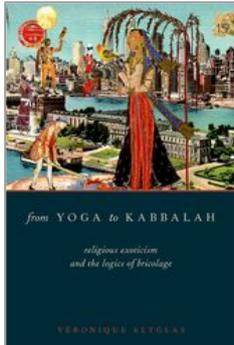


University Press Scholarship Online

Oxford Scholarship Online



From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage

Véronique Altglas

Print publication date: 2014

Print ISBN-13: 9780199997626

Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: June 2014

DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199997626.001.0001

Introduction

Véronique Altglas

DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199997626.003.0001

Abstract and Keywords

The introduction summarizes the limitations of the current sociological analysis of bricolage, and presents the book's objectives and theoretical frame. Inscribed inside a larger effort to contribute to a critical sociology of religion, this study aims to provide an understanding of the ways in which certain foreign religious practices and beliefs are disseminated and appropriated in contemporary practices of bricolage. These practices are understood as part of a "religious exoticism": this notion draws attention to the processes that make "available" cultural and religious resources for their appropriation. It also addresses the type of engagement that individuals develop with the culturally and religiously foreign. After presenting this study's general key findings and arguments, the introduction presents its methodological design, in particular the choice of case studies and the emphasis on empirical, comparative, and cross-national research.

Introduction

Keywords: critical sociology of religion, religious exoticism, comparative research, cross-national research

“whatever new things come up, I’m up for trying, ” asserts Kim.¹ Kim is a 24-year-old artist. Dismissive about her Anglican education, she has been frequenting the Hindu-based movement Siddha Yoga in London for seven months. She has also experimented with yoga, hypnotherapy, and card reading, as well as alternative therapies such as acupuncture and chiropractic. Over the years, I have met numerous individuals who would endorse Kim’s motto and who explore, successively or simultaneously, a vast array of religious teachings and alternative therapies originating from different cultural backgrounds.

By and large, the popularization of yoga and meditation, public curiosity about shamanism and Sufism, and the recent craze for Kabbalah all demonstrate the appeal of foreign religious traditions to a wide audience in advanced industrial societies. Strange and enticing, their perceived otherness seems to lend them authenticity and to nourish hopes for the discovery of mysteries and hidden truths. However, such popularization has not led to mass conversions to Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or Judaism. These traditions, as Kim’s example suggests, are often explored as fragmented “resources” that are combined in seemingly eclectic assortments. This exoticism in the religious sphere, as such, has never been sociologically investigated: Why are individuals attracted to “foreign” religious traditions especially? Why are some of them appropriated and not others? Does their popularization entail their transformation and, if so, which ones? How do people engage with religious beliefs and practices that are initially foreign to them? By exploring a range of teachings and practices in different religious traditions, do individuals craft their personal religion? What roles do these appropriated religious teachings play in people’s lives? Finally, what does this popularization of yoga, Sufism, meditation, or Kabbalah tell us about contemporary societies? These are the questions that this book addresses through cross-national research on three case studies: the Hindu-based Siddha Yoga and Sivananda Centres in France and Britain, and the Kabbalah Centre in France, Britain, Brazil, and Israel.

(p.2) Bricolage and Religious Individualism

Sociologists of religion have not considered *religious exoticism*, the fascination for “foreign” religions, as an object of study in itself. Rather, they considered this fascination to be evidence of the fact that in contemporary society, individuals increasingly craft their religious life and identity by picking and mixing from a wide range of religious traditions. This has been called *bricolage*. *Bricolage* is a French common word that has no direct translation in the English language. It designates activities of fabricating, repairing, and installing—something like “DIY.” It conveys the idea that this practice is amateurish or not serious—the verb *bricoler* in some contexts can be translated as “fiddling.” Lévi-Strauss (1966) originally used the term as a metaphor to explain the ways in which mythological thought creates meaning and “fixes” myths by replacing missing or forgotten elements with residual components. In short,

[f] or Levi-Strauss, mythical meaning-making bricoleurs combine their imagination with whatever knowledge tools they have at-hand in their repertoire (e.g., ritual, observation, social practices) and with whatever artifacts are available in their given context (i.e., discourses, institutions, and dominant knowledges) to meet diverse knowledge-production tasks. (Rogers 2012, 3)

Bastide developed the notion of bricolage to analyze syncretism with reference to Afro-Brazilian religions. He makes of bricolage a response to the “holes” of collective memory. It is about repairing what is already here (as such, bricolage is not pure invention but is organized) and, by doing so, it creates new meaning. Thus, Bastide’s (1970) “sociology of bricolage” is an attempt to grasp the rules and logics that organize the manipulation, transformation, and making of symbolic resources.

Despite being originally used in the study of traditional societies, sociologists of religion started to refer to bricolage to describe the religious life in advanced industrial societies. Thus, “bricolage” was presented by Luckmann (1979) as an outcome of the privatization of religion. For Luckmann,

because religious institutions lose their social control in the modern world, religion becomes a private matter, and hence individuals elaborate personally their beliefs and practices from diverse sources:

The privatization of individual existence is linked to the privatization of religion in general. As for religious themes one is tempted to say with some exaggeration: *anything goes*. In the global interpenetration (p.3) of cultures, a vast—and by no means silent, although perhaps imaginary—museum of values notions, enchantments, and practices has become *available*. It has become available “directly” but primarily through the filter of mass media rather than social relations. The choice is determined rather *less by social conditions*—although evidently they continue to play a kind of screening role—*than by individual psychologies*. (Luckmann 1979, 136, my emphases)

The assumptions being made here by Luckmann—an absolute eclecticism, the unthought-of “availability” of undifferentiated symbolic resources, and extreme religious individualism—unfortunately remain within the sociology of religion up to this day. As so often, here the reference to globalization is descriptive rather than explanatory.

Indeed, sociologists of religion have by and large understood bricolage as the making of eclectic and personal religiosities within modern individualism. “Sheilaism,” coined by one of Bellah et al.’s (1985, 221) interviewees who named her religion after herself, also seemed to legitimate the idea that belief has become unique to each individual. Like Luckmann, Hervieu-Léger’s seminal works on religion and modernity emphasize processes of individualization and subjectivization in the making of modern religious life: “in the domain of religion like elsewhere, we have observed the capacity of the individual to elaborate his own universe of norms and values from his own singular experience tends to impose itself beyond the regulatory endeavors of institutions” (Hervieu-Léger 1999, 69, my translation). Individualization and subjectivization are unsurprisingly emphasized in relation to the most heterodox and unregulated religious spheres: Heelas

(1996a, 23), for instance, believes that “(much) of the New Age movement is beyond tradition, beyond established or codified ethicality, indeed beyond belief.” Pushing the Luckmannian theory of privatization to its extreme, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) evoke a vibrant “spirituality” growing outside institutions and generated by a “subjective turn”: as fewer and fewer people live according to “external expectations, ” “the subjectivities of each individual become a, if not the, unique source of significance, meaning and authority” (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 10, 3–4). The authors do not address practices of bricolage, but their claim about the primacy of “self-authority” over “external” constraints presupposes that the “spiritual revolution” they predict is about the rise of a personal form of religiosity, which authorizes the free appropriation of various religious resources.

