

Finding the Brown Body in Contemporary Yoga

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The collision of health inequalities exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and social inequities raised through the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd put a spotlight on the treatment of black bodies in world of white privilege. In contemporary yoga settings, this led to discussions around inclusion on the basis of race, gender and body shape and size alongside issues of cultural appropriation and appreciation by white bodies of a practice which originates in the Indian subcontinent and has been exported, largely as means of physical exercise, globally. Most of the main contributors to the debate have been from the Global North, with yoga practitioners in North America and Europe leading the conversation. In India, yoga continues to be used as a soft power tool by the ruling party and a vehicle of Hindu nationalism. Conspicuous by its absence is an interrogation of the socio-politics of the brown body, both as the intended initial recipient of instructions in yoga (including asana) and as an evolving, modern practitioner. This paper will examine both yogic and anthropological literature in an attempt to understand the historical relevance of the brown body in the Indian subcontinent, as a subject of forced and voluntary migration and will reflect on the brown body's positioning in contemporary practice.

Author: MOONDA, Firdose (University of Cape Town)

Presenter: MOONDA, Firdose (University of Cape Town)

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