

The Politics of Imagining at the Boundaries of Yogaland

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This paper explores the production of imaginaries and the processes of meaning-making vis à vis the politics of identity and power at the boundaries of Yogaland. Yogaland, as a spatial-temporal domain that is primarily founded on acts of imagination, is understood here as epitomising the institutionalisation of the expanding transnational modern yoga project. However, having been applied both descriptively by practitioners and analytically by scholars, the boundaries of Yogaland remain ambiguous and continually contested.

Drawing upon ethnographic research conducted at the boundaries of Yogaland, this paper proposes that the politics of imagination undergo negotiation within these very locales. It contends that such negotiations constitute a pivotal aspect of the underlying processes of meaning-making that are fundamental to the expansion and external validation of the transnational yoga project. Within this context, boundaries are construed as distinct localities where challenges, predicaments, or dissonances manifest, thereby posing a potential threat to Yogaland's persistence. Examples of such dissonances include the promotion of Hindu fascism in the name of dharma, the concealment of abusive guru histories while celebrating their roles in popularising yoga, and the inflationary use of health claims to legitimise yoga practice while ignoring safeguards or physical risks. Imaginaries and narrations are employed to reconcile these cleavages and mitigate the dissonances in the perception of Yogaland, a process that effectively engages in defining Yogaland and the demarcation of its boundaries.

Preliminary findings suggest that the Yogaland experience is inherently ephemeral, as the extraordinariness (Außeralltäglichkeit) it offers can only be temporarily embraced before it inevitably dissipates into ordinari-ness. Consequently, the principal modes of engagement with Yogaland predominantly revolve around imaginative constructs created from outside its boundaries, which makes it an eternally elusive and liminal place.

Author: AUGSPURGER, Jens U. (SOAS University of London)

Presenter: AUGSPURGER, Jens U. (SOAS University of London)

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