These assumptions about religious individualism and bricolage have been reinforced by reference to theories developed outside the sociology of religion. First, they echo the paradigm of individualization and detraditionalization (p.4) that Giddens, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim elaborated. This paradigm has remained significantly influential within the social sciences until today, despite growing criticisms (Atkinson 2007; Brannen and Nilsen 2005; Savage 2000; Skeggs 2004). By and large, Giddens (1991), Beck (1992), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1996, 2002) contend that extrinsic, traditional authorities do not structure people’s lives as they once did and that, in “reflexive” societies, individuals are left to produce their own biography and identity through personal choice. Therefore, in a reflexive society, it is believed that “we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves” (Giddens 1991, 75). According to this perspective, bricolage with exotic religious resources would be the result of individuals’ liberation from collective norms and values. They now would be free to pursue the realization of themselves through diverse means chosen on the basis of unique, subjective experiences. Yet, sociologists of religion seem to forget that for Beck (in Atkinson 2007, 353), such reflexive constructions of personal biographies are relatively standardized, because individuals become more dependent on

the dictates of various institutions and experts (including religious movements) to lead them on an increasingly important quest for self-fulfillment.

Like the individualization and detraditionalization paradigm itself, some of the depictions of religious individualism draw on postmodern theories. These theories presuppose that we have entered a new era, characterized by the death of tradition and great narratives. Instead, the postmodern world involves the fragmentation of information and knowledge, the collapse of boundaries between reality and representations, and the implosion of social classes and genders—by making such claims, postmodern theories clearly intended to challenge social theory (Kellner 1990). Postmodernity is thus the end of a single worldview; it celebrates the local and the heterogeneous, the plurality of voices and meanings, the patchwork, pick and mix, and the pastiche (Jencks 1992). Applied to religion, the postmodern stance makes of bricolage a playful individual practice that consecrates the breaking of boundaries between and within traditions, and even more if we follow Blain (2002, 3–4) about neo-shamanism in Europe: “Within Western ‘post-modern society’ an increasing number of people are turning to construct their own spiritual relationships with the earth, other people, and those with whom we share the earth: plants, animals, and various spirit-beings found in the mythologies of the world.” The postmodern perspective is also illustrated below by Srinivas’s (2010, 179) study of Sathya Sai Baba devotees:

Devotees do not choose one religious system and reject another; they choose parts of different systems, putting them together individually (p.5) in a pastiche (similar to what Levi Strauss has called bricolage), the ways that citizens experience and craft a multiculturalist approach. In a sense then, the Sai devotees “craft” a religious structure and a religious identity for themselves. They self-consciously shape a devotional identity by picking and choosing parts of the Sathya Sai system of belief for which they feel an affinity....[Identity] becomes a space in which conscious choice occurs not merely between

preconstructed identities but also between parts of identities.

Srinivas completes this description by outlining “both the power and pleasure of agency” involved in bricolage. As a way to engage with a diversity of religious traditions, bricolage is also, in her view, an empowering “skill of living in multicultural societies and in the postmodern world” (2010, 180, 179).

Finally, economic metaphors of the market are increasingly applied to religion. These also emphasize both the freeing of religion from the control of institutions and individuals’ ability to freely elaborate religions *à la carte*. In this perspective, practices of bricolage with foreign religious resources would suggest that religions have become objects of consumption chosen by empowered consumers (Carrette and King 2005; Hervieu-Léger 2001, 148–151; Lau 2000). For instance,

one can practice Chinese meditation while listening [to] Andean relaxation music and burning Indian incense. One can go on a yoga retreat in the Caribbean, enjoy aromatherapy massages, and eat a strictly macrobiotic diet based on Japanese foods. Through the very combination of the public sphere of alternative health and the global marketplace, the individual is *empowered* to create his or her *own unique strategy for living in the modern world*—at least according to an implicit code of consumption which suggests that buying into this *bricolage* is the first step toward responsibility. (Lau 2000, 13, my emphasis)

This short presentation of sociological discussions of bricolage emphasizes how the sociology of religion has approached the exploration of foreign religious traditions: in short, as a characteristic of a social world that has broken with tradition and historicity. In such a world, emancipated individuals choose, consume, and combine religious resources of all kind in unique assortments, thereby elaborating personal, hence unique, religious identities and systems. This book suggests that this understanding of bricolage with foreign religions largely overestimates its eclecticism, takes for granted the

availability (p.6) of religious resources, and misunderstands religious individualism. Overall, inflating the eclectic and personal nature of practices of bricolage has led to a neglect of their social and cultural logics.

I am certainly not the first to challenge sociology of religion's approach to bricolage. The first criticism concerns the distortion and misunderstanding of the metaphor once used by Lévi-Strauss and Bastide. For the anthropologist André Mary (1994, 1995, 2000, 2005), we cannot talk about "bricolage" anymore. For a start, bricolage as described by sociologists of religion does not imply a need to "repair" a culture's gaps and discontinuities. On the contrary, for Mary, in the modern or postmodern setting, fragmentations, paradoxes, and heterodoxies seem to be characteristically unproblematic for social actors. Mary also outlines that bricolage, as defined by Lévi-Strauss, implies "pre-constraints" relating to the meaning and content of resources that are being used, and which the bricoleur cannot ignore. Besides, the range of resources that can be used is finite and limited. Finally, bricolage is not free in the traditional societies to which it was originally applied. In African and South American syncretisms, the introduction of new resources in religious life was linked to colonial contexts. Power relations and cultural domination generated hierarchies in values and meanings which, in turn, affected the making of bricolage (Mary 1994, 93). All of these constraints make bricolage a process of tensions, negotiations, and compromises, leading to the elaboration of syncretic syntheses. Mary thus prefers to talk about "post-traditional" or "postmodern collages" in contemporary societies, to emphasize what he sees as their lack of constraints and tensions. In his view, collages are not creative of new religious syntheses; they indifferently patch together *any* religious resource from a seemingly unlimited stock and empty them of their original meanings. Contemporary society "praises the making of collages and resolutely inscribes itself in a conversion to the fragmentary, to a plural and imploded reality, consecrating the loss to any reference to foundational and unifying great narratives" (Mary 2000, 194, my translation). In other words, while making a valuable critique of the use of "bricolage" by sociologists of religion, Mary

shares their understanding of radical religious individualism when it comes to “postmodern collages.”

