Race and Yoga

Yoga in Global Muslim Contexts: Cultural Representations and Spiritual Practices

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The story of this issue, like that of many rewarding collaborations, weaves through various moments of synergy and correspondence between the co-editors and the editorial board of *Race and Yoga* over the course of the past two years. The special issue editors met soon after Farha contacted Narin to invite her to participate in a roundtable discussion at the *Feminisms and Rhetorics* conference held at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA in October 2023. Although they had never met before, they were familiar with each other's work from being *Race and Yoga* journal authors. The subsequent panel, on the topic of "Radical Self Care as Resistance for Women of Color in the Academy," was a space of kinship and connection for the presenters as we discussed our wellness practices within the increasingly fraught spaces of academia. Our presentations were an opportunity to share how we intertwine our personal wellness habits with our academic critical work on topics related to health and wellness; participation was also an act of feminist solidarity. The other speakers on this roundtable included Stephanie Y. Evans, Janaka Bowman Lewis, and Debarati Dutta and our comments prompted a lively discussion from a large audience that included faculty, administrators, and students. Soon after, Farha met with Jennifer Musial, the Managing Editor of *Race and Yoga* at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference where she was invited to organize a special issue of this journal; she then invited Narin to co-edit.

In the interest of encouraging a wide representation of contributors and making this a collection that prioritizes belonging and feminist solidarity, the process of bringing this issue together involved many layers of outreach and collaboration with our contributors and with the editors and board of *Race and Yoga*. We would like to extend our appreciation to Jennifer Musial, Tria Blu Wakpa, and Sheena Sood who all supported us through the many stages of this issue. The process of generating this collection has included monthly meetings and multiple check-ins with them as we organized the issue and its call for papers (CFP), cultivated and selected contributors, chose reviewers, and managed the overall process of bringing the issue to life. We are also very grateful for the careful and diligent work of Sammy Roth, the editorial assistant for the journal who did much of the copyediting for these contributions. Thank you to Lauren Hatch Pokhrel and Samantha Griggs who also copyedited selections. Jennifer Musial oversaw much of the final copyediting work and took care of the communication and technical work to publish the issue online. It was an honor and privilege to work with a journal that embodies feminist principles and sustains feminist community. We thank all of these individuals

for their careful assistance and effort and are immensely grateful to *Race and Yoga* and its leadership for bringing us together, supporting our special issue topic, and for championing the mission of publishing groundbreaking critical and creative work addressing the complex intersections of gender, race, and yoga that also explore yoga in the Muslim world.

We were lucky that as we began this collaboration in late 2023, many of us were slowly reconvening at feminist conferences and in other supportive spaces after years of the pandemic and the isolation it enforced. The energy of gathering again while grappling with the challenges of the era made this a time rife for new collaborations and community building. This project (and our ongoing commitment to yoga) unfurled as we returned to our institutional spaces while navigating a variety of difficult decisions and situations within our academic and personal lives, intense phases of caregiving, and the backdrop of an increasingly combative and changing political landscape. As South Asian, Muslim, American women who are daughters and caregivers our project unfolded as we dealt with immensely difficult moments of attending to our parents during health crises. We held virtual meetings while multi-tasking within hospital spaces, senior care centers, our homes, our offices, and our cars. As we navigated personal and professional anguish and grief during this two-year period, larger social, political, and cultural disruptions loomed beyond the tension of our personal and academic lives. We worked on the CFP with the backdrop of 2024 election politics in the US and during a time when international conflicts including genocide in Palestine, the occupation of Kashmir, atrocities in Sudan and conflict in Congo and elsewhere dominated the media and re-enforced structural hierarchies (Amnesty International 2025; "From Domicile to Dominion" 2021; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 2025); the visual and rhetorical effects of this moment put violence and upheaval at the forefront of representation and produced discourses and disputes related to nationhood, religion, and questions of belonging.

