



Legitimacy and the selling of yoga in the “Yoga Capital of the World”

– ‘Yoga and tourism is like combining mango and salt’

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“It is possible that in the not too distant future if the Indian wants to learn about India he will have to consult the West, and if the West wants to remember how they were they will have to come to us.”

– Unnamed writer quoted in Gita Mehta, *Karma Cola* (Favero, 2003)

Front Page: Picture of “Yoga at Across River Ganga Rishikesh Uttarakhand India” from the Yoga & Ayurveda Tour in Rishikesh (Memorable India Tour Operator, n.d.)

Personal Note and Acknowledgements

Before getting into the contents of this thesis report, I would like to take this opportunity to convey something directly to you, the reader, who might be about to embark on their own Master's thesis or other research project. Uri Alon could not have been more right, when he discussed the discrepancy between the real research process and what ends up as an organized whole on paper in his enlightening TED talk. I hope you are very excited to start the research process, but make sure you also allow yourself to feel confused, discouraged, or even outright panicked sometimes. That is all part of the process, everyone goes through it, even the more experienced scholars that you may look up to. It would be an exaggeration to say this thesis is made of blood, sweat and tears, but exclude the "blood" and it is pretty accurate.

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Most importantly, I want to dedicate this thesis to my father, who suddenly passed away a day before I initially was to fly to India. While it has been the most difficult time of my life, you have been my strength to persevere, even in your absence.

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Abbreviations

HAF – Hindu American Foundation

IYF – International Yoga Festival

YTT – Yoga Teacher Training

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Abstract

Yoga is arguably one of the most popular globalised forms of intangible heritage that is still linked to local place-specific heritage tourism. Its widespread global popularity with ever-increasing new “forms” of yoga (e.g. “Beer Yoga” or “Disco Yoga”) has led to what some describe as the over-commercialization of yoga, resulting in a detachment from its spiritual roots. Combining the global nature and complex intra-continental history of yoga with the highly commercialized context of growing yoga tourism to Rishikesh, India’s “Yoga Capital of the World”, gives a sense of the complexities of the process of the construction of legitimacy by yoga actors in and around the tourism industry. Drawing on interviews with a variety of yoga actors and tourists, as well as auto-ethnographic observations, this research explores how yogic legitimacy becomes (de)constructed in a fast-growing tourist city. It is found that different ‘types’ of yoga actors have different understandings of the appropriate ways to practise and/or sell yoga. While those inside the tourism industry make trade-offs between packaging yoga as an easy to consume product for tourists, and providing a deeper understanding of “authentic” Indian yoga, others deconstruct the legitimacy yoga’s commercialization by questioning the very combination of ‘yoga’ and ‘tourism’. The legitimacy of foreign (US-based) intervention into the regulation of yoga tourism is also questioned and seen as problematic, while the need for some type of regulation of yoga is acknowledged. The current lack of regulation also impacts yoga tourists’ perception of yogic legitimacy, as many face (dis)orientation in their quest for finding the right kind of yoga (i.e. the right balance between authenticity and commercialization). Concerns about the over-commercialization of yoga and consequences of this complex reality for the continued legitimacy of Rishikesh as the “Yoga Capital of the World” are discussed, and recommendations for securing a more sustainable and regulated yoga tourism industry that is supposed from the ground up are provided.

Key words: *intangible heritage; yoga tourism; India; yogic legitimacy; commercialization*

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1 Introduction

Consider the following incident, as recorded in my field notes:

An Indian man dressed only in swimwear, revealing his undeniably plump belly, is standing by the Ganga river. About to take a bath in the river, he is approached by a female tourist who asks him if she can take his picture. He answers “sure sure”, to which he proudly adds “I do yoga four times daily, can you see?”. She laughs and replies “no I don’t think so” – not-so-subtly referring to his midsection. “Yes I do it!”, he insists, and again “no I don’t think so” she denies. Then the tourist requests the man to stand in tree pose for the best photogenic effect, while depicting the requested yoga pose herself (standing on one leg with her hands touching above her head). Now it is the man’s turn to negate; “no no no, yoga is mostly mental” he says with a big smile. The woman laughs and, unable to take her imagined “Indian man in tree pose by the Ganga river” picture, she walks away.

Yoga is arguably one of the most well-known forms of intangible heritage of India today. As defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), intangible heritage is all non-material forms of cultural heritage that have been passed on for generations, including “traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts” (UNESCO, n.d.). The word “yoga” can be translated literally to “yoke” or “unity”, and describes a philosophy of spiritual practise, whereby the mind learns to control the body and quiet itself in order to reach peace and unity with the divine. The number of active yoga practitioners around the world (also called “yogis”) now ranges in the many tens of millions of people. It is a hugely popular form of exercise all over the world; its status as mainstream exercise is for instance exemplified by its endorsement from the White House, who have stated that “yoga has become a universal language of spiritual exercise in the United States, crossing many lines of religion and cultures”, urging Americans to join in their Obama White House Challenge to do yoga and “Be Healthy, Be Active, Be You!” (Rajghatta, 2013). Yoga has become a multi-billion-dollar industry, with people paying a lot of money for yoga classes and over \$100 for one pair of yoga pants. In 2012, 20.4 million Americans practiced yoga, a 29% increase from 2008, and they spent a combined “\$10.3 billion a year on yoga classes and products, including equipment, clothing, vacations, and media” compared to \$5.7 billion in 2008 (Yoga Journal, 2012).

This has led to what some describe as the commercialisation and commodification of yoga, in which yoga has become completely detached from its spiritual roots and has become sold and practised like nothing more than a nice exercise for a tight physique. Different styles of yoga have been contrived by individual yoga teachers that combine these ancient postures into new sequences, and attempts have been made to claim copyright on these sequences such as in the case of Bikram Choudhury and his “Bikram yoga”, also known as “hot yoga” - yoga practised in a heated room for increased flexibility. This copyright has ultimately been rejected, but it did spark discussion on the ownership of yoga. In fact, the invention of this “hot yoga” by Bikram has proven to be just the beginning of the invention and

sale of new types of yoga, as many different forms of yoga are popping up all over the world (e.g. “Stand-Up Paddleboard Yoga”, “Rock-n-roll Yoga”, “Yogalates”, “Beer Yoga” and even “Goat Yoga” (“Goat Yoga,” n.d.; Godrej, 2016)).

Opinions on the true origin of yoga differ, with some groups, like the Indian government, emphasizing its origin in the general Indian psyche (UNESCO, 2016), while others claiming it is specifically the heritage of Hinduism and as such “Hinduism, as a faith tradition, stands at this pass a victim of overt intellectual property theft” (Waters, n.d.; Hindu American Foundation, n.d.). The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) for instance has started the “Take Back Yoga” campaign in 2008, writing on their website:

As the multi-billion dollar yoga industry continues to grow with studios becoming as prevalent as Starbucks [...], the mass commercialization of this ancient practice, rooted in Hindu thought, has become concerning. With proliferation of new forms of "yoga," the underlying meaning, philosophy, and purpose of yoga are being lost (Hindu American Foundation, n.d.).

This campaign is meant to bring light to the (in the eyes of HAF) fact that yoga has its roots in the Hindu religion and that in modern times yoga has become completely separated from its Hindu origins; it has become “culturally appropriated” by mass consumer culture.

Cultural appropriation has been defined by Ziff & Rao (1997, p. 1) as “the taking – from a culture that is not one’s own – of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artefacts, history and ways of knowledge”. Cultural appropriation has become a particular concern with the rise of the Information Society in which all kinds of elements from different cultures can become easily stripped of their cultural content and shared all over the globe (Brown, 2005). Possible negative impacts of cultural appropriation include: cultural appropriation can harm the appropriated community and impact their integrity and identity; cultural appropriation can impact the cultural object itself by damaging or transforming a given cultural good or practise; and cultural appropriation wrongly allows some to benefit to the material (i.e. financial) detriment of others (Ziff & Rao, 1997, p. 8). The HAF thus aims to address their concerns around the cultural appropriation of yoga through their “Take Back Yoga” campaign, in the form of media coverage on the topic through television, blogs and articles.

This view is in stark contrast with that held by another big player in the world of modern day yoga, the American Yoga Association. They write on their website that:

“There is a common misconception that Yoga is rooted in Hinduism; on the contrary, Hinduism’s religious structures evolved much later and incorporated some of the practices of Yoga. (Other religions throughout the world have also incorporated practices and ideas related to Yoga.)” (American Yoga Association, n.d.).

This view advocates that the origin of yoga transcends religion, and thus Hinduism. As such it denies the claim that cultural appropriation or intellectual property theft is taking place with the mass commercialization of yoga in the West.

Despite disagreement on the ownership of yoga, and whether or not it is religious in its essence, there is a widespread agreement about yoga originating in the Indian subcontinent. Following discussions on the widespread commercialization of yoga, the Indian Government decided to nominate yoga to be on the intangible world heritage list of UNESCO, and it got accepted onto this list as recently as December 1st, 2016 (UNESCO, 2016). In the video accompanying the government's nomination of yoga for the UNESCO intangible heritage list in 2016, yoga is described as: "*a scientific and traditional knowledge, [yoga] is a concept given to the world by India*" and "*yoga has been an essential part of the Indian psyche from ancient times*" (UNESCO, 2016). This is an interesting narrative that stresses the universal importance of yoga for the cultural identity of all Indians, transcending religious or other differences between the citizens.

Now think back to the anecdote shared at the beginning of this chapter, which hinted at different understandings of yoga in a light interaction between a Western tourist and Indian man. Considering the rapid increase in popularity of yoga, combined with the wide variety of interpretations of what yoga truly means, how and where it should be best practised, and whether or not it has a religious component creates an interesting lens for the study of yoga tourism to India. Every year many tourists travel to India to experience "true, spiritual" India and study yoga "at the source" (Maddox, 2014). Certain cities in India are famous for being "yoga destinations" and it is here where most yoga tourists gather. These include for instance Mysore, Goa, Pune, Puducherry, and Rishikesh (Vyas, 2014). These yoga tourists consider a trip to India to be the ultimate dedication to their yoga practise, by studying yoga in its authentic form and in the authentic Indian context. These tourists thus bring with them their own ideas around the origin and true nature of yoga. Scholars who have studied the phenomenon of yoga tourism have mostly focussed their efforts on the Western yoga tourists; uncovering for instance how the complex history of yoga is linked with colonialist imaginations of Indian yoga by Western yoga tourists (Lieberman, 2004; Maddox, 2014). However, as a highly globalised form of intangible heritage that is subject to a multitude of interpretations, a better understanding of how the legitimacy of the commercialization of yoga is being negotiated and performed in particular yoga tourism contexts is still lacking. In this thesis I take up this lack of knowledge by analysing how yogic legitimacy becomes constructed by the yoga tourism industry as well as the yoga tourists in Rishikesh, India's "Yoga Capital of the World".

1.1 The city of Rishikesh as a yoga tourist destination

With a population of roughly 100,000, Rishikesh is not a particularly big Indian city, but it has still managed to become a highly popular tourist attraction with a focus on cultural heritage attractions. There is not a lot of demographic information available about Rishikesh. In a "Provisional Population Totals" document published by the Indian government it is stated that in 2011 Rishikesh had a total population of 102,138, out of which 54,466 males and 47,672 females. The literacy rate was higher than the national average: 86.86% compared to 74.04% (*Provisional Population Totals*, 2011).

Rishikesh is particularly popular among tourists visiting India for reasons of ayurveda, yoga and meditation (Aggarwal, Guglani, & Goel, 2008) and has also been termed the “Yoga Capital of the World”. A big part of its popularity among spiritual and yoga tourists stems from the fact that the Beatles stayed in Rishikesh to study Transcendental Meditation in 1968. To this day there remains a “Beatles Ashram” in the city (Wong, 2016) and there exists also a “Happy Rishikesh song” that the Beatles wrote after their stay (Kozinn, 1988). The city has been recognized by the Ministry of Tourism as one of the six prominent wellness destinations in the country (Vyas, 2014). It is also home to the International Yoga Festival (IYF) which is a yearly festival that attracts yoga lovers from all over the world. Rana (2015, p. 6) who studied the motives of tourists visiting Rishikesh, concluded that “Indian festivals are major attraction among foreign tourists”, particularly as they relate to spirituality and religion.

The IYF was first organized in 1989 by the Government of Uttar Pradesh, and since 2001 it has been organized by the Government of Uttarakhand and hosted by Parmarth Niketan ashram (IYF, n.d.). On the website of the festival, the organizers state that *“the annual International Yoga Festival, organized by Parmarth Niketan (Rishikesh) in the sacred and heavenly state of Uttarakhand, the birthplace of Yoga, is grounded in the authentic origin of Yoga”* (IYF, n.d.). In 2016 it attracted 1200 participants from 85 countries (Yoga Life Australia, 2016). Cultural heritage festivals usually mix different elements and aspects of this heritage (Mathisen, 2009), and the International Yoga Festival is no different in this respect. According to their website:

“This year there are more than 70 presenters, from 20 countries, giving nearly 150 classes [...]. Ashtanga Yoga, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, Bharat Yoga, Deep Yoga, Shintoh Yoga and Somatics Yoga are just a few of the more than 60 different offerings throughout the week. There are also classes in meditation, mudras, Sanskrit chanting, reiki, Indian philosophy and much more. Further, spiritual discourses will be held by revered spiritual leaders from India and abroad. There will also be cultural dance/music performances highlighting the culture of this Himalayan Garhwal region as well as music from musicians from Israel, Australia and the U.S.” (IYF, n.d.).

The wide inclusion of different interpretations or forms of yoga in the festival is not without its controversies however. During the 2011 International Yoga Festival, some female Western yoga teachers were accused of making a “spectacle” of yoga by wearing revealing outfits and not respecting the sacred nature of yoga. As Yogi Ram, one of the yoga gurus who was offended by the yoga teachers, put it: *“wearing skimpy clothes, glamorizing or doing unusual things definitely affects the dignity of Yoga. The government needs to step in and retain the essence and authenticity of the traditional Indian art”* (McCollum Lord, 2011). This albeit small controversy suggests that there exists some form of contestation around yogic legitimacy in yoga tourism.

1.2 Problem Statement

It is increasingly recognized that “heritage values now delimit and transcend individual nation-states, thereby highlighting a critical need to discuss heritage uses and functions in a wider framework beyond a nation scale” (Park, 2014, p. 208). In particular intangible heritage, being immaterial and fluid in nature, can quite easily travel across space and time and reach people from different cultures or ethnicities and be transformed in the process. As Park (2014, p. 111) put it: “under conditions of globalisation, geographical boundaries have become rather meaningless in an increasingly interconnected world”. Thus a complex process unfolds by which “local heritage assets become transformed into global heritage, with a new need to serve a global community, while striving to maintain its cultural integrity and locality as a resistance to globalisation” (ibid., p. 113).

Research on intangible heritage and cultural tourism has stressed the issue of commodification, urging tourism planners to carefully consider the impact of tourism on the intangible heritage of local communities (George, 2010). The commodification of intangible heritage is facilitated by globalization; more specifically through free-market capitalist ‘neoliberal’ globalization, heritage has become increasingly deconstructed, deterritorialised and commodified (Park, 2014). Through these ever-increasing conditions of global connectedness, intangible heritage necessarily also changes form and meaning as it goes through the process of global (re)interpretation, and the lines around the ownership of that particular intangible heritage become blurred. According to (González, 2008, p. 807) “in the global environment a person can have diverse identifications coming together from different countries to build an inclusive identity” and in this sense “the liaison between identity and locality vanishes”. This certainly seems to be the case for many yoga tourists coming to India to learn more about “real, Authentic” yoga; yoga has become such a global phenomenon that it already forms a large part of the identity of tourists travelling to India, perhaps even *more so* than of the identity of many Indians who might not necessarily see yoga as “their” heritage (see Arora & Sharma, 2013; Bandyopadhyay, Morais, & Chick, 2008).