Other scholars express their doubts about this radical religious individualism and highlight the need to understand bricolage in social context. Campiche (1993, 2003, 2004) underscores the significance of socialization, by reminding us that individuals do not elaborate their religious identity in a social vacuum. Personal experience may have become determinant in religious life, but it is anchored in social contexts; a nexus of social relations and interactions enable social actors to authenticate it. Accordingly, bricolage is (p.7) relative and entails beliefs that are, to a certain extent, collectively shared, a view endorsed by Obadia (1999) in his study of Tibetan Buddhism in France. Indeed, is not Sheila explaining that she believes in “God” and in fact “would be willing to endorse few more specific injunctions” (Bellah et al. 1985, 221)? Wood (2009, 241) actually underscores the Christian undertone of Sheila’s depiction of her belief in his critique of “self-authority” within the sociology of spirituality. Indeed, even the most atomized religious milieus have common orientations and constitute a coherent system of meaning that are collectively shared; this is precisely what Champion established in her long-term study of the French “mystical-esoteric nebula.” She presented its “psycho-religious orientations” as worldliness, the value of intimate experience, the quest for unity, individual responsibility, love as ethical basis, a form of humanistic ethics, confidence in one’s journey, and the belief in the possibility of “non-ordinary” realities (Champion 1990). By and large, Champion (2004, 61) notes the lack of precise sociological analyses of bricolage’s internal “organization.”

Both Hervieu-Léger (2001, 127) and Mary (1994, 97; 2005, 286) acknowledge that self-realization, and more widely individualization, constitute an imperative that affects contemporary practices of bricolage. Yet this imperative is more presumed than investigated, and the authors do not seem to envisage that the necessity to make religious choices may grant bricolage a rather coherent and predictable social dimension. Indeed, Hervieu-Léger (2005, 300) insists on the

“increasing eclecticism that characterize[s] individuals’ productions in terms of belief, ” despite recognizing (without further developments) that the availability of religious resources is not boundless in a given social context and that people do not have the same predispositions to access these resources. Available resources are certainly limited in a given social environment, but what makes some of them (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism, Kabbalah, or shamanism) “available”? As suggested by Hervieu-Léger, sociologists have observed that it is the urban educated middle classes that engage with these religious traditions in seemingly eclectic religious trajectories, but why is that so? What should this observation tell us about the meaning and role of bricolage as social practice?

In short, not only are scholars of religion prone to overestimate the individual and eclectic nature of bricolage, but their methodological individualism does not encourage them to ponder the social constraints, norms, and factors that they acknowledge and that might reveal its internal logics. Besides, none of them enquire into the prominent role played by foreign religious resources in bricolage, the uneven “availability” and appeal of these resources, and how, in practice, individuals engage with these “things foreign.”

(p.8) For a Critical Sociology of Religion

Beyond an understanding of religious exoticism and the logics of bricolage, this study is inscribed inside a larger effort to contribute to a critical sociology of religion (Wood and Altglas 2010; Altglas 2012). My stance is not new in this regard: Beckford (1989, 1-17) and Turner (1991, 3-4) regretted that the sociology of religion remains isolated from wider sociological debates; it privileges the detailed descriptions of religious experiences and beliefs to the detriment of consideration of social class, family organization, power, and authority. The current tendency to overestimate personal subjectivity, “choice, ” and “freedom” in the making of bricolage, or in the study of “spirituality” (Wood 2009, 2010), makes these flaws of the sociology of religion even more acute.

It is, however, not the only subfield affected by a propensity to inflate the role of agency and subjectivity while denying that of structure, or to simply imagine that these things are disjointed. There is in today's social sciences a "retreat of the social" as Kapferer (2005, 1-2) put it, "a shift away from a concern with social, relational and interactive structures, as well as institutional and organizational formations...[t]he complexities of their internal dynamics, their structuring processes, and the forces of their effects on human action within and beyond them." Yet, sociology emerged as a new discipline through this epistemological break: it claims that the individual is, and cannot but be, social. Durkheim's study of suicide is foundational in that it demonstrates that even the most intimate and personal decision that seems to rest upon contingent and unique circumstances, is socially determined to the point that we can predict suicide rates and explain their variations in relation to identified social factors and trends. The "sociological imagination" is therefore an ability to understand the interplay between individual biographies and the wider social and historical context (Mills 1959). For that reason, opposing the individual and the social, making of the self a "natural" category unaffected by class, ethnicity, or gender, and assuming that individuals craft personal identities and religious systems all constitute a break from the epistemological foundations of sociology, if not a subversion of these.

It indeed becomes a subversion of sociology when one makes the most radical claims about religious individualism and individualization by rewriting the discipline's epistemological foundations. Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 1), for instance open their book *The Spiritual Revolution* with an abridged citation from Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*: "[truncated: There still remain] those contemporary aspirations towards a religion which would consist entirely in internal and subjective states, and which would be constructed freely by each of us." Presented as such, this quotation seems to (p.9) suggest that Durkheim believes in the existence of the religious life described by Heelas and Woodhead in their book. However, the reader of the *Elementary Forms* (1971 [1915], 47) would see that for

Durkheim, these aspirations “remain” to be considered and are then dismissed immediately by him as “uncertain possibilities.” Therefore, Durkheim continues, they do not constitute a hindrance to defining religion as he famously did (“beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community...all those who adhere to them”) and to concluding that religion is “an eminently collective thing.” In fact, this section of the *Elementary Forms* is very interesting: in the preceding paragraphs, Durkheim responds to thinkers of his time who wondered “if the day will not come when there will be no other cult than that which each man will freely perform within himself.” The idea of an absolute religious individualism is therefore not new, and neither are its critiques. Durkheim (1971 [1915], 46) concedes that “individual cults” may exist in certain social contexts, yet nonetheless to him they are “simply aspects of the religion common to the church to which individuals belong” and not “distinct and autonomous religious systems.” Therefore, “individual cults” still imply that “it is the church that teaches the individual the identity of his personal gods, what their role is, how we must enter into relationship with them, and how we must honour them.” In other words, for Durkheim, individualized forms of religion would necessarily be shaped by socialization from religious institutions.

