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Stretching the peace - The role of Kundalini yoga in lives of youth in a township of Alexandra, South Africa

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Master in International Studies

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June, 2021



SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would have not been possible without support from several people. First, I would like to express my gratitude to Marianne Felix, Yoga4Alex, and all the yogis who took part in this research. Without your support and insight, I would have not been able to complete this thesis. Also, my supervisor Raquel, thank you for supporting my non-traditional approach, helpful advice, and being super responsive.

I would like to thank Abbas, my dear colleague who was always willing to share el mate, “office” space, and big ideas. Ricardo, for believing in me when I did not, and Anni for being in my life for over 20 years.

Last, but not least, I would like to show appreciation to all the people who are creating peace in this chaotic world. Thank you all.

Abstract

Conflicts in the world have become increasingly complex, chronic, and violent, causing enormous humanitarian and economical costs. The peacebuilding paradigm has attempted to address the issue but has struggled to build peace. Some alternatives, such as yoga, have been implemented with promising results. The research has shown regular yoga practice to increase mental wellbeing, emotional control, improve relationships, and increase feelings of belonging. Kundalini yoga has presented similar outcomes, but there is no previous evaluation in peace context. In this research, I studied how youth in the township of Alexandra, Johannesburg, South Africa experience Kundalini yoga practice, and if Kundalini yoga could be used as a peacebuilding tool. The mixed-methods single case study was analysed using Reflexive thematic analysis and discussed according to transrational peace philosophy. Findings show that Kundalini yoga played an important role in the yogi's lives creating personal transformation, restored relationships, new opportunities, and overall improved wellbeing. Implications to society were lower, but they existed. The role of Yoga4Alex was significant as a community builder, offering a safer place for the yogis, and as a provider of socio-economical help. Thus, Kundalini yoga might be a potential peacebuilding tool, because of its positive effects on individual lives and society.

Keywords: Kundalini yoga, peacebuilding, transrational peace philosophy

Resumo

Os conflitos no mundo têm-se tornado cada vez mais crônicos, prolongados e violentos, causando enormes custos humanitários e econômicos, que muitos dos paradigmas de peacebuilding não conseguiram resolver. Algumas alternativas, como a ioga, foram implementadas com resultados promissores. Foi demonstrado que a prática regular de ioga aumenta o bem-estar mental, o controle emocional, melhora as relações entre indivíduos e aumenta os sentimentos de pertença. Kundalini yoga apresentou resultados semelhantes, mas sua adequação como uma ferramenta de peacebuilding não foi estudada previamente. Nesta pesquisa, estudei como os jovens do município de Alexandra, em Joanesburgo, na África do Sul, vivenciam a prática da Kundalini ioga e como esta pode ser usada como uma ferramenta de peacebuilding. O estudo de caso único de métodos mistos foi investigado por meio de análise temática reflexiva e debatido de acordo com a filosofia da paz transracional. As descobertas indicam que a ioga Kundalini desempenhou um papel importante na vida do iogue, criando transformação pessoal, melhores relações interpessoais, novas oportunidades e um bem-estar geral melhorado. As implicações para a sociedade são menores, mas ainda existem. O papel do Yoga4Alex foi significativo como um construtor do sentimento de comunidade, oferecendo um lugar mais seguro para os iogues e também como fornecedor de ajuda socioeconômica. Assim, Kundalini Yoga pode ser uma potencial ferramenta de peacebuilding, devido aos seus efeitos positivos na vida individual e, conseqüentemente, na sociedade.

Palavras-chave: Kundalini yoga, peacebuilding, filosofia da paz transracional

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	iii
Resumo	v
List of Figures	viii
Glossary of Acronyms	ix
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. Literature review	5
2.1. A brief history of peacebuilding	5
2.2. Theoretical framework	8
2.3. Introduction to yoga	11
2.3.1. History and practices of yoga	11
2.3.2. Yoga – building inner peace	13
2.3.3. Yoga is not only fun and games – the critique	15
Chapter 3. Methodology	17
3.1. The transrational research approach in a nutshell	17
3.2. Research design	18
3.2.1. Case study	19
3.2.2. Data collection strategy	21
3.2.3. Method of analysis	24
3.3. Research positioning	25
3.4. Ethical considerations	26
3.5. Limitations	27
Chapter 4. Findings	29
4.1. How Kundalini yoga affects the personal life	29
4.1.1. Yoga – a holistic transformation tool	31
4.1.2. Negative implications of yoga	33
4.2. How yoga affects the community	34
4.3. Yoga creates peace	37
4.4. Yoga, tool for peacebuilding or politics?	39
Chapter 5. Conclusion	42
Bibliography	44

Appendix A – Interview guide	52
Appendix B – Online survey questions	53
Appendix C – Informed consent	55
Appendix D – Informed consent online survey	56

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Lederach's pyramid enlarged to the three-dimensional transrational model; bird's-eye view (Dietrich, 2014, p. 50)	9
Figure 2.2 The inter-and intrapersonal layers of Lederach's pyramid; bird's-eye view according to Dietrich (2013, p. 203)	10
Table 3.1 Respondents who took part in the research	23
Table 3.2 The list of data sources. * Refer to table 3.1	23
Table 4.1 Overlay of effects of Kundalini yoga to individual and the society	29

Glossary of Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
BCE	Before Common Era
EC	Ethics Committee
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Program
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
UN	United Nations
IAHV	International Association of Human Values

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“Breath in, Arms up. Exhale, forward bend. Half lift, downwards facing dog. – This is how I always start my yoga classes”. I am sitting in a common room of a volunteer house in Beqaa valley and listen to a yoga instructor depicting me a yoga class she instructed in a peculiar environment—a refugee camp in Lebanon. With excitement, I asked why to bring a stylish hobby of mostly white western women to a refugee camp, a location that rarely has even proper sanitary systems? Within the next couple of hours, I heard a fascinating story of the transformative effects of yoga, that, with its embodied practice, could help people to overcome difficult life challenges and create inner peace. The yogic philosophy, which emphasised unity, balance, and collective wellbeing, could have wider implications for society. Myriad of yoga research has presented interesting findings on how people practising yoga (also called yogi) have benefitted from yoga. Yogis experienced decreased aggressiveness with improvement in relationships (Liévano-Karim, 2019), and decreased symptoms of PTSD (Cushing et al., 2018).

As I was listening to the story, I could not help to distract myself from thinking about the current conflicts, that Syrian civil war represents an example. Whereas in history, wars were predominantly an issue of two countries, today the modern conflicts are complex events that do not respond to traditional conflict resolution (United Nations, n.d.). This has led to great humanitarian and economical costs, as almost 80 million people were forced to leave their homes, marking approximately one per cent of the whole human population (UNHCR Global Trends 2019, 2020). Nearly half of the displaced population are children (Child Displacement, 2021). Additionally, the economic costs are significant. Institute for Economics and Peace (2020) estimates that the economic impact of violence in 2019 was \$14.5 trillion, equivalent to 10.6% of the world total GDP. This number is a total impact of all violence and includes violence such as homicides, calling the damaging effects of conflicts.

The conflicts have wide implications for the affected populations. Most commonly, the individuals experience symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Charlson et al., 2019; Thabet et al., 2018). The implications also reflect into the society in a form of increased social problems and risky behaviour, violence at home, school, and neighbourhood (El-Khodary & Samara, 2020). Consequently eroding the population’s sense of belonging to the community, common moral structure, values and rules, along with the corrosion of institutions (Beristain & Lykes, 2008; Hamber, 2009; Lykes & Coquillon, 2009).

The international community has been trying to create peace in the world using a myriad of approaches. One of these concepts is peacebuilding, presented to the larger audience by the UN's secretary-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992 (Schneckener, 2016). It has since become one of the most important political, developmental, and humanitarian tools to address the root causes of conflicts and help societies to return to peace (Richmond & Visoka, 2021).

The past three decades have displayed a few victories and many failures (e.g. Rwanda, Somalia, and Afghanistan) of peacebuilding, resulting in a comprehensive body of literature that has analysed and theorised various dimensions of peacebuilding (Tschirgi, 2019). The debate has generally divided into two camps – the solution-orientated field seeking to find pragmatic ways to build peace, and the critical field predominantly focusing on debating against the liberal peacebuilding approach (Schneckener, 2016). Despite wide-ranging scrutiny, critical peace research has struggled to include alternative epistemologies and ontologies in the mainstream discussion (Gnoth, 2020). In an example, intriguing feminist peace research (see more in Väyrynen et al., 2021), and including knowledge from non-western philosophies (in an example, Tanabe, 2020) has remained broadly in the background.

As the nature of conflicts is changing, there is a need for new solutions that could help to tackle the increasing violence (United Nations, n.d.). One way could be to extend the theoretical frameworks reaching outside of the traditional western realist and positivist approaches. Peace research should more actively enlarge the concept of peace and include knowledge outside of the familiar framework (Dietrich, 2006). In a practical example, IAHV in Lebanon and other locations, have already implementing holistic strategies to place human experience in the centre of the peacebuilding process (Hertog, 2019).

Reflecting on the story I heard in Lebanon, I speculate if yoga could show us a novel way of building peace. As yoga is an ancient way of creating tranquillity and cohesion in people's lives, with the embedded philosophy of peaceful union between the individual, society, and cosmos, it could be implemented as a holistic tool for long-lasting peace (Lefurgey, 2018). Yoga programs have already been used in multiple contexts (e.g. Lebanon, Colombia, and Kenya) aiming to build peace (Lefurgey, 2018), but most of the studies have examined modern postural yoga, which frequently omits the yoga philosophy (Jain, 2020). However, less known yoga styles, such as Kundalini yoga aims for personal and societal transformation via strong philosophical foundations (Khalsa & Maxwell, 1989).

Along these lines, I argue, that to build stronger peace, we need to expand the peacebuilding toolkit and place the human condition in the centre of peacebuilding processes. To support my argument, in this research I studied how kundalini yoga practitioners experienced the effects of

Kundalini yoga in their lives. The research sets in a case study of Yoga4Alex, which is an NGO that organises Kundalini yoga classes and other activities for people in Alexandra township, Johannesburg, South Africa. The dataset contains semi-structured interviews with yoga instructors, online surveys of yogis, and three annual reports of Yoga4Alex from the years 2016-2018. The data analysis follows the RTA guidelines presented by Braun and colleagues (2019) to understand the deeper meaning of the phenomena. Thus, in this research I aim to answer to following research question and sub-question:

- Could Kundalini yoga be used as a peacebuilding tool?
 - o What is the role of Kundalini yoga practice in the lives of youth living in Alexandra township, South Africa?

To theoretically frame this research, I am using Wolfgang Dietrich's (2012, 2013) transrational peace philosophy, which works as a complex and extensive theoretical model explaining peace as a multitude of perspectives depending on the observer. Moreover, the conflict is seen as a disruption of personal energies. Once these blockages are solved, peace should ascend to society. Dietrich's theory includes knowledge from the eastern philosophies, humanistic psychology, and integrative thinking. It also works as a research philosophy stemming inspiration from postmodern thought, which allows the researcher to include knowledge from the non-western philosophies, such as yoga, which contains a philosophical approach often unfamiliar to western science (Dietrich, 2013). The transrational research approach in this sense means, that the research philosophy combines the rational manner of doing science, but adds openness to understand also something that we cannot see, or measure, such as transpersonal experiences and spirituality (Echavarría Alvarez et al., 2018).

The thesis unfolds as follows: In the second chapter, I will present the definition, brief history, and some of the current critical debates of peacebuilding. I will then introduce the theoretical framework, followed by the history of modern postural yoga and the key principles of Kundalini yoga. I end the second chapter by critically examine the negative implications of yoga.