We write this introduction now in December 2025 recognizing how quickly cultural shifts can take place and how easily work in the areas of feminist and critical race studies can be vulnerable. We write in a moment that feels continually (and increasingly) frenzied, but also one that reveals how necessary it is to continue conversations around the themes presented. Through readings of the multifaceted cultural and social frameworks of yoga in relation to Muslim contexts, our issue presents nuanced dialogues surrounding questions of identity, community, and belonging. It addresses themes that challenge easy oppositional distinctions and assumptions about both yoga and Muslim identities. We recognize that any publication that addresses topics related to gender, race, religion, and contemporary politics needs to do so with careful assessment and circumspection as well as through a diversity of positions. This is why the issue includes authors from different geographical locations who represent a variety of academic disciplines and ranks as well as writers from outside academia. The format of their contributions is also varied – the collection includes critical articles, a range of personal reflections, and an interview. Our goal has been to make space for multiple of voices and to present multiple critical and personal perspectives that can expand our understanding of yoga as it functions in contemporary society in a variety of global contexts. The issue reframes and expands critical readings of yoga to integrate Muslim experiences as part of opening a rich and valuable set of questions that contribute to fields as wide-ranging as gender studies, literary and cultural studies, religious studies, sociology, anthropology, and critical yoga studies among others. The collection provides us with a diversity of stories, voices, reflections, and critiques about the place of yoga in a variety of Muslim contexts; the selections remind us about how much more we can do to trace the intersections of yoga within different cultures and spiritual traditions and how yoga is a

system practiced globally in a variety of forms both secular and religious. Our own yoga practice has remained a source of centering and grounding in the process of this collaboration; it has inspired the work and continues to influence the way that we present the collection to you.

Section One: Self/Family/Collaboration/Reflection

Who are we as co-editors? What does it mean for us to practice yoga and why does it matter? What has guided us toward the development of this issue? A project like this demands that we reflect upon our positionality and consider how our similarities and differences have brought us together to amplify the strengths of the project. Many of the contributions in this collection merge personal history and experience with critical analysis – our introduction takes the same approach as we consider the ways that our varying, but intertwined backgrounds support the issue's goal to provide broad and complex understandings of yoga in the Muslim world.

Narin is a literary/cultural studies scholar whose work addresses Victorian literature, culture, and empire with a focus upon issues of gender, health, and embodiment. She is currently working on a book manuscript, *Vital Exchanges: Travel, Embodiment, and Gendered Cultures of Yoga*, that considers gender, colonialism, and the transatlantic/ transnational expansion of yoga in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She has published articles that address yoga and its cultural significance. Her essay in the *Race and Yoga*'s *Special Issue on South Asian Voices on Yoga* (2020) considers the intersections of gender, race, and colonial history through a reading of yoga and nineteenth century women's travel. She has also published a chapter in the collection, *Practicing Yoga as Resistance: Voices of Color in Search of Freedom* (2021, ed. Cara Hagan) that addresses the pedagogical contexts of yoga and its potential to build community. Her research on yoga intersects with work in the fields of health humanities and Victorian literature; a forthcoming publication discusses yoga in relation to historical conceptualizations of gaslighting, and other projects integrate analysis of yoga within readings of colonialism, global health, and medicine. She sees this issue as a particularly timely project that will contribute to literary/cultural studies, critical yoga studies, postcolonial/ decolonial studies, gender studies, sociology, religious studies, and history among others.

Farha is a sociologist/women's studies scholar whose work addresses how consumption and food can be a lens to better understand Muslim American women through an intersectional and transnational feminist lens. She holds an MA in religious studies, PhD in sociology, and is currently the director of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies. Her book *Intersectionality in the Muslim South Asian-American Middle Class* (2021a) explores everyday consumption of South Asian Muslim American women through food, clothing, and social media. She has included religion into the framework of intersectionality to explore the ways that these Muslim women negotiate their gendered, classed, racial, and religious identities. She asserts that through consumption Muslim women re-negotiate inherited ethno-religious traditions. Farha is currently working on her next manuscript, *Food, Faith and Friendship* (2028), focusing on the role that halal food has for community-making and friendship networks in one of the Muslim communities in Florida. She has also published on modest fashion (2021b), hijab (2009), transnational feminist solidarity and Muslim women, and most recently feminist food studies (2024; 2025). *Culinaria*, her forthcoming volume (2026) co-edited with Stephanie Y. Evans and Janaka Bowman Lewis, uses transnational feminism and intersectionality to expand feminist food studies. Overall, Farha's work is interested in Muslim women and consumption, and

women of color and critical wellness studies. She sees this issue as contributing to an understanding of how both Muslim women along with women of color create feminist solidarities and care; the issue also contributes to the fields of critical yoga studies, women's studies, religious studies, and sociology.