This subversion of sociology manifests itself in a repetition of the process: in the concluding sections of their book, Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 148) cite Durkheim (in Pickering 1975, 96–97) as distinguishing a “religion handed down by tradition” and a “free, private and optional religion, fashioned according to one’s needs and understanding.” They name other scholars as well, saying that they all believed that “spirituality” was growing, thereby confirming their own hypothesis—a “spiritual revolution” was occurring while institutional forms of religion declined. But Heelas and Woodhead omit to cite the paragraph that follows Durkheim’s distinction, in which he explains that “public” and “private” religions “belong to the same family, ” that the practices and beliefs of the “individual” religion are insignificant, and again, that “it is obviously private belief which is derived from public belief.” It might not be a bad idea indeed to refer to Durkheim’s ideas about

religious individualism. This would allow sociologists to consider the possibility for much more coherence and continuity in the religious life of “spiritual seekers” and bricoleurs. Indeed, previous regular churchgoing is a predicting factor for participation in “spiritual” milieus (Wood 2009, 245). Not only did I find that most of the individuals exploring Hindu or Kabbalistic teachings have had a religious education, but also that several claimed to rediscover the Christian faith they were (p.10) raised in through this “detour.” But such usage of sociology as described above rather demonstrates an impoverishment of the sociological way of thinking while still seeking its legitimacy in the authority of its founders.

A critical sociology of religion entails a reflexive approach. Some sociologists of religion attempt to address critically the subfield’s normative penchant, which sometimes leads scholars to “defend” their object of study and hence to assume its positive social role (Bender et al. 2013), or its universality (Beaman 2013), as well as to misjudge its public significance through the flawed notion of “post-secularity” (Beckford 2012). It is also an ambivalent relationship with the object of study (religion) that informs assumptions about radical religious individualism. As illustrated by the writings of Luckmann, Hervieu-Léger, and Heelas and Woodhead, radical religious individualism is more often than not articulated with the idea that, outside declining religious institutions, there is an invisible, recomposed religious life and perhaps, an ongoing “spiritual revolution.” Underlying this is the belief that religion may change shape but cannot decline. Luckmann (1990, 127) contends that “religion is not disappearing from the modern world: experiences of transcendence are a universal component of human life.” By not conceiving the possibility of the decline of religion’s influence, some scholars may tell us more about their own experience than about the social world they aim to describe. Yet these academic discourses are not socially innocuous: they authorize certain views of the social world and as such have practical consequences—there are, for example, questionable practical and regulative consequences of assumptions about religion’s significance and universality (Beaman 2013).

Thus, a critical sociology of religion, as Bourdieu (2010 [1987]) advances in his address to sociologists of religion, requires them to reflect on the ways in which they might, in some instances, position themselves simultaneously in the academic and religious fields, and thus play a double play. Bourdieu contends that it is not possible to understand religion adequately *and* take part in religious contestations and stakes at the same time, simply because such involvement binds scholars to the beliefs and preconceptions associated with belonging to the religious field—for instance, assuming that religion is universal, or that it has a significant or positive social role.

Assuming that individuals are now free to make their own identity has the same epistemological weakness, in other words, reflecting and legitimizing academics' social experience. In her critique of the paradigm of individualization and detraditionalization, Skeggs underlines that the emphasis on fluidity, empowerment, mobility, and choice in fact reveals the habitus of those contributing to such a theoretical framework, that is to say, the social experience of a small upper middle-class minority that is far from being representative of (p.11) society as a whole. "Their sociology, " Skeggs (2004, 53) argues, "can thus be viewed as part of a symbolic struggle for the authorization of their experience and perspectives." Again, this is not without consequences: it is hardly difficult to catch a glimpse of the potential interplays between social theories that inflate the significance of agency and subjectivity, on the one hand, and forms of governance that encourage the formation of autonomous and self-managed individuals, on the other hand. Ultimately, reflecting on the conditions in which we produce sociological knowledge and on how this knowledge is affected by these conditions (Bourdieu 2013) is a core element of a critical sociology of religion.

Religious Exoticism as Framework

This book aims to provide an understanding of the ways in which certain foreign religious practices and beliefs, which I call "exotic religious resources, " are disseminated and appropriated in contemporary practices of bricolage. These practices are understood as part of a "religious exoticism";

this notion draws attention to the processes that make “available” cultural and religious resources for their appropriation. It also addresses the type of engagement that individuals develop with the culturally and religiously foreign.

Two preliminary notes of caution are nonetheless necessary. First, there is nothing normative in the reference to “religious exoticism.” By using this notion, I am not lamenting over the ways in which social actors engage with foreign religions, since I do not imply that this engagement is more superficial or less authentic than another. Every encounter with foreign cultures or religions implies an understanding from one’s point of view and necessitates interpretations, translations, and selections. Authenticity, or authentic interest in other cultures, if such things existed, is not what I propose to discuss here. Ultimately, I do not believe that the role of academics is to be the “authorized guardians” of tradition (Huss 2007b). Second, “religious exoticism” addresses *one* way of engaging with foreign religions, among others. I do not pretend to describe within this framework every way in which social actors interact with various religions in the contemporary world. Alongside religious exoticism, other individuals, for instance, undertake a process of conversion, thereby adopting a new way of life and identity. In these cases, religious exoticism might (or might not) contribute to social actors’ phases in the discovery of a new religion; it does not suggest a static relation. The relation that “religious exoticism” aims to capture is nonetheless significant. Indeed, while conversions to Buddhism, Hinduism, or Judaism are relatively small in (p.12) number, certain fragments of these religions are widely explored by a large public, through literature, courses, conferences, and retreats, as well as short term-involvement in various religious movements. This is what religious exoticism focuses on.

Exoticism has mostly been discussed in cultural studies, in particular to explore the ways in which artists and intellectuals have used or depicted non-Western cultures in the knowledge or art that they produce. “Exoticism” is derived from the Greek *exōtikos*, “foreign, ” from *exō*, “outside.” It suggests an attempt to grasp otherness, yet what is exotic is

not an “inherent quality” of particular social groups, places, ideas or practices. Indeed, no one is intrinsically “other.” Exoticism is instead relational; it is a “particular mode of aesthetic perception” that emphasizes, and to a certain extent elaborates, the otherness of groups, locations, ideas, and practices (Huggan 2001, 13). Moreover, the exotic is attractive *because* it is seen as being “different” (Todorov 1993, 264); exoticism makes otherness “strangely or unfamiliarly beautiful and enticing” (Figueira 1994, 1). Yet it is less about accounting for cultural differences than formulating an ideal, by dramatizing and even constructing differences. For example, the analysis of the popularization of Kabbalah and neo-Hinduism shows that these religious traditions are perceived—and appropriated—as primordial and mystical kernels of “spirituality.”² This construction of otherness can involve a distance in time rather than in culture only: neo-pagans for example, by trying to reclaim ancestral European practices such as Druidism or witchcraft, exoticize pre-modern Europe. I thereby suggest that exoticism can manifest itself in one’s relation with one’s own religious tradition: partly secularized Jews can be attracted by Kabbalah as a primordial Jewish “spirituality, ” while ignoring or even rejecting contemporary Judaism as lived in its mainstream institutions (see Chapter 2). Similarly, a section of the bourgeoisie in Muslim countries who have a conflicted relation with Islam rediscover it through westernized forms of Sufism (Haenni and Voix 2006; Philippon 2014).