The intersect between the globalization of intangible heritage, heritage tourism and local construction of legitimacy around the “selling” of this intangible heritage in a tourism context deserves more scholarly attention than it has thus far been given. The combination of yoga and tourism is still a relatively unexplored phenomenon in tourism studies, and what has been written on the topic has focussed mostly on the perspective of the tourist (e.g. Maddox, 2014; Smith & Kelly, 2006). As stated earlier, yoga is arguably one of the most popular globalised forms of intangible heritage that is still linked to local place-specific heritage tourism. Combine the global nature and complex intra-continental history of yoga with the highly commercialized context of yoga tourism to a “Yoga Capital of the World”, and you get a sense of the complexities of the process of the construction of legitimacy in selling yoga as a product. Yoga is at once a spiritual practise and a commodity; it has been transformed into a myriad of products for yoga tourism to India, from singular yoga classes to longer courses or retreats,

and multiple week yoga teacher trainings which result in the participant receiving a yoga teacher certification. So then how do locals and tourists establish legitimacy around the selling of yoga in a highly commercialized setting of a “Yoga Capital of the World”? Who has the right to “sell” this “ancient spiritual practise” or certify anyone to be a proper yoga teacher and why, and how do they construct their legitimacy or deconstruct that of others? These are the questions that I take up in this research.

1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The aim of this research is at once practical and theoretical. Theoretically, the objective of this research is to contribute to our understanding of the construction of legitimacy around the selling of a highly globalised form of intangible heritage in a local context, through studying the material and discursive elements involved in this process. Practically, following Ballesteros & Ramírez (2007) I am concerned with the need to “negotiate selection and evaluation criteria” in the development of heritage tourism, taking into account local voices and community identity. As yoga continues to thrive as a leisure activity globally, and more and more tourists travel to India to do yoga, the need for a critical look on the processes of legitimacy (de)construction around the selling of this intangible heritage becomes clear.

This research objective has led to the following main research question:

How is the yogic legitimacy (de)constructed in the context of yoga tourism to India’s “Yoga Capital of the World”?

The main research question has been divided into the following sub-questions, which also guide the chapter division:

- How is yoga understood or practised differently by the different actors involved in constructing yogic legitimacy in Rishikesh? (chapter 5)
- How is yogic legitimacy (de)constructed in different forms of “selling” yoga? (chapter 6)
- How is yogic legitimacy (de)constructed in different forms of “consuming” yoga? (chapter 7)

The set-up of this thesis is as follows; chapter 2 consists of a literature review that positions this research in the context of existing literature, chapter 3 details the theoretical framework used in this research, chapter 4 describes the methodology and chapters 5-7 consist of the results, by which chapter 5 serves as the springboard for the next two chapters. The thesis concludes with a combined conclusion and discussion that goes into (among other things) the challenges for the future of yoga tourism to Rishikesh and the need for more regulation; a comparison between yoga tourism and conservation tourism as it relates to legitimacy construction; and suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to position this research in the context of existing literature on the complex origins of yoga, its current global popularity, and its promotion as a tourist product and beyond. It serves to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the global politics around yoga that form the backdrop to the local case study that is the focus of this thesis.

2.1 More on the complex origins of yoga

As with many cases of intangible cultural heritage in today's world, "yoga" as we currently know it has a long and complicated history with influences reaching far beyond the Indian subcontinent. As George (2010, p. 380) put it "humans have been borrowing from others since the beginning of time", and this often makes particular forms and origins of intangible heritage rather hard to define.

In our current day understanding, yoga is a largely physical practise which builds strength, flexibility and balance by taking on certain bodily poses and focussing on the breath. Many yogis have some intuitive understanding of yoga being based in an ancient spiritual tradition in India. Some Western yoga teachers echo this idea by burning incense, playing Indian classical music or placing Hindu gods in the yoga studio (Maddox, 2014). This is the result of the constructed story of a monolithic and "authentic" yoga that borrows its legitimacy from its roots in ancient texts and practises (Godrej, 2016). Many famous yogis who have been instrumental in the promotion of yoga in early twentieth century have relied on this story, that "from the time it was discovered, more than four thousand years ago, yoga was perfectly delineated, formulated and preached in India" (Godrej, 2016, p. 4). However, scholars who have studied the history of contemporary yoga have come to the conclusion that a "'pure' yoga never existed and that the 'notion of an original yoga is a just-so story'" (Lieberman, 2008, p. 100 in Maddox, 2014, p. 331). Interestingly, the postures that today form such a fundamental part of modern yoga, "despite their Sanskrit names, do not occur in the medieval tantric texts where hatha-yoga is elaborated, much less in the earlier classical texts, where there is scarcely any mention of physical postures" (Alter, 2004 in Godrej, 2016, p. 4). Yoga's philosophical foundations are highly diverse, having been cross-culturally influenced by Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, and other non-Brahmanical traditions as far back as 300 BC (Godrej, 2016, p. 3). In these days, the practise of yoga largely focussed on meditative practises to bring the person closer to God, without any mention of physical movement.

Upon its first introduction to the West, yoga was regarded with suspicion as it was seen as a product of the dangerous and exotic East, suspected of being a threat to Protestant orthodoxy (Schmidt, 2010). It was only through interactions between South Asia and the West that yoga became "deconstructed and reconstructed", while narratives of its "authentic" tradition were used to legitimize it as an ethical ancient tradition (Godrej, 2016). It wasn't until this interaction with the West that yoga transformed into the largely physical practise focussed on postures we know today, particularly through interactions with Western physical practises such as "gymnastics, calisthenics, body building, and

acrobatics” (Maddox, 2014, p. 336; Singleton, 2010). While Indian scholars and yoga practitioners Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) are widely believed to have been first to introduce yogic ideas to the West, one might even say that “Eugene Sandow, the father of modern body building, has had a greater influence on the form and practise of ... modern hatha yoga ... than either Aurobindo or Vivekananda” (Alter, 2004, p. 28 in Maddox, 2015, p. 336). It is important to recognize this transnational aspect in the ongoing recreation of yoga if we are to understand the complexities and contestation around yoga as an intangible heritage (Maddox, 2014).

2.2 Governmental promotion of yoga

Heritage, both in its material and intangible form, can serve as a “unifying sign” (Bessière, 1998), helping “to preserve and reconstruct the collective memory of a social group, thereby enhancing the group’s social and cultural identities” (Park, 2014, p. 95). Particularly social groups as defined by nationality require a strong sense of shared memories of the past in order to solidify a feeling of national kinship and solidarity (Bell, 2003). In order to create this strong sense of belonging to a nation and nationality by its citizens, governmental promotion of a certain national heritage is a “primary instrument” (Park, 2014, p. 97). This promotion of national heritage is essential not only for creating a sense of national identification, but also for “neutralizing potentially competing heritages of social-cultural groups or regions” (Ashworth, Graham, & Tunbridge, 2000, p.12 in Park, 2014, p.97). In this way national heritage can serve to delegitimize claims on the nation’s land or people by other nations. According to Hobsbawm (1983) it is very common for modern national heritages to be made up of invented traditions; this “mass-generation of traditions” often serves the political goal of establishing bonds of loyalty among citizens. It can also serve an economic function, particularly when the artificial augmentation of a particular national heritage serves to promote tourism (Park, 2014). This shows that the governmental promotion of yoga has to also be viewed in its complicated political, cultural and economic context.

In the first half of the twentieth century, yoga had largely developed into the postural hatha yoga popular today, as a result of India’s contact with global physical culture movement (Singleton, 2010). But similarly important for this development of postural yoga was the Indian government’s “nationalist aspirations to building a strong, disciplined population capable of rejecting colonial rule and ruling itself” (Godrej, 2016, p. 4). Nationalists reformers like Swami Kuvalayananda promoted this active form of postural yoga with the goal “to prepare the young generation for service of the country” (Alter, 2007, p. 23). This developed partly as a response to the ideology of “muscular Christianity”, which was spread by the British and found by some to be explicitly imperialist (Alter, 2007). The British characterized Indian men as emasculated, as children who were not able to rule themselves and required leadership from the strong British men (Chakraborty, 2007). As such, “the body of the colonized functioned as a site for the construction of colonial authority and legitimacy” (p. 1174). The promotion of yoga was thus

seen as a nationalist response to colonialization; it was a way to fight colonial domination both physically and ideologically through creating strong and proud national citizens.

More currently the government of India has been noticeably active in promoting yoga, for instance through the inception of an International Yoga Day in 2015, appointing a minister dedicated to yoga and traditional medicine (Inani, 2015) and applying yoga to be added on UNESCO's intangible heritage list. India's foreign affairs minister, Sushma Swaraj, has been quoted as saying "yoga is the soft power of India and through that soft power the whole world can be one global village, and this trend of violence can be done away with with this kind of peace" ("Transcript (English Interpretation) of Joint Press Conference by External Affairs Minister and Minister of State (I/C) AYUSH on Celebration of International Day of Yoga (June 9, 2015)," 2015). Besides the claim that yoga promotes peace, yoga is also promoted by the government as a way of staying fit for schoolchildren, stating in the 2003 Youth Policy of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports: "Health of the mind should be coupled with the health of the spirit. Towards this, yoga and meditation should be propagated widely among the youth. Yoga, in particular, should be taught in the schools" (in Alter, 2007, p. 20).

However, some have been critical of this apolitical narrative in the governmental promotion of yoga, arguing that it is part of the government's project to congregate Hindu identity with Indian national identity more broadly, by forcing the religious ideas from Hinduism to dominate the national policy. Even though seeing "India just as a Hindu Country is a fairly bizarre idea" given its diverse religious plurality of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity and more (Sen, 2005), there are Hindu nationalists who "are promoting a narrowly Hindu view of Indian history" (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008, p. 794). Elements from Hinduism are for instance dominant in the tourism promotional efforts of the government of India (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008). The authors of this 2008 study write that "it is apparent from this study that the Indian Government's efforts to build Indian national identity are inextricably linked to a Hinducentric national identity" (p.804). Although yoga is not intrinsically religious, and people from many different religions incorporate yogic traditions into their religious practise, there are those who wish to exclusively associate yoga with Hinduism out of a political agenda (Douglass, 2010). Douglas writes for instance: "this is clearly evidenced in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led state government conducted a mass yoga program in the schools. The BJP is considered by some social scientists' as a paramilitary, fundamentalist political party that seeks to use the idea of "tradition" to secure power in a largely Hindu country" (2010, p. 167). Therefore the government's idea of yoga being an integral part of physical education in its schools is not neutral.

Particularly some religious groups like Muslims and Christians have taken an issue with the governmental promotion of yoga. In the case of governmental promotion of yoga for school children, this issue has even come before the Supreme Court of India, which expressed caution in making yoga

mandatory for all schoolchildren because of a possible religious component (Arora & Sharma, 2013). The court considered the question “can we be asking all the schools to have one period for yoga classes every day when certain minority institutions may have reservations against it?” Adding to the controversy was a Hindu priest and BJP lawmaker called Yogi Adityanath, who reportedly said that “those who oppose a set of yoga postures known as Surya Namaskar—or salutations to the Sun God—should leave the country or drown themselves in the ocean” (Inani, 2015).

Besides the promotion of yoga to create an united nation proud of its heritage, to create fit citizens capable of resisting colonial rule, to create healthy school children, or out of the political will to congregate Hindu identity with Indian national identity, the government of course simply also has a vested economic interest in promoting India as a yoga and wellness tourism destination (Ravichandran & Suresh, 2010). International tourism to India has seen a quick rise over the last decade. It is expected to grow from 3,4 million tourists bringing in around \$4.7 billion in 2004 to 10 million tourists by 2020 (Aggarwal et al., 2008).

This understanding of the complexities behind the governmental promotion of yoga serves as a contextualization to the construction of yogic legitimacy in on-the-ground realities of yoga tourism that is the focus of this research.

3 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework details the main concepts and theories used in this research. Firstly, it elaborates the theoretical understanding of legitimacy construction in relation to the commodification that takes place in tourism, by explaining how this research builds on theoretical approaches used in previous research.

Secondly, as discussed in the previous chapters, the aim of this research is to extend our understanding of the construction of legitimacy around the selling of intangible heritage in tourism, and this is approached from both the locals' and tourists' point of view and experience. While the focus is thus on the humans involved in yoga tourism and their lived experience (i.e. the discursive), this research also borrows some aspects from New Materialism, which as a theory and ontological lens aims to include the material (non-human) elements of reality into our academic focus (in fact blurring the lines between these categories). Therefore the second part of this theoretical framework serves to detail how this research deals with the differentiation between the discursive and the material, and to what degree I take the aspects of New Materialism on board in the analysis.

3.1 Legitimacy and the commodification of intangible heritage

The starting point of this research' exploration of legitimacy is Suchman's definition of the term:

“a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions”
(Suchman, 1995, p. 574).

Legitimacy is thus a rather broad concept; it is seen as socially constructed in relation with “culturally bound expectations with respect to organizational activities, and similarly constructed and bound by perceptions of the organization's activities and impacts” (Lawrence, Wickins, & Phillips, 1997, p. 309). In the context of this research on yoga tourism, legitimacy can be interpreted in one of two ways. On the one hand, the question is of yogic legitimacy itself; the perception that someone or some organization is a legitimate yoga actor, based on the perceiving person's system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions of what it means to do yoga. As discussed previously in the introduction and literature review, there are many different interpretations around what it means to do yoga in the world. On the other hand, there is the question of legitimacy around the *commercialization* of yoga itself. The moment anything with inherent value (e.g. science, spirituality, religion, nature etc.) becomes transformed into a commodity and is made to have economic value, the question of the legitimacy arises. Thus this second case of legitimacy around yoga tourism refers to the perception that anyone has the *right to commercialize* or “sell” yoga and does so in appropriate ways. In this research, both play an important role, and the latter is seen as the continuation of the more encompassing former. The main research

question and focus is therefore on yogic legitimacy, but where the perceived legitimacy of commercialization of yoga will be brought into the discussion at different times throughout the chapters.

The process of the construction of legitimacy also involves stakeholders that “argue for the illegitimacy of an activity rather than for its legitimacy” and “the management of legitimacy therefore has two modes: trying to legitimize some activity and trying to delegitimize it” (Lawrence et al., 1997, p. 309). Legitimacy construction should thus be seen a complex multi-dimensional social process, with a different outcome depending on the person or organization. Because this research is interested in both the construction of legitimacy by those offering yoga tourism products, and the deconstruction of legitimacy by others, the methodological focus of this research is on a wide range of local actors, as further discussed in chapter 4.

Lawrence et al. (1997, p. 307) “argue that the problem of legitimacy can best be understood in terms of the interaction among stakeholders, social and political issues, and the frameworks used by stakeholders to evaluate those issues”. In other words, understanding a person’s evaluative framework, or their norms, values, beliefs and definitions around the topic, is essential for understanding the process by which they construct or deconstruct the legitimacy of an entity’s action. The role of the political process in managing legitimacy becomes particularly clear in the case of emerging industries that are not yet regulated, and rely on entrepreneurs for “identifying opportunities, assembling resources, and recruiting and training employees” (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994, p. 647). Although not necessarily “new”, yoga tourism represents an industry that is widely growing in India and is still in its early stages of regulation. Individual entrepreneurs are identifying opportunities for new yoga schools, assemble resources and recruit and train employees to be the yoga teachers, without any formal regulatory body being yet in place to monitor and standardize the industry. These local yoga actors face issues of legitimacy as different “stakeholders come into conflict as they work to construct expectations and perceptions that favor their goals and interests” (Lawrence et al., 1997, p. 309).

Cousins, Evans and Sadler (2009, n.p.) have illustrated that in the case of conservation tourism, where tourism is combined with contributing to conservation science, this growing industry “makes trade-offs between scientific rigor and neoliberal market logic”, in a process that “resists simple categorization”. Conservation tourism is in some ways comparable to yoga tourism, as both represent active forms of tourism in which commercial aspects have to be weighed against the scientific or yogic values. In the former, it is nature that is commodified and scientific legitimacy that is constructed, and in the latter, it is intangible heritage that is commodified and yogic legitimacy that is constructed. Because of these similarities in their challenges, the research by Cousins et al. (2009) is seen as a fruitful departure for the discussion of the results of this research in chapter 8.

Within intangible heritage tourism, legitimacy and authenticity are two concepts that are closely interlinked. Because it is expected that the perceived yogic legitimacy of an actor depends in no lesser

extent on the perceived authenticity of that yoga, the concept is further discussed below. The concept of authenticity within the scholarly field of leisure and tourism “operates within numerous frameworks, the most prominent of which are objective, constructivist, and existential definitions of the term” (Maddox, 2014, p. 333). It is a contested concept, and some authors argue it is based on a “Euro-centric view of the process of cultural commodification” which does not adequately take locals’ perspectives into account (Cole, 2007, p. 943). In this research, authenticity is seen as a construction, “as something projected onto objects by tourists and/or the tourism media, thereby creating various versions of authenticity for the same objects that are dependent upon particular, constructed interpretations (ibid.)”. Depending on the different expectations and perceptions on the authenticity of yoga by stakeholders, these stakeholders will hold different positions on yogic legitimacy and the legitimacy of its commercialization. Through viewing authenticity as a construction, this research aims to move beyond the “trope of contemporary yoga as a commodified divergence from some authentic, premodern, monolithic, cultural ideal” (Godrej, 2016, p. 22).