The third chapter explains the methodology, where I describe the research philosophy and methods that I used in this research. I also present the case study and context where the research is situated in. In the fourth chapter, I show how Kundalini yoga affected respondent's personal life and society by answering the research question. In the last chapter, I will conclude the research with suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Peacebuilding is a complex topic that has been under increasing debate for the past five decades (Tschirgi, 2019). This complex issue has produced an abundance of theories and approaches among scholars, but also plenty of critiques, especially against the liberal approach (Tschirgi, 2019). There are alternative approaches, but many of them have not received the attention they might have deserved. One of these approaches is yoga, which has been used in conflict transformation for centuries. In this chapter, I will review some of the critical peacebuilding literature and present an alternative way of interpreting peace and peacebuilding. I will do so by presenting a transrational peace theory. Continuing with the alternative approach, I then display a brief history of modern postural yoga and Kundalini yoga. I will end the chapter with a critique of yoga.

2.1. A brief history of peacebuilding

One of the first examples of modern-day peacebuilding efforts occurred in Central Europe in the 17th century when Westphalian peace treaties ended a three-decade Central European war, creating the basis for modern western peacebuilding practices (Schneckener, 2016). The peace treaties agreed on the power-sharing between multiple institutions, from church to feudal states, and thus created a new division of power on multiple levels (Schneckener, 2016). In the mid-'70s, Johan Galtung (1975) presented his world-famous three-fold suggestion for sustainable peace: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. He claimed that peacekeeping and peacemaking are institutional tools to control negative peace, whereas peacebuilding is when the society is cleaned from structural violence. Galtung's ideas can be still seen in modern-day peace literature. Another 'father' of the peace research is American sociologist John Paul Lederach (1997) who divided conflicts into four phases of intervention, preparation and planning, social change and the future, marking that way the difficulty and complexity of the peace process. He also took a rather holistic approach and suggested that peacebuilding should be operated from the top, middle, and grassroots level with multifaceted approaches, depending on the context of the conflict. Furthermore, Lederach calls for the importance of socio-economic and -cultural capital as the money is needed to run the operations and the cultural capital is used for social change.

What peacebuilding is in action? While there is no absolute definition, the general description states peacebuilding as a “commitment to preventing and resolving conflicts through peaceful means, bringing violent conflicts to an end, and addressing their root causes while rebuilding relationships” (Tschirgi, 2019, p. 315). It aims to gain positive peace via multilateral cooperation between the international community, NGOs, and regimes taking into consideration the socio-political and psychological dimensions. (Schneckener, 2016). Michael Barnett et al. (2007, p. 37) suggest that peacebuilding requires “external interventions that are intended to reduce the risk that a state will erupt into or return to war” so that the root causes of the conflicts are solved to stop the cycles of violence leading the societies into peace (Barnett et al., 2007).

In the real-life, many of the peacebuilding agendas have adopted the so-called liberal peacebuilding approach where western liberal values, free-market economy, and powerful institutions, were thought to automatically lead to peace in conflict-torn countries (Chandler, 2017). Followed by creating the peacebuilding commission and peacebuilding fund later in the mid-2000, the UN had created a significant structure that encouraged other international and smaller grassroots organisations to take part in the peacebuilding agenda on a large scale within the liberal peace framework (Schneckener, 2016).

However, the initiatives have not produced anticipated results. Half of the countries subjected to early peacebuilding interventions relapsed back to conflict, with about three-quarters ending up with authoritarian regimes (Barnett et al., 2007). As David Chandler (2017) puts it, the weakness of the liberal peacebuilding agenda was the naïve belief that one-fix for all types of implementation of western policies would correct the world. However, it was never to succeed as the liberal peacebuilding project was, at some level, an idealistic accident lined with a lack of understanding of the world.

The failure of the peacebuilding operations by the international organisations caused a vast body of critique in academia that continues today. The main debate is divided into two camps – scholars seeking solution-orientated responses and critical camps debating mainly against the liberal peacebuilding approach (Tschirgi, 2019). Critiques’ main arguments being that instead of building peace, western countries are trying to develop undeveloped countries to fit their own political and economic systems without addressing the needs of the post-conflict societies (Schneckener, 2016). In an example, Tobias Denskus, (2007) claimed that liberal peacebuilding is not aiming to improve societies for the better. Instead, it creates an industry of elite western aid workers giving orders from the offices of European countries, who justify funding needs via peacebuilding discourse. This top-down approach results in the “poor quality peace” that

feeds the instability in the post-conflict area, which raises the need to include the local worldview in the peacebuilding programs (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2007, p. 496).

Local Roger Mac Ginty & Oliver Richmond (2013) imply that while the international institutions could be utilised to form peace, the primary intention has to come within the society and to serve the society where peace should be built. More precisely, the locality is not seen necessarily as a geographical locale but more from the practice, including the small-scale practices that affect the everyday life of the citizens. The aim is to build an environment where the members of the community regain the feeling of belonging and empathy. Perhaps, the daily stressors should be thought of as perpetuating peace or conflict. Mac Ginty (2014) continues highlighting the importance of addressing the “everyday peace activities”, coping mechanisms that help people within the conflict-affected society to form pockets of peace that accurately utilised could be used as a tool for peace. However, Gearoid Millar (2020) calls for attention to the everyday approach. He states interestingly that even everyday approaches are often politicised, which in the end, neglects the various dimensions of human life.

But could peacebuilding work if it is based on politicisation? According to Aidan Gnoth (2020), the critique against liberal peacebuilding is substantial, there is very little variance as most of the scholars tend to criticise the concept of peacebuilding but within the limits of the hegemonic western system. This produces an academic narrative that has difficulties accepting the innovative ideas that would challenge the concept of peacebuilding causing. Also, international organisations, such as the UN have become hesitant to use the concept of peacebuilding for being “too linear and too reductionist” (Chandler, 2017, p. 8). maybe the problem is not the concept of peacebuilding but how it sees peace itself. To peacebuilding regain its power, an interdisciplinary approach based on the “human condition” including the ideas from the cultures outside of the western, post-Westphalian and enlightenment-based sciences, is needed (Galtung, 2010). In other words, the peacebuilding process should have the people in the centre improving their living conditions, but also empower them so that the transformation is possible (Lykes & Coquillon, 2009).

To conclude, peacebuilding as a concept has received a considerable amount of critique during the past decades. However, academia has struggled to expand the mainstream discussion, leaving the alternative approaches in the background, neglecting the human condition among many others. In the next section, I will present Wolfgang Dietrich’s contemporary approach to peace and peacebuilding, which presents fundamentally different epistemological and ontological foundations compared to traditional peace research offering an exciting novel way to theorise peace.

2.2. Theoretical framework

One of the alternative ways of building peace is to broaden the concept of peace. Wolfgang Dietrich's (Dietrich, 2012, 2013, 2018) trilogy expands the definition of peace from singular to multi-plural. In practice, the definition of peace is seen from the observer's point of view (Echavarría Alvarez et al., 2018), thus creating a landscape of many peaces. The theory also offers guidance on peace work in a form of elicitive conflict transformation, where the key player on peace work is the peace worker itself. Last, elicitive conflict mapping gives ideas on how to analyse conflicts according to transrational thought. Along these lines, the transrational peace philosophy combines modern science with the full human experience, and philosophies combined from different religions, philosophical thoughts, and humanistic psychology (Dietrich, 2014).

Basing his models on Lederach's conflict theories Dietrich (2012) identifies four different peaces:

- Human-centred energetic peace springs via the inner experience of peace and harmony
- Institution orientated moral peaces forms via justice
- Modern peace forms with security, strong institutions, and governance via authoritarian influence
- Postmodern peace questions the modern and moral peaces seeking truth (Kester et al., 2019)

All together these four dimensions of peace are constantly in interrelated communication with each other forming transrational peaces, as visualised in figure 1. In other words, there is no peace within the society if one of these four dimensions is off the balance. Consequently, highlighting only institutional, or political peace, the society cannot recover from the conflict.

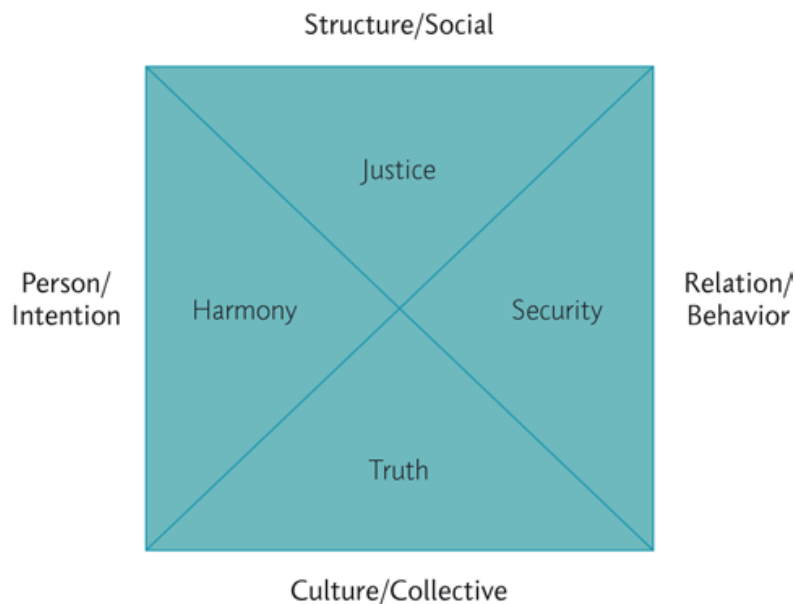


Figure 2.1. Lederach's pyramid enlarged to the three-dimensional transrational model; bird's-eye view (Dietrich, 2014, p. 50)

Dietrich places the versatility of the definition of peace in the centre of attention. In this manner, he highlights the importance of acknowledging the human experience in peacebuilding, but also the complexity of solving conflicts. As Dietrich expands his idea:

Therefore, the epistemic subject of transrational peace studies is the systemic examination of the interrelations among individual and societal behavior in the four horizontal fields (harmony, justice, security, truth) and on all vertical levels, from the grassroots to middle and regional levels of administration and management to the highest-ranking representatives of state and society. (Dietrich, 2013, p. 200).

Transrational peace is a holistic amalgamation of worldviews and human experiences that, when in balance form transrational peace – “As it is experienced by human beings, peace has a mental aspect, just as well as an embodied, emotional or spiritual one.” (Echavarría Alvarez et al., 2018, p. 4).

Conflicts, transrational peace philosophy describes as energy blockages that manifest within the society, but have roots deep in human life (Koppensteiner, 2020). At the episode level, conflict is perceptible as wars, bombings, terrorism, or other forms of violence that disturb everyday harmony. However, the root causes of the conflicts hide “beyond the deeper layers of the involved people's Ego” (Dietrich, 2014, p. 50), the epicenter of the conflicts are not visible to the world.

As the causes of conflicts are buried deep within, also the experiences of peace are often beyond the rational mind, as Dietrich discloses:

The mind does not have words for it, though peak- and peace-experiences happen precisely there when the Ego is twisted, that is, when for a moment the primordial, harmonious and eternal unity of individual and universal existence is experienced by the human being. (Dietrich 2014, p. 50)

Thereupon, building peace is only possible via addressing the interpersonal layers of human beings, videlicet personal, sexual, socio-emotional, mental, and spiritual, first. After approaching the epicenter of the conflict via the intrapersonal layers, the interpersonal layers of family, community, society, policity and global, can reach peace. (Dietrich, 2013). The visualisation of the layer system is presented in figure 2, where the root causes of the conflict are placed in the centre of the figure. The consequences of the conflict reflect the personal levels and the society, and vice versa. To note, the epicenter is beyond the rational mind, hidden within the people, who are in the episode layer manifest in the conflict, or the peace.