Through the construction of idealized others, exoticism often seeks to reclaim “‘elsewhere’ values ‘lost’ with the modernization of European society” (Bongie 1991, 5). In this regard, orientalism (a particular form of exoticism) offers a case in point. Said (1978) explains how the Orient was a European invention, a representation of otherness that, by contrast, enabled the affirmation of European culture and identity (as modern, rational, potent) when the East was deemed to be irrational, emotional, and mystical. Orientalism was precisely a way to think of the “East” as an absolute complement to the West where, writes Said (1978, 115), “what mattered was not Asia so much as Asia’s use to modern Europe.” For romantic orientalists, such a portrayal of (p.13)

the Orient was particularly potent: in the *fin de siècle* era, it captured what they believed modern Europe had left behind. Studying and knowing the “mystical East” would thus allow European culture to regenerate itself. These representations proved to be long-lasting. In fact, they are still shared by those whom I interviewed, who think that “the West has lost it,” as one of them put it, and who look to yoga and meditation as authentic sources of personal regeneration. Overall, this book demonstrates that exotic religious resources are, indeed, constructed and disseminated on the terms of those who appropriate them—that is, as universal and flexible techniques for the realization of the self.

Furthermore, Todorov (1993, 265) argues that, to elaborate and maintain the representations of idealized others, it is necessary to ignore the “reality” of other peoples and cultures:

Knowledge is incompatible with exoticism, but lack of knowledge is in turn irreconcilable with praise of others; yet praise without knowledge is precisely what exoticism aspires to be. This is its constitutive paradox.

Exoticism’s paradoxical ignorance is well illustrated in the Chapter 3 of this book by the representations of a spiritual and timeless India among those who traveled and even lived there, overlooking the modernity of contemporary Indian society. Similarly, students of Kabbalah who travel to Israel for festivals and pilgrimages, by their own account, seem to dip into biblical times.

Exoticism’s ambivalence derives from specific cultural encounters and relations, in which discourses and representations about other people have been associated with their subjugation. This is why Arac and Ritvo (1991, 3) consider that exoticism conceals, by its aestheticization of otherness, asymmetrical power relations. This also suggests that there is nothing arbitrary in the selection of particular “others” to be exoticized, while some, deemed too “primitive,” are rejected. For example, discourses about the “mystical East” that emerged in the nineteenth century were not independent from imperialist ideology and colonial practice in Asia. The ways in which Christian interpretations of Kabbalah

extracted it from its Jewish context to confirm the truths of Christianity, and even to convert Jews, reflected Christian Europe's conflicted relations with its Jewry (Chapter 1 of this book develops these examples). Thus, contextualized, exoticism may be interpreted as a way to conquer culture "from the inside," through knowing, interpreting, and appropriating it; Root (1995), for instance, sees exoticism as a "cannibal culture." This terminology might seem slightly extreme regarding the contemporary popularization of (p.14) yoga or Kabbalah, yet less so when one thinks of the non-Jewish Kabbalists, "white gurus," and "plastic shamans"³ who became authorities in the religions of others.

Because of their Foucauldian stance, postcolonial studies are prone to underline how power is exerted through knowledge when analyzing exoticism. However, as Said (1993) himself acknowledges, the subjects of exotic discourses are not passive; in fact they have often used these discourses to resist imperialism. Orientalist ideas about India's spiritual supremacy, for instance, have been appropriated in the elaboration of an anti-colonial Hindu nationalism, but also by gurus who came to Europe and North America in a "counter-mission" (Hummel 1988; King 1999; Kopf 1969). More recently, contemporary gurus and Kabbalists actively contribute to the making of idealized Eastern spiritualities and Kabbalistic mysteries, respectively. They also instrumentalize exotic representations with subtlety to add mystery and distinction to their teachings, as shown by Siddha Yoga's reference to Kashmir Shaivism and the Kabbalah Centre's identification with the Moroccan Kabbalistic tradition (see Chapter 3). Yet, it remains that exoticism, as a way to simultaneously think about and ignore others, reflects asymmetric relations. This is underscored by the fact that exotic representations and discourses are overwhelmingly elaborated by the observer, not the observed (Todorov 1993, 264). This presupposes the entitlement and the power to do so (Figueira 1994, 2). While I certainly do not make assumptions about the intentionality of religious exoticism, practicing yoga or meditation, joining Native Americans in a sweat lodge, studying Kabbalah while expressing disdain for Judaism

(Chapter 2), are all contemporary practices that unavoidably presuppose a sense of entitlement.

Exoticism is accordingly fundamentally ambivalent about other cultures, which are viewed with a mixture of fascination and distaste. Nineteenth-century orientalist perceived contemporary India as a backward civilization and had no interest in its popular, contemporary religious life, which they believed was a degradation of Hinduism. Instead, they were looking for its “golden age, ” a pure Hinduism to be found in the Upanishads, believed to contain untouched mysticism and truths. Similarly, christianized Kabbalah had become a core element of European esoteric tradition, but some of the prominent figures of nineteenth-century esotericism refused to consider Kabbalah as Jewish; for them, it had to have nobler origins. Contemporary students of yoga, meditation, or Kabbalah idealize “Eastern spiritualities” and Kabbalah, respectively, but they certainly do not aspire to become Hindu or Jewish. In fact, when confronted with the Hindu or Jewish character of these teachings, they evoke feelings of discomfort and may display dismissive attitudes (Chapter 2).

(p.15) This conflicted way of engaging with others’ traditions requires selections, translations, and interpretations to deal with what triggers feelings of distaste. Exoticism entails a “domestication of the foreign and unpredictable, ” writes Foster (1982, 21), “so that once the labeling is imposed, the phenomena to which they then apply begin to be structured in a way which makes them comprehensible and possibly predictable, if predictably defiant of total familiarity.” Exoticism is, therefore, relatively self-referential. Indeed, for Huggan (2001, 22),

[exoticism] acts as the safety-net that supports these potentially dangerous transactions, as the regulating mechanism that attempts to manoeuvre difference back again to the same. Exoticism posits the lure of difference while protecting its practitioners from close involvement.

Finally, through this process of domestication, objects, ideas, and practices are somewhat removed from their original cultural context. Appadurai (1986, 28) illustrates what he calls

the “aesthetics of decontextualization” with examples of tools and artifacts that are commoditized, consumed, and diverted from their original meaning, to be displayed in Western homes. This book emphasizes that popularized Hindu-based and Kabbalistic teachings are de-linked from their original religious and cultural frameworks to reach a non-Hindu or non-Jewish audience, and are significantly shaped by the therapy culture of advanced industrial society. Needless to say, the psychologization of Vedanta and Kabbalah makes them familiar and predictable.