3.2 The Discursive and its relation with the Material

The focus of this research is on how the legitimacy of the commercialization of yoga becomes (de)constructed by the actors involved in yoga tourism. Though its main ontological and methodological lens is anthropocentric, as is further discussed in chapter 4, it borrows some aspects and ideas from more materialistic approaches that consider the discursive as intermingled with the material elements. In its exploration of the discourses used to (de)legitimize actors and their actions, this research thus aims to extend its focus from a purely discursive focus. This section serves to explain these materialist conceptualizations of reality and highlight how this research borrows from them.

There has been a recent ‘turn to materiality’ and reconsideration of non-human processes in much of social science, including organizational research (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015), sociology and feminist research (Nick J. Fox & Alldred, 2013) and tourism studies (Gren & Huijbens, 2012). What these approaches have in common is that they question the “primacy of human agency in social life” and assert that more academic “attention needs to be given to how meaning and matter are held together” (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015, p. 698). They are based on the ontological position that “discourse cannot exist without being materialized” while simultaneously matter does not have some objective existence outside of discourse (p. 699), in other words they are mutually entangled without existing independently from each other. This holds important consequences for our academic pursuit of studying and understanding the world. In the words of Barad (2003, p. 822):

“The relationship between the material and the discursive is one of mutual entailment. Neither is articulated/articulable in the absence of the other; matter and meaning are mutually articulated. Neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither has privileged status in determining the other”.

They are, in other words, “ontologically inseparable” (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015, p. 699) in that they “lack an independent, self-contained existence” (Barad, 2007, p. ix). This ontological lens thus shifts our attention away from only focussing on the discursive elements that make up the social world, not through a reductionist view of materialism that focusses on macro-structures, but by looking beyond the very distinctness of the categories. This theory of New Materialism, which is the most common name given to this movement (Connolly, 2013), not only states that discursive and material elements do not exist independently from each other, but furthermore, “it puts in question other social theory dualisms including culture/nature, structure/agency, reason/emotion, human/non-human, animate/inanimate, inside/outside, and perhaps most importantly, mind/matter (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 4–5; Coole & Frost, 2010, pp. 26–27; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010, p. 157)” (N.J. Fox & Alldred, 2014) and can thus be seen as a rather radical departure from our most basic mental categorizations of the world. In this conference paper by Fox and Alldred, the approach is aptly summarized as follows:

“This approach is predicated upon three propositions: that we should look not at what entities are, but at their material effects -- what they do (Braidotti, 2000, p. 159; Buchanan, 1997, p. 74); that all matter has an ‘agential’ capacity to affect, rather than being merely the inert clay moulded by human agency, consciousness and imagination (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 2); and that this focus on the materiality of effects (rather than things) allows thoughts, desires, ideas and abstractions to be considered alongside the ‘hard’ matter of bodies and things (van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010, p. 166)” (N.J. Fox & Alldred, 2014).

Having shortly elaborated this ‘turn to materiality’, I now focus on its use in this research. While New Materialism is not the overall guiding approach of this research, as the main guiding force in the (de)construction of legitimacy in yoga tourism is still seen as the discursive, I find common ground with the above-mentioned approaches in their assertion that discourse is always in a state of being materially enacted in practice in a specific time and place. ‘The discursive’ can thus manifest in ‘the material’ in interesting and complex ways and that materiality again can impact the discursive. Relating this idea to the context of yoga tourism, the construction of yogic legitimacy is thus seen as a largely social process involving socially constructed and culturally embedded values and norms, but also including material manifestations of discourse that significantly impact the process. Material elements such as scale, place, institutions and material conditions and goods also play an important part in the construction of legitimacy, beyond the discursive values, norms and beliefs of actors.

Thus wherever most relevant, these material aspects of yogic legitimacy, as they emerged from the data, are referenced throughout analysis chapters 5-7. As the main theoretical and methodological focus of this research remains on the discursive, analysis chapters 6 and 7 are organized by the two main groups of actors involved in legitimacy construction: the locals and the tourists, or those generally doing the “selling” of yoga tourism and those doing the “consuming”, whereby material manifestation of the discursive is in the background highlighted throughout the chapters. In the conclusion/discussion of

chapter 8 I reflect back on the usefulness of taking these aspects of New Materialism on board in this research.

4 Methodology

This section contains the methodological underpinning of this research and its justification in relation to the research questions and objective.

4.1 Research Design – Qualitative Case Study

For the purpose of answering the main research question, a qualitative case study was deemed most appropriate as this “provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomena within their contexts” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). This case study can be characterized as “instrumental” (Stake, 1995) as the aim of this research is to increase our understanding of how legitimacy around the commercialization of a globalized intangible heritage becomes (de)constructed in the context tourism to a specific local destination. The case of yoga tourism to Rishikesh, India’s “Yoga Capital of the World”, provides a supporting role in this objective. Because it represents a case of intangible heritage that has become globally mainstream to a rather “extreme” extent, this case likely provides more and richer information on the phenomenon than a less extreme case of globalized intangible heritage tourism such as for instance flamenco tourism to Spain (Flyvbjerg, 2016).

Rishikesh, in the Northern state of Uttarakhand, has been chosen as the location because of a variety of practical as well as theoretical reasons. Most importantly is its popularity as a yoga tourist destination and its title as the “Yoga Capital of the World”, as well as being home to the organization of the International Yoga Festival. Additionally, its accessibility from the capital of New Delhi and the fact



Figure 1 The location of Rishikesh (maps.google.com)

that I have been there on a previous trip, provided great practical benefits. A total of one month was spent in the field. Figure 1 shows the location of Rishikesh on a map of India.

4.2 Methods of Data Collection

An important part of any case study approach is to collect data from multiple sources and/or multiple data types, in order to achieve construct validity (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 1994). This data from multiple sources is then jointly analysed as if each data type provides one piece of the “puzzle”, rather than treated as individual pieces of information (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554). Three methods were considered most suitable for this study – informal/semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation, and auto-ethnographic observations – as the combination of data gathered through these three methods was expected to provide enough pieces of the puzzle to get a detailed understanding of how yogic legitimacy becomes (de)constructed by those involved in yoga tourism. However, I do not wish to create the misconception that through this triangulation a fully complete picture of the complex reality can emerge, but rather the goal is to get a better understanding of this complex reality (Boeije, 't Hart, & Hox, 2009).

These three methods were chosen based on their consistency with the theoretical/ontological understandings as previously discussed in chapter 3. The interviews form the main source of data from which locals' and tourists' values, beliefs and understandings about yoga were uncovered, as well as the discursive elements involved in their (de)construction of yogic legitimacy. The photo-elicitation served to incorporate more of the physical world of yoga into the discussion, by priming the interviewees to think about the body and bodily norms and values around yoga, different scales in time and place and the institutionalization of yoga. More on their specific use can be found in subsection 4.2.2 and appendix I. Lastly the auto-ethnographic observations added to the data by providing a critical reflection on the (discursive *and* material) process of legitimacy construction, particularly from the point of view of a tourist, as well as increase reliability in the interviews (Harper, 2002). Where relevant, some personal pictures from the auto-ethnographic observations are included in chapters 5-7.

The particular implementation of these methods remained somewhat flexible during fieldwork, – particularly as it related to the amount and ratio of informal and semi-structured interviews, the use of pictures as elicitation in the interviews and the set-up of the interview guide –, following the recommendation to be methodically flexible in the case of doing research abroad or in the Global South specifically (Desai et al., 2008). After the first two pilot interviews (one with a tourist and one with a local), the interview-guide was evaluated and adjusted where necessary – a process that occurred at a few points throughout the fieldwork. In the following sub-sections I go over these methods one by one.

4.2.1 Informal and semi-structured interviews

A combination of informal and semi-structured interviews were used. Informal interviews were implemented particularly in the beginning of the fieldwork, as these allowed me to “settle in” and “build

rapport”, but also sporadically throughout the fieldwork to explore “new topics of interest that might have been overlooked” (Bernard, 2011, p. 156). Semi-structured interviews were held with selected research participants that fit into the groups of interest. The particular group of locals that were interesting for this research were those involved in the yoga tourism industry either directly (e.g. yoga teacher, yoga school owner) or indirectly (e.g. doing work at these facilities unrelated to yoga or at organizations outside of the industry working to deconstruct its legitimacy). The initial informal interviews thus also served to locate these actors of interest. Once one or two respondents were located who fit this description, snowball and convenience sampling was used to get into contact with other respondents. The particular group of tourists I was interested in were those who held yoga as one of their main motivations for travelling to Rishikesh, with a roughly equal division between tourists who had an open itinerary and tourists who came for a pre-booked yoga course or yoga teacher training of a few weeks to a few months.

The interviews followed a general script and covered the list of topics as described in the interview guide, but at the same time held a lot of space for the individual expression of relevant topics. In qualitative interviews, the researcher can be seen as “wandering along” with the respondents, “asking questions that lead subjects to tell their own stories of the lived world”, whereby the person being travelled with is more important than the particular route to follow (Kvale, 1996, p. 4 in Warren, 2001, p. 86). Therefore the interview guide must be seen as a mere guide, rather than strict script. “There is growing evidence that 10-20 knowledgeable people are enough to uncover and understand the core categories in any well-defined cultural domain or study of lived experience” (Bernard, 2011, p. 154), and using this guideline I interviewed 9 tourists and 15 locals. The aim was to interview more locals, as the other method of auto ethnographic observations was already from the point of view of me, a Western yoga tourist and researcher – as further elaborated in section 4.2.3.

With permission of the interviewee, the interviews were recorded on a mobile phone and additional notes about the interview were made by hand. For initiating the informal and semi-structured interviews as well as for translating if the situation requires it, I had the help of an Indian friend who was also Rishikesh during the time of my research. Having this “local guide” helped to build rapport with the locals, and in negotiating my way through issues relating to the cultural difference between researcher and research participant as further discussed in the section on positionality (section 4.4) and reflected back on in the conclusion/discussion (chapter 8).

4.2.2 Photo-elicitation

The semi-structured interviews were combined with the method of photo-elicitation, which is a powerful method that uses the visual to access sensory experiences. Burns & Lester (2005, p. 50) recommend tourism scholars to make use of this visual method as to not undermine a “potentially rich seam of evidence that can inform our understanding of tourism as a social construct”, and Orobítz-Canal

(2004, p. 38) suggests “both photographic content and the narratives photographs evoke, offer [...] routes to knowledges that cannot be achieved by verbal communication”. Scarles (2010, p. 908) has summarized the benefits of including photo-elicitation in interview settings as follows:

“Visuals facilitate rapport, provide security and comfort as respondents reach out, touch or hold the photographs around which conversations develop. They trigger and sharpen respondents’ memories and recollections (Cronin & Gale, 1996), facilitate the articulation of ideas and build bridges between the conscious and unconscious as knowledges are retrieved (Harper, 2002).”

Using pictures in interviews can also help to stimulate involvement of the participant in the interview, by creating more enthusiasm to share their story (Harper, 2002). The interview data that arises from discussing photographs thus adds a different layer to the interview, by virtue of photo’s evoking particular information, feelings and memories (Harper, 2002).

A total of six pictures were brought to the interview setting, which were meant to facilitate the discussion on the main topics as described in the interview guide. The pictures were particularly helpful for facilitating the discussion around the first sub-question (“How is yoga understood or practised differently by the different actors involved in constructing yogic legitimacy in Rishikesh?”), by nudging the respondent to share more about their understanding of yoga in relation to (among other things) the body and bodily norms and values around yoga, different scales in time and place and the institutionalization of yoga. The pictures that were selected for this research can be found in figure 2. Each of the pictures was selected with a particular aim in mind, and was found through search engines Bing and Google.

Picture 1 and 2 represent recently invented ways of practising physical postural yoga and were meant to facilitate the discussion on the participants’ values and beliefs on the “Westernisation” and “commercialization” of yoga. Picture 3 was shared in relation to the discussion on possible conflicts between Western and Eastern styles of teaching yoga and the International Yoga Festival more broadly. Picture 4 represents Indians practising yoga, and functions to facilitate the discussion on different places and material conditions of practising yoga, as well as to reflect on what yoga may mean for themselves or the *other* by comparing it to for instance images 1, 2 and 4. Picture 5 is highly relevant in relation to discussion on yoga as India’s heritage and the governmental promotion of yoga, as it shows Prime Minister Modi practising yoga on International Yoga Day (a day that his government initiated). Finally picture 6 takes the interviewee back in time to around 1950. According to Berger (1992, p. 193 in Harper, 2002, p.13), “black-and-white photography is paradoxically more evocative than colour photography. It stimulates a faster onrush of memories because less has been given, more has been left out”. Going back in time by showing pictures of the past also importantly “breaks the frame” of yoga images that we are used to seeing today, thus evoking “aspects of the past” in respondents reflection on their evolution and

current conditions (Harper, 2002, p. 20). Of course the interview process of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, so these images were introduced in or left out of the conversation wherever deemed more appropriate.



Picture 1 Paddle-board Yoga



Picture 4 Indian children practising yoga



Picture 2 Glow in the dark yoga party



Picture 5 Indian Prime Minister Modi practising yoga with a New Delhi crowd on International Yoga Day



Picture 3 Shiva Rea, Western yoga teacher accused of making a "spectacle" of yoga at IYF 2011



Picture 6 Pattabhi Jois, developer of Ashtanga Yoga, demonstrating a yoga posture around 1950

Figure 2 The pictures used for photo-elicitation

4.2.3 Auto-ethnographic observations

In addition to the interviews and photo-elicitation, I participated in yoga tourism as a tourist by taking multiple yoga classes at different facilities and generally having a touristic experience in Rishikesh for the duration of a month. I noted down my experiences and reflections in a diary format in an aim to uncover the subtleties of legitimacy construction by tourists specifically. Here, the definition

of *analytic auto-ethnography* by Anderson (2006, p. 373) was followed, “in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena”. This method can very well be combined with more traditional ethnographic practices such as interviewing (Anderson, 2006). It is my own deep involvement in yoga that has led me to this research topic in the first place. As an active yoga student, I practise almost every day, both in-class at the university gym and at home on my own mat. If not for this research, I would still be highly motivated to travel to India to practise yoga in Rishikesh and for instance be a part of the International Yoga Festival. This makes auto-ethnography a particularly useful method, considering that “in contrast to the detached-outsider characteristic of colonial anthropologists, contemporary anthropologists would frequently be full members of the cultures they studied” (Anderson, 2006). As such, “the researcher’s own feelings and experiences are incorporated into the story and considered as vital data for understanding the social world being observed” (Anderson, 2006).

During my time in Rishikesh I stayed in three different hotels, one of which also served as a full-time yoga retreat and the other two offered drop-in yoga classes on the side for guests and outsiders. I participated in yoga classes at these hotels as well as at other locations that offer yoga classes. Besides yoga activities, I engaged in other regular touristic activities such as eating at local diners, walking around the city, taking photographs etc. – all within the main tourist areas of Rishikesh as identified in Figure 3. Of course, these activities were alternated with the other methods of this research which took me out of the role as tourist and back to the role of the researcher. As such, auto-ethnographic observations cannot be neatly separated from the other methods; what I learned through interviews and photo-elicitation has influenced how I experienced yoga tourism and vice versa. This thus required a reflexive approach to diary writing where I reflected openly on the changes in my beliefs, behaviour and attitude as the research progresses (Anderson, 2006).

