

Transnational Circulation of Yoga Instructors and Practitioners between Brazil and India (1950s-1970s)

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In the 1970s, a regular flow of Hatha Yoga practitioners between Brazil and India was established, connecting yoga academies and research institutes in the two countries. However, the actual movement of ideas and people within such South-South yogic network was possible only due to the engagement of a small group of physical educators based in Rio de Janeiro with Hatha Yoga, initiated in the 1950s. In this paper, we focus on the role played by one of these professionals, Jean-Pierre Bastiou (1924-2016), a French bodybuilder, yoga practitioner and instructor, in the creation and furthering of transnational linkages between yoga academies and research centers in Brazil and India. Bastiou entered the transnational network forged by Swami Sivananda in the mid-1950s when he was already based in Rio de Janeiro. A disciple-by-mail of Sivananda, Jean-Pierre was the founder of the “Sivananda School of Hatha Yoga of Rio de Janeiro”, in 1958. He travelled to India for the first time in 1961 with the purpose of meeting his Guru. During this trip, he expanded his connections with modern Indian Yoga. Having enrolled at the Teacher Training Course offered by the Yoga Institute, in the first semester of 1962, Bastiou started a long-lasting relationship with Shri Yogendra and his methods. With the aim of interpreting the role of Jean-Pierre Bastiou as a cultural broker dedicated to bringing together incipient communities of yoga practice in his adopted country and well-established modern Indian yogic communities, we analyze primary sources such as newspaper and magazine articles, memoirs, travelogues, and yoga manuals. We argue that this case study, by looking into trajectories of subjects in peripheral positions within yoga transnational networks, would allow us to broaden and refine our understanding of the diverse and complex dynamics permeating this field of practice and study.

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