Book Content

As an analytical framework, exoticism aptly captures the ways in which foreign religious beliefs and practices are disseminated and appropriated in advanced industrial societies. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the cultural and historical context of the popularization of Vedantic and Kabbalistic teachings. These religious beliefs and practices have been constructed, disseminated, and appropriated in ways which reflect desires and expectations that were, at first, external to traditional Hinduism and Judaism: perceived as pure, primordial, and mystical traditions (and subsequently presented as such by Hindu and Jewish leaders), they were hoped to revitalize Western contemporary religious and cultural life. Western expectations thus largely contributed to shape Hindu-based and Kabbalistic teachings before they were adopted in Euroamerican societies. The “availability” of exotic religious resources is (p.16) therefore not a given, but the result of specific cultural encounters and historical contexts that made some of them (and not others) “available.”

Chapter 2 explores neo-Hindu disciples’ and Kabbalah students’ outlooks on Hinduism and Judaism, respectively, as well as their religious identities and trajectories. While idealizing the “mystical East” and Kabbalistic mysteries, they explore yoga, meditation, or Kabbalah *despite* their Hindu or Jewish characters. Indeed, when confronted with the “reality” of otherness (through language, liturgy, or devotional practices), these prove to be a source of discomfort, if not of culture shock. Accordingly, the majority never envisage conversion; instead, they tend to adopt a selection of practices

during peripheral and short-term involvement. Thus, another important finding of this research is that social actors rarely engage with otherness in a free, unproblematic, and playful manner.

Religious exoticism's ambivalence explains why Kabbalistic and Hindu-based teachings are appealing despite being strange and mysterious, at the same time as their particularisms are neutralized. This is the focus of Chapter 3. As they spread transnationally, neo-Hindu movements and the Kabbalah Centre refuse to be identified as Hindu or Jewish, but present their teachings as universal meta-religions that transcend national, religious, and cultural boundaries. This entails reinterpreting the significance of rituals and core tenets that make traditional Hinduism and Judaism ethnic religions, introducing new practices, engaging in endless interpretative discourses, and implementing organizational strategies. The domestication processes of exotic religious resources are plentiful, contradictory, and perilous for what were initially movements of revitalization. Scholars describe bricolage as fluid, playful, and unaffected by diversity; but there is a "backstage" that enables it and which reveals that otherness truly matters for the "producers" of exotic religious resources.

Ultimately, universalistic ambitions are also affected by constraints and opportunities at the local level. In particular, national responses to religious diversity and the characteristics of the religious landscape are decisive. By comparing neo-Hindu movements in France and Britain, on the one hand, and the Kabbalah Centre in these two countries, on the other hand, Chapter 4 shows that in certain contexts, these religious organizations sometimes think it is wiser to identify with Hinduism or Judaism respectively. Conversely, depending on the local context as well, the development of universalistic or particularistic strategies impacts locally on the potential for the dissemination of religious teachings. Once again, the availability of exotic religious resources results from a complex and conflicted process of negotiations and reinterpretations, in interaction with social environments and in which otherness (p.17) tremendously matters, both for

their public and their producers. In short, bricolage is also shaped by national contexts.

Exotic religious resources are popularized by being universalized, de-ethnicized, but also, as shown in Chapter 5, psychologized. Indeed, the main motivation of their audience is to find in these resources efficient means to improve their lives through the transformation of the self and its attitudes. The leaders of the studied religious movements present Vedanta and Kabbalah as an inner-worldly salvation, shaped by an ethos of self-realization. Therapy culture also shapes how the exotic religious resources are disseminated, that is, in courses, workshops, and retreats, through which “students” pay to access and take home techniques for self-improvement. Because therapy culture significantly standardizes religious teachings, the eclecticism of their students’ religious trajectory is overstated by sociologists of religion. Furthermore, religious incursions in yoga, meditation, or Kabbalah tend to contribute to a rather unchanging quest, since individuals successively adopt practical methods for the realization of the self in a sort of “lifelong religious learning.” In other words, rather than making successive different choices, they reiterate a coherent religious orientation.

The domestication and appropriation of exotic religious resources as tools for self-realization is at the core of religious exoticism; Chapter 6 therefore discusses the social significance of such aims. At this point, the book deepens its criticisms of the sociology of religion’s methodological individualism. It shows that the quest for self-realization does not evidence “self-authority, ” but rather entails the conformity to a set of norms and values that actually reveals wider constraints exerted on individuals in advanced industrial societies. Flexible economies and the shrinking of the welfare state require from individuals that they become increasingly responsible for themselves, in a relatively unpredictable and insecure social environment. In this context, the self has become the locus of individuals’ governance. Religion, even in its most privatized forms, does not escape from this social context, as shown by incentives to work on oneself, adopt appropriate practices, and constantly evaluate and control one’s emotions. In short, bricolage with religious and

therapeutic resources is significantly shaped by the neoliberal political, economic, and cultural perspective that requires individuals to be self-managed and autonomous.

The book's last two chapters underscore that social actors' participation in this self-making is largely affected by gender and class. Exotic religious resources may be used by women to perform gendered roles in their private and professional lives. Chapter 7 shows that they are also typically appropriated by middle-class individuals as techniques enhancing emotional competence. (p.18) Being flexible, "positive," managing one's reactions, coping with stress, developing harmonious relationships with others: these soft skills are transferable—and transferred—in the working life of professionals. Exoticism is also highly significant: those exploring exotic religious resources tend to belong to what Bourdieu called the "new petite bourgeoisie." Therapists, artists, or those working in marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, and design, are traders of symbolic goods and services. Their predisposition to "cosmopolitanism," and hence their attraction to meditation, yoga, shamanism, or Kabbalah, reflect the fact that accessing symbolic resources and controlling their circulation are vital in relation to their socio-professional position. The analysis of particular individual trajectories indeed suggests that the use of exotic religious resources as cultural capital is particularly beneficial for those who are experts in personal growth, alternative therapies, or "spirituality," and who represent a significant proportion of students of neo-Hinduism and Kabbalah. In their case, practices of bricolage need to be understood as the continuous re-skilling of freelancers involved in competitive and unregulated markets of specific symbolic goods.

An Empirical Approach

The general understanding of religious exoticism and reassessment of bricolage presented in this book would not have been possible without an empirical and comparative approach. This work draws on two large-scale and cross-national studies that I have undertaken, first among Hindu-based movements in France and Britain, and more recently on the Kabbalah Centre in France, Britain, Brazil, and Israel.⁴

When possible, references to works on the popularization of Tantrism, Sufism, shamanism, Buddhism, and Asian traditional medicines in Euroamerican societies are made to show that the notion of “religious exoticism” captures general trends beyond my case studies.