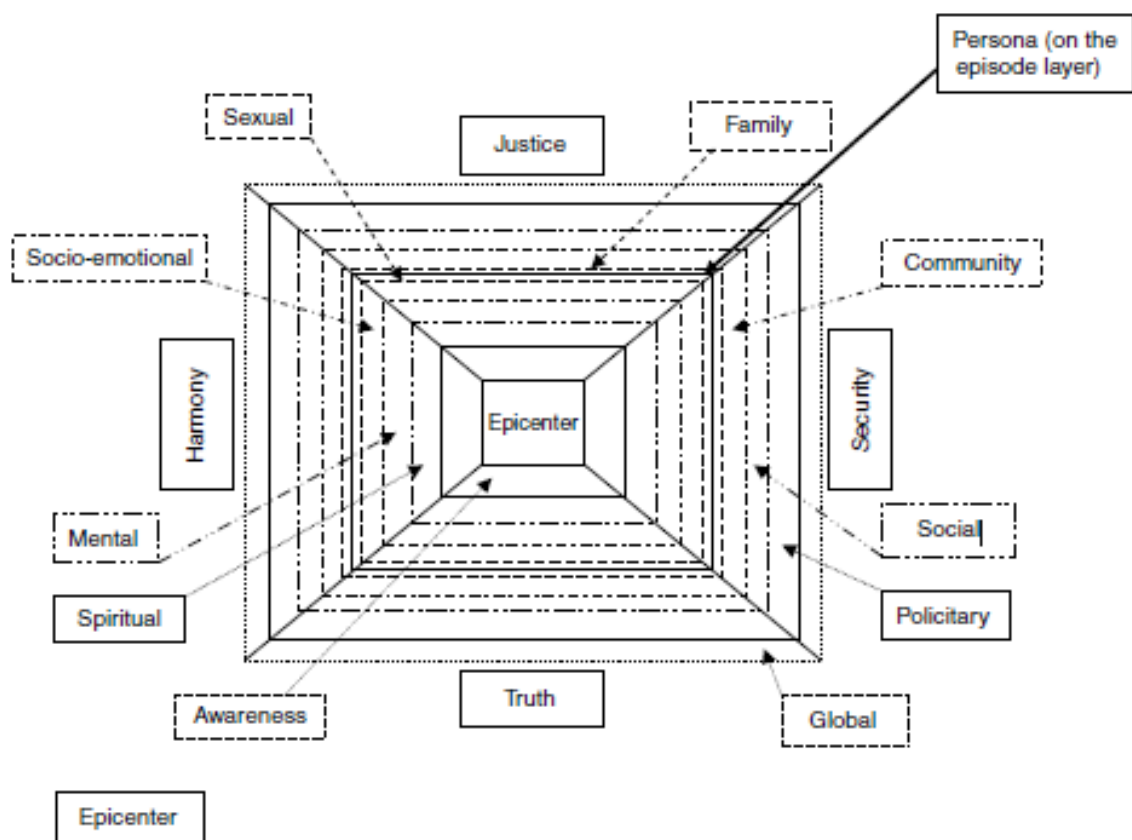


Figure 2.2. The inter- and intrapersonal layers of Lederach's pyramid; bird's-eye view, according to Dietrich (2013, p. 203)

As Dietrich, (2014) describes, transrational peace philosophy is a different illustration of the philosophy of peace but also offers contrasting points of view to the conflict work. Situating

the underlying causes of conflict within the people who are involved. This concerns not only the people who are directly involved with the conflict as perpetrators or victims but also the peace worker, who becomes a part of the conflict once they work with it. In this sense, transrational peace philosophy is rejecting the neutrality of the peace worker, who is accordingly seen as an active part of the conflict work, instead of being a neutral peacebuilder.

In summary, transrational peace theory sees peace as a multitude of perceptions, depending on which point peace is observed. Root causes of conflicts are located within the people who are part of the conflict, and therefore peacebuilding should address the interpersonal issues over societal issues. Transrational peace theory enables the researcher to gain a deeper knowledge of themes such as yoga, which has ancient roots in eastern religions and philosophies (De Michelis, 2008). In the next section, I will present a brief history of modern postural and Kundalini yoga and explain how they have been studied in the context of peacebuilding.

2.3. Introduction to yoga

The history of yoga is complex and long, extending thousands of years in history. Today there are multiple yoga styles practised globally, basing the main characters in the ancient yogic philosophy (Singleton, 2010). In this section, I will explain the brief history of modern postural yoga that is one of the dominant yoga styles practised globally today, and how it landed in the western world. I will describe also the key features of Kundalini yoga, ending this section by presenting a critique of yoga.

2.3.1. History and practices of yoga

Yoga, as we see it today, has a long and intriguing history. While some sources claim yoga has been practised in India and Tibet for over 50 000 years (K. G. Khalsa & Maxwell, 1989), the verifiable evidence has been traced back to the 2500 BCE Himalayan Indus Saraswati valley civilisation (Singleton, 2010). Although debated, originally yoga was practised in a form of meditations to control their mind and finally defeat the death itself (Singleton, 2010). Philosophically, yoga was founded based on dharmic religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, to reach moksha (liberation) from the cycle of reincarnations (De Michelis, 2008).

Today modern postural yoga draws structure from two important sets of writings. Mark Singleton (2010) claims that The Hindu text Bhagavad Gita, also commonly called the Gita, forms three different ways to reach liberation, thus presents three yoga styles. Karma yoga, which emphasises the unconditional work towards the wellbeing of others without asking for a

reward. In bhakti-yoga, the practitioner finds liberation via devoting themselves to the yoga practice, and finally jnana yoga, where the yogi seeks knowledge. Elizabeth De Michelis (2008) adds the fourth main yoga style, tantra yoga, that often is mistakenly assumed to include only sexual positions. However, instead of being purely sexual yoga, tantra yoga seeks liberation via altered states of mind and energies of the body, acknowledging the importance of sexuality, but does not highlight it. An example of widely popular and physical Hatha yoga has its origins in early tantra yoga traditions (Singleton, 2010).

To the western world, yoga arrived from 19th century India, which with its exotic reputation intrigued scholars from other upper-class westerners to explore alternative ways of belief, government, and seek answers to the fundamental questions (Deslippe & Newcombe, 2020). Yoga was also seen as something weird and otherworldly, claiming a questionable reputation. As an example, yoga was an endless source of entertainment as Indian yoga fakirs performed their extreme flexibility via Hatha yoga positions in Europe and India (Singleton, 2010). An important shift in the yoga landscape happened first in the mid-19th century when the eastern cultures and religions were increasingly accepted in the west, and finally at the end of the century when Swami Vivekananda presented his interpretation of Patanjali's yoga sutras in a form of Raja yoga, at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in the USA (De Michelis, 2008). This notion started a process, which led to the hype yoga enjoys today.

As Mark Singleton (2010) reviews, coming to the 20th century yoga continued developing, and it returned to physicality as global body culture highlighted healthy and strong bodies. In India, the body culture translated to the nationalistic endeavour to resist British colonial power and yoga gyms were often a cover-up for nationalist militant operations. In the mid-20th century, easier travel from the USA and the UK to India along with the hippie movement made the yoga boom in the west and coming to the 90s' yoga became commercialised and widely popular in its modern form (Singleton, 2010).

Along with the rise of modern postural yoga, another style was gaining attention in the USA when Yogi Bajan brought Kundalini yoga to the awareness of the big audience in California in the late '60s (Deslippe, 2012). The origins of Kundalini yoga are, like many other types of yoga, vastly unknown. However, the term Kundalini, which translates to "coiled up" is present in the old tantric and Hatha writings (Singleton, 2010) depicting the mystical, psychocosmological energy that often is characterised as serpent sleeping in the base of the spine (Patañjali et al., 2007). Kundalini yoga aims for personal transformation, and sometimes it is referred to as "yoga of awareness" (Vallejos et al., 2016, p 264). Moreover, some texts refer to it as Laya yoga (Feuerstein, 2008).

In practice, Kundalini yoga works holistically, addressing the whole body and the mind. Shakti Parwha Kaur Khalsa (1996) explains that Kundalini yoga is practised by performing carefully constructed sequences (kriyas) made of combinations of body movements (asanas), breathwork (pranayama), specific hand positions (mudras), deep meditation and chanting specific words or sentences (mantras). Once the body is ready, the spinal cord and the seven energy nodes (chakras) along it are pure and ready to take the Kundalini energy. After Kundalini energy is awakened, it coils up around the spine, raising throughout seven points of centre of energy, also called chakras. This chakra system, which is a theory of how energy flows in humans, is an important part of Kundalini yoga. Each chakra has its responsibility area that affects human function, personality, and health. Chacras is located along the spine, starting from the bottom of the pelvis reaching the top of the head (Mann & Singh, 2018).

As Khalsa (1996) continues, this process is called Kundalini awakening and after the person is free from the body and we connect the mind and to the universe. Kundalini yoga has been said to be an extensive approach to human life, that frequently practised can help yogi balance their lives and shift their perspective from individualism to collective (Singh Khalsa & O’Keeffe, 2016). Kundalini yoga has strong philosophical underpinnings of emphasising balance and peacefulness that direct the practice and supports the progress of the yogi (S. P. K. Khalsa, 1996). The philosophy converts on the practical level to overall balance to the yogi’s life, stronger nervous, moral and psychological systems, as well as brings help to control stress and feelings (S. P. K. Khalsa, 1996). In other words, Kundalini yoga is working as a cleaning and organising tool to put yogi’s life in order.

2.3.2. Yoga – building inner peace

A quick google scholar search of yoga and delivers nearly 900 000 results, revealing humongous interest among scholars. Kundalini yoga the number is humble 16 000. However, when searching for yoga and peacebuilding, the numbers are much lower. So how yoga link with peacebuilding? As mentioned in the introduction, violent conflicts cause various mental health and societal issues, which yoga has been shown to ease. In an example in the USA, deeply traumatised youth aged 12-21 got improvements in mood regulation, coping mechanisms and anger management and helping to cope with the trauma (Spinazzola et al., 2011). Another study traumatised pre-school children who took part in an eight-week mindful yoga practice which increased their self-regulation significantly (Razza et al., 2020). Similarly, Moé Kishida and colleagues (2018) studied over 100 yogis and found out that yoga helped them

to build better relationships, reduce mental health problems and experienced improved spiritual connection.

Outside of the western context, Kathryn Culver with her colleagues (2015) studied how trauma-related distress responded to yoga and other body movement practices. They conducted a study of eight-week yoga versus dance body movement intervention with 76 participants, between seven to seventeen years old, divided randomly into the yoga group, dance group, and a waiting list control group. The yoga group had the highest reduction of symptoms compared to the others. In conflict-related settings, yoga has been implemented in prisons and to reintroduce ex-militia back to society, as well as treat the veterans from the USA who came back from the field with PTSD (Lefurgey, 2018). In Colombia, peacebuilding NGO Dunna is concentrating on peacebuilding via yoga and meditation and has done significant research on peacebuilding via yoga. The recent study highlights the good results of 24-week yoga intervention in a school setting where a group of 68 members from fifth, eighth, and ninth grade did yoga twice a week, two-hour sessions resulting decrease in aggression not in the yoga group but also the whole school (Velásquez et al., 2015).

Even though kundalini yoga has gained less attention among scholars than general yoga, the results promise similar effects as presented with general yoga. Studies have shown the decrease in stress levels (García-Sesnich et al., 2017), affect positively on values of middle-aged men (Prasath et al., 2017), and decrease of somatic symptoms and general anxiety among adult females (Gabriel et al., 2018). More closely, among underprivileged communities, Meliné Sarkissian et al. (2018) presented results of a 10-week Kundalini yoga program on disadvantaged school children, suggesting increased emotional regulation and resilience with decreased stress levels. Kibby McMahon and colleagues (2021) presented similar results with increased emotional regulation among 119 American adolescents after a six-week Kundalini yoga program. Although a majority of the research has been conducted in the western setting and on adult populations, a study by Amanendra Mann & Jitender Singh, (2018) showed an overall increase in mental wellbeing on teenage male athletes in India.