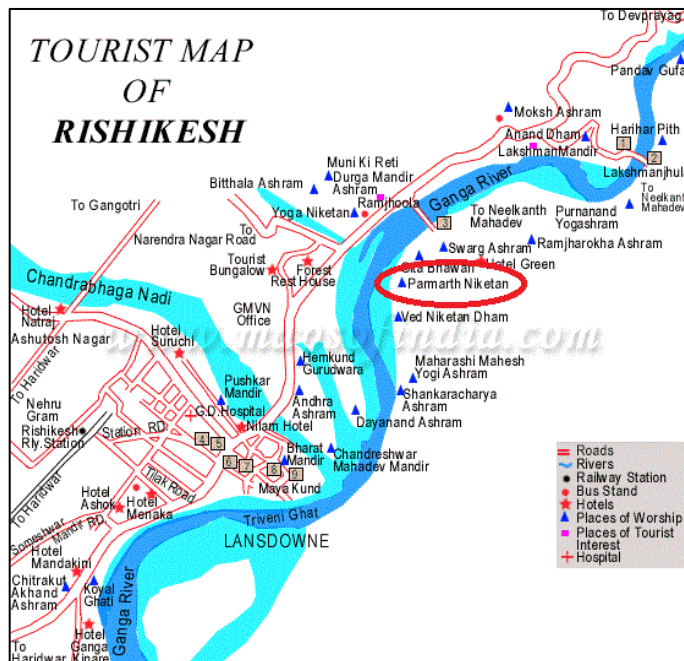


Figure 3 Tourist map of Rishikesh. Location of IYF (Parmarth Niketan) is circled in red (www.mapsofindia.com)

4.3 Interview Transcription and Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis were not separate activities, but rather intertwined from the beginning of the data collection through a reflexive attitude at the research direction and interview contents. The transcription of interviews with locals who only spoke Hindi took place while still in the field, so I had the help of a translator nearby to ensure the most accurate transcription. The interviews that took place in English, which were the majority, were transcribed upon return.

I follow Poland's (2001) critique of the (naturalistic) idea that the translation of social reality to audiotape and subsequently to text is unproblematic. In this process of translation into a text many subtleties and different meanings do get lost. For this reason I wrote down comments during and after the interview which focussed on “body language, facial expressions, eye gazes, nods, smiles or frowns, the physical setting, the ways participants are dressed, and other factors affecting the tone of the interview” (Poland, 2002).

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used for the analysis of the collected data (both interview transcripts and auto ethnographic notes). CAQDAS' have many benefits, such as reducing the amount of time the researcher spends on clerical work, and most notably it encourages rigor in the analysis (Seale, 2002). Their main downside – they remove the researcher from the data – was overcome by doing the transcriptions myself rather than hiring transcribers, thus ensuring a close connection with the data. The interview data was combined with data from auto-ethnographic observations, and this data was coded both deductively and inductively until certain themes emerged.

Particular sections of transcribed interview data that stood out as lengthy personal stories (“narratives”) were analysed performatively. “A story involves storytelling, which is a reciprocal event between a teller and an audience. When we tell stories about our lives we perform our (preferred) identities” (Langellier, 2001 in Riessman, 2001, p. 701). A relevant point of entry here is the “social positioning in stories – how narrators choose to position audiences, characters, and themselves” (Riessman, 2002). This reveals certain power relations, as it focusses on how the narrator positions themselves and others as either victims in certain cases, or as active agents able to control events and actively initiate action (p. 702). The data analysis thus focussed on uncovering the discursive elements involved in the (de)construction of yogic legitimacy, while also paying attention to how these discursive elements engage with the material in important ways (as discussed in section 3.2).

The data analysis led to certain findings and conclusions (which follow in subsequent chapters), that are not meant to be generalised to a bigger population in a statistical sense. Rather, through the use of rigorous methods, the conclusions increase our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon and this can be called theoretical generalizability (Boeije et al., 2009). A few times throughout the fieldwork the principle of member validation was implemented, by discussing preliminary interpretations of the data with the participants (Boeije et al., 2009; Poland, 2002), but this depended on the willingness of participants to invest additional time. It also must be noted that the specific focus of this research changed shortly after my return from the field and thus not all of the new interpretations could be discussed with participants.

4.4 Reflections on Positionality

Maoz (2006, p. 234) rightfully claimed that “more studies about the locals’ view of tourists [...] are [...] needed. Preferably, the researcher would be a resident of a Third World country”. Me being a researcher from the West doing research on both locals and tourists in India indeed brings with it some issues that deserve reflection throughout the entire research process, from data gathering to analysis and beyond. Having previously travelled through India, I understand very well the importance of considering the “researchers body”. Being a Westerner, particularly a tall female with long blonde hair, tends to draw a lot of superficial interest from onlookers, but at the same time difficulties in getting others to open up about deeper issues. Learning from other researchers in this case has been very helpful, for instance in getting locals to open up about their true feelings:

“On some occasions the Indians were reluctant to disparage the Israelis and to reveal their real feelings towards them or to talk of their own staging techniques. It was only after the author gave her word that their stories would not be told to other Israelis and that they would all remain anonymous that they agreed to open up. Most of them did not agree to be taped; the other interviews were taped and transcribed” (Maoz, 2006, p. 226).

Indeed, in the field it became clear that it was extremely important to build trust by assuring the participants that all research data would be handled with care and anonymity was guaranteed. I also built

rapport through dressing gender and culturally-appropriate, utilizing the little bit of Hindi that I know, and through the help of my Indian friend who served as an interpreter. For safety purposes, all interviews were held in a public place (e.g. restaurants or cafés) and during the daytime.

When doing fieldwork in the Global South as a Western researcher, it is important to consider the economic inequality and possible power differentials between researcher and research participant (Desai et al., 2008). I followed Bernard's (2011) advice to pay informants for their time in the case that they agree to a semi-structured interview. Informal interviews were not compensated with any payment, as the very nature of such an interview is random, unplanned and does not require the person to know they are part of a research (Bernard, 2011). Paying participants for their time of course has benefits as well as downsides. On the one hand it is fair to pay informants for their contribution, especially when engaging the locals who are not on holiday and need their time to make money. Providing some monetary compensation for participants' time also increases the incentive to participate. On the other hand, it runs the risk of creating a situation where research participants give socially desirable answers, as they might shift from being intrinsically to externally motivated to participate in the research. Judging these concerns in the case of this particular research, I concluded that a small payment for participation was justified. Because the tourists are in Rishikesh in their free time, while locals could be spending their time making a living, I only compensated the locals for their time. For the particular appropriate amount I relied in part on the judgement of my local interpreter, as they varied depending on the context and the amount of time taken for the interview. For instance it was acknowledged that it is more appropriate to compensate a working class person for their time than a wealthy hotel owner (Madden, 2010). For a list of all interviewees including the data on whom I paid and which amount can be found in appendix II.

All participants were sufficiently informed at the start of the interview about the research purpose, myself (the researcher) and the role of the Indian interpreter, and what would be done with collected the data, in order to insure informed consent (Desai et al., 2008). It was considered important to openly communicate about the expected outcome of the research, specifically about who was expected to benefit. I clarified that it was unrealistic to expect that this rather short-term research for the purpose of my MSc thesis would impact on-the-ground reality, in order to avoid creating unrealistic expectations of possible positive impacts. Considering that the (local) participants do not otherwise benefit from contributing to this research with their time and effort was seen as another reason why a financial compensation would be ethically preferable.

The reflection on positionality in this research is not limited to what is written in this section, but was a constant in the entire research process including data analysis. It is important to recognize that “any one representation of an ‘other’ is just that; only one way of seeing things; this attitude comes from the idea that truth is partial, not absolute” (Madden, 2010, p. 22). Because I, the researcher, am the

primary tool of research in this ethnographic study, and I, just like the groups I study, come with histories and socialization, it is essential to acknowledge my influence on the research and representation (p. 22-23). Of particular importance here is avoiding the issue of appropriation, which Said (1978) has defined as a dominant group sustaining a particular hegemonic view of the “Other” (“colonised”) through textual authority. According to Opie (1992) even feminist scholars who aim to provide a voice for the suppressed run the risk of appropriating the other by getting lost in ideology and not properly representing the diversity of voices present in a complex reality. Therefore, the focus of this research was to recognize a variety of different and competing voices, while “continually re-examining the extent to which [my] ideology contributes to a failure to see beyond it” (Opie, 1992). The reflexive auto-ethnographic notes assisted a great deal in this regard.

5 Different Understandings of Yoga

As identified by Lawrence et al. (1997, p. 310), different stakeholders hold different evaluative frameworks or sets of expectations that are applied “to their understandings of the activities of the company or industry” in order to judge legitimacy. Therefore it is important to first get a better understanding of how yoga is understood differently by the different actors involved in constructing yogic legitimacy in Rishikesh. This thus goes beyond a focus on the actors involved in yoga tourism, as there are those who consider themselves outside of the tourism industry who actively deconstruct the yogic legitimacy of others and the legitimacy of its commercialization.

Understandings on what yoga entails and how it should be practised vary greatly between the yoga actors in Rishikesh, as is shown in the summary of different evaluative frameworks found in this research in Table 1. This list is not exhaustive nor are the items mutually exclusive, but they do represent some of the main evaluative frameworks held by those involved in yoga tourism. They were identified from the empirical data by focussing on Suchman’s (1995) definition of legitimacy, thus these 5 ways of framing yoga represent main systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions present around yoga that serve to judge whether actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate (i.e. construct legitimacy). Interestingly, a multitude of interpretations around yoga cannot just be found between individuals, but oftentimes one individual will hold multiple of these evaluative frameworks even if they seem to be at conflict with each other at face value. More on this tension follows in subsequent chapters.

Table 1 Different meanings of yoga

Evaluative Framework:	Elaboration of Framework:	Held mostly by:
Yoga and Science	Yoga as an ancient science that modern (Western) science has yet to fully catch up with, including proven methods of how to attain liberation. As such it is an important and vast subject with strong connections to Ayurveda, meditation, Tantra and more, which one cannot master even after many (“40+”) years of intense dedicated study.	The bigger and more well-known local ashrams and yoga teachers who consider themselves to be in the category of the more “serious” yoga teachers of Rishikesh.
Yoga and Spirituality	Yoga as a spiritual exercise which is both outside of religion and the merely physical realm, as it connects you to the greater consciousness. Yoga as “selfless service”, something that by its definition cannot be commodified. Often linked to the idea that modern day postural yoga is rather far removed from its spiritual essence.	Local yoga/meditation gurus and ashrams who are outside the yoga tourism industry and who tend to deconstruct the legitimacy of selling yoga as a product from their outsider position. Some yoga teachers and tourists also draw on general ideas of yoga relating to spirituality but do not

		extend this to the same conclusion that yoga cannot be sold.
Yoga and Bodily Exercise	Yoga as a form of physical exercise that requires discipline and is good for both body and mind. Often linked to the idea that different modern interpretations of yoga (e.g. “goat yoga”, “beer yoga”) also each have their purpose for attracting people to do yoga.	Managers and employees of local enterprises and ashrams that offer yoga courses in which bodily exercise play a large role. Also popular amongst yoga tourists, specifically yoga teacher training (YTT) students.
Yoga and Money	Yoga as an opportunity to profit from increasing tourism to Rishikesh. People who view it as such have for instance opened yoga related enterprises or became a yoga teacher after noticing the increased influx of tourists in Rishikesh from which they want to profit.	Common among local entrepreneurs and employees who are (in)directly involved in yoga tourism in Rishikesh. Also asserted by tourists who plan to incorporate yoga into their professional lives back home.
Yoga and the Status of Tourists	Yoga as a status symbol by virtue of it being mostly an activity for <i>tourists</i> ; something “others” (foreigners) do. It is here seen as only attainable for people with sufficient time, money and access to a proper teacher which many locals do not. Also linked to the idea that who (‘whose bodies’) participates in yoga classes must be monitored (i.e. Indians are excluded).	Closely related to the previous evaluative framework, it is mostly held by the general public of Rishikesh and lower-end workers in the tourism industry, as well as some local yoga entrepreneurs and their employees.

These different frameworks form the basis on which legitimacy of selling yoga becomes (de)constructed, and as serve as a springboard for chapter 6 and 7. In these chapters I will refer back to these frameworks, to explain the role that these different and at times multiple interpretations of yoga have in the (de)construction of yogic legitimacy. I now go over them one by one in more detail.

5.1 Yoga and Science

In many interviews with yoga teachers echoed the idea that yoga is an ancient Indian science and should be taken seriously as such. The idea here is that ancient yogis have already discovered deep truths about the benefits and techniques of yoga that modern science is only now slowly catching up to, for instance the health benefits of meditation (e.g. Rosenzweig et al., 2010) and hatha yoga (e.g. Ross & Thomas, 2010) and the positive force of sound vibrations or chanting “Om” (Telles, Nagarathna, & Nagendra, 1995). This perspective represents a shift in thinking from the dominant framework in the West, – which is that ‘our’ scientific methods are at the front runner of new knowledge – to the

perspective that a lot of true knowledge has long been discovered by saints, sages and yogis and ‘we’ are only now slowly getting back to it.

The following two rather lengthy quotes from two different Indian yoga teachers in Rishikesh provide more insight into this perspective. The first provides an elaboration of a male yoga teacher’s (49) understanding of yoga as the science of how to attain liberation. The second is the perspective of a female yoga teacher (30) on how modern science is catching up and through (albeit limited) equipment is able to prove the benefits of yoga.

“This technology is Indian technology of yoga and tantra. Putting it in scientific way, analogical way. This is the science; liberation, nirvana, amadhi, moksha, the name changes with different people, but actually the science is this. [...] When the gravitational force on the body becomes zero, that is asanas [yoga postures], it doesn’t matter how you are hanging yourself. No posture is the point, point is that gravitational force becomes zero. The moment gravitational force becomes zero, a vacuum is created. The moment a vacuum is created, according to the law of nature, all the energy will rush towards that. Because you created a vacuum, you know, a tornado comes.”

&

“Still science is working, now they are coming to that point. [...] In this era people are maybe not, they are not on that level, so they can prove, like they see the levitation or they open their third eye, and they prove you. The level is not that kind of. But thank god to science, to their equipment, now they are helping. They are trying to measure, they are trying to examine the things. So few things are proven, [...] like when you are in a deep meditation, they can prove whether you are in meditation or you are thinking or you are sleeping. Because of the science they can prove. So still they are working, they have to work hard [laughs]. So nobody can make you fool, in the name of yoga.”

Yoga here is seen as a scientific method of attaining liberation, which includes a variety of different techniques that have been revealed over many years by different gurus or yogis, and modern science is slowly working to prove its benefits. As such it is a vast subject with strong connections to other longstanding Indian traditions such as Ayurveda, meditation, Tantra and more, which one cannot master even after many (“40+”) years of intense dedicated study. The narrative here is that whenever one goes deeper into any particular subject of yoga, one discovers that there is still more to learn and as a result one can spend her/his whole life studying yoga and still not know everything there is to know. The human body and the material measurability of the effects of yoga on its wellness and spiritual liberation, play an important role in this framework. Some yoga teachers in Rishikesh for instance practise their own semi-scientific research on yoga, for instance on “yoga and anti-aging”. Based on the results of their own research, they create different curriculums for yoga students to come study and specialize in for instance these rejuvenation techniques.

Because of this idea that yoga is a vast and ancient science that one can spend their entire life studying without fully mastering the subject, people who hold this framework often actively criticise the current popularity of the term “yogi”. As the manager of a local high-end hotel which also offers yoga

courses shared with me: *“I have been practising every day for 20 years, and I still would not consider myself a yogi. I am a small man in this subject, but it is a very vast subject”*. And similarly, the more cynical meditation guru: *“these days, people grow their hair and call themselves yogi [laughs]”*. A yogi, in the traditional Indian sense of the word, refers mostly to men who live a life withdrawn from family and everyday society to live a life of spiritual devotion in the “caves” or the “mountains”. Traditionally therefore, Indian parents are very wary when their sons (or daughters) develop an interest in yoga. Only recently, through interaction with the West, has Indian society started to see that yoga is not just for the few devotees and has there been a revival of interest in the subject of yoga by Indians. However, the idea that someone can simply practise physical postural yoga and call themselves a yogi (as many Western/American yoga students like to refer to themselves as) is still very foreign to the mind of many Indian yoga teachers. Many local yoga teachers rather think the popularity of this term, and related terms like “yoga”, “meditation” and “tantra” are based on misconceptions which are the result of the terms having become so mainstream:

“There are misunderstanding upon misunderstanding in this world about this phenomenon. The moment a word becomes generalized it loses all its meaning. [...] So this words of yoga, tantra, awareness, god, love, they have all lost their meanings. They exist in the common denominator of the person, which layman are using without understanding anything.” (Male local yoga teacher, 49).

This perspective has significant consequences for the construction of yogic legitimacy of those who commercialize yoga in yoga tourism. If yoga is such a vast subject which cannot be mastered even by someone practising and studying yoga for over 40 years, how can one rightly sell a yoga experience to a tourist, let alone promise to make someone a yoga teacher within a course of a few weeks? This is an issue I get back to in chapter 6.

