

Yoga, Value Retraditionalisation and Minority-Identified Yoga Practitioners in Finland

Thursday 23 May 2024 14:15 (30 minutes)

This talk introduces my upcoming empirical research on BIPOC and LGBTQ+ yoga practitioners' experiences of yoga in Finland. Contemporary yoga appears as liberal, empowering and subversive on the surface, but has been criticised for complicity in oppressive structures, such as whiteness, patriarchy, and heterosexism (Jain 2020; Lucia 2020; Balizet & Myers 2016). Within the scene of yoga and holistic spirituality advocates for racial justice and inclusivity have called for teachers and practitioners to practice introspection regarding questions of cultural appropriation, white privilege, and cis- and heteronormativity (Saad 2020; Camellia 2023; Wiggins 2023). These issues have become increasingly topical in recent years due to the growing visibility of the political far right, conservatism, and conspiracy thinking within the field of holistic spirituality worldwide. As such, the yoga scene mirrors wider cultural trends of value retraditionalisation and the rise of nationalist and anti-gender ideologies. Thus, this presentation unpacks questions of the inclusivity and accessibility of yoga spaces, and how these recent developments may impact already vulnerable groups of yoga practitioners. While there are studies about BIPOC practitioners' experiences of (mainly American) yoga (eg. the journal *Race and Yoga*), the experiences of LGBTQ+ practitioners remain largely unexplored. I will investigate the inclusivity of yoga in the context of Finland, which is characterised by nordic exceptionalism –the idea that Finland among other nordic countries is an exceptionally democratic and equal welfare state. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that image of exceptionalism easily makes inequalities invisible, for instance, by contributing to problematic assumptions that posit Finland outside of histories of racism and colonialism (Keskinen 2021). Furthermore, while Finland scores relatively high in international comparisons regarding LGBTQ+ rights, hatespeech and hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people continue to be major problems (Oikeusministeriö 2021). Indeed, awareness of race and LGBTQ+ issues seem only just emerging in the Finnish yoga scene.

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