For peacebuilding, yoga seems to offer a multifaceted way to address conflict born mental health problems in a way that is person-centred and takes consideration of the whole body and mind. As Mayme Lefurgey (2018) explains, yoga creates a stronger mind-body connection which can help the person seek trust within themselves, and therefore change their worldview fruitful for the peace. More importantly, yoga practice could help to give each participant their approach and tools to build a peace that is suitable for their needs. Along with healing the yoga has beneficial features of calming the societies via individuals. When the individual problems

are easing, the people are claimed to be more receptive for the peace efforts as when the negative feelings are not occupying the person's mind anymore, the new space for alternatives for violence are opening and feelings of belonging to the community are making the individuals attached to the peace efforts stronger (Upadhyaya, 2019).

2.3.3. Yoga is not only fun and games – the critique

Yoga has seen waves of hype in the western world since landing the old continent some hundreds of years ago, however, today yoga faces two issues. The first issue regards the neo-liberalisation of yoga. Andrea Jain (2020) argues that in the west neoliberal yoga is perceived as “a quick fix” highlighting the capitalistic consumer culture, which is expressed via expensive yoga classes and clothes. Underlining only individual wellbeing, modern yoga culture could be seen as exploiting the genuine idea of healing and transforming for the sake of increasing people's productivity. Respected yoga master Gopi Krishna (1996) explains that yoga has the power to save or destroy, and it is up to the yogis which is the outcome. The individualistic and self-centred approach, without interest in the spiritual side of the yoga and Kundalini energy, is destructive. Thus, the yogis should be under the supervision of a knowledgeable yoga master and learn not only the physical side of yoga but also the spiritual one.

Practising yoga without proper guidance and knowledge can be dangerous. A review by Holger Cramer and colleagues (2018) suggests that despite the recorded health benefits, a significant number of yoga practitioners have suffered at least a mild injury during their yoga path. Though they claim the injuries are not serious, they stress the importance of a professional yoga instructor. Yoga can also damage the mind. Liane Hofmann (2013) claims that Kundalini awakenings caused by excessive spiritual practices can sometimes result in Kundalini syndrome, in which the Kundalini awakening does not stop manifesting. Burning sensations in the spine, involuntary body movements, and hallucinations are some examples of symptoms presented in Hofmann's research. These “spiritual crises” are often unfamiliar to the health care professionals, and therefore might be misdiagnosed or miss treated.

Secondly, yoga research has faced critique because of its methodological failures. Recent meta-reviews criticised studies lacking control groups, having small sample sizes mainly done in the western countries with white participants (Miller et al., 2020). Other quality issues included a lack of structured and testable interventions and reporting biases. (Cramer, Anheyer, et al., 2018; Cramer, Lauche, et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2020). Also, most of the yoga research is measuring the short-term impact of yoga programs only. An example, with the longest follow-up period of one year (Kinser et al., 2014).

To conclude the chapter, peacebuilding has been under extensive scrutiny without being able to find a ground-breaking consensus on how peace should be built. Modern peacebuilding critique often directs against the liberal peacebuilding model, which believes that implementing the liberal western values and the market economy would automatically lead to peace. Dietrich's transrational peaces theory suggests peace should be built from within and include knowledge from outside of western paradigms. Alternative ways, such as yoga, could bring new insights for the discussion with its embodied and philosophical approach. The new ideas can be useful in the areas where conflicts have not ceased since the peace has been agreed on paper. One of such cases is the townships in South Africa, such as Alexandra, that do not offer many prospects on the people. In the next section, I will present the methodology of the research and the theoretical framework that guides the research.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

In the previous chapter, I have outlined the shortcomings of the current peacebuilding paradigm, which still bases its interventions on thoughts of liberal, Eurocentric values, and idealistic or realistic paradigms. To expand the critical discussion, therefore, the use of a novel theoretical and philosophical framework is needed. The reductionist philosophical approaches do not allow the researcher to understand the true causes of conflicts that lie within the people living the conflict (Dietrich, 2012). Therefore, researching issues outside of the western framework could hide some fundamental issues when the ontologies or epistemologies of the present system do not recognise the studied culture (Kumar, 2010). Thus, to guide the research philosophy of this study, I will use Dietrich Wolfgang's transrational peace philosophy that expands the presented transrational peace theory to research philosophy. Pluralism of onto-epistemologies of postmodernism and the human-centred approach of transrational research philosophy (Koppensteiner, 2020) permits me with the flexibility to question the current mainstream scholarship. In this chapter, I will first present the philosophical basis of the transrational research approach that guides this research. I will then continue to the research design with the depiction of a case study. I will then progress to a description of data collection and analysis methods ending the chapter with introducing the research positioning and discussing the ethical considerations and limitations of this research.

3.1. The transrational research approach in a nutshell

Transrational peace philosophy is a comprehensive way of seeing peace and conducting peace research, which originates in the work of peace researcher Wolfgang (Dietrich, 2012, 2013, 2018). In the previous chapter, I presented the theoretical approach to transrational peace and how it sees peace and peacebuilding. According to (Dietrich, 2013) Transrational peace philosophy is not only a theory of peace but also offers foundations for research philosophy. Having roots in the pluralistic and critical views of postmodernism, the transrational research approach challenges the hegemonic and strict world views of the purely western approaches. In this section, I explain how the transrational research philosophy affects the ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of this research.

Transrational research philosophy provides an opportunity to conduct research, allowing the inclusion of non-western worldviews and therefore provides an alternative that differs from the mainstream research. Hence, the transrational research approach is integrating human-centred views from the eastern philosophies with the western rational thoughts (Dietrich, 2012) forming an approach, that sees the ontologies and epistemologies at the same level between each other (Kester et al., 2019). In the other words, human existence and knowledge are a part of the bigger cosmos, where the person floats over time experiencing the human life with feelings, emotions, and events being one with the knowledge. According to Norbert Koppensteiner (2020), the transrational approach embraces human potentiality via expression instead of suppression. Humans cannot be described as internal nor sociological features only, but the need to understand the influence of both together is needed. As he summarises:

Transnationality thus perceives the human being as a permanently oscillating meeting point, a contact boundary at work that emerges in the resonance, correspondence and homeostatic balance between interpersonal and intrapersonal layers. It derives its energy from the larger ground of the transpersonal All-One that imbues it with a tendency towards self-actualization. (Koppensteiner, 2018, p. 65)

Epistemology of transrational approach follows postmodern, multi-plural, thought of knowledge and knowing. However, the approach is open to integrate epistemological ideas from other fields of philosophies and acknowledges that obtaining knowledge is a dynamical process, which will never be complete (Koppensteiner, 2018). Transrational peace research creates a framework for the research that does not set tight restrictions on measurable data or methods, nor set boundaries for worldviews to be included. Along these lines, transrational research philosophy facilitates a flexible framework that supports the inclusion of yoga philosophies and practices. Furthermore, it creates flexible foundations for data collection and therefore helps to understand the deeper meanings of the topics researched (Koppensteiner, 2018), which allows small sample size qualitative inquiry.

3.2. Research design

Yoga research has produced a vast body of positive results suggesting yoga creates inner harmony, eases mental health problems and helps to create a connection with communities, however, most of the studies have concentrated on modern postural yoga, which often is emphasising physicality over philosophy. Therefore, yoga might be a working peacebuilding tool (Lefurgey, 2018). However, the vast majority of the research is focused on modern postural

yoga, which is often based on the physical dimension of yoga omitting the philosophical framework. Kundalini yoga has been absent in peace research but offers a strong philosophical framework, and therefore it deserves a closer academic look. Therefore, I am to answer the following research questions:

- Could Kundalini yoga be used as a peacebuilding tool?
 - o What is the role of Kundalini yoga practice in the lives of youth living in Alexandra township, South Africa?

As the transrational peace approach does not set any requirements for the methods of data collection, the researcher is free to use whatever methodology they think is suitable for the situation per sé (Friedel, 2015). However, the research is directed via the research question, which is designed from the researcher's point of the view. The methods then should serve the researchers endeavour to produce information systematically, but not to sacrifice the multiple epistemologies and ontologies.

Nonetheless, transrational philosophy does not set requirements for methods, it asks for structure for clarity, therefore I have used a descriptive case study approach of analysing the experiences of two instructors and five students living in the township of Alexandra in Johannesburg, South Africa. A descriptive case study is a valid research design when examining specific phenomena and people's personal histories and experiences (Denzin, 2018). Yoga4Alex, an organisation that concentrates on the wellbeing of the youth in a post-conflict setting presents an interesting showcase, which is free from western peacebuilding biases. Therefore, it gives an exceptional opportunity to evaluate the effects of the Kundalini yoga practice.

As the transrational approach honours the relationship between the researcher and the participant more of a two-way street than a one-directional way of gaining information, this could affect the selection of methods. (Koppensteiner, 2020). I will next present the context and outlook of operations of Yoga4Alex, the organisation under analysis, followed by the data collection strategy.

3.2.1. Case study

As a case study, I analysed the work of Yoga4Alex, an NGO that is offering Kundalini yoga classes and other activities to the people living in the township of Alexandra, in Johannesburg, South Africa.

South Africa presents an interesting context of the celebrated peace process that did not meet grand expectations. According to Charles Nyuykonge and Siphamandla Zondi (2017), after decades of discriminative apartheid, South Africa started an extensive peace process lead by Nelson Mandela and African National Congress (ANC). With the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) new governance promised to address vast socio-economic issues the nation suffered for a long time also including the underprivileged members of the society such as people of low socio-economic status and black people. As a result, black people got political rights and multiple new development projects were set up to make life better for everyone (Nieftagodien, 2012). Part of the reconciliation process Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up, which remains one of the most acclaimed tools to heal countries after conflicts (Palmary et al., 2015). However, it did not manage to solve deep-rooted issues.

While the involvement of the international community was very limited in South Africa, the peacebuilding process was based on the liberal peace ideology, and could not address the socio-economic problems, but more resembles colonialism (Forde et al., 2021). The liberal values in South African peace were paying attention to democracy over the society (Saul, 2004), despite Mandela's hopes to create a country for everybody. Once claimed to be a highly inclusive "rainbow nation", today South Africa presents a vastly distinct reality (Omoyefa, 2014). Elevated levels of social exclusion, extreme inequality gap, and high levels of violence, and HIV/AIDS crisis are everyday challenges of South Africans (Palmary et al., 2015). To draw an example, the unofficial employment rate in the last quarter of 2020 was over 40% (Quarterly Labour Force Survey Quarter 4: 2020, 201 C.E.), the top tenth owns close to 90% of the wealth (Chatterjee et al., 2020), and there are on average 60 murders per day (Cohen & Vecchiato, 2020).

These embitter consequences of poor living conditions are often centralised to the townships such as Alexandra. Previously a hometown of Nelson Mandela (Bonner & Nieftagodien, 2008), and a housing area for relatively well-off black people, Alexandra is today a home of 180 000-300 000 mostly black people from various, commonly immigrant, backgrounds. Languages spoken in the township include isiZulu, Sepedi, and Xitsonga (Harrison et al., 2014). According to Harrison et al. (2014) the people in the township are poor, as more than 65% are living in extremely low-income, and over 31% in low-income households. Many of the people are living in informal settlements, backyard sheds, and hostels that were built for factory workers. The quality of housing is overall poor and many of the areas in Alexandra are overcrowded. The level of sanitation is deprived or non-existent, pests are common quest and pollution levels high (Clarno, 2017).

Violence is present in the overcrowded Alexandra as it has always been a bipolar junction of us and others. A high level of immigrants creates negations on the people who have been occupants longer, as well as the house owners who are contradicting renters with the high unemployment rate and substance abuse aggregating the problem (Harrison et al., 2014). According to Mpangi Kwenge, (2020) xenophobic violence is a significant risk in the township and can affect the entire community. For example, in May 2008 large demonstrations led to xenophobic attacks throughout South Africa, and over 60 people died and 700 got injured. Laurent Fourchard & Aurelia Segatti(2015) portray a strong division between the nationals and people who do not have permanent citizenship, which is caused by the strict immigration policies. Only the recognised refugees and the citizens can act as full members of the society, while the people who have no access to citizenship, such as many living in townships, are vulnerable to violence, discrimination, and exploitation.