Thus, as co-editors, we represent academic scholarship in a variety of fields. Both of us have published work related to women's and gender studies with a specific emphasis on gender in the contexts of South Asia and the Muslim diaspora, and our work is rooted within a decolonial, feminist approach that considers theorizations of the body, care, and community. Co-editing this issue has been an opportunity to address questions of embodiment and identity through an experience that has itself been an act of feminist solidarity – the issue has been an opportunity for us to prioritize interdisciplinarity and recognize how strong partnerships can be forged across disciplines and within a feminist praxis. Feminist approaches were integral to how we recruited contributors at different stages of their academic careers and welcomed activist scholars into this space. We prioritized care and nurturing approaches as we worked with contributors during revisions to challenge the potentially caustic process of academic publishing.

Our yoga practice has informed and contributed to the trajectory of our academic paths as well as our personal lives. Narin began practicing yoga seriously as a graduate student and has been teaching for over twenty years. She is a certified yoga teacher at the 500-hour level, has done numerous workshops and trainings, and operates a studio collaboratively in Atlanta, GA. Her time with a growing community of students – many of whom have been taking her classes for over fifteen years – and her studio partner, Lynn Brandli, is restorative and has been a source of rewarding collaboration. Following the claim of Sri Aurobindo that "all life is yoga," she has seen her practice as a holistic form integrated within various facets of her life and tied to her scholarship and practices of self-care and community care.

Farha, as an Indian American Muslim, came to yoga as a practice in 2016 and in the last year became more committed to yoga as part of self-care during her time in Tampa caring for her mother after a stroke. She found a supportive space in Tampa at a neighborhood yoga studio in addition to the support of her mother's Muslim immigrant community as she cared for her mother during recovery. For Farha, a yoga practice has complemented both her commitment to self-care but also social justice. As she helped launch a Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) yoga practice during COVID-19 committed to accessibility, she became more committed to understanding yoga as a space of community (Ternikar 2021c). The physical, mental, and emotional support that comes from our background in yoga is woven into this phase of our lives as well as this special issue.

Both of our personal histories are rooted in South Asia. Narin's parents were born in India; her father, born in Delhi, moved to Lahore, Pakistan during the Partition while her mother stayed on in Lucknow, India for years beyond the Partition and eventually moved to Karachi. Her parents became diplomats, and Narin was born in Turkey and then lived in Europe and the Middle East for much of her childhood. Her father eventually became the Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) based in Kathmandu, Nepal after serving on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) based in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for many years. Her parents' lifestyle exposed her to many religious, geographical, and political contexts, and their household was one in which debates about politics and religion were often forged at the dinner table. While both her parents were very progressive, they held different attitudes toward religious practice – her mother was more traditional in terms of rituals, while her father took a more non-traditional path – both approaches were equally grounded in a sense of

spiritual introspection. Her parents sometimes held oppositional political views and approaches to faith and Narin's, as a result, are often flexible and varied. Her yoga practice has become a pathway that is interwoven with her Muslim background and interest in spirituality. She sees it as one of many paths toward gaining a better, more intuitive way of understanding the world.

Farha's parents were both born in India, and part of her mother's family migrated to Pakistan eventually. Born in London, Farha was raised by both her parents in Tampa, Florida, in an observant Sunni household. Though her family and both her parents were also from Sunni Indian families, her parents were a mixed caste marriage. She grew up in Tampa, attending Sunday school at the Islamic Society of Tampa Bay Area (ISTABA) where her mother was actively organizing Ramadan and iftar schedules and her father served on the board of the mosque. She also attended ISNA (Islamic Society of North America) as part of growing up Muslim American in the United States. *Her mother remains* active in the Sunni Muslim community in Tampa**.** As a feminist Muslim scholar, whose family has been rooted in an American Muslim community, Farha continues to practice rituals like *salat* but sees them as complementary (rather than contradictory) to yoga.