5.2 Yoga and Spirituality

This evaluative framework sees yoga as fundamentally a spiritual practise, pointing to a broader interpretation of yoga beyond hatha yoga (physical postural yoga) to include for instance the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali. There are many different ‘limbs’ or parts of yoga that together make up a person’s spiritual journey towards enlightenment. With this definition or understanding of yoga, many more people practise yoga than those who do physical postural yoga, and one may even be a yogi without ever stepping on a mat. An example of these different limbs of yoga is bhakti yoga, the path of pilgrimage or devotion to a spiritual god, which was brought up by one local yoga teacher (31) in response to my question if many Indians practise yoga:

“Indians they do different yoga. Bhakti yoga. They all do bhakti yoga doing, pilgrimage. You know bhakti yoga? They all do pilgrimage. They coming here, to do their own. Maybe physically they are not doing much, but they are coming here for bhakti yoga, they walked, bare feet. They

put lot of money, and they are not so rich people as well. They coming, so hot, in the busses. That is also practise.”

Often this framework is linked to the idea that modern day postural yoga is rather far removed from its spiritual essence, or even cannot rightfully be called yoga anymore but rather is the sort of physical performance that belongs in a “circus” as it is all for show rather than for spirituality. Getting your body in an uncomfortable position or “standing on your head”, as they see yoga having become, is not considered as having anything to do with spirituality, but rather is like gymnastics. Following this broader view of yoga, one can be extremely flexible and manage to do all the poses perfectly, but that still does not mean one has any real understanding of yoga or is on a spiritual path.

In this evaluative framework, “yoga” and “tourism” are two fundamentally different activities, with fundamentally different motivations, and by combining them the essence of the more serious activity of the two (yoga) becomes lost. For what turned out to be one of the more bizarre interviews I held in Rishikesh, I approached the general secretary of an old ashram in Rishikesh, which I had heard was one of the few places where locals go to practise yoga. When I sat down and started introducing the purpose of my research, the general secretary was least bit impressed; he could not understand what I wanted to know from him and he thought that the idea of studying yoga tourism was absurd and a waste of time:

“Yoga and tourism cannot be combined. Yoga is an inner science, tourism is for outside entertainment. Yoga is for eternity while tourism is temporary. [...] You cannot combine mango and salt. Then you can combine anything with anything”.

What this quote illustrates is plural. Firstly it shows that in this framework the very existence of such a thing as “yoga tourism” is denied, as any commercialization of yoga is illegitimate and can only be the making of someone who does not understand the essence *true* yoga. Secondly, it illustrates the close link between this framework and the previous, “yoga and science”. Both are very similar in their views and norms around yoga, but because their departure point in the argument around the construction of legitimacy (as follows in chapters 6 and 7) slightly vary they are explained separately in this chapter.

The general secretary further explained that the purpose of yoga is selfless service, and that is materially enacted by this ashram as such; the only physical postural yoga this ashram offers are not open to outsiders (“how can people who come here for 1-2 days learn yoga?”) and is only available for men (because “we do not have a female teacher”). Out of this definition of yoga as selfless service, the ashram furthermore is connected to a free medical centre which offers medical assistance to those in need. What yoga has become in Rishikesh – a commodity sold for profit – is thus not recognized as yoga but rather seen as mere commerce, and similarly the idea of Rishikesh being the “Yoga Capital of the World” is seen as a marketing gimmick. Those who uphold this evaluative framework are generally of the opinion that only serious spiritual seekers can get something out of their visit to Rishikesh, while

those without a vision get lost in all of its commercial distractions and never get close to understanding what yoga really is about.

The people I spoke with who uphold this evaluative framework generally were very frustrated with the direction Rishikesh is headed in. A further discussion on the current and future challenges of Rishikesh as well as recommendations in relation to the sustainability of this future can be found in section 8.1.

5.3 Yoga and Bodily Exercise

Yoga is also popularly seen as a form of physical exercise which is healthy for both mind and body, although this framework rarely stands on its own; nobody I spoke to solely framed yoga as a form of exercise without at least some understanding of yoga having spiritual roots. Rather, in this framework the physical activity of yoga with very real physical and mental personal benefits takes the front seat. As aptly summarized in the words of a local manager of a yoga hotel and restaurant (71):

“Basically people take it as spiritual, it is not spiritual. [...] It takes care of dementia, Alzheimer, and all this. And there is the ‘ooohmmmm’, people say it is spiritual. It is, ok they can take it that way, but it is an exercise.”

This quote illustrates how in this framework, the bodily exercise is seen as the primary essence of yoga and yoga’s benefits, although it is acknowledged that people can experience it as spiritual as well. It is this understanding of yoga that is also common among foreign yoga tourists in Rishikesh. Many of them come to Rishikesh to learn what Indian hatha yoga is like, perhaps with a desire to also learn more about the philosophical underpinnings but with a focus on the physical practise of postures. A Canadian tourist (30) taking a two-week yoga course for instance shared with me her thoughts on the morning yoga class, which consisted more of chanting mantras than the early morning exercise she was used to back home:

“Like I even noticed in class this morning, I was like man I gained a few pounds, like I want to lose a little bit of weight here, let’s do something a little bit more vigorous, you know?”

As such, from this point of reference, modern interpretations of yoga where the postures are placed in a new setting (e.g. on a paddleboard, on a farm etc.), are not seen as necessarily a bad thing. Admittedly, they are highly Westernized interpretations, but the idea here is that they can still bring the practitioner a lot of the same physical and mental benefits as a more traditional yoga practise. These Westernized forms of yoga are seen to have value in their own right, because they keep the world interested in yoga and can be a gateway to more original forms of yoga. Yoga is thus seen more as a *technique* of bodily exercise, which can bring benefits even if the specific form of the technique is constantly altered and updated. This is illustrated in the following answer by a female manager of a yoga retreat hotel to my question about what she thought of new Western interpretations of yoga:

“This is very good, because if you were to every day, because this is the human mentality, they don’t want to repeat and repeat anything and they get bored. Every time if three or four or five

times they doing they get bored. If every time they doing new, they are very excited to do it. And it is good to have every time some new techniques.” (Female manager of a yoga retreat hotel, 48)

It is not difficult to see how such a view of yoga as a technique of bodily exercise, which benefits from constant updating and rebranding for keeping people interested in yoga, lends itself for combining yoga into a tourism product.

5.4 Yoga and Money

Yoga is often seen as a money-making opportunity, both by the locals of Rishikesh, who recognize the increasing need for yoga teachers and yoga schools through tourism, and yoga tourists who come to Rishikesh to do a multiple-week “yoga teacher training” (YTT) that certifies them to take up yoga as a profession in their home country. This does not necessarily mean that their interest in yoga is solely determined by its commercial potential; many yoga teachers I spoke with defended charging money for their yoga classes (“I have a family to take care of”), while emphasizing that there is a clear distinction between the genuine yoga teachers of Rishikesh (like themselves) and those who are solely in it for the money. The stories about Indian yoga teachers giving classes to tourists without any formal education in yoga, perhaps having learned some yoga from YouTube or none at all, are not uncommon. One of such rumours was shared with me by an Indian yoga teacher (35), himself owner of his own yoga school:

“There is one yoga teacher training, many people are coming for yoga teacher training. He never did yoga, he is MBA guy. He did MBA in Australia. [...] He is MBA, he know how to organize, he know how to organize things, he know what to sell, he know what to do. Now he is teaching classes. [...] He has just one MBA from Australia, and he never practised himself. He never practised. So he, if he never practised, how you can teach asanas? How you can tell people to do postures? How you can tell people to follow yogic life? It is fake. Maybe he is earning a lot of money, but that is not right.”

It is often recognized by those within the yoga tourism industry that making money from yoga requires a delicate balance and can be done in both appropriate and inappropriate ways. “Selling yoga” here is not seen as a contradiction in terms as by those who view yoga as selfless service, but it still requires the teacher to have genuine motives and intentions, as well as a genuine background in yoga, rather than being just money oriented.

Yoga's money-making potential is recognized not just by those directly selling yoga classes and courses, but also by a wider range of entrepreneurs who sell related products such as yoga clothes and yoga books. Out of the few owners of such shops that I spoke with, all of them considered it as just their job ("this is just a job, I do not have any knowledge about yoga"), reacting a bit shy and reluctant to be interviewed about their own relationship with yoga. Figure 4 shows an interesting example of such a shop; on its exterior is a picture of a nearly naked Shiva Rea practising a yoga pose (the American yoga teacher at the centre of the 2011 International Yoga Festival controversy). Rather than being shooed for making a spectacle of yoga, here the picture of a half-naked Western female practising yoga is displayed in one of the bigger shopping streets of Rishikesh for the purpose of increasing business in the bookshop. As such, it is a very visible material manifestation of this discourse.



Figure 4 A half-naked Shiva Rae on the front of a yoga bookshop in Rishikesh (personal picture)

Interesting about this kind of discourse is that there is a lack of critical delineation of what yoga truly entails or how it should be practised. Because the motivation of money takes the foreground, the discourse here is that yoga can almost be combined with anything; as figure 4 illustrates, yoga is seen as something closely related to Ayurveda, Hinduism, Buddhism, chakras, but also with the sexualized (Western) female body and the purchasing of differently coloured yoga mats in the highly commercial setting of a shopping street.

5.5 Yoga and the Status of Tourists

This strong link between yoga and money is also dominant in the minds of much of the general public of Rishikesh and many lower-end workers within and outside of the tourist industry, leading many to consider yoga as a sort of status symbol. In the minds of many of the general public in Rishikesh, yoga has become seen as an *activity for tourists*; something tourists come to Rishikesh to try out or experience as part of the itinerary that Rishikesh has to offer tourists, alongside for instance river rafting on the Ganga or swimming by the waterfalls. This idea that yoga is an activity for tourists (only) or those

with excess money and time, leads to yoga being seen as something unattainable from the point of view of many locals. It is something they wish were able to do but because socio-economic status and family obligations simply do not have the time and money to do. One of the employees of a yoga retreat hotel, whose job consisted mostly of cleaning and carrying the guests' luggage, shared with me that he had always really wanted to try yoga but simply was not able to find a teacher, and was even kicked out of a yoga class offered by this very hotel he worked for:

“People from outside have money, so they can do yoga. But how can we do yoga? We don't have any teachers to teach us, or money. Neither do we have time. [...] Yeah main thing is there is no teacher. Main thing is this, the kid can be as smart, unless there is a good teacher teaching they wouldn't learn anything. Even I wanted to do yoga. The one time I even went to [name of hotel's yoga teacher] for yoga, and he made me get up from there and leave the room. And he said this is not for you. Since then my heart was broken.” (Male lower level employee at hotel, 38).

It is rare for locals and tourists to be doing yoga in the same room together in Rishikesh, as the tourists are charged a fee of anywhere between 200-500 INR for one drop-in class (roughly 3-7 EUR) which is a fee that locals are not willing or able to pay. Additionally, many yoga studios are also careful to allow locals (especially men) to participate in their yoga classes, even if the Indian men are willing to pay the money. It was not uncommon to hear stories of Indian guys being kicked out of a yoga class because they were accused of inappropriately staring at the (Western) females:

“They come sometimes [laughs], like, girls are going in.. ‘I want to do!’ Come in sir. And then everybody is in forward fold, they are sitting. [...] I respect my students and I want other people to respect my students also. You are not just sitting and watching them. So sometimes I tell them, no sir you are not doing.” (Male local yoga teacher, 35).

This kind of monitoring of who gets to participate serves the purpose of protecting the (largely female) yoga students from unwanted gazing, but seems to also have the (unintended) effect of contributing to the idea that yoga is an activity for *tourists only*. These activities of monitoring who (‘whose bodies’) gets to participate in class and asking a fee to attend, illustrate how this discourse becomes materialized through practise. It also illustrates how important of a role a person's material conditions play in creating their understanding of yoga, even when yoga in itself does not require any money to practise.

This evaluative framework of yoga as related to the status of tourists is mostly held by locals who only from a distance come into contact with yoga and otherwise live their busy lives in Rishikesh completely detached from yoga and what goes on in the yoga tourism industry, and as such it does not result in any particularly active deconstruction of yogic legitimacy of anyone in particular. Because of yoga's perceived status as a touristic activity, many locals feel out of the loop or even unconcerned with yoga and do not have any particular opinions about the essence of yoga or the appropriateness of its commercialization. Because of that, this framework does not necessarily play a large role in the

following two chapters, but rather I will return to this finding and its consequences for the continued legitimacy of Rishikesh as the “Yoga Capital of the World” as a whole in chapter 8.

6 Legitimacy (de)construction when selling yoga

Having first established the main different frameworks around yoga that can be found in Rishikesh, I now take the analysis a step further by looking into the process of yogic legitimacy (de)construction around the selling of yoga from the local point of view, including actors both within and outside of the yoga tourism industry.

6.1 Questioning Each Other; Time, Place and Authenticity

Those offering yoga in Rishikesh can be roughly divided into three different groups or self-proclaimed ‘types’ of yoga teachers, who vary in their particular discourses around the yogic legitimacy based on their differing evaluative frameworks around yoga. Firstly, there are those that completely feel they are outside of the tourism ‘industry’, they do not charge money for their classes and believe yoga to be a deeply spiritual undertaking that extends far beyond physical exercise. Often they are wary of tourists or outsiders coming in to try yoga for just a brief period, and only accept the more serious spiritual devotees. They consider themselves the true, original yogis of which there are still very few left in Rishikesh and are against any form of commercialization of yoga. Secondly, there are those yoga teachers and schools that do charge a fee and allow people to come in for single classes, but they consider themselves to do so with sincere motivations; because they have a strong background in yoga and philosophy, they do not consider there to be anything wrong with making money from yoga. Thirdly, there are those who have recognized the money-making potential of yoga as a tourism product and are just in it from this monetary perspective, the “money maker yoga teacher”. They most often do not consider anything to be wrong with such an approach to yoga, in fact it is their right to benefit monetarily from the world’s interest in their cultural heritage and they would be crazy not to. Between these groups, a process takes place whereby deconstructing the legitimacy, authenticity and intentions of the other serves to construct oneself as a legitimate actor in yoga.

In general terms, those who belong to the first group discredit what is being done by the hands of those in both other two groups, as they feel that yoga loses its essence when it is made into a tourism product and money is being made from it. The yoga, meditation and other gatherings that they offer are donation-based, rather than for a fixed fee. In other words, they construct their own legitimacy in yoga by virtue of having the understanding of yoga as a spiritual journey which by its very definition cannot be commercialized, i.e. “real” yoga, and deconstruct the legitimacy of anyone who makes yoga into a commercial product. There exists a clear tendency by these ashrams to disassociate from other places in Rishikesh; they do not like to be compared to – what they refer to as – “those other places” that make up the majority of Rishikesh, and they look down upon “the yoga you find in Rishikesh” in general. An example of a rather aggressive disassociation from general yoga tourism and yoga tourists is the case of one of the oldest ashrams in Rishikesh. Figure 5 shows some of the many “don’t disturb” signs that can be found on the gates of the ashram.



Figure 5 "Don't Disturb" signs outside a traditional ashram sceptical of yoga tourism (personal picture)

After making an appointment and being careful not to disturb anyone, I was allowed onto the ashram's premises for an interview. Here, the owner's daughter shared with me that they use these signs to keep out the "disturbing" type of tourists who are not serious yoga devotees, but are perceived to be in Rishikesh for partying and haphazardly trying out yoga or meditation. They purposefully do not have any signs advertising their ashram throughout Rishikesh, because they wish to only attract quality spiritual seekers and keep out the "average yoga tourist" as she explained *"if you let one donkey up here, it will shit, and the shit will attract flies"*. Those who are not serious are not allowed to stay on the premises, but rather are encouraged to "go join the shit" outside the ashram gates. The owners consider themselves as singlehandedly "keeping Rishikesh alive" by upholding these high standards. In other words, outside of their ashram and the few yoga devotees that find their way to it, they consider Rishikesh to be "dead" by the hands of commercialization. This example is illustrative of the salience of the issue of yogic legitimacy in the eyes of many local yoga actors. When yoga is seen as a science or spiritual path, the commercialization of yoga by actors in the tourism industry is not only seen as illegitimate but as hurting the sacred nature of the practise. These differing values and norms around yoga also result in tangible material tensions, for instance over valuable plots of land. A different yoga teacher who knows the owner of the above-mentioned ashram for instance shared with me this prediction on the ashram's future:

"When he was child, he came to Rishikesh and he founded an ashram, it is still there. In the whole of Rishikesh, authority of hatha and kundalini [...] And once he will die, his ashram costs 200 crore rupees, people waiting for him dead. The moment he dies, structure will come up there [laughs]." (Male local yoga teacher, 49).