To respond to the chaotic living conditions of Alexandra, Dr Marianne Felix founded Yoga4Alex in 2011 with the aim of “Enabling youngsters to break out of the cycle of poverty by learning to take thoughtful control of their bodies and choices.” (About, n.d.). The vision of the organisation is “that all youngsters who take part in Yoga4Alex can learn to cope effectively with stress so they can focus on their schoolwork and personal development.” (About, n.d.). Nowadays, according to their website (Programs, n.d.), Yoga4Alex offers a variety of Kundalini yoga classes, Kundalini yoga instructor training, personal mentoring, and workshops. Kundalini yoga is organised for and high school students, teachers, and the public in the township of Alexandra. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Yoga4Alex reached 5500 school students in Kundalini yoga classes with 24 students in the English literacy program in six partner schools, and three people are in instructor training and 12 instructing (YOGA 4 ALEX, n.d.). Moreover, Yoga4Alex organises community events, such as Yoga4Mandela or end-of-the-year party, and takes yogis to annual Kundalini yoga festivals (Programs, n.d.).

3.2.2. Data collection strategy

This research exists in the qualitative inquiry, which allows a researcher to develop a deep understanding of the topic by having the research participant in the centre of the data (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative methods are not restricted to numbers or inflexible structures, which enables the research process to be flexible, holistic, and responsive (Creswell, 2018). However, data collection for this research was challenging. My original plan was to conduct a three-week field research period in Alexandra, Johannesburg between January 2021 to February 2021 and interview a minimum of five yogis and five instructors. Because of safety concerns and travel

restrictions caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, fieldwork was impossible. Thus, I followed the lead of many other researchers (Lourenco & Tasimi, 2020) and transfer the data collected online.

Consequently, I used purposive sampling, which allows a researcher to seek a small number of people that have extensive insights to share in the study (Given, 2008). To increase the reach of potential participants, I used the snowball method to complement purposive sampling to find potential participants via word of mouth (Silverman, 2013). Therefore, I contacted Dr Marianne Felix from Yoga4Alex, who expressed interest to co-operate with me to find potential participants in the research. I gave the following inclusion criteria to Dr Felix who then delivered my email address to the potential participants:

1. Must be over 18 years old during the interview
2. Must have practised Kundalini yoga more than 2 years ago OR must be instructed Kundalini yoga for more than 2 years
3. Must be able to communicate in English
4. Must be able to attend one online interview

The first email round provided six potential participants, which all were yoga instructors. Out of these six, I interviewed two instructors in April via zoom, while the remaining four did not respond to the scheduling email, and therefore were excluded from the dataset. Lack of responses could be due to unstable access to an internet connection, which is a common problem when conducting research online among minorities and low-income populations (Lourenco & Tasimi, 2020). To attract more potential participants, I created an online form (appendix B) that was more accessible to potential participants as filling a form did not require a stable internet connection.

Dr Felix shared the form with a previous student, who then shared the link with 80 potential participants. The form was open for one month while five respondents completed it fully. Table 1 shows an overall presentation of the participant's data and includes the code that refers to them in the findings section.

Code	Gender	Age	Year of starting yoga	Years of practised	Instructor or yogi
I1	Female	29	2014	7	Instructor
I2	Male	27	2015	6	Instructor
S1	Female	21	2017	4	Yogi
S2	Female	26	2012	9	Yogi
S3	Female	26	2014	7	Yogi
S4	Male	19	2019	2	Yogi
S5	Female	20	2016	6	Yogi

Table 3.1. Respondents who took part in the research

To complete the data set with three annual reports provided by Dr Felix, which described the actions of Yoga4Alex throughout. The conclusion of the dataset is presented in table 2.

Reference code in thesis	Data collected	Form	Total of
I*	Semi-structured interviews	Zoom interview	2
S*	Online survey responses	MS Forms – survey	5
AR 2016	Yoga4Alex, Annual Report from 2016	.pdf	1
AR 2017	Yoga4Alex, Annual Report from 2017	.pdf	1
AR 2018	Yoga4Alex, Annual Report from 2018	.pdf	1

Table 3.2. The list of data sources. * Refer to table 1

I conducted the two zoom interviews according to an interview guide (Appendix A), that I developed in a semi-structured design. Semi-structured interviews help to give a context for the interview while still enjoying the freedom of letting the interview situation direct where the researcher and the participant are intuitively going (Denzin, 2018). The questions were constructed along transrational peace theory to seek an understanding of personal and societal implications of yoga from the yoga instructor's point of view. Before the beginning of each interview, I asked for signed informed consent (Appendix C) and verified that participation is

voluntary and could be ended at any point without justification. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and saved to a private folder in the ISCTE cloud. The raw material was deleted after transcription was completed and verified.

The open-ended online survey questions (Appendix B) were based on the initial interview guide, with minor changes in the perspectives of the questions to emphasise more the yogi's personal experience with Kundalini yoga practice. Before the participant could begin the form, they had to read and approve similar informed consent that was required from the zoom interview participants (Appendix D). To complement the interview and online survey data, I gained access to three annual reports of Yoga4Alex that all explained the organisation's primary goals and achievements from the respective years.

After I had completed the interviews and received the annual reports, the online form had been open for answers for a month. I then evaluated the quantity and quality of the data, which turned out to be rich. I decided to halt data collection and continue to analyse.

Even though the number of interviews and online surveys is low, the quality of the data was rich and provided extensive insights into the role of Kundalini yoga in the yogi's lives. As this research examines a phenomenon that has not been researched before, the small but insightful sample size is justified (Thomas, 2021).

3.2.3. Method of analysis

For data analysis, I used Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) as presented by Virginia Braun and colleagues (2019) which is commonly used to seek common themes that reveal shared meanings from the data. Therefore, it is a suitable method to analyse complex topics such as yoga. RTA is a theory flexible orientation, meaning that it does not bear underlying philosophical or theoretical assumptions that could direct the data collection or analysis, which makes it an ideal analytical tool used with a myriad of theories (Braun et al., 2019). It is a researcher-centred approach to conduct qualitative inquiry and analyse data from various sources (Braun et al., 2019). RTA positions research as "storyteller" rather than an objective data producer, highlighting the researcher's subjectivity as an interpreter of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thus, the RTA suits well along with the transrational philosophy, which places the researcher as a part of the research project and emphasises the subjectivity of the data.

The data set included two interviews, five online survey responses, and three annual reports which I analysed using the RTA six-step guide, that included the following steps:

1) Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding 3) generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report. (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 4)

The first step was to become familiar with the data. I did it via reading the materials and transcribing the interviews. For the transcription, I used MS Word automatic transcribing feature. Once the automatic transcription was done, I listened to the audio and corrected minor errors that were left in the transcriptions. During this phase, I made brief notes from ideas that surfaced during the transcription process. Coding was then done inductively with a semantic approach to observe which themes would arise naturally. During the fourth step of developing initial themes, I reviewed the first notes and quickly comprehended that potential themes would fit in the transrational theory. Therefore, I changed to the deductive approach and continued organising the codes to three themes, along with the theoretical framework. After verifying initial themes, I had generated three themes: how Kundalini yoga practice affected to individual's life, how Kundalini yoga practice affected society, and how the participants experienced peace. I started writing the findings chapter and reviewed the themes once more to verify the accuracy of the findings. The last step included one last round of data verification and completing chapter four.

3.3. Research positioning

Koppensteiner (2020) claims that the role of the researcher in transrational thought is integrative and participatory. The researcher is never just a neutral observer but more of resource and source, meaning that the researcher's own experiences are seen to affect the output of the research, but work as a source for insights into the topic. This means that the researchers are encouraged to use their entire existence to inquire knowledge integrating the researcher's senses, feelings, intuition, and soul, along with just using cognitive skills. Thus, the researcher's approach to the studied topic should be expressed as a part of the research. This opens a researcher a new way of viewing the research methods, approaches, and the position of the researcher itself, including them as an active part of the research process (Norbert 2018; Dietrich, 2013).

In this research, my background affects two topics – selection of the topic, and selection of the theoretical framework. My reasoning why I have attempted to try out something out or “normal” is fundamentally attached to my character and personality and therefore affects my

work. Throughout my life, I often have refused to believe the common norms and function via ways that are commonly accepted with no questioning. This relates to my outlook on the current western worldview, and observations on how it often makes societies ill. After more than 10 years of yoga and two years with breathwork practice, I have been introduced to the eastern wisdom, that differs from the current system offering an alternative value set that guides people living different lives. I am not stating the eastern, or any non-western way is better than any other belief. Instead, what I call for is understanding, empathy, and inclusion towards something that sometimes feels strange or uncomfortable for the westerners. For example, when I am thinking about peace, for me the definition is simple – peace is a state of an individual who suffers no stress, no agitation, is free from worries and negative behavioural patterns. I genuinely believe that when people are peaceful within, the societies are peaceful too. Within 10 years of practising yoga, I have seen the transformation within myself, but also fellow yogis, who have found peace within.

Of course, yoga, as with every other philosophy and thought in this world, is subjected to the effects of globalisation. Jain (2020) in an example, shows how the system will not be “healed” if the healing happens towards the symptoms, but not underlying problems. In my worldview, the western system without wisdom from elsewhere is the root cause, not the symptoms of violence, and many other problems. Thus, it feels natural to research a philosophical framework that allows flexibility to be aligned with the research on a personal level, while benefitting from the tools of organising the knowledge. As I presented before, the transrational philosophy does not contradict or reject the more traditional approaches but is asking to include the worldviews.

3.4. Ethical considerations

When working in academia, ethical considerations should be considered with great respect. The ethical decisions are often guided by the research philosophy and the requirements set by the research institution. In the transrational approach, ethical guidance begins from the relationship between the researcher and the data sources. With interviews, the research is considered as a two-dimensional relationship between the researcher and the participant as “knowing always is relational and participatory.” (Koppensteiner, 2018, p. 66). This ethical approach turns research into an event in which the researcher operates as a facilitator for “empathy, congruence, presence and acceptance” (Ibid. p. 66). As the research is an event where the knowledge is produced together, inviting the participants for taking part in the entire research process is

advisable. Koppensteiner (2018) reminds, that sometimes the research process could start a transformation, which can lead to a need for support. Thus, the researcher should be available for the participants, but also take care of themselves, as the transformation process could begin within the scholar themselves.

As a master's student at ISCTE IUL, I have been bound to follow the Code of Ethical Conduct in Research (ISCTE IUL, 2016) set by the Ethics committee (EC) of the university. I planned my research according to the guide, and one of my highest priorities was to minimise the harm caused to the participants. As the data collection included a collection of potentially sensitive information from participants, had to plan the research carefully. I applied for ethical approval from the EC before starting the data collection and made sure all the required issues were taken care of. I paid great attention to transparency and made sure the purpose of the research was always clear.

Every interviewee and online survey participant were required to read and accept informed consent before taking part in the research. The informed consent and information given to participants highlighted the voluntary nature of the research, and that they can end the participation without justification. All participation data were stored in the private folder on the ISCTE IUL cloud service. Interview raw data was kept in the folder during the transcription but was deleted immediately once the transcription was completed. All participation data was anonymised, and only the researcher has access to the code list that contains identification details of the interviewees. Also, online respondents were given an opportunity to take part in a live interview, in case they would have liked to do so. Four gave their email addresses, which all of them I emailed asking if anyone wanted to share something. None responded. Even though the risk of personal harm was extremely low, I had contact information for the local mental health hotline available, in case a participant would have requested it.