Our divergent and shifting relationships to our own religious/spiritual practice are represented within this issue and intertwined with our experience of yoga and our reading of its place in contemporary culture. Like many of the authors of this collection, we occupy positions as Muslim women in the academy working on issues of race, gender, and justice at a time in which these terms are increasingly under attack. Our relationship to our religious tradition is varied and intersects with other aspects of identity. We will share a little more about ourselves, our relationship to yoga, and the publication process at the end of this introduction but now turn to the collection itself to foreground the work of our contributors.

Section Two: Collaboration and Process/Contributor Selections

This project has been, like our practice, an unfolding, evolving undertaking that combines academic critique with personal reflection. Its cultural, interdisciplinary, and transnational focus contributes to a range of academic fields and will interest readers beyond academia. It took us some time to come up with the CFP for this issue. Our goal was to address the complexity of yoga practices and histories within the context of its expansion and globalization in Muslim contexts broadly construed. We chose to be as broad as possible in our understanding of Islamic practices in a variety of national, geographical, ideological and cultural contexts. Religious studies scholars of Islam, in particular, who are also interested in Muslim women and lived religious practice may find this issue to build on the earlier scholarship on Muslim women (Ali 2016; Barlas 2019; Chan-Malik 2018; Haddad et al. 2006; Hammer 2012; Karim 2009). Our issue archives important scholarship produced by women and thus provides valuable insight into gender as it intersects with Muslim identities, representations, and contexts.

Scholarship on Islam within both global and American contexts is far from monolithic. Critical research in the areas of Islam and feminism also continue to evolve (Abu-Lughod 2013; Ali 2022; Bullock 2002; Mahmood 2011; Mernissi 1987; Wadud 1999). Feminists have made space for social justice causes, in the case of interpretations of queer Muslim identities for example, and have led the way for social justice movements in spaces like Iran and Kashmir, but also within the locations of the United States and Canada through activism around Palestine, Black Lives Matter, and Queer Rights (Abdul Khabeer 2016; Savci 2021; Zia 2020). Recent work on transnational feminist solidarity from Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) and

Muslim scholars around Kasmir, Afghanistan, Palestine, Iran and Iraq is one concrete example of this (Ali et al. 2025).

Along with trying to address different aspects of Muslim scholarship and experience, our goal was also to solicit essays from scholars of various ranks – our collection includes reflections from academics from a variety of global institutional contexts, from an undergraduate student on her way to graduate school to a yoga teacher who is outside academia. It includes the work of scholars whose relationship to Islam as a religious practice is varied. Some of the contributors practice Islamic rituals, others have a more fraught relationship with religion; thus, we represent the complexity of Muslim experience as we address how we choose to interpret religious and cultural histories with diverse approaches. Our collection includes writers whose backgrounds represent the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, various parts of the Middle East, and South Asia – among the subject matter they tackle are topics as wide-ranging as yoga's relationship to ancestral histories in Tunisia, to its representations in Pakistani media forms, to its relationship to Black identities and the Nation of Islam, to its relationship to tourism and spiritual travel in Kenya. Our selections, as is typical in *Race and Yoga* issues, include a range of written styles and forms; together, these address the conflicted histories and cultures of yoga in relation to the Muslim world and provide diverse perspectives upon yoga practices and histories within a global context. The submissions we received were all from women who represent different disciplinary approaches. Our scholars represent disciplines that include anthropology, cultural studies, literature, Middle East studies, religious studies, sociology, South Asian studies, and women's studies among others. Their writing contributes to the interdisciplinary approach of this collection as it complements these expansive fields. The rich, thoughtful, and reflective pieces of this issue give us opportunities to assess a topic that has not been a common enough subject of study and that we believe can contribute to the widening field of critical yoga studies – *Yoga in Global Muslim Contexts*.

Yoga is now, as we all know, part of a billion-dollar industry that has spanned across the globe. Its expansion parallels the growth of wellness industries more broadly and its physical and spiritual practices have applicability in a range of contexts, locations, and regions. An examination of yoga in Muslim contexts gives us an opportunity to revisit yoga histories – their relationship to the region of South Asia as well as spaces within the Middle East, the Far East, North Africa, and beyond. The desire to "claim" yoga as a Hindu practice and perhaps resist it as a Muslim one creates an undercurrent of tension in readings of yoga history – scholars and practitioners often align yoga with Hinduism, yet its history as a practice reveals that individuals of a variety of religious backgrounds have turned to it. The movements of peoples historically has encouraged practices such as yoga to be hybridized and fused; the same can be said about the Muslim world and the movement of peoples within it. Practices of Islam are widely varying, complex, and infused with traditions from particular regions and schools of thought including Sunni, Shia, Nation of Islam, and Sufism.

