

Omwashing Yoga: The Far-Right's Weaponization of Spirituality Toward Ethnonationalism

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Yoga continues to be popularly employed in mainstream spaces such as corporations, educational institutions, and elitist networks. Recently, there has been a global uptick of yoga's deployment by far-right political entities, such as police academies, detention facilities, vigilante groups, armed forces, and law enforcement programs. While existing literature advances critical understandings on yoga in the former spheres, scholars have limited understanding on the political intentions of yoga's appropriation by the military and far-right. This research lessens the gap by bringing a critical lens to the global phenomenon of "omwashing," the far-right's use of yoga as a colonial and ethnonationalist tool to mask state violence and divert the gaze from their supremacist agendas. Focusing specifically on India, Israel, and the U.S, I examine the consumption, political purpose, and ethical stakes of yoga's appropriation by the far-right - and consider how, for instance, the depiction of yoga as a "peaceful" practice to help law enforcement officers, soldiers, and defense forces combat "stress" and cultivate "calmness" serves to promote the dangerous practice of "spiritual bypassing" and legitimize state-sanctioned violence against the marginalized "other."

Peeling back the sociological, historical, and political roots and consequences of the decision to militarize yoga in these contexts, I employ discourses of orientalism, queer feminism, neoliberal spirituality, and decolonization to analyze how far-right governments, authoritarian leaders, and related political institutions discuss their use of yoga and mindfulness. Methodologically, I use a combination of focus groups, media and content analysis, and autoethnography as a yoga teacher to study how Indian, Israeli, and American political and cultural institutions co-opt New Age spirituality. By weaponizing yoga to conceal their fascist ideologies, these far-right forces advance an islamophobic, genocidal, and imperial agenda while disguising their societies as free and peaceful. At the heart of this study is the anti-imperial struggle to decolonize yoga.

Sheena Sood, PhD (she/her) is a Philadelphia-based activist, educator, sociologist, and healing justice visionary of South Asian descent. She is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Delaware Valley University in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Sheena has studied yoga at Kailash Tribal School of Yoga in McLeodganj, India (YTT-200hr, AYTTC-500hr). Her current research project, *Omwashing Yoga: Weaponized Spirituality in India, Israel, and the US*, investigates the growing incorporation of yoga and mindfulness by far-right law enforcement, military, and vigilante groups. Envisioning a futuristic yoga that centers collective freedom by centering all humanity, living beings, and Mother Earth, Sheena curates "Decolonizing Yoga" workshops through frameworks that recognize yoga's oppressive layers and liberatory potential. She is also the founder and creative director of *Yoga Warrior Tales*, an interactive adventure-based educational program that teaches children yoga and mindfulness through a social justice lens. Learn more at www.sheenashining.com.

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