3.5. Limitations

Like every research, also this one has limitations. The main limitation is the small sample size. Because of the current global COVID-19 pandemic, it was impossible to conduct the fieldwork, that I planned originally. As lack of personal contact with the potential participants, it was extremely difficult to find people willing to contribute in the interview or online survey. The challenge of seeking online participants among underprivileged populations is a common problem due to a lack of access to a stable internet connection (Lourenco & Tasimi, 2020), therefore this research would have benefitted field work significantly. However, I analysed only

one case closely, the small sample size is justified, if the quality of the data is satisfying (Thomas, 2021).

Second, but a minor limitation is the variety of the data. This was clear in the online responses and annual reports. In this specific research, the organisation provided data could have over-promoted the benefits of yoga while the online responses gave one-dimensional and short answers. However, as the research question was asking what the role of Kundalini yoga in the participants lives, the dataset depicted well the benefits participants gained.

Third, as all the participants benefitted from yoga, this study did not include the voices from people who experience no effects or experienced negative effects of Kundalini yoga. This interesting curiosity does not undermine the findings of this research but should be taken into consideration when planning on future research projects.

To conclude, because of the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalised to the population outside of the researched sample. However, as the primary aim was to understand the experience of kundalini yoga practice, the small sample size was justified. The current dataset was rich and depicted well the experiences of the people who benefitted from yoga.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

In this chapter, I am presenting how the youth living in Alexandra township, South Africa, experienced the role of Kundalini yoga in their lives and how they experience peace. I seek to answer the research question – if Kundalini yoga could be used as a peacebuilding tool. This chapter is divided into three parts according to the transrational peace theory. The overlay of the results is visualised in figure three, which I will explain further in this chapter. The first theme shows the perceptions of how the yogis see the effects of Kundalini yoga on their personal life marking the major factors of mental health, career development, behaviour, and potential negative side effects of yoga. The second theme shows the effects of Kundalini yoga on the community, including family life, and presents the role of Yoga4Alex. The third overarching theme presents my interpretation of the dataset to depict how the respondents define peace and peacebuilding. All the quotes in this chapter are presented as they were expressed by the respondents and annual reports.

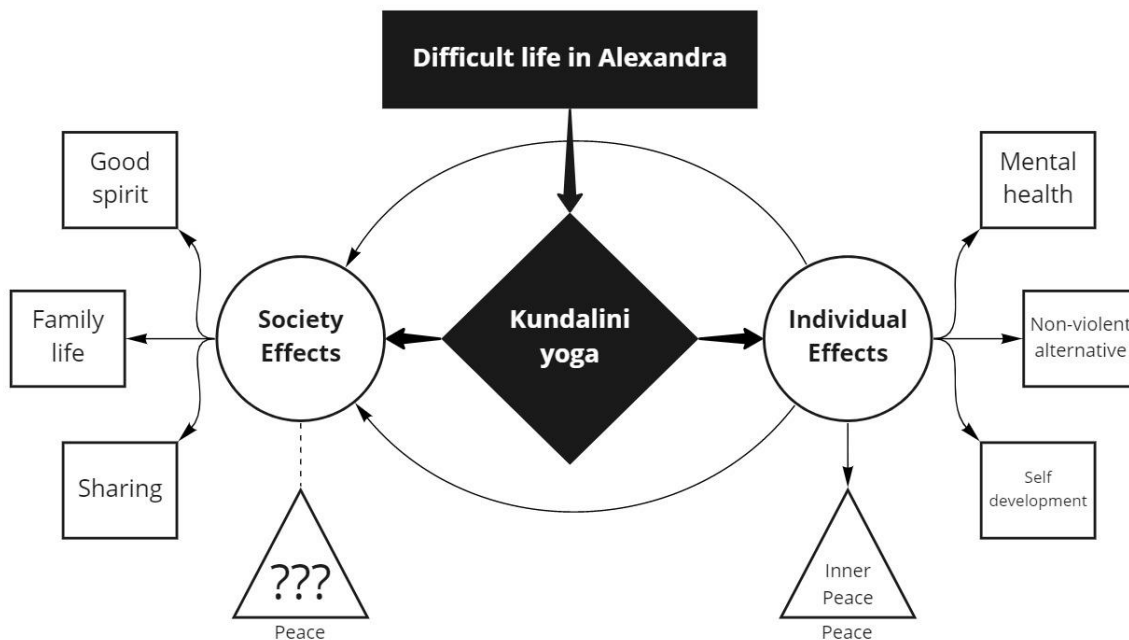


Figure 4.1. Overlay of effects of Kundalini yoga to individual and the society

4.1. How Kundalini yoga affects the personal life

In this section, I will present my interpretation of the respondent's views on Kundalini yoga, and its effects on personal life. Throughout the dataset, it was evident that Kundalini yoga affected strongly on respondents' lives. Respondents reported significant changes in their

mood, wellbeing, and school performance. Moreover, the experience with Kundalini yoga was seen almost as one of the most important experiences in their lives. Before I elaborate on the effect of the Kundalini yoga practice, it is appropriate to introduce how the respondents discover Kundalini yoga.

In the data two main ways were present: as a part of basic education, and via word of mouth. About half of the respondents recalled attending yoga class first time as a part of the mandatory life orientation of physical education class. This is not a surprise as, according to Yoga4Alex, between 2016 and 2018 they reached over 2000 students from three schools where Kundalini yoga classes held. Yoga was also recommended via siblings or a partner, which encouraged respondents to try Kundalini yoga. Three respondents mentioned the founder of the organisation, Dr Felix, as a key contact who introducing yoga to them. Locations varied from school to free-time activities, as one respondent stated, “She introduced yoga to phuthaditjhaba centre in 2014 when I was doing a career readiness course in the same centre. I loved it and I joined her and others on Wednesdays. Since then I never stopped.” (S3).

When asked what inspired them to try yoga, motivation was dominantly external-driven and linked to the school environment. To illustrate, S1 tells “because I was getting marks for attending the yoga class as PET during the life orientation period”. It is not a surprise the respondents discovered yoga via school setting, as Yoga4Alex has actively contacted schools and offered to integrate yoga into the school schedule.

While the experience of getting know to yoga, most respondents did not have high expectations. For instance, I2 remembers: “So actually when my first encounter with yoga is to see them sleeping, I’m like so you just go there to sleep every day then...”. However, some respondents underlined they did not think they may do yoga because of their spiritual beliefs: “I thought yoga was just for fun and gaining nothing and was more other people’s religion.” (S5). Also, skin colour and socio-economical class raised doubts, that I1 explains:

...Like when you watch TV, you see those people who have like nice body doing yoga.
...And I say, Okay, we’re going to do yoga and we know that we can get this body.
We’re going to look nice and some. That is because we know that yoga, usually people who do yoga are, white people, so we know that something that is very fancy. So that’s what I thought. I didn’t think that this was something that it’s mostly spiritual like, yeah.

This shows that the media and the common beliefs of the society seem to reflect the opinions towards yoga to the youth. While none of the respondents mentioned they did not want to try

yoga because of their prejudices, they highlighted how surprised they were by the effects they experienced during their yoga practice.

4.1.1. Yoga – a holistic transformation tool

Life in Alexandra was difficult for the respondents. Before starting yoga, the majority of respondents suffered problems at some level. Many reported emotional problems, low self-esteem, and a lack of behavioural control. To draw an example, S4 tells:

I was a person who was trapped to being shy, but I was able to get furious very easily and I was a short tempered person and to myself I think I never my thoughts more than I trusted other people's thoughts.

One respondent did not report any problems but stated other difficulties in their life: "I had a normal life but with lack of courage and positivity" (S1) underlining the lack of prospects of the youth living in Alexandra.

Regarding the hard living conditions in Alexandra, when asked what kind of transformation yoga does, it was not a surprise to hear predominantly positive replies. While all the respondents reported positive changes in their mental health, five respondents reported the changes in physics enjoying the idea that yoga gives a nice physical body: "I find yoga interesting with more fun and actively. It can also be our exercise routine. make you fit." (S5). However, the primary effect was experienced in the transformation of the mind and the restored connection between the mind and the body.

Therefore, the most distinctive finding was experienced in the positive effects in psychological, emotional, behavioural, and spiritual dimensions. Many of the respondents verbalised their effects in a way that depicted how the connection within themselves became stronger. As I1 states, yoga makes you "get in touch with yourself" and I2 elaborates with longer words:

For me, I think yoga is just... Just get in touch with yourself, that sometimes, when you grow up, you lose that inner self, or get clouded by what's happening around you. But yoga is the way of going back to yourself and realise that I have the power and realises that there's nothing outside. Everything starts with me and again for you to be in that position you really need to.

In this sense, Kundalini yoga seemed to transform the outlook of the yogi towards the internal world, and therefore seek help, not relying on the outside assistance, but via strengthening the

yogi's own competencies. This caused multiple positive effects on the yogi's mental health and emotional and behavioural control. Most of the respondents reported lower stress levels, increased self-awareness, increased concentration, better decision making, and self-confidence. As S2 highlights: "You develop self-esteem, self-reliance, faith, and a strong bond with your mind, body and soul. You study yourself and master your abilities". Here, the respondents demonstrate the unexpected and holistic changes they noticed after starting the Kundalini yoga practice.

Yoga seemed to play a rather important role in offering tools to cope with the difficult life situations Alexandra offers daily. In a way, yoga created a new way of looking at things, as S1 advises "it changes the way you see things in life, and you see a positive opportunity in every situation and have a better way of handling things.". The increased feeling of taking control of their own life, which before was restricted because of limiting beliefs and mental health problems, was translated into action. Doing so, the yogis were able to choose a non-violent coping mechanism, alternative to the typical township behaviour as I1 informs:

Alex is not like everyone is doing the drugs and um and there are people who are trying to fight that while trying to stop that, but he like they're struggling like even the law is struggling to stop it. ... The people who are in Alex, if they have nothing else to do a day, is that going to these groups and gangs. ... They can come and do it so by doing Yoga in schools were giving them a new identity so that they don't belong in that certain groups of doing drugs.

What the I1 suggests is that the yoga practice, and the location where the yoga is practised, creates courage for the yogis to work actively towards their wellbeing, instead of just passively falling into problems.

Besides increased mental health, or perhaps because of it, some respondents reported improved career opportunities which showed in higher grades at school, and a sense of direction in life as S5 reports: "... I didn't even know what I wanted to do after my matrix. But now during my yoga years I'm more focused on my career.". Moreover, Yoga4Alex provided numerous learning workshops at their guesthouse creating a calm study environment. This translated to improvements in the final grades and increased pass rates for some students. One respondent also reported about gaining financial and material benefits: "It was more than yoga, Dr Marianne helped me with our career choices, mentoring, tutors gave me a laptop for my studies (Not just any, a Macbook pro) and paid for my 1 year trip to Cape Town" (S2), which partly encouraged them to continue practising yoga.

Seemingly, yoga practice expanded from experienced inner change and tools to cope with difficult life challenges to a framework that allowed the students to reach extra help that was not available from elsewhere.

4.1.2. Negative implications of yoga

The personal effects were reported with rather high enthusiasm, and only one expressed direct negative effects of Kundalini yoga: “I think I become too soft and too kind to a point where people take advantage of me sometimes.” (S1). Others did not state any negative effects. Likewise, the organisation provided material did not address any negative aspects of yoga. However, the two instructors interviewed brought up some concerns the physical misconduct. In an example, I1 stated: “We know that Kundalini is so powerful in a way that you can’t use it while we’re doing drugs.” (I1) and I2 highlighted the physical risks of yoga: “putting pressure on the body where it’s not necessary, I think that’s also can be a negative side that I’ve seen with yoga” (I2). More importantly, I2 raised a question about the common misbelief of yoga being an answer to every problem:

A lot of people think that this one fixed and quick fix that fixes everything, but to me, it’s kind of like a process, so it’s kind of like process and even feel life philosophy. It gives a little bit of direction to the life. Scientifically is always has been proven that yoga does really help with stress. It does help with blood pressure, does really help with other sort of diseases. Not cure them but either prevent them or reduce them.