Key topics in this collection address intersectional identities, shifting geographies, immigrant experiences, the pandemic and beyond, dress and cultural identity, land and ancestral histories, histories of colonialism, yoga in media and popular culture, childhood reflections/theme of growing up, Muslim identities and Hindu nationalism in configurations of yoga, and yoga as a site of healing and recovery. Our authors address questions of practice in various locations and settings and interrogate how their experience with yoga is related to their experiences of home, belonging, and nation.

Our issue begins with two personal reflections that address issues of belonging, secularity, and nationhood. The first, Shahin Kachwala's "Contested Poses: A Secular Muslim Woman's Ambivalent Reflection on Belonging and Feminism," describes the dilemma of sustaining a yoga practice as a Muslim Indian woman and considers how yoga has become a politicized symbol of Hindu supremacy. The author reflects upon early yoga experiences and her attempts to understand "the racialized and gendered nature of yoga in the United States" and addresses how she turned to the practice in a time of grief. She explores the complicated positioning of being an Indian woman but also a Muslim in an American yoga class and she addresses how yoga was "perceived as un-Islamic" in Muslim communities. The author reflects upon positionality and belonging in yoga as she writes, "As a politicized practice, yoga holds flexible meanings; it is both ancient and modern, gentle and strenuous, secular and religious. In attempting to engage with yoga's plural meanings and effects, in this essay, I first attempt to explore what it means to practice or not practice yoga as a secular Indian Muslim woman, someone who is perceived as both an insider and an outsider" (2).

This piece, like the one that follows it, addresses the complex national, religious, and cultural intersections at play with personal yoga practices. Our second contribution, by Sabyn Javeri, considers how perceptions of yoga were (and continue to be) intertwined with notions of national and religious identity in South Asian contexts. Writing from the perspective of a Pakistani Muslim practitioner, this essay provides a reflection of the childhood experience of yoga in Pakistan against the backdrop of television and media representations of yoga. Javeri analyzes how, through the depiction of yoga in a popular television show in Pakistan, the practice was represented as a rebellious form allied with Western as well as Hindu culture. Javeri describes navigating the terrain of yoga representation and the moral codes imbued within it as she reflects upon how practices of yoga were passed down from her mother's meditative yoga practice. She describes a return to yoga while living in the UK, noting how her practice helped her "understand how our post-colonial anxieties about identity, purity, authenticity, had made us suspicious of practices that predated Islam, predated Hinduism, predated borders altogether" (14). Addressing the communal histories shared in South Asia prior to the Partition, she writes, "Borders can claim territory. They can redraw identities. But they cannot cancel the body's memory of breath, the heart's desire for stillness, or the wisdom of practices older than states. Our politics tried to erase something older than modern nationalism, a practice of breath and presence that predates Partition, predates sectarian lines" (14). Javeri's selection addresses questions of faith and allegiance in relation to nationalism and describes how yoga can provide a sense of unified history. Both of our first two authors address issues of Muslim identity and representation in relation to yoga practice and provide us with thoughtful and insightful critical readings of their personal and familial experiences with yoga.

While these initial two contributions are personal reflections by authors who critique and navigate the positionality of yoga and selfhood within South Asian contexts, our third, "Giving You the Best of What God has Given You': The Use of Yoga among Members of the Nation of Islam" is a critical essay by Kayla Wheeler addressing gender, race, religion, and yoga in the United States. Through a reading of the Nation of Islam (NOI), she addresses Black Muslim identity and engagement with yoga practices. Wheeler focuses upon women's experiences in the NOI and profiles how members "define, describe and use yoga" (18) in a journey toward wellness and resistance. She addresses how their practices and identities contribute to our understanding of yoga and religion in America. Wheeler writes, "domesticity, physical and spiritual purity, personal responsibility for health, thinness, fitness, and embracing motherhood –

paired with a general suspicion of allopathic medicine have helped shape the contemporary views of yoga by Black women in the Nation of Islam" (23).