The second group of yoga actors considers it possible to make money from yoga in an ethical way by having the right intentions, knowledge and capabilities, and with this mentality have set up their own studio or are teaching at yoga schools. What makes this group distinctly different from the previous is that they engage in the mechanisms of the market; they actively advertise their yoga classes both online and in the streets of Rishikesh, engage with review platforms such as TripAdvisor and try to price their classes competitively. However, they do acknowledge that yoga is much more than a tourism product and to make it into one requires ethical considerations. Similarly to the previous group, these yoga actors also construct their own yogic legitimacy through creating a discursive contrast with others, ‘the illegitimate and inauthentic yoga teachers’. They wish to be perceived as offering genuine quality yoga classes, by contrasting their genuineness against the over-commercialization of others. Figure 6 is a good example of such a discourse; it is the advertising sign of one yoga school which offers yoga tourists the opportunity to “not only be a money maker yoga teacher” like all the others but rather “become a knowledge generator yoga teacher” by joining their particular course. The figure also illustrates the prominence of the struggle for yogic legitimacy in the material reality (streetscape) of Rishikesh.

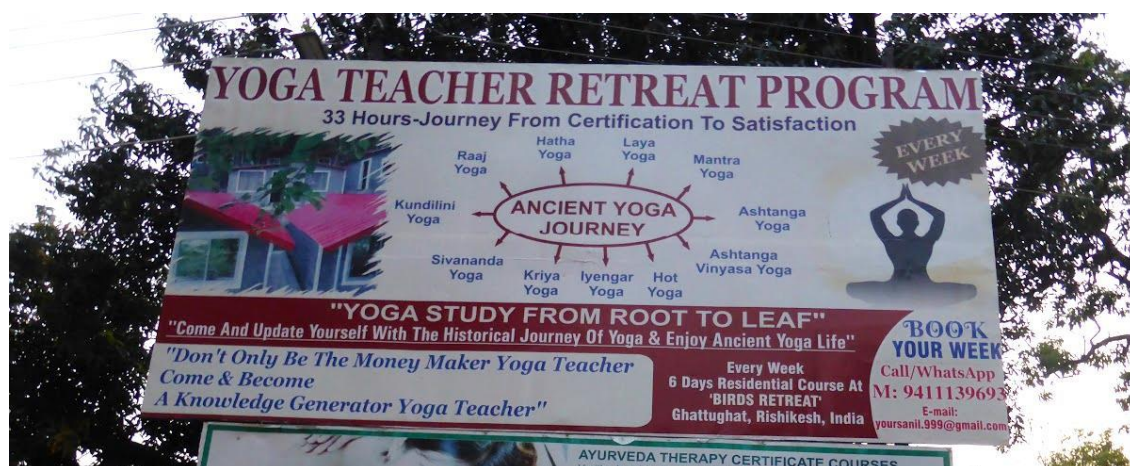


Figure 6 "Don't Only Be The Money Maker Yoga Teacher" (personal picture)

These actors thus argue that the legitimacy of the commercialization of yoga happens along a spectrum, whereby those who have not struck the right balance between the spiritual and money-making aspects of yoga are seen as illegitimate. Falling on the right side of the spectrum, which justifies making money from what they recognize as a vast and ancient practise, is a matter of the right intentions, motivations and understanding of real yoga. Many yoga teachers have shared similar ideas with me to the one below:

"Earning money from yoga is not a wrong thing, you know, it is not a wrong thing, but keep your intentions clear. Keep your intentions clear. Keep your sincerity. [...] See we need to fulfil our material things as well. Like if I am married, I need my children to go to a good school. If I keep doing charity and giving free classes, ... you understand? So it is my material needs, it is

my children. [...] So earning money out of yoga is not a bad thing, but keep the sincerity. Ok money is ok, but give the right thing.” (Male local yoga teacher, 32).

Thus they differentiate themselves from the third group by virtue of their sincerity and right intentions for making money from yoga, while the others wrongfully got into yoga with a “business mind-set” or from a “selfish purpose”. To be perceived as a legitimate yoga teacher who is selling something “real”, one must go beyond a mere bodily exercise approach to yoga. Some yoga schools and teachers achieve this by giving philosophy of yoga classes that teach the student about the long history of yoga, while others incorporate “spiritual” elements into their everyday classes, such as chanting, prayer, and sharing wisdom about life throughout or after the class.

“I am also giving them the spiritual side of the practise as well. I am teaching them why are we doing this asana. Why we need to do this thing, so it is a good combination I am trying to give them. You know? So people, if they want only physical, they will not come to Rishikesh, because back home they have many many classes, just with a lot of sweat, lot of sweat, lot of sweat. And then, that is why they are traveling for.” (Male local yoga teacher, 32).

The exact unwritten requirements that allow someone to fall into this second category of “the sincere kind” of money makers from yoga are rather unclear and arbitrary however. An interesting example in this light is the interaction I had with the same local yoga teacher who shared with me the story of someone with a Master in Business Administration from Australia opening a YTT school in Rishikesh without any experience in yoga, something which he considered highly unethical. In my effort to nudge him to tell me a bit more, I shared that I had even heard stories of locals who had only learned some yoga from YouTube teaching classes to tourists – a rather shocking accusation in my mind. However, his strong reply to this gave me the impression he himself might have learned a thing or two from the video streaming website, or at least does not consider it the highest level of questioning someone’s legitimacy:

“YouTube is much better. If somebody is MBA, you know nothing, and he is a boss of a big school [raises voice]. And everybody is coming and meeting him. And then you are practising five years yoga and you are sitting in front of the guy he never done yoga. It [YouTube] is better”.

Thus, some might even consider a person who has only learned yoga through videos on YouTube as a genuine yoga teacher, or at least consider such an accusation not to be the highest form of questioning of someone’s yogic legitimacy. Because in this case an understanding of yoga as a deep and vast practised is mixed with that of yoga as a money-making opportunity, the exact line of what is appropriate and ethical becomes much more blurred than in the first case. In the case of the first group, yogic legitimacy is clearly at odds with the commercialization of yoga, while in the second this process is nuanced.

What both groups have in common however is that the time scale and locality often times play an important role for their construction of yogic legitimacy. It is their ‘longevity’ and ‘locality’ – having

been practising yoga in Rishikesh (long) before the outside world started getting involved and declared it a buzzing tourism hotspot – that makes them more authentic and thus more legitimacy yoga actors than others.

6.2 Questioned Legitimacy of Certificates and Foreign Interventions

When it comes to the (global) institutionalization of yoga, locals have a lot of questions and critiques around the legitimacy of schemes that have been imposed on them from the outside. There is a general sense among many of local yoga teachers that the capitalistic West and America specifically has outsmarted India in terms of selling yoga through their more advanced marketing skills and service sector, having institutionalized yoga and made it into an industry from which the West is now greatly benefitting monetarily. This is a particular salient issue in the case of the popular yoga tourist activity of yoga teacher trainings (YTT) and their certificates. During such courses, yoga tourists (largely Western and female) generally spend either 200, 300 or 500 hours (a couple of weeks to a few months) at a specific ashram or yoga school, by the end of which they get a teacher certificate that qualifies them to become a yoga teacher themselves. The price tag of a 200-hour YTT course runs anywhere from 1000 to 2000 USD. Although widely offered in Rishikesh, those involved in the yoga tourism industry clearly view this as a tourist activity, as a product created to meet the demand of tourists, but one that does not necessarily fit with their understanding of what it means to be a yoga teacher. Indians who are interested in following the path of yoga generally go to university and study yoga for multiple years, providing them with a much deeper understanding of yoga than a 200-hour course focussed heavily on physical postural (hatha) yoga (e.g. Gyanunlimited, 2015). The 200-500 hour YTT courses are offered because that is generally the amount of time a yoga tourists is willing to spend learning yoga to become a yoga teacher, and because of their popularity are highly profitable for the yoga schools. Many Indian/Rishikesh-based yoga teachers have conflicting ideas about offering this type of product:

“But to get a certificate of 200 hours and that after 200 hours, is.., you think yoga you can learn in 200 hours? [laughs]. I am learning 40 years, 45 years. And I still, I cannot say that I am an authority of yoga and tantra.... So it is a vast study, and looking at the whole scenario and understanding the need of the people and students, we started also, we are going to start teaching YTT, but we created our own syllabus according to that. And our intention is that in 200 hours at least yoga teacher should know fundamentals, and he or she should be able to give daily classes. That is the maximum output if you force on a person in to 200 hours, can be that a one-hour class can be led by him without having the others, one or two or three classes, that is the maximum one can push a student in 200 hours.” (Male local yoga teacher, 49).

The certificates do not particularly hold much value in the eyes of the more serious yoga devotees, but still local teachers admit that they offer the courses because there is a demand from tourists. During my time in Rishikesh I have heard many rumours of teachers who have made copies of one certificate and gave them to all their students, or similarly about people who are in no way qualified to teach future teachers giving out certificates:

“And now every home in Rishikesh, one person is doing yoga, one person is teaching yoga. [...] In every family [laughs]. Whether it is a boy or girl, he has just learned for five six months or one year. We will teach you, we will teach you, we will teach you. Certificate, we will get you. Give us this money and we will get you [laughs].” (Male meditation guru, 75).

These quotes demonstrate the difficulties of regulating the quality and consistency of the yoga teacher training courses that attract so many yoga tourists from abroad. To this day there is a lack of regulation by the Indian government or another organization which actively monitors who gets to teach yoga classes. One outsider organization that has come in and taken on some regulatory role is Yoga Alliance US, which because of their contested role in the process will be discussed in more detail below.

6.2.1 Yoga Alliance US

There is one main authority in the field of yoga certification in Rishikesh and that is Yoga Alliance US. Yoga Alliance is a non-profit association based in the United States, which has as one of their main aims “encouraging safe yoga instruction by promoting adoption of Yoga Alliance Registry’s quantitative Standards” (“Yoga Alliance - About Us,” 2017). Even though it is common for yoga schools in Rishikesh to be certified by Yoga Alliance, there exists a lot of distrust and dissatisfaction with the scheme in Rishikesh, and the fact that this certification is US based rather than Indian is considered rather “shameful” by many local yoga teachers. Not only are many local yoga teachers critical of the fact that it is an American organization certifying Indian yoga schools and teachers, but also because they question the quality of the certification process itself. It is rather easy to have your yoga school be registered with Yoga Alliance; it requires the person interested in opening a certified school to digitally upload a syllabus and the name of one lead trainer at the facility who is registered with the organization as having completed a 200-hour YTT before. The process is criticized for being more of a paperwork scheme than offering any real regulation, as Yoga Alliance never actually comes to check the quality of any yoga offerings at its schools.

The following two lengthy quotes express the views of two different local yoga teachers on Yoga Alliance. Even though both of the yoga teachers quoted below are critical of the organization, it is useful to keep in mind that both offer YTT courses that are US certified:

“And now in Rishikesh there are now more than 200 yoga schools. In 200 yoga schools, every school is teaching yoga to some other students, and getting a certificate from Yoga Alliance. So every student is paying money to America for getting education in India by Indian teacher, Indian school. So all effort is made by Indians, and money is being earned by America. And what America is giving is just the certificate, that they approve that this school is teaching up to a minimum standard. That is it. They are not coming here to check what am I teaching you, I can give you a fake certificate and you go in your country and teach on that certificate and you can injure a person. And that time yoga alliance will not take responsibility. That time school will be bad, which is Indian school, Indian teacher, he didn’t teach you nice. But when the money comes there, the Yoga Alliance is taking all the money. If it was Indian government who was taking money on that, then you can say Indian government has given certificate to a bad

yoga school or a this thing or a teacher. So you can see how much is all commercialized. I am not saying Yoga Alliance is bad, they had brain, that's why they can use that brain and earn money in India without doing a thing. And Indian government didn't use that brain, so they are not earning, simple.” (Male local yoga teacher, 35).

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“My only question is where is social responsibility. Did you ever write or publish, did you write any hatha yoga, or Patanjali yoga sutra? You took it! As a human value I am asking. As a human value that you are earning from that source, that you are copyrighting yes because of technology and knowledge of capitalism, how to channel and raise funds and motivate minds and manipulate minds to take money. [...] So my question is, I am not against American Yoga Alliance, they have worked hard, they have earned money, but they should know what they are doing, where is your human values? You are teaching yoga. Yoga means not a technique, at least the love, compassion, consideration for the other human feelings. What you have, a club? Members of your own club? [laughs]. What you are doing? Members of your own club. Now your ego is boosted, while yoga is completely against the ego system. When you are a yogi you should go for the sublimation of ego. Then you are giving, yes, I am great American Yoga Alliance certified, 200 hours, which you don't know even ABC of yoga. 200 hours.” (Male local yoga teacher, 49).

What these two quotes illustrate is plural. On one hand, there is the dissatisfaction with the “taking” of yoga by a foreign nation without providing social responsibility or value for the locals of Rishikesh or the tradition of yoga, as well as a deconstruction of the legitimacy of Yoga Alliance and its certifications by claiming they do not understand the true essence of yoga (i.e. the sublimation of ego) and that the scheme does not hold much regulatory value. On the other hand, there is some level of respect or acknowledgement for the work that Yoga Alliance has done in recognizing the need for and setting up some certification scheme, albeit a highly flawed one, and the wish for the Indian government to take over this task. Therefore, out of lack of a better option and desire to make money, almost all yoga schools in Rishikesh become Yoga Alliance certified. Still, the organization’s legitimacy is questioned and forms a real source of conflict and even shame for local yoga enterprises.

6.3 Large Scale Promotion and Diversification for Touristic Ends

As established in the earlier sections, an important part of the construction of yogic legitimacy for certain local yoga actors stems from their locality, being rooted in a city with a long history as a place for yogis and spiritual seekers, a holy city that is located on the banks of the sacred Ganga river. Rishikesh enjoys a natural yogic legitimacy that has been drawing people interested in yoga to its banks for hundreds of years. For many local yoga teachers, the more recent large-scale promotion of Rishikesh as a yoga tourism hotspot, in which the Indian national government plays an important role, is hurting this sense of Rishikesh as a spiritual city and natural authority in the field of yoga because it goes against the essence of yoga. In a way, the argument here is the culmination of both previous sections; yogic

legitimacy is seen as something that comes naturally by virtue of an actor being genuine, authentic and truly understanding what it means to do yoga rather than something that can be imposed from ‘above’, particularly not from global and market-driven sources. A good example in this case is the organization of the yearly multiple-day International Yoga Festival.

To the outside world, IYF plays an important role in the construction of Rishikesh as the “Yoga Capital of the World”. It is an extremely popular event that keeps growing every year and is only limited by Rishikesh’ physical carrying capacity for tourists; during the seven days of this yearly event, a lot of hotels find themselves fully booked, and as the manager of one hotel put it “*even if we had double the number of rooms we would be full*”. The festival is organized by the state Government of Uttarakhand, in coordination with Parmarth Niketan ashram, one of the larger and more well-known ashrams of Rishikesh. It is also promoted by the National Government of India; a personally signed message by Prime Minister Modi hanging on the halls of the ashram, reads:

“Yoga is much more than a set of exercises. It is a philosophy of discipline and meditation that brings about a qualitative transformation in an individual’s personality. Parmarth Niketan’s service to humanity is an inspiration for many, across India and the world. I am sure, the mighty Himalayas, the holy River Ganga, and the sacred land of Uttarakhand will provide a perfect setting for this Yoga Festival at Rishikesh”.

The festival brings together many different forms and interpretations of yoga (e.g. Ashtanga Yoga, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, Bharat Yoga, Deep Yoga, Shintoh Yoga and Somatics Yoga etc.) and even extends beyond yoga and into music and performative arts from within and outside of India. It seems to position itself between all four of the different evaluative frameworks around yoga mentioned earlier (e.g. by focussing its offering mostly on different kinds of physical postural (hatha) yoga that people all over the world have come up with, and by charging a substantial admission fee, yet emphasizing yoga’s spiritual nature and relation to other spiritual practises). It seems that exactly this wide inclusion and mixture of different elements of yoga combined with the grand scale and commercial nature of the festival is what has led some local yoga teachers to question its legitimacy. The way the festival has been set up – as a truly global event which is promoted by the national government and includes participation from many different yoga teachers and types of yoga –, has led to the criticism that the festival is too much for show and imposed from the outside world. These hesitations around the sincerity of the festival are for instance articulated in the quote below:

“I am little negative about yoga festival, as well [...] because it is too much, they are forcing on the people. They should not force. [...] But don’t go and tell everyone, hey, do yoga. Do this. This is not yoga. So I am against it, creating this festival.” (Male local yoga teacher, 31).