Between the lines, the essence is not to create false promises to give anyone a sense of automatic healing. Instead, yoga practice is a way of living that could lead to healthier lifestyles and increase wellbeing. But if yoga practice ends, the positive effects disappear.

Both instructors addressed the importance of group work. They saw the classes as delicate environments that could empower the students. However, I2 touches important dimension regarding trust:

If you build that positivity within an in student ... then again you disappear, it would cost a trust. This person is selling me a false hope, you know? You need to take them through the chain until they are able to really understand in their own.

Therefore, not only yoga plays a part in the yogi’s life but also the instructor who creates the environment and space where yoga is practised. As many of the people living in post-conflict

zones could be in a vulnerable position, the context where yoga is practised becomes even more important.

To conclude, Kundalini yoga practice affected significantly respondents' lives. Most of the respondents experienced improved wellbeing and restored relationships with themselves. Minor negative consequences were related to being "too good", or inflated expectations of the positive effects of yoga. In the next section, I will present more about how the personal positive benefits are demonstrated on a wider scale in society.

4.2. How yoga affects the community

When talking about how Kundalini yoga practice affected the community and political landscape, most of the respondents could not name any. While one respondent stated that there were no implications, others remained silent. Even though respondents could not directly name any effects, the closed look at the dataset revealed some level implications to society. One example was presented in I2 answers where they highlighted the willingness to give back to the community:

There were so many things that I went through in life and being told that you have the ability to change that. And you, yourself realising that you have the ability to change your life, was like something that I also feel like I need to pass to other people, who are also in the same situation as me or even in a worst situation.

Saying this, the I2 is depicting an example of the yoga philosophy that aims, not only to take care of the individual wellbeing but pays attention to the comfort of the entire community regardless of what is the status of the other people.

Many of the respondents could not elaborate deeper on how they want to give back. Regardless, the annual reports of Yoga4Alex show that many of the previous students are engaging actively in the community via the work of Yoga4Alex. Buddy system, Kundalini yoga classes, workshops, yoga events, alumni groups and volunteering for the community all attracted previous yoga students. One of the wider impact activities was the Yoga4Mandela event, that Yoga4Peace had been organising once per year since 2016. Yoga4Alex hosted a yoga event that grew over the three years:

Our first 67 minutes of Yoga4Mandela event was held in 2016 and one hundred people participated, many of whom had never done yoga before. In 2017 Yoga4Alex asked ten youngsters from each school to recruit ten of their classmates. The organisers were

delighted when two hundred learners attended. This year we again asked learners attending afterschool yoga to recruit classmates and over three-hundred-and-one learners attended. (AR 2018, p. 10)

In this way, the people involved with the work of Yoga4Alex were not only enjoying the yoga by themselves but helped others to join too. In addition, Yoga4Alex the workshops educate attendees with communication skills, and the annual trip to the Spring yoga festival offered for 70 yogis a long weekend in a peaceful yoga community. These events, and regular yoga practice not only take care of the individuals, but via instructors and volunteers also change the mood of the community:

I am not just in a yoga instructor, but I go there with my group is kind of like a team in the community and the space that the energy that we that we bring in that area. (I2)

Thus, the yoga instructors and workers of the Yoga4Alex acted as ambassadors of goodwill, that show an example, and encourage the people of Alexandria to take care of others instead of resorting to violence. This creates a community that is there for the people, instead of vice versa. As the Annual Report from 2016 (p. 3) marks:

Yoga4Alex is a community of young people who feel loved, accepted and supported. Yoga4Alex gives them a sense of belonging. A space where they can risk being true to themselves.

The support from the organisation and increased openness of the individuals translated to decreased friction in everyday social life. A few respondents reported seeing these effects in their daily life at home. For instance, I1 witnessed the families becoming more interested in yoga too:

I can say that yoga, it can really work if it is not only the learners who are doing it. The parents come forward and say that I realised that my child is doing this. Can I also be part of it even if like it's not only one person, but the whole family doing that.

The Kundalini yoga practice thus opened the space for the children to be heard, and show to their parents an example of a non-violent alternative. Also, the I2 agreed:

We have had a great impact on the students and even sometimes you get a message from their parents: so you know what, lately I have a better relationship with my daughter and with my son. So it means that whatever that you were doing with my sons or with my child is really show it really improving the behaviour or the attitude of my child.

Although the two instructors mentioned good feedback from some parents, some respondents did not agree, as S3 argues: “Some parents don’t want their children doing yoga” marking the variety of opinions towards yoga in the community of Alexandra. However, as Yoga4Alex is working in the school system, it grants them superior access to the community compared to an organisation without wider acceptance.

One of the main issues against Kundalini yoga practice was related to religion. Like some individuals were hesitant to try yoga because of religious presumptions, also the community was sometimes against yoga because of a misconception of the religious nature of Kundalini yoga:

Some people they are religious and when you bring something that is, that they don’t understand them, and special with us in Kundalini yoga, you do chanting, which is in a Gurmukhi or Sanskrit, something that they don’t understand. Then there’s that question that what is this person bringing? Is it something that is demonic? (I2)

The underlying thought here is, that as Alexandra is already a conflicted area, bringing something completely new is challenging the sense of basic trust, which then manifests in a rejection of the idea. The I1 explains it further via their own experience of going through a change with yoga.

I can say it’s fear. Fear of change, because, um. I think people will have their own beliefs and if there is someone who can just come and say: There is this thing that can wake you up, but they already have something that they believe in. It’s very hard for them. I know it because I’m a Christian.

If they would have had a more closed relationship with the Christian religion, they would have stopped practising yoga. However, they continued and became an instructor later. Yoga4Alex mitigates the scepticism from the community by adapting the yoga practice. The instructors are giving information and explaining the root ideas of the practice, as well as are adapting relevant measures such as not including mantras in the practice.

To conclude, yoga affected society mainly via individuals, who after started practising was more involved with the community and wanted to share the tools they learned from yoga. The role of the Yoga4Alex was significant, not only to provide yoga classes but enriched the lives of the community members via events, workshops, and opportunities for the learners.

4.3. Yoga creates peace

At the end of the interviews and online questionnaire, the respondents were invited to spare a moment to reflect on how they define peace, and what would be the best way to build it. The answers pointed out the variance in definitions. Though, many presented peace as a state of being, rather than something politically or economically constructed. Like S5 illustrated “Peace is a stress-free state of security and calmness that comes when there’s no fighting.”. This definition highlights the interrelationship between individuals but also marks the calmness that could mean inner peace. S2 continues in the same direction by stating: “Being able to walk in the street fairly without having to think that someone is going to harras me...”. I1 expands with the relational dimension of peace:

A place where you can communicate in a freeway way like there is no one can interrupt you. That place where you can speak in someone can listen to you so. Yeah, that’s how I can define peace.

Moreover, S3 concludes their definition of peace: “Being true to yourself and being one with your inner self.”. Along with these definitions, the everyday challenges are echoing as a wish to live in a setting without violence directed towards them. But more importantly, all these responses highlight the importance of inner experience – the feelings of belonging, and lack of fear and stress.

Life without violence could be hard to reach, as according to some respondents the apartheid still has its legacy deeply rooted in Alexandra. This can be can show in distrust as I2 explains:

Like I should be living a better life now since you moved away from apartheid and we still high unemployment is still drug abuse and sometimes people feel like they do tend to look at and say who is causing my trouble. They tend to look for someone that they can blame and say you are the cause of my problem and you know that when one person says it and then the next person, sooner or later its 20 then it’s 50.

The illustration of the situation in Alexandra reminds of the broken phone -effect, in which the message gest distorted during it travels through a chain of people. Same way, the rumours and negative thoughts are eroding the community. I1 continues:

If there are two people who were together, and they share like the same thing where the other person won’t listen and the other person won’t listen. ... I think that’s something also that we are facing in South Africa because people, everyone wants to be right.

I would say that the spread of negative thoughts is only a challenge in South Africa, but in other locations too. Especially in the internet's time when rumours could spread within milliseconds through the world. Thus, the negativity should be stopped before it explodes into a full conflict. When asked what the best way of building peace would be, I2 questioned the whole idea of peace, and how to define it in this context: tells:

Just to fully understand what peace means for each and every individual and, especially in Alex you are the community where problem everywhere, and people coming from different places, and speaking different languages, you can find maybe about 20 different languages. So what does peace mean for each and every language? And I think peace is linked with democracy. How can you make sure that you democratised the society in a way that it's still in tune with their values, and their belief systems?

I2 then presents valid questions of the actorness of the peace, but also on what values the peace process is placed. Also, the importance of cultural knowledge is present in their statement.

On how to build peace, the online respondents were unanimous, underlining the position of meditation and increasing compassion and self-knowledge. As S5 concludes: "calm your mind, be true to myself, meditate". However, also the zoom interviewees addressed the importance of compassion:

If we can have that understanding with compassion, and also recognise that, okay, the other person is different and also recognised that the other person is here we are. We are the same and we can share the same thoughts. (I1)

Thus, the respondents all expressed the importance of placing the people first in peacebuilding. Respondents stated that peace should be built primarily from within. The role of yoga in a peacebuilding process was concluded well by I2:

I think the role of yoga is just to for us to reach as many students in as we can. Really show them that they are the change that they want to be. If they want to see change, change starts with a man. You know, as much as you love to take care of yourself. You need to take care of your community and you need to for you to take care of your community needs to be clear of what you want. your mind has to be straight. You don't need to pick up a brick or stone and just start hitting someone. Stop doing that cause at the end of the day ... You're not solving any problems, just tried causing more problem.

To sum up this section, the respondents connected peace via their inner state of calmness and absence of stress. They also mentioned the space, where they can live their life without the need to be afraid of harassment. Peacebuilding was seen principally as an action that should start within the person first. Yoga could be one tool, as it teaches yogis to take care of the community and live together in harmony.

4.4. Yoga, tool for personal transformation or peacebuilding?

In this section, I will answer the research questions elaborating on the answer to the sub-question first. I will do so because the findings suggested Kundalini yoga having such an important role in many areas of respondents' lives. The findings of this study are aligned with the recent research (Mann & Singh, 2018; McMahon et al., 2021; Sarkissian et al., 2018) highlighting the positive effects of Kundalini yoga practice on individuals. Kundalini yoga seems to help to cope with stress and offer tools for personal development and transformation. While the implications on personal lives were consistent thought out of the dataset, the implications for the community were less clear. The respondents reported a better relationship with families, and many wanted to give back to their community, showing that yoga practice helped them to feel belonging and unity with society. This finding is also aligned with previous research, where improved relationships and feelings of unity were reported (Ross et al., 2014). This study, therefore, joins the increasing body of yoga studies that confirms the potentiality of Kundalini yoga practice for personal and societal transformation.

To answer the main research question, if Kundalini yoga could be used as a peacebuilding tool, I would have to answer carefully yes. This is due to positive individual effects, and improved relationships within the yogis near the community. According to transrational peace theory, Kundalini yoga seems to create inner peace and therefore attacks the root causes in the epicenter transforming the people. However, the effects on society are not visible outside of their near community. Further questions therefore arise.

First, do we have to make a difference between different yoga styles? While modern postural yoga has been often criticised to be too exclusive and capitalistically orientated (Lefurgey, 2018) and a tool to spread neoliberal values, at least in western societies (Godrej, 2017), are the yoga styles with tighter philosophical frameworks more suitable for peace work? Not necessarily, especially when talking about Kundalini yoga, which is a powerful practice and potentially destructive when practised without proper guidance (Suchandra et al., 2021).

Perhaps then the way yoga is offered is more important than the yoga style. An example, in Colombia, where another yoga NGO Dunna is offering yoga to underprivileged people on a non-profit basis. They aim to offer psychosocial help and community building to the entire society, therefore rebuilding the trust in the society (Quiñones et al., 2018). By doing so, the organisation is building peace from within the individuals and the societies, without monetising or increasing exclusion of the peace efforts. Likewise, in Alexandra, Yoga4Alex is using a similar operating model to Kundalini yoga, hence providing tools for individuals, who then affect positively the community by “giving back” to society. In this sense, the communities could use yoga to transfer the individual benefits to society.