All three of the first essays in the collection address the intersections of yoga with aspects of race and identity; contributing to the geographical and cultural breadth of the collection, they also give us opportunities to understand the variety of ways that both "yoga" and "Islam" are fluid terms that represent a diversity of rituals, practices, and beliefs. In particular, these selections raise questions about the challenge of traversing a yoga practice when it is defined culturally as being intertwined with a particular history or identity that is perceived as non-Muslim – in the personal reflections, these authors navigate what it means to practice yoga when it is assumed to be a "non-Muslim" practice or represented as such; the critical scholarly essay in this first cluster addresses how yoga becomes employed as part of a health practice by women who also sustain their identities as members of the Nation of Islam. These pieces reflect the pliable and shifting nature of yoga itself as well as the various ways that it is employed within intimate, familial, and personal contexts.

The essays that follow consider yoga's trajectory geographically beyond the United States and South Asia to Muslim contexts within Kenya and North Africa. Sarah Marleen Hillawaert's offering, "Breath and Belief: Yoga, Islam, and the Moral Politics of Wellness in Lamu, Kenya," addresses yoga in relation to East Africa's growing tourism industry. Taking an ethnographic approach, the essay analyzes the Lamu Yoga Festival, held on the Swahili island of Lamu, an area with a strong Sufi Muslim history. She addresses how yoga is marketed and consumed in this area and traces the various intersections of the wellness industry with yoga and spiritual practices. Her particular focus is upon the introduction of yoga and other wellness rituals to Muslim girls in the region and how these practices operate "as a mode of soft power, a moral economy, and a site of friction" (24). She examines how "yoga is promoted as a tool of health, peace, and empowerment, particularly for Muslim girls, and now local residents interpret, negotiate, or resist these discourses" (24).

Questions of tradition, history, and land extend to the next essay in this cluster, "From the Ivory Tower to the Citrus Grove: Yoga as Decolonial Practice" by Douja Mamelouk. In this self-reflection, the author addresses questions of ancestral histories and rituals in a reading of a return to home. Mamelouk's journey to her family's citrus grove in Tunisia is an act of reclaiming selfhood as she abandons academic life in the United States. Her piece examines what it means to practice yoga in Tunisia, in a space where it is presented as complementary to Islamic practices and part of a path toward decolonial action. She writes, "in this Muslim-majority context, yoga intersects with local spiritual traditions in unexpected, even subversive ways…I interrogate how yoga can be decolonized and recontextualized beyond colonial paradigms" (39). Describing her experience of practicing yoga within her family's citrus grove with Dhouha, the teacher leading the sessions, she writes, "Unlike the commodified 'mindfulness of American studios, which treats Eastern traditions as fragmented tools for self-improvement, Dhouha's practice refuses extraction. For her, yoga does not replace or exoticize Islamic spirituality, it nourishes it" (40).

Mamelouk's assessment of yoga as a malleable practice that can be empowering connects with themes that are addressed in our next self-reflection written by Ayeh Maysoon Hajjari, a Moroccan Muslim student who traces the development of Raha Syracuse, a Muslim women-led youth-based program organized during the pandemic. In "Empowerment through Yoga: A Reflection on how Muslim American Women Build Spaces of Healing," she describes the experience of organizing and participating in an outdoor yoga session for Muslim women and

compares this to her previous experiences taking yoga in gym class where she felt like an outsider. Beyond exploring the experience of taking a yoga class in different special and cultural contexts, Hajjari's piece addresses the development of her Muslim identity and her decision to mark herself as a practicing Muslim by wearing a hijab against the backdrop of contemporary politics in the United States. Her piece addresses notions of modesty, safety, and embodiment within rituals of yoga practice within women's spaces.