Fieldwork on Hindu-based religions focused on two movements: Siddha Yoga and the Sivananda Centres. This research involved two years of participant observation and the collection of 80 non-directive interviews with the leaders and members of these two groups, in London and Paris, between 1999 and 2005. This research was completed by a short study of the ways in which religious movements that refer to Hinduism are affected by national responses to religious diversity in France and Britain (2005–2006).⁵ This entailed a new collection of data through visits to the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and other neo-Hindu movements, and the Hindu Forum of Britain was contacted for documents and information on their activities and purposes. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted (p.19) with the social players involved in the management of religious diversity in both countries.⁶

The study of the Kabbalah Centre took place between 2007 and 2010. It involved 13 months of participant observation and 80 interviews, mainly in Paris, London, Rio de Janeiro, and Tel Aviv.⁷ Interviews were conducted with the Kabbalah Centre’s teachers and students, former teachers and students, representatives of governmental bodies regulating religions, anti-cult movements, rabbis and spokespersons of Liberal and Orthodox Judaism, as well as other social actors interacting directly or indirectly with the Kabbalah Centre, such as journalists. I also attended various events and courses relating to Kabbalah in these four locations and interviewed individuals who teach Kabbalah, either within or outside a Jewish setting. Press articles, television programs, and official reports were also collected.

The reader might wonder why these case studies in particular have been selected. For a start, new religious movements (NRMs), as circumscribed groups with a specific teaching, represent good settings to investigate the production and

appropriation of religious resources. These processes in less “formative” (Wood 2009) environments, such as those designated New Age, are more diffuse and therefore less easy to observe. There is no doubt that a solid and valuable study of religious esotericism could have been undertaken by analyzing the popularization of teachings referring to shamanism, Buddhism, or Sufism. The choice of Kabbalistic and Hindu-based teachings simply reflects my itinerary as a researcher. In my early years, I was encouraged to research movements referring to Hinduism, since at the time no such study had been undertaken in France. Thus, in the mid-1990s, I investigated the Sri Chinmoy Centre and Sahaja Yoga in Paris and explored the range of religious teaching referring to Hinduism in Paris—the present book sometimes refers to these preliminary studies (Altglas 1997, 1998, 2000). Starting my doctoral thesis, I decided to compare the transnational diffusion of Siddha Yoga and Sivananda Centres, and the ways in which their teachings are appropriated in France and Britain. I chose these two groups because, while some Hindu-based movements were often investigated (ISKCON, the Rajneesh movement, Transcendental Meditation), this was not so much the case with Siddha Yoga and the Sivananda Centres, despite the fact that they seemed to be relatively lively organizations in Paris when I first got to know them. This research’s main argument was that the presence of Hindu teachings in Euroamerican societies did not demonstrate an easternization of the West, as suggested by Campbell (2007). Rather, their adaptive strategies and the way in which their disciples appropriated neo-Hindu practices and values entailed a westernization of Hindu teachings (Altglas 2005). The present book draws on (p.20) the data collected for this in-depth research on Siddha Yoga and the Sivananda Centres. In any case, it seems a good idea for a study of religious exoticism to include a case relating to the “mystical East,” since the dissemination of Asian beliefs and practices and the popularity of Buddhism have become prominent features of religious life in advanced industrial societies.

I also felt it was important to maintain a comparative approach to avoid generalizing the particularities of one case study and to be able, instead, to develop a larger reflection of

higher significance. In other words, my aim was to work around a sociological problem, rather than being the expert of one specific case study. The Kabbalah Centre may have been an easy choice: it had been one of the most controversial NRMs of the early 2000s, subjected to intense media coverage because of the celebrities who joined the movement. More important, representations of both Hinduism and Judaism seemed symbolically powerful, as they refer to a golden age and a holy land, India or Israel, which mobilizes religious imagination. Just as modern gurus claim the Vedanta to be universal and to transcend all cultural boundaries, the founder of the Kabbalah Centre, Philip Berg, declared that the Torah was not transmitted to the Jews only, but to all, and part of the controversies raised by the movement was that he made an esoteric teaching available to anyone, whereas in mainstream Judaism, Kabbalah is usually supposed to be studied only by Jewish mature men. Thus, like neo-Hindu movements, the Kabbalah Centre seemed to be a fascinating example of the transformation of a non-proselytizing, ethnic religion into a global religious network. I suspected that as in neo-Hinduism, the universalization of Kabbalah would imply innovations to adapt it to a wider audience. This book underscores that the universalization, de-contextualization and psychologization of these teachings are very comparable. Despite their different origins, doctrines, and practices, they become very standardized and use similar techniques for self-realization and fulfillment.

The differences between these case studies were also potentially interesting. I was intrigued by the fact that, while Siddha Yoga and the Sivananda Centres in Euroamerican societies tend not to attract disciples of South Asian origin, the Kabbalah Centre attracted two different kinds of disciples: secular Jews who, I imagined, may wish to reconnect with their religious background, and others, non-Jews, who were probably engaged in another religious trajectory. How these different constituencies interact in the movement, and how its leaders reconcile their expectations, were fascinating issues. I had observed that some neo-Hindu gurus have a nationalistic discourse in India, but in the West successfully emphasize the therapeutic virtues of their teachings (giving them a non-ethnic, non-political aspect), which made me wonder how

(p.21) religious leaders strategically play the specific as well as the universal card in transnational religions. I knew that Berg had claimed that the Torah was given not only to the Jews, and was said to have subsequently lost Jewish disciples. By and large, these strategies would prove to be an issue of tremendous importance for the Kabbalah Centre's current crises and tensions (these issues are addressed in Chapters 2 and 3).

Cross-National Perspectives

The advantage of cross-national approaches is that they avoid generalizing what may be specific to a case study in one location. Beyond the British-French axis of the research on neo-Hindu movements, I widened the cross-national comparison for the study of the Kabbalah Centre by conducting research in Brazil and Israel. The limits of such an enterprise need to be acknowledged, and they have to do with the level of expertise a researcher can acquire in a lifetime. The sections of the book on the psychologization of religion, neoliberalism, religious teaching and social classes heavily draw on the British and French contexts, which I know particularly well. A thorough comparative analysis of economic liberalism with the Israeli and Brazilian contexts would require a level of expertise which admittedly I do not have. Similarly, while I am confident to analyze in-depth responses to religious diversity and the religious landscape in Britain and France, it would be far too ambitious for me to attempt a similar thorough exercise for other national contexts.