Secondly, how does the political use of yoga affect society? When asked about the political implications of yoga, most of the respondents did not see yoga affecting the political life in Alexandra at all. This was a surprise, as I was expecting to see at least some sort of effect. My expectations stemmed from the research conducted on mindfulness and politics. In an example, Jamie Bristow (2019) presents a case from the British parliament, where a group of politicians did a mindfulness course. Besides individual positive effects, some politicians reported feelings of increased openness to new ideas which helped them to expand their approaches towards unfamiliar perspectives. Also, increased compassion and empathy were reported. Others (Ferguson, 2016; Moore, 2016) were a little more cautious, as they did not believe mindfulness or Buddhist values could change the politics in the USA.

Interestingly, there is one country that has used yoga successfully as a soft power and a tool of diplomacy – India. Prime minister Narendra Modi has been an active promoter of yoga since the mid-2010. Pushing the UN to accept the cultural importance of yoga and establish an international yoga day, Modi has self-claimed India to be the cultural ambassador of yoga (Gautam & Droogan, 2018). Modi’s push for exporting yoga to China, Japan, and Israel has enhanced the bilateral relationships between the countries and promoted peaceful cooperation (Gautam & Droogan, 2018). Many scholars have criticised the political use of yoga, which gains support for “Hindu supremacist ideology” from the unknowledgeable yogis from the western world (McCartney, 2017), boosting the Indian national identity, and implementing neoliberal values into Indian politics and society. Moreover, the political use of yoga could result in the exclusion of different minorities and religious groups (Jain, 2020). However, yoga is a rather complex consolidation of philosophical, religious, and practical dimensions that should not be dismissed because of political connotations (Gautam & Droogan, 2018). Reflecting on this, Kundalini yoga could be a suitable tool for peacebuilding as it has little connection to political discourses.

Third, do Kundalini yoga bring world peace? I do not think so, as it is not a practice for everybody. However, when implemented accordingly in a correct setting, without the pressure of neoliberal values, Kundalini yoga could work as a path of individual and societal transformation. Thus, it would extremely important to pay attention to the transformation and peaceful philosophy over politicisation and promises of quick healing. Henceforward, the potentiality of Kundalini yoga as a peacebuilding tool relies not only on the ‘yoga’ itself but the philosophical framework the yoga is presented. In this sense, any meditative practice, breathwork, or example singing and dancing could work as a tool for building a peaceful society.

Therefore, I would like to conclude this chapter by wondering if the peace philosophy is more important than tools, that are used. As the peacebuilding field has struggled to include alternative philosophies to the western orientated, and liberal values-based approach (Gnoth, 2020), this study shows that the definition of peace should be expanded from the Galtungian positive-negative peace thinking to many peaces. While Kundalini yoga is only one tool, the philosophy that it bears priorities the balance, collective wellbeing, and healthy lifestyles over liberal and individualistic thinking. Implementing an inclusive way of peace interpretations that are first creating peace within opens the door for a larger development pathway, where everyone is invited. Kundalini yoga, with its transformational philosophy that concentrates on balance and communal wellbeing (S. P. K. Khalsa, 1996), could be an answer to build peace from within. To understand the mechanics of any alternative, person-centred peace initiatives, we could use Dietrich’s (2012) many peace theory, which highlights the plurality of peace as a concept and lived experience. Ultimately, to reach peace, the human experience should be prioritised over liberal market values or politics. This does not only mean material needs but also psychological, spiritual, and emotional, which often seem to miss from the peacebuilding policies. As South Africa 30 years later proves, the violence does not stop with outstanding plans of democracy if the human condition is not met first.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In this study I examined if Kundalini yoga could be used as a peacebuilding tool, and how the yogis in the South African township of Alexandra experience kundalini yoga practice. The findings suggest that the Kundalini yoga practice could offer a transformative space in which peace could be built. This would happen according to the transrational peace philosophy, which highlights the importance of building peace from within. As Kundalini yoga practice is aiming for balance within the person and to transfer the yogi's outlook from personal to collective, it indeed attacks the epicenter of the conflict via personal layers. The transformational power of Kundalini yoga is attached to the chakra system, which could be a little unfamiliar to many western researchers, but via transrational peace philosophy, the understanding of the system could be acquired with a curious mind.

The study also shows that Kundalini practice plays an important role in the yogis lives in Alexandra. Many of the respondents experienced that yoga created a community that offered them support and mental wellbeing. Moreover, the yoga practice helped the yogis to develop tools they could use for personal transformation that created a new identity and therefore offered a non-violent alternative for everyday life. One of the key players was expectedly Yoga4Alex, which worked as safe heaven offering safer places for study, but also financial incentives, which must have been lifesavers for some of the community members. Moreover, Yoga4Alex created positive energy in the area.

What was missing in this study were the voices of the people who did not benefit from the Kundalini practice or experienced negative effects. This was because of the current global COVID-19 pandemic, that prevented me from doing fieldwork in Alexandra. If the fieldwork would have been possible, I believe also reaching those who did not see any help from the yoga would have been included in the research. Also, the wider effects outside of the yogis near the community were not clear.

Therefore, more research is then needed. First, Kundalini yoga is an under-researched topic in the peacebuilding field. Because Yoga4Alex alone reaches over 5000 students, and only seven took part in this study, there should be more extensive research done in the population that did not benefit from Kundalini yoga, or experienced negative effects. Furthermore, extensive research should be done among the population that is living near the yogis to understand at what level the society experiences the positive effects of yoga practice. The

second field of more studies is within the transrational peace philosophy that, as a relatively novel approach, deserves further attention. Future research topics could be various body-orientated practices such as dance, breathwork, or indigenous traditions.

The aim of this thesis was not to claim peacebuilding, or peace research, ignorant or ineffective as this would not be fair. Instead, I hope that I could have contributed to include alternative ways of thinking that, often seem to be undervalued in the peace discussion. Peacebuilding, despite being highly contested, still offers many tools that could help to tackle complex battles. However, to make the world inclusive, there is a need to include knowledge outside of our familiar ways of exploring themes. Moreover, addressing the epicenter of the people's experience could increase the prospects of peace. This way, we can make the world not only peaceful but a greater place for everyone.

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Appendix A – Interview guide

For INSTRUCTORS of the yoga program:

Basic data:

Gender:

Age:

The year started yoga:

Years practised:

Yoga:

Can you tell me about your life before you started practising yoga?

How did you find yoga?

What were your thoughts regarding yoga before starting? Did they change over time?

What type of yoga do you instruct?

Can you tell me about the yoga program you instructed (when, how many times per week, how long)?

Why did you want to instruct a yoga program?

What were the aims of the yoga program?

How was the yoga program presented to the participants?

What do you know about the philosophy of yoga?

In your own words, what kind of transformation yoga does?

Personal effects of Kundalini yoga

How would you describe the inner harmony of the participants before they started the yoga program?

How the yoga program affected participants inner self? (Feelings, emotions, thoughts, regarding self, future etc.)

How would you describe their inner harmony changed over the period from the ending of the program until today?

Why did the change happen?

What are the negative sides of yoga programs to inner harmony?

Effects on society

How would you describe the community, where the yoga program was instructed, before the beginning of the yoga program?

How did the community respond to the yoga program?

How yoga programs affected the community?

What effects the yoga program had regarding the political and global landscape?

How did these effects change over the period from the finish of the program until today?

What are the negative effects of the yoga programs on the community and politics?

Peacebuilding:

How do you define peace?

What are your experiences with different peacebuilding programs?

In your own words, what is the best way to build peace?

What discussion is missing in the peacebuilding field?

Do you have anything else to add?

Appendix B – Online survey questions

Approval of the informed consent
I have started yoga more than two years
I agree with the conditions mentioned above

Basic data:

Gender
Age
When was the first time you tried yoga?
How long have you practised yoga?

Yoga:

Describe your life before yoga
How did you find yoga?
Did you continue practising yoga after the first time, if yes why?
If you not, why?
What were your thoughts regarding yoga before starting?
Did they change over time?
Describe the yoga program you attended
What encouraged you to attend to yoga program?
What discouraged?
How the yoga program was promoted to you?
What made you try?
What do you think, what kind of transformation yoga does?

Personal effects of Kundalini yoga

How would you describe your inner self (feelings, emotions, thoughts regarding self and the future) BEFORE you started yoga?
How would you describe your inner self (feelings, emotions, thoughts regarding self and the future) TODAY?
How yoga affected this transformation?
What do you think are the NEGATIVE effects on the inner self (feelings, emotions, thoughts regarding self and the future)?

How yoga affects the community

How would you describe the community you live in BEFORE the beginning of the yoga program?
How would you describe the community TODAY?
How yoga affected the community you live in?
What are the negative implications of the yoga program to the community you live in?
Thinking about the time from the beginning of the yoga program you attended or instructed, how the effects of the program have sustained over time?

Peacebuilding

How do you define peace?
What do you think, is the best way to build peace?
Describe your experience regarding peacebuilding programs
What do you think is missing from peacebuilding?

Contact email address

I would like to take part in an interview

Appendix C – Informed consent



INFORMED CONSENT

The present study arises in the context of a master's dissertation underway at Iscte - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. The study is carried out by Sauli Kahkonen (sauli_kaehkoenen@iscte-iul.pt), a master's student in International Studies, who can be contacted if you have any questions or comments. The thesis is supervised by Dr. Raquel Beleza da Silva (raquel.beleza.silva@iscte-iul.pt).

The aim of the study is to understand what the role of yoga as a peacebuilding tool is. Moreover, the study tries to increase understanding on the long-term positive and negative factors of yoga, that affect to the peace process and individual's life.

Your participation in the study is highly valued, as it will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field of science. The participation consists one interview of length of maximum one hour and 30 minutes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. The recordings will be saved to ISCTE Office 365 SharePoint folder. Once the transcriptions are completed, the recordings will be deleted immediately.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary: you can freely choose to participate or not to participate. If you choose to participate, you can stop your participation at any time without having to provide any justification. In addition to being voluntary, participation is also anonymous and confidential: You will never be asked to identify yourself at any time during the study. There are no significant expected risks associated with participation in the study.

The data are analyzed thematically, therefore direct quotes from the interviews could be included in the thesis. However, the participant's identity will be concealed.

I declare that I have understood the objectives of what was proposed and explained to me by the researcher, that I have been given the opportunity to ask all the questions about the present study, and for all of them, to have received an enlightening answer, and I accept participate in it.

_____ (location), _____ (date)

Name: _____

Signature: _____

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Appendix D – Informed consent online survey

Hi there,

Have you ever taken part in a yoga program or have instructed one? Did you find it beneficial, or hated it? Or possibly did not notice any impact on your life, whatsoever? If you answered any of the previous questions yes, please carry on reading.

My name is Sauli, I'm a master's student at ISCTE IUL, a university in Portugal, and at the moment I am preparing my master thesis project under the theme of yoga. Let me tell you a bit about my research. Yoga has been practised for centuries, and there is a lot of research stating what kind of effects yoga has on the human body, mind, and spirit. However, very little is known about how Kundalini yoga affects people in peacebuilding.

In my research project, I am trying to answer this gap by examining how Kundalini yoga works as a peacebuilding tool and what role it plays in the yogi's life. To understand the process, I invite you, a yogi, to share your experience with yoga by answering this online survey.

Participation is voluntary, and you can stop the survey at any time. All answers will be anonymous, which means that you will not be recognisable from the answers. However, if you want more information or results of the research, you can leave your email at the end of the survey. All data is kept in a private folder. There are no risks related when answering this survey.

I would appreciate your time and effort greatly, and I hope together we can increase the understanding of how yoga could be used as a peacebuilding tool.

Thank you very much!

Yours

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