Many of the essays in this collection address questions of identity formation, childhood, and the experience of taking yoga in different contextual spaces and settings. Our final three selections extend this theme along with addressing notions of Muslim identity within a variety of cultural and national contexts. They also address yoga with specific ethnographic approaches. Diane Charmey's "Disrupting Monoliths: Yogi Haider's Localization of Yoga in Pakistan" traces the representation of yoga in Pakistani media through a reading of a contemporary yoga teacher and the growth of his following. Charmey takes a digital, ethnographic approach to examining popular culture understandings of yoga in Pakistan. They consider how Yogi Haider uses the medium of social media to shape notions of yoga and integrate it within Pakistani culture. They write that Yogi Haider strategically invokes social media to establish his teachings "in a familiar sociocultural context through his use of poetry, space and history, as a means to challenge Pakistan's global image and India's sole claim to yoga" (51). Charmey "explores how Yogi Haider's individual narrative challenges stereotypical portrayals of Pakistan and reveals yoga's often overlooked presence in the country" (50). Evoking themes from earlier contributions in this collection, this essay traces how yoga is linked to healing and to exchanges between various religious and cultural influences and histories in South Asia.

Our next selection, "Returning to Fitra," is by Neda Ahson, a yoga instructor who explores the practice of teaching yoga to children. Through an analysis of "Meddy Teddy," a mindfulness-centered toy for young children, she examines the pedagogical impact of yoga upon youth, and traces how a focus upon breath and movement can support them. She writes, "When I teach yoga to Muslim children of color, the practice becomes an embodied reclamation – a declaration of our right to presence, to joy, and to spiritual autonomy. As a practicing Muslim, Islam is not merely cultural – it is the ethical and spiritual center of my life. I understand practice as a path of purification (*tazkiya*), remembrance (*dhikr*), and radical compassion (*rahma*). In my teaching, Islam and yoga are not at odds, they are in conversation" (70). Like many other authors in this collection, Ahson considers yoga's affiliation and compatibility with other forms of spiritual and religious exploration.

Our final selection by Sheena Sood, "Yoga in Gaza: A Conversation Featuring Hadeel Al-Gharbawi of Al-Jawad Camp," is an interview with the founder of Al-Jawad camp, a Palestinian educational camp that offers art therapy and various forms of support including yoga to children in Gaza. Sood's conversation with Al-Gharbawi traces how yoga can be a therapeutic balm for children suffering from trauma. Sood's framing of this interview includes analysis of yoga as a co-opted system for weaponizing, fascist movements and its potential as a form of resistance and rest. Writing as an upper-caste Hindu American scholar, Sood considers how Hindu fundamentalism places yoga solely within Hindu contexts and employs it as a system of authority. She highlights how yoga can both be a tool of soft power but also as a tool of healing in an ongoing genocide; she explores how children who are refugees in the Al-Jawad camp are using yoga to respond to the traumas of their situation. Within the interview, Al-Gharbari describes how she developed a yoga-based curriculum to support children with the loss of war and "psychological problems, including severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and

trauma" and how yoga has become "a joyful exercise for them" (87). She states that, "I think that religion, Islam, and yoga can go hand in hand… I have found a way to weave in Islamic practices like prayer with the breathing exercises that come from yoga and sort of put it all together" (88). With the interview format, Sood's selection gives us an opportunity to hear directly from the perspective of a voice in Gaza employing yoga as a form of recovery and survival.

Concluding Section: Out in the World

We recognize that in this moment of sometimes tense, divisive, and confrontational politics, our issue is susceptible to rash responses that make limiting assumptions about Muslim practices and identities as well as about yoga itself. Indeed, the first *Race and Yoga* social media announcement about the forthcoming contributions incited comments that claimed that yoga is nothing but a Hindu practice and suggested that yoga is "haram in Islam" (haram meaning forbidden). In a time when anger is easily incited and fueled, and reactionary claims and threats seem increasingly common, we decided as editors that it was important to protect the issue as well as our contributors from unnecessary stress by coming up with a careful social media strategy and by publishing the essays in clusters and announcing them all at once. That we felt the need to have additional meetings, address these issues with the board (who were immensely supportive and understood the concerns) says a lot about the moment we are now in and the additional steps that need to be taken when publishing on topics on the Muslim world and spiritual practices. Multiple layers of invisible labor underwrote the feminist praxis of the board members as well as our own commitment to feminist solidarities.