Yet, while being clear about the limits of what one can solidly investigate, it is still worth trying: it has become obvious that transnational religious phenomena require cross-national investigations. It is the only way to identify constant features and local variations across branches, and to gauge the impact of national contexts on these transnational organizations. For instance, whereas the British state has been relatively liberal regarding "cults," the French state considers them a threat to the state and society. Comparison of responses to NRMs in France and Britain based on neo-Hindu case studies proved to be revealing. In Britain, neo-Hindus are torn between the institutional pressure to emphasize the reference to Hinduism

and their universalistic ideology, which targets a Western audience. In contrast, it is crucial for NRMs in France to differentiate themselves from the so-called cults, insisting, for example, on their religious character or authenticity. Accordingly, a comparison of adaptive strategies to a very controversial movement with ambiguous relations to Judaism such as the Kabbalah Centre seemed very promising. And indeed, it proved to be so. In London, the movement flourished as (p.22) a “universal wisdom” among a very mixed and cosmopolitan constituency. By contrast, in France, the Kabbalah Centre was relatively successful in the 1990s among the Jewish population. However, students who initially found in the Kabbalah Centre a way of strengthening their Jewish identity moved away, discouraged by the fierce opposition of French Jewish authorities and dissatisfied with the Kabbalah Centre’s universalistic and psychologizing turn, leading to the Parisian Centre’s closure. This double cross-national comparison (neo-Hindu movements in France and Britain versus the Kabbalah Centre in France and Britain) informs the Chapter 4.

Moreover, I would argue that comparing four national contexts, especially in qualitative research, does not need to be rigid by systematically granting the same status to each of these contexts included in the comparison, unless we decide that the comparison becomes an end in itself. Rather, my aim was to investigate the popularization of exotic religious resources through practices of bricolage; a flexible comparative approach, opportunistically driven by the research aims, seemed more useful. The book therefore addresses the peculiarities of each context in points in time in order to shed light on the subtleties, logics, and tensions in the making of religious teachings and identities. As such, the comparative perspective provides an understanding of the popularization of exotic religious resources that no singled-out, unique case could have done.

Israel seemed to be an obvious choice in the study of the Kabbalah Centre, because it started there. Moreover, in the only existing Jewish state, Judaism is strongly intertwined with Israeli national identity. I therefore wondered whether the strategy of universalizing Kabbalah was applied in the Israeli

branch of the movement and, if so, how the audience responded to it. Indeed, I suspected that the involvement of Israeli members in the Kabbalah Centre could be slightly different and may involve the strengthening of their Jewish identity. The research proved that was the case and that the leaders' universalistic strategy had its discontents. The references to the Israeli case appear at different points in the book, for instance, in order to address its distinctiveness regarding religious identity. The predominance of Orthodox Judaism in Israel and its effects on the development of the Kabbalah Centre is also compared with the French, British, Brazilian, and American contexts.

While the Kabbalah Centre encounters the opposition of religious orthodoxy in Israel, it faces a very different situation in Brazil. Unsurprisingly, two of the seven Latin American Kabbalah Centre's branches are Brazilian. Indeed, Brazil represents an exceptional case of exuberant religious culture, which has generated numerous organizations that are now part of global religious networks. I thought that the Kabbalah Centre would contribute to (p.23) the alternative religious scene that has grown up among the urban middle classes since the 1980s, including Eastern religions, esoteric organizations, and alternative therapies. The historical religious diversity that discouraged the formation of strong anti-cult networks and policies in Brazil seemed to be fascinating to compare with the other national contexts. Chapter 2 of this book discusses why, despite all these favorable conditions, the Kabbalah Centre has not been as successful in Brazil as I initially thought it would be. Data suggest that the Brazilian religious field, as diverse as it may be, represents a challenge for a movement anchored in the Jewish tradition, despite a form of prestige associated with the Jewish identity in Brazil. This would require further investigation, yet in the light of arguments being made in this book, the idea that Brazil's unusual capacity to assimilate and combine various traditions has its limits and logics should not surprise us.

To summarize, this study of religious exoticism sheds light on the following. First, bricolage is not independent from cultural and historical contexts that make available certain religious

resources. The pool of resources is therefore neither unlimited nor arbitrary. Second, contemporary bricoleurs are prone to break with the “pre-constraints” of the resources that they use, but not out of “freedom” and indifference for their original meanings. On the contrary, otherness matters in practices of bricolage; it generates conflicting feelings and requires its domestication, which, as Huggan (2001, 22) says, “manoeuvre difference back again to the same.” Thus, heterodox combinations of beliefs and practices are not that playful. The ability to engage with diversity may be in fact relatively small: indeed, an idealized otherness miraculously responds to expectations for universal, authentic, and efficient tools for self-realization. Third, bricolage is much less eclectic than assumed: on the one hand, exotic religious resources are greatly homogeneous due to the neutralization of their particularism and their psychologization; on the other hand, their audience is involved in a very consistent and stable endeavor to actualize one’s self for relational and professional purposes in the long term. Fourth, bricolage is not characterized by “self-authority.” Indeed, the socialization to norms and values is great, even in privatized and deregulated religious sectors. Besides, bricolage is a class- and gender-based practice, structured by the personal responsibility for realizing one’s self in the context of neoliberal politics.

Notes:

(1) . The names of research participants have been changed to protect their anonymity.

(2) . By “spirituality, ” this book refers to research participants’ use of the term, hence my use of quotation marks. For reasons explained in Chapter 6, I do not believe that “spirituality” is a useful sociological concept, especially when contrasted with “religion.”

(3) . A pejorative term first used by Native Americans, referring to those trying to pass as traditional Native American healers.

(4) . Interviews have been conducted in French, English, and Brazilian Portuguese in accordance with interviewees’ mother tongues. I used French and English to conduct my interviews

in Israel; English has significantly spread among the Israeli population, and the Kabbalah Centre's audience tend to be educated, middle-class Israeli who usually have a good command of English. Many also have Sephardic origins and French is their mother tongue. Not speaking Hebrew was not a hindrance in participant observation either; it prompted students to engage with me intensively, by explaining rituals and prayers and by translating teachers' commentaries. The interviews cited in this book have been translated into English by myself when originally in French or Portuguese.

(5) . Post-doctoral fellowship funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council (PTA-026-27-0864).

(6) . In France: the president of the MIVILUDES, the persons in charge of the Office of religious organizations (Bureau des Cultes), and the spokesperson of the CAP, an organization which in the name of NRMs and their members sued the main anti-cult organization. In England: representatives of the Inner Cities Religious Council, the Cohesion and Faith Unit, the Charity Commission, and INFORM, a charity based in the London School of Economics whose aims are to collect and diffuse information on NRMs to the public. A quick interview was conducted by phone with the chair of the Cult Information Centre.

(7) . Funded by a research grant from the British Economic and Social Research Council (RES-063-27-0041).



Access brought to you by: **New York University**