This local yoga teacher seems to take particular issue with the forceful nature of the organization of such a global festival, referring also to the large scale of its promotion as well as the diversification of yoga.

Interestingly, the International Yoga Festival appeared as a bit of a taboo subject during the interviews. It appeared as though people were reluctant to express their true feelings around the festival, possibly because of the large role it plays in attracting yoga tourists and constructing Rishikesh as the “Yoga Capital of the World”, thus further revealing the salience of the issue. One female yoga teacher (30) who teaches at the ashram where the festival takes place, shared that at her first IYF she had felt rather shocked at all the variety of physical yoga teachings that are presented at the festival, but later she learned to appreciate that the festival “has something for everybody”. Now, she admits, she uses the festival to also learn herself “*what is happening in the world. How they, how they are, uh, serving yoga.* [Continues in Hindi:] *How they cook yoga*” all around the world. Although many tourists travel to Rishikesh to experience “real” yoga with its “authentic” Indian roots, the festival thus seems to also create an opposite effect of introducing the “local” to the “global”, by introducing local teachers to what is happening in the global world of yoga, and not all of them appreciate the forceful nature of this type of large scale promotion and diversification of yoga. The festival is oftentimes perceived by the local yoga community as something that is rather imposed from the outside, as a large commercial undertaking serving to promote Rishikesh.

Local yoga teachers also point out that such massive outside promotion of Rishikesh as a yoga tourist destination has other negative consequences beyond an overly forceful commercialization and promotion of yoga; it has for instance also resulted in increased local land prices as more people from big cities like New Delhi have come to purchase property. The role of the national government in this promotion of Rishikesh as a tourist hotspot is an active one. Besides promoting IYF, the national government is also expected to invest large sums of money in the tourism industry of Rishikesh, specifically in increasing its infrastructure and accessibility. The manager of a local high-end hotel and restaurant shared with me that the nearest airport to Rishikesh is expected to grow “seven times bigger within two years” by creating direct international connections from Dubai, Bangkok, Kathmandu as well as direct domestic flights from Lucknow, Amritsar, Varanasi and beyond. This material expansion of the airport and subsequent increased connectivity of Rishikesh to the rest of India and the world is likely to increase the influx of tourists significantly. The promotion of Rishikesh as a yoga destination brings in much needed money, even those critical of the commercialization of yoga recognize that, but it also brings swarms of tourists who congest the roads and bring pollution to the holy river Ganga, who locals love so much (Ganga has recently become the “first non-human entity in India to be granted the same legal rights as people” (Safi, 2017)). Many locals thus share a reflexive attitude over the more recent governmental marketing of yoga tourism, and many entrepreneurs within yoga tourism call for more regulation of the tourism sector by the national government rather than a mere promotion of (yoga) tourism.

6.4 Sub-conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated that different discursive and material elements are involved in the (de)construction of yogic legitimacy in different forms of ‘selling’ yoga. Because of the plurality of understandings of yoga and involvement of a wide range of actors, constructing yogic legitimacy in Rishikesh is a complex process.

On a local scale, different types of actors deal with the construction of their own legitimacy and deconstruction of the legitimacy of others differently, based on their differing evaluative frameworks around yoga. Some claim superiority by denying being part of the tourism industry at all, as they claim that the search for spirituality is fundamentally different from the hedonistic search of the average tourist. In this sense, they aim to construct their own yogic legitimacy by deconstructing others’ legitimacy in commercializing yoga, as they feel that anyone who understands the essence of yoga knows it is the opposite of a ‘product’. Other yoga schools, who do actively advertise their yoga classes to tourists, construct their own legitimacy by claiming to offer a genuine understanding of ‘authentic’ yoga and deconstructing the legitimacy of others that are just in it for the money. An important part of the materialization of this discourse is the many street signs that make up the streetscape of Rishikesh which are used to communicate about the genuineness of the yoga offered. These yoga actors posit that making money from yoga can be done in both ethical and unethical ways and that this requires a reflexive attitude and constant balancing between tourists’ needs and yogic values.

While this contestation for yogic legitimacy takes place between local actors, there also exists a general tendency to deconstruct the legitimacy of outside actors and institutions imposing their yoga authority on Rishikesh. Many are critical of such outside organizations as Yoga Alliance US who are seen as having conveniently ‘taken’ the right to certify Indian yoga by Indian teachers from behind their computers in the USA, while otherwise not doing any real work to ensure the quality of yoga offerings or taking on any responsibility for what takes place on the ground. One yoga teacher, having studied yoga for eight years in serious yoga schools before becoming a teacher, even shared with me that he heard that 8 out of 10 yoga teachers in the world now are 200-hour yoga alliance US certified, “*so basically, to take it fairly, at least 7 out of 10 teachers in the world are bad*”. Thus, to be a legitimate actor in the yoga tourism industry it is posited that you ought to be socially responsible and add back to the tradition of yoga more than you take from it.

Similarly, yoga should not be heavily promoted or forced onto people like a commercialized tourism product, such as many yoga teachers feel is the case with the IYF and tourism promotion by the national government. It is these cases of large scale promotion that are seen as particularly damaging to both Rishikesh spiritual reputation and are seen as a miscalculation of what yoga truly is. However, this criticism is complicated by the fact that the IYF generates high revenue streams for the local tourism businesses. Thus for some, even though they recognize that what is happening in terms of over-

commercialization of yoga is “not very good”, it is still considered a good thing that Indians are making money from yoga tourism and are starting to see some benefit from the commodification of yoga done by the West, as for instance articulated in the following quote:

“We all Indians all need this money, so let them have it. Let them have it, take the certificates from here and there, [...] and, whether it is legal or illegal, but I .. if they get the money, then they deserve it. And we pay for their computer, for their scientific work, so why shouldn't they pay? Though some of the things are not very good, but it will come in alignment.” (Male meditation guru, 75).

7 Legitimacy (de)construction when consuming yoga

7.1 Spiritual or Overly Commercialized Place?

Similar to the findings of Maddox (2014) in Mysore, yoga tourists travel to Rishikesh with a sense of wanting to explore “real” yoga or “study at the source”. Many of the tourists I spoke with expressed that the past (half a) year or few months before coming to Rishikesh had been the most stressful times of their lives, and they had come to Rishikesh to escape their lives back home and find some peace by deepening their understanding of “real” yoga. In many cases the yoga tourists coming to Rishikesh have already been practising yoga for a while in their home country and are already quite proficient at the physical postural practise of yoga; in quite a few instances they are more advanced practitioners of the *asanas* than the Indian teachers they find themselves taking classes with in Rishikesh. Still, the tourists come to Rishikesh for a specific type of yoga experience in the birthplace of yoga. Rather than going to one of the many yoga retreats which can be taken anywhere in the world, tourists want to experience the yoga *culture*, and see the place where yoga originated with their own eyes.

The tourists’ understanding of Rishikesh as a legitimate place for yoga tourism then either becomes challenged or confirmed (or both) during the trip itself. In general, there were two different tendencies in the ways in which tourists handled the material reality of a highly commercial and touristic Rishikesh in relation to their perception of yogic legitimacy after arrival. A few were not necessarily faced by it at all, seeing Rishikesh indeed as a naturally “fairy-tale” place, worthy of its reputation as a spiritual and yogic city even after arrival. This perspective is for instance described in the following quote by a seasoned traveller from Australia:

“As soon as I arrived, it so confirmed that this is the place for me, I feel so comfortable here. [...] The graciousness of the people, if that makes sense, like, because I would say if you go somewhere like Indonesia or parts of Asia, it can be a different experience. People are... Maybe Rishikesh is like a fairy-tale place anyway I guess, but people are very genuine and they have a great sense of humour. I don’t think people are setting out to trick me most of the time, and if they are, you can have a laugh at it and then you can be friends afterwards, you know what I mean?” (Female yoga tourist from Australia, 48).

These tourists, often seasoned travellers, are familiar with the highly commercial setting in which tourism takes place around the world and already expected to find something similar to have happened to yoga on their trip to Rishikesh. As in the case of the following quote, some tourists were “not really so disappointed” as a result:

“Uhm, I think that I already just imagined that it was going to be commercialized, so I think that I am not really so disappointed [...]. My first instinct is to say that it is more authentic than it is commercialized. Ehm, but that is only an instinct because I have no comparison with that. So I’m okay with that, and to be honest, this is more so for me to be, not really focussed on what we are doing per say, but for me to get out of it personally, feel better personally, and I am less

focussed on like, you know, the movements that we are doing.” (Female yoga tourists from the Netherlands, 26).

For the majority of tourists I spoke with however, the reality of Rishikesh as a highly commercialized place of tourism production overruled the perception of Rishikesh as the birthplace of yoga and spirituality. In the perception of these tourists, the commercial aspect of yoga tourism has taken over the city, and in particular the copious amounts of yoga offered and advertised through street signs seem to play an active role for this deconstruction yogic legitimacy in the eyes of these tourists. Additionally, the pervasive presence of the other main tourist activity in Rishikesh, wild river rafting on the Ganga, also adds to the perception of Rishikesh as a town for *tourists* rather than *spirituality*. Vans with rafting boats tied to their roof often crowd the roads of Rishikesh, particularly in weekends and in high season, and the presence of these many rafting boats throughout the river often full of young shouting tourists do, are seen as “polluting” the view of Ganga. It is this overall impression of the commercial nature of Rishikesh that oftentimes impacts tourists’ judgement, leading them to feel there is just *too much* tourism, particularly for a city that ought to be spiritual and holy.

7.1.1 Tourists’ (dis)orientation in a Chaotic Streetscape: Who is Legitimate?

Most of the advertising of yoga classes happens through flyers, banners and signs posted all over the streets in the touristic area of Rishikesh. These streets of Rishikesh are thus overloaded with yoga signs promising “daily drop in classes”, “hatha yoga, kundalini yoga, vinyasa yoga, yoga therapy”, “experienced teachers”, “200, 300 or 500-hour teacher training”, “US Alliance certificate” and more. Illustrating the omnipresence of yoga in the streetscape of Rishikesh is figure 7: a collection of the many yoga signs of Rishikesh. The multitude of these signs, although meant to attract tourists to the yoga classes, schools and ashrams that they advertise, often have the effect of disorienting tourists in their efforts to find legitimate yoga teachers. One German tourist (26) shared with me that he had previously gone to Goa to practise yoga (another famous tourist hotspot for yoga in India), but here in Rishikesh, the world capital of yoga, he was unsure whether he wanted to try doing any yoga at all. With so many signs advocating different yoga classes in different places on every street corner, it becomes hard to know which place is “good” or “authentic”. This feeling is increased due to a lack of regulatory body that can provide an objective measure of the quality yoga schools and teachers, leaving the tourists to rely largely on online reviews and word of mouth from other tourists. As one yoga tourist put it:

“In my perception, walking through Rishikesh, it is kind of overwhelming, there is so many schools, so many signs, it’s like, how do you know where there is a good teacher? Where.. You know, everyone says the same thing, everyone says their teachers are experienced. I guess like places have people come in and assist and teach for a couple of years, and everyone just branches off and starts their own school, and it’s just like expanding so fast. To me, it’s like after seeing so many signs about classes, I don’t know where to even go.” (Male tourist from New York, America, 24).

This experience is illustrative for a lot of yoga tourists coming to Rishikesh. Some come with a predetermined plan of where they will be staying to take yoga classes or their teacher training course, which they either found through the internet or through their yoga community at home, but those who come with an open itinerary tend to quickly become overwhelmed by the sheer amount of yoga offerings. Because of the overwhelming amount of yoga, tourists for the most part rely on other tourists to share which yoga teacher is a proper one and which to avoid, as for instance illustrated by the following quote:

“In fact what happened, I was looking for a class in Rishikesh. [...] I was just buying a train ticket and I was talking to the man [...] and then I was like do you know any good teacher here? And he was like yes I have a really good teacher to recommend you. [...] So I started practising with him, and I didn't try any class before because I was like overwhelmed by Rishikesh. I was like, what? There is like yoga everywhere! How do we know what is good and what is not? Just, I waited for five days, didn't try a class. Then I found this teacher.” (Female yoga tourist from Quebec, Canada, 26).

Thus, while the street signs are used by yoga schools and ashrams to advertise themselves and differentiate from the many others, their multitude and lack of regulation leads to a perception of chaos and subsequently seems to decrease the perceived yogic legitimacy of these places for the tourists.



Figure 7 Collection of the many yoga signs of Rishikesh (personal pictures)

7.2 Tourists' Duplex Demands and Bodily/Material Needs

Many tourists uphold different evaluative frameworks around yoga at once, leading to duplex demands from the yoga schools and teachers, for instance one tourist expressed having come to Rishikesh to learn more about the spiritual side of yoga and simultaneously complained about the lack of physical intensity of the yoga classes she had been taking (i.e. framing yoga as a work out). Similarly, tourists do not generally have any issues with the commodification of yoga per se, as they have come to Rishikesh to consume it in one way or the other, but they do start to feel it is not genuine when its commercialization becomes too apparent. In this section, I go further into these duplex demands by tourists and how this relates to legitimacy construction.

For tourists, it is important that their yoga experience in Rishikesh is different from the one they get at home, but paradoxically and simultaneously also not *too* different. Tourists for instance appreciate that the type of yoga offered in Rishikesh seems to be less “showy” than what they are used to from yoga classes at home, with less emphasis on how the poses look or merge into each other like a “story” or flowy dance as they are used to back home. This perception of a less “showy” yoga is generally appreciated and considered an important element of “true” yoga, as it allows the yoga student to focus less on ego-centric comparison with other yoga students and more on their internal state of mind. Another way in which yoga at home is generally judged to be different from yoga in Rishikesh, is the abundance of chanting ancient mantras throughout the duration of many yoga classes in Rishikesh. These chants add a layer of mystique and appear to give the yoga tourist the experience of the spiritual nature of real Indian yoga. However, particularly in the beginning of their stay in Rishikesh, these chants and prayers in Hindi can simultaneously be perceived by the tourists as slightly uncomfortable, confusing and achieving the opposite effect to that desired:

“I guess it is.. a lot more, I guess chanting than I would have expected, and I would have hoped for. [...] So I am not really sure if I am going to get out of it what I would have wanted to or intended to. [...] I can't pronounce them and then I am so fixated on trying to pronounce them properly that I am not focussed on my, what we are intended to focus on” (Female yoga tourist from Toronto, Canada, 30).

This quote illustrates the complexity of making yoga in the right kind of product for tourists. On one hand, they come to experience “authentic” Indian yoga, while on the other hand the tourists’ desire for a different yoga experience compared to home also has its limits; the experience should not be “too Indian” to the point where they feel like a fish out of water or where all comfort is lacking. This makes the process of questioning and constructing yogic legitimacy when consuming yoga a complex one, because the yoga is judged simultaneously based on its perceived authenticity as a spiritual practise, different from the physical practise tourists are used to from back home, and by the criteria tourists are used to judge any tourist product on (such as value for money, material and mental comfort, safety etc.).

This complexity can in part be contributed to the embodiment aspect of practising yoga. Yoga tourism is an active form of tourism, which requires the tourist to actively participate, dress in yoga outfits, do challenging poses in hot rooms and with limited equipment. It is thus not enough to only feel like the yoga that they are offered is authentic and Indian, but tourists also want to feel physically comfortable and safe. For instance, the Indian teacher needs to be sufficiently proficient in English to safely guide the student through difficult and even potentially dangerous poses. Similarly, the more intensive yoga courses are often experienced as very physically challenging and leave yoga tourists prone to injury and in need of good rest (i.e. a good sleeping environment) as further discussed in section 7.2.1. These duplex demands which include a desire by tourists for authentic yoga *and* some level of familiarity and material comfort do not go unnoticed by local actors in the tourism industry and at times lead to frustration, as for instance verbalized in this lengthy quote:

“First rule of the ashram, is to give up, and be happy whatever you have. Now, foreigners, they come in the ashram they start complaining in the review, food was so not so good, I didn’t like, the bed was so hard. Of course, it was ashram! What do you expect? Now you writing the comment. [...] If you are looking for real authentic, real experiences, you need to make your feet dirty, you need to feel lower back pain and sleep on those beds. But you don’t make your feet dirty, and you want to make everything nice for you. No, please. You want authentic experience, and you don’t want to make feet dirty as well. Please, find somewhere else, stay in your home [laughter]. Stay in your home, your home has a nice bed, has a nice fridge, you can get cold and hot water whatever you want, Bisleri water, ok. Why you come here, so far to Rishikesh? [...] Like one guy in TripAdvisor, he write one comment. He didn’t took my class, he tried two times but classes were full. [...] He didn’t know what I am doing inside, but he write the comment. [He wrote] ‘I cannot rate this class, I thought I heard from many people that this class is amazing, but the outside is dirty, and then the mats are so close’. Come on, you are in India!” (Male local yoga teacher, 32).