This issue challenges us to look beyond binary assumptions about who can and should practice yoga; it asks us to consider the nuances and complexities of yoga as it has proliferated around the globe and taken on hybridized forms. Indeed, the term "yoga" now encapsulates various forms of practice and traditions. Its history and development incorporates cross-cultural influences inflected by increased travel, colonial exchange, and the increased publication and dissemination of texts made possible by industrialization and increased global interaction. Scholars such as Mark Singleton (2010) have traced the historical connection of yoga *asana* as a postural practice to European gymnastics and other forms of physical culture. Sarah Strauss has also encouraged an understanding of yoga as a form influenced by the circularity of ideas across the globe, noting "the complexity of the production of yoga as an explicitly transnational project spanning the period since the 1890s" (2004, 13). Scholars have also begun to assess the synergies between various traditions and yoga and the variety of historical influences that shaped our notions of "yoga" as a flexible term. David Gordon White has argued that yoga is conceptually broad and that "it has been possible to morph it into nearly any practice or process one chooses" (White 2002, 2). The Routledge *Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* includes selections that address the intersections of yoga with a variety of spiritual and religious traditions (Newcombe and O'Brien-Kop 2021). Patrick J. D'Silva's chapter in that volume traces Muslim engagement with yoga, particularly with meditation practices, historically; his research highlights the propriety impulse toward yoga as a "quintessentially Hindu cultural and religious 'product'" but argues that the practice is multi-variant and there is "'no singular, definitive yoga'" (2021, 212). Much of the research on yoga and Islam, most notably by scholars such as Carl Ernst, has focused upon Sufism to trace similarities in approaches between Sufi mystics and yogis (2016). Other scholars such as Aditya Behl have also published on Sufism and early Indian

Islamic histories (2012), and Shankar Nair has, in his book, *Translating Wisdom: Hindu-Muslim Intellectual Interactions in Early Modern South Asia* (2020) shown the various crossovers, parallel traditions, and intellectual collaborations forged between Hindu and Muslim scholars in Mughal South Asia. Muslim yogis have been featured in popular culture publications and social media forums; for example, in 2019 *Yoga Journal* showcased the teaching approaches and backgrounds of five yoga teachers finding connections between rituals of fasting, meditation, and moon timelines in their essay, "Muslim Yogis Share the Parallels Between Yoga and Islam" (Caldena 2019).

The historical synergies between various religious systems and alternative spiritual traditions (such as Theosophy and New Thought) were influenced by the expansion of yogic texts and the development of comparative religion and anthropology as distinct fields in the nineteenth century. In our contemporary moment, yoga, a practice rooted geographically in South Asia, has taken on a cultural resonance across the globe and has become fused with other spiritual traditions, physical rituals, and health customs. What does it mean to assign yoga to one religious or spiritual system and not the other? Or to claim that it is forbidden and/or dangerous and in opposition to certain religious histories? What does it mean to address issues of race, culture, religion, social justice and yoga in this highly charged and often reactive historical moment when binary oppositions are fierce and claims to particular histories are loud? Where does that leave yoga now to those of us who turn to it and practice it as one of many access points toward self-development and well-being? And what does it mean to share personal experiences and critical responses that center examining issues of belonging and well-being through the lens of yoga? These are some of the many questions that fuel this project and ask us to consider the yet largely understudied ways that yoga has been integrated within Muslim contexts. The essays and responses within the collection are just the beginning of what we hope will be a continued rich and complex series of dialogues on our chosen theme.

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We wrote this essay in honor of our fathers and dedicate it to our mothers who embody and exemplify strong Muslim womanhood in challenging times. Throughout the last year we both spent substantial time on parental caregiving. That emotional and physical experience was fused within the work that went into bringing this volume to publication. As Muslim/South Asian daughters we have been taught the value of ancestral knowledge and recognize how important it is to give our parents support and care as they age and struggle with illness. Both of us have suffered the loss of our fathers – Farha's father died over twenty years ago and Narin's father died just a few months ago, both of cancer. Familial engagement and attention is ongoing for us as our mothers navigate widowhood and aging. Throughout these challenging times, we've had to manage our own well-being as caregivers. Yoga has been a source of self-care and also of feminist community. We are grateful for collaboration, friendship, and rapport that we gained through this project and for the opportunity to write and work creatively together toward this publication. In closing, this issue has brought us together both as feminist scholars but also Muslim women of color navigating layered challenges at this particular moment.

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