me, through a reverse image search, that Bodhi House had used the image of someone else without their permission. Having brought this to the attention of Bodhi House, they shut down their website (accessed April 17, 2018, <https://www.bodhi-house.me/>).
7. This excerpt is a segment from a seventy-five-minute speech given in Sanskrit in November 2016 in San Francisco that was later translated and adapted for the following video (McCartney 2017e).
8. BhG 6.20: *yatroparamate cittam niruddham yoga-sevayā / yatra caivātmanātmanam paśyannātmani tuśyati //* (Sargeant 2009, 291).

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