This quote aptly illustrates the discursive and material tensions present when combining “yoga” and “tourism”. From the point of view of the narrator, it positions some (not all) tourists as impossibly demanding (“*you want authentic experience, and you don’t want to make feet dirty as well*”) and unaware of their surroundings (“*you are in India!*”). It describes the tourists as having the most power in the interaction, because they get to write negative reviews online which impacts and forces local businesses and organizations to adapt. The frustration comes from being asked to provide the tourists with an experience that this local yoga teacher sees as fundamentally inauthentic or un-Indian; he feels he is being asked to deliver the impossible.

7.2.1 Legitimacy of Certificates and Experiences with Yoga Teacher Trainings

Yoga tourists who come to Rishikesh specifically to do a multiple week yoga teacher training course can be seen as a specific kind of yoga tourist; they generally have a longer history of doing yoga, and are willing to spend more time researching yoga schools and staying on location than most other tourists. As stated earlier, the culmination of such a YTT is a teaching certificate that allows the yoga tourist to find a job as a yoga teacher in their home country. These certificates are handed out in a

certification ceremony that completes the 200, 300 or 500 hours courses and are meant to illustrate that the student now has acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to teach their own yoga class. Not all new certified yogis plan to actually become yoga teachers after their return home, but many wish to implement their newly learned skills in their private and professional lives in one way or the other. Most yoga tourists opt for yoga schools that are US Alliance certified, because of their internationally recognized system of certification. They are generally unaware that this organization is US based but rather speak of it as an “internationally recognized system”. This requirement for an internationally recognized certificate seems to thus come from this practical consideration of wanting the certificate to be valid outside of India, but the US Alliance brand is not necessarily recognized by tourists as an indicator for quality due to the fact that very many yoga schools offer this kind of certification.

Although widely popular, these multiple-week courses can also be experienced as rather challenging by tourists. Because of yoga school’s desire to stand out from the crowd and offer students a truly deeper understanding of yoga than their competitors – even if approached from a bodily exercise point of view there is a whole lot to learn on the physical postural level –, yoga schools generally try to fit a very loaded schedule full of classes within the limited devoted time of 200, 300 or 500 hours. This results in prospective yoga teachers’ days in the more serious yoga schools being packed according to tight schedules, which do not leave the student with much room to explore by themselves:

“Sometimes I feel like this is so.. this is like a boarding school or something, because every day, in such an international environment, I feel like we are living sort of detached from the Indian society and we have breakfast, lunch, dinner and all the training courses all the time together. And sometimes we just forget where we are. [...] The schedule is quite intense, the breaks are not long, and you’re so tired, you get up at six in the morning so during the break we just take a nap. [...] You don’t have time to interact with other people.” (Female yoga tourist from Indonesia, 27).

On one hand, the students really appreciate it when the yoga school carefully manages their schedule and “looks after them so well” that they barely need to leave the premises, on the other hand they sometimes feel it is a shame that their experience is seemingly “un-Indian” and “detached from Indian society”. The students are often not used to the different style of teaching that they experience during the YTT and doing so much intense yoga in a day (2+ hours), and as a result quite a few yoga tourists get injured during the courses:

“The style, the delivery is different. [...] It is a very big group, so it is quite a diverse range in skills and abilities. Uhm, there is probably more individual attention in Australia I think, but maybe you need to push yourself forward if you need it here. So, ehm, but I don’t have anything to prove you know? I am pretty, very flexible naturally, and I think that can be a problem for me because it can mean I am in the wrong, incorrect posture. [...] There has been quite a few people injured, but I haven’t, fortunately.” (Female yoga tourist from Australia, 48).

These two quotes illustrate a slight discrepancy that seems to exist between how yoga courses have been set up in Rishikesh and the expectations and preparedness of the yoga tourists. Materially, this has

resulted in physical injuries that have prevented many yoga students from partaking in the full program that they paid for. And because the courses have been set up in such a way that a new batch of students arrives shortly after the old batch has received their certificate, most of the time there is little room for extending the course to fit individual needs.

However, despite these challenges, YTT tourists are noticeably more positive about their teacher training experience than are many of the yoga teachers who themselves are providing the certification. Tourists generally feel they have learned a whole lot in their dedicated 200, 300 or 500 hours, enough to seriously change the direction of their professional and/or personal lives back home, even when many of the local teachers consider learning yoga in 200 hours a “joke”.

7.3 Sub-conclusion

In this chapter, I have illustrated that different material and discursive elements are involved in the (de)construction of yogic legitimacy on the “consuming” side of yoga tourism. Yoga tourists come to Rishikesh with a pre-established sense of yogic authority; they come because of the city’s reputation as a truly spiritual place, the birthplace of yoga, even though they can take yoga classes and get similar YTT certificates almost anywhere in the world. An important finding here is that in many cases, the yoga tourists find themselves confused and overwhelmed by the commercial chaos of Rishikesh upon first arrival. Because of this confusion, they rely for a large part on reputation of different yoga schools and teachers through word of mouth. Reputations are easily damaged, and moreover yoga schools have to find some way to be noticed among all the others without appearing too loud in their advertisements as this creates the perception of being overly-commercialized. Some places naturally appear more legitimate to the yoga tourists than others, for instance well-established ashrams such as Parmarth Niketan (where the IYF takes place) enjoy a lot of yogic legitimacy in the eyes of most tourists:

“I think this is the best ashram in Rishikesh, Parmarth. It is famous, world knows it. [...] This is authenticated, world knows it, but you can go various places in Rishikesh, it is advertising yoga classes or whatever, but it is not authenticated. [...] The world knows Parmarth Niketan, it is a big name. And it will not ruin its reputation.” (Male tourist from New Delhi, India, 23).

This quote also illustrates that tourists largely rely on word of mouth to judge which places are worthwhile and which are just in it for the money, so reputation is key for local yoga actors. Whether a place is worthwhile or not is a consideration based on carefully balancing on one hand the quality of the classes and teaching material and its status as authentic Indian yoga, with on the other hand the presence of some level of material/bodily comfort and the teacher’s ability to be in line with the students’ previous (Western) yoga experiences. What this shows in terms of legitimacy construction around yoga, is that it is rather hard work in the highly competitive yoga tourism industry to be perceived as a legitimate yoga teacher by tourists. It requires more than merely being perceived as “authentic” and “Indian”, but also requires balancing the different understandings and levels of comfort with yoga that tourists carry with them from their home country. Many local yoga teachers struggle in one way or the other with balancing

these duplex demands, and as a result what they offer tourists as a yoga ‘product’ may not necessarily correlate with their own understanding of what it means to practise yoga.

8 Conclusion & Discussion

The objective of this research was to contribute to our understanding of the construction of legitimacy around the selling of a highly globalised form of intangible heritage in a local context, by studying the case of yoga tourism to the “Yoga Capital of the World”. As many forms of intangible heritage in the world, yoga exists within multiple systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions of the word that serve to judge whether actions around this intangible heritage are “desirable, proper, or appropriate” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). This research has illustrated the importance of understanding how the actors involved in yoga tourism hold different norms around yoga and subsequently different value judgements about the appropriateness and correct way to “sell” or “practise” yoga, while simultaneously considering those more-than-discursive elements such as place, scale, bodies and institutions in this process.

The findings of this research have indicated discrepancies as well as similarities between the legitimacy construction by those “selling” and the ones “consuming” yoga in the context of yoga tourism, justifying the methodological choice to focus on both groups separately. What both groups have in common is a strong desire to weed out the so called “real” yoga teachers from the “fake”, and there is a lot of contestation around who falls into what category. Important here for someone’s perceived legitimacy to “sell” yoga is the purity of their intentions. Very often local yoga teachers deconstruct each other’s’ legitimacy to sell yoga by claiming that others have the wrong intentions and are only in it for the money. They differentiate themselves by claiming to be more authentic – “I am keeping Rishikesh alive” –, communicating this to the outside world either by writing similar statements on street signs or by refusing to advertise altogether. While yoga tourists are trying to find the right place to do yoga, some yoga schools turn this around and are actively looking for the right kind of tourist. The right kind of tourist here is seen as a “non-tourist”, someone who has come on a serious spiritual quest, rather than for hedonistic pursuits (as they think tourists generally are). For the more serious yoga schools and ashrams, tourism is something that is frowned upon, and its combination with yoga is like combining “mango and salt” – or any two random things that do not go together.

When yoga tourists first arrive in Rishikesh, they either have a predetermined plan of where they will take a yoga course, or they come without such a plan. In the latter case, they quickly become overwhelmed by the sheer amount of yoga offerings and advertisements. Tourists interested in trying yoga generally rely on word of mouth, learning from the experiences of others to judge which out of all yoga classes is a good one to take. Particularly rumours about who is just in it for the money, the “YouTube” kind of yoga teacher, travel fast, and also add to the perception of Rishikesh overall being too commercialized. But even at well-established places that have a solid reputation, sometimes yoga tourists find themselves overwhelmed or disappointed. There is a fine line between tourists’ desire for a real authentic experience, and it being too much outside of their comfort zone (“*too Indian*”). This

balance is hard to get right, and at times – when for instance bad reviews impact their reputation – creates resistance from yoga teachers (“*Come on, you are in India!*”).

The discrepancies between both groups reside in their construction of the legitimacy of yoga teacher trainings, the certificates, and outside international organizations involved in this certification process. For the locals, the idea that one can become a certified yoga teacher through a 200-hour course is rather absurd. The sentiment that YTT courses are mere tourism products is highly prevalent, but they are still offered because they make local yoga schools a lot of money. Similarly, there was a real sensible conflict and sense of shame around the certification scheme being from an American organization. Although locals recognize the need for regulation, they heavily criticize both the regulation methods of Yoga Alliance (or lack thereof), and the fact that it is a foreign organization making money from Indian effort. This imposed foreign authority in the field of yoga is actively questioned and resisted, and many want the Indian government to step in. The concerns are not only based on the question of who has the right to materially profit from an Indian teacher teaching yoga in India, but also concerns issues around national pride. When it comes to outside authority being imposed upon Rishikesh, the concerns correlate with the negative impacts of cultural appropriation as defined by Ziff and Rao (1997) and discussed in the introduction. As one yoga school owner (49) confided in me with conviction, “*If new generation [of India], young generation, just pay attention to their, the way they learned yoga, you learn their marketing skills, and see. America will collapse in one month, one month will not take America to collapse. If this awareness if being brought to India, nobody will ask American yoga alliance certificate after that*”. In other words, there is a lot of confidence in India’s ability to manage their own matters related to yoga and tourism, especially with current prime minister Modi who is seen as a great benefactor for yoga in India. However, there are some concerns about the future of yoga tourism to Rishikesh which require this Indian take-over in the marketing of and capitalizing from yoga (tourism) to also be bound by strict regulation and management, as further discussed in section 8.1.

Yoga tourists appear generally unaware of the salience of this issue for locals. For many it is an important prerequisite for their yoga course that the certification is internationally recognized, as many plan to incorporate teaching yoga in their professional lives back home in some form or the other. For these tourists, taking yoga teacher trainings thus “cross the boundaries between work and leisure”, as they are preoccupied with both having a good touristic experience and achieving a certification to possibly enhance their careers back home (Cousins et al., 2009). Because of the limited amount of interaction that takes place between tourists and locals, as well as the economic incentive for locals to keep offering the same yoga courses, these issues of questioned yogic authority and ownership underlying all of Rishikesh’ vibrant yoga tourism remain largely hidden to the public eye.

This brings us back to the discussion on the globalization of intangible heritage. Putting it in slightly exaggerated terms, yoga is about as globalized as it gets; anyone in the world can take yoga classes and

devote their whole life to yoga without ever having stepped foot in India. If India truly wishes to grow its tourism potential and establish itself as the authority on yoga, rather than losing its yogic credibility through over commercialized selling of yoga (as already seems to be happening in Rishikesh), it will need to address some very real on the ground issues, as further discussed below.

8.1 Concerns about Continued Legitimacy and Recommendations

It is difficult to generalize about the future of yoga tourism to Rishikesh or to India more broadly, but the findings of this research do show some reason for concern about the future of (yoga) tourism development. In this section, I go over these concerns, and also provide some recommendations for the national government and regulatory tourism bodies concerned with Rishikesh specifically. My aim with these recommendations is not necessarily to improve the selling of yoga in yoga tourism, but rather to urge against over-commercialization and development by improving regulatory systems and encouraging a further debate on what is desirable in terms of the selling of this intangible heritage.

Many locals within the yoga sector expressed their concerns about the future of Rishikesh and emphasized the need for more regulation, exclaiming for instance that “Rishikesh digging its own grave” if it continues in its current state of mindless tourism growth. Currently, new yoga teachers are being “pumped out” by 200-hour yoga teacher trainings like a “machine” and with new yoga school “machines” popping up left and right, many fear that this will lead to the demise of Rishikesh and a total loss of its spiritual essence. Most locals agree that already not much of Rishikesh’ former glory as a place for spiritual leaders is left; the reality of Rishikesh is a new reality now, with a booming tourism industry and new structures being built in every vacant plot. However rich its history of spiritual leaders and practise, it is often admitted that as commercialization has taken over Rishikesh, all but very few of the “real yogis” have fled the town.

Thus, as the continued legitimacy of Rishikesh as a place of spiritual devotion and yoga is at stake, there is a serious call for regulation on yoga tourism. This regulation will have to come from an Indian initiative, preferably the Indian government, as outside regulation such as Yoga Alliance US faces questioned legitimacy. Although 200-hour yoga teacher trainings are the norm all around the world, this new (Indian) regulatory body will need to seriously consider whether such a limited time period aligns with their ideas of what it means to study yoga. Especially as the homeland of yoga, India may be instrumental in setting a new global standard for what it means to be a yoga teacher. As so many locals expressed, 200 hours is not enough to even learn the “ABC of yoga”, let alone learn enough to be able to teach someone else. This new regulatory body will need to be set up in such a way that there is enough man power to physically check up on yoga schools and teachers, if it wants to have a real impact rather than being seen as a new paperwork scheme.

Specific to Rishikesh, perhaps an online platform should be set up where all yoga schools of Rishikesh can be found, in order to make the experience of finding a place to yoga in Rishikesh become

less overwhelming and frustrating than it is now for many yoga tourists. Additionally, in order to safeguard Rishikesh' tourism reputation, a tighter general regulation of the tourism industry should be put in place (for instance on hygienic standards) as suggested by local managers of tourism enterprises themselves. For now, one manager (71) resorts to advising his guests:

"I tell people, they ask, 'can we go and eat outside?', I said, you can eat to any café, but first visit their washroom. If the washroom is clean, then pretty sure that their kitchen would be clean. [...] Because a lot of people, our guests staying here, people have eaten outside, and holding their stomach, you know? It is a problem. So we have to warn them about it. A lot of joints you know, they have a very filthy way of preparing which is bad and brings the bad news for the tourism here."

There are reasons to be optimistic. For locals, the good news is that there is the political will for change, and some action towards better regulation of the yoga tourism industry appears to already have been taken. Although not yet made public, some owners of yoga schools shared with me that the "background work" for an Indian governmental certification of yoga that will make Yoga Alliance US redundant has already started. For now, this of course remains a matter of speculation, but it will be interesting to see how things change in the future. Seeing as though currently the industry is dealing with both rapid growth and serious under regulation, combined with a wide variety of understandings of yoga and how it should be practised itself, this will not be an easy task.

Another reason for optimism or source of hope for locals comes from a non-anthropocentric source. Rishikesh has historically been considered a spiritual and holy place for a reason, and one of the reasons is the presence of the holy Ganga river (especially in the 'unique' combination with the Himalaya mountains). 'Mother' Ganga is often said to be an important reason for why Rishikesh has a magnetic pull on people, and is considered to have a real 'agential' capacity to keep Rishikesh alive even in the wake of massive tourism development and pollution, as for instance articulated in this quote by a local yoga teacher (25):

"And then I visit my brother and I came to Rishikesh, I was in Ram Jhula [one of the famous pedestrian bridges] with my backpack, six o'clock in the morning when I saw Ganga. I right away decided I am not leaving Rishikesh. I will do anything, but I will never leave, and now I am here. Because I don't know, I have seen a lot of rivers, but Ganga... I almost was about to cry, like little children you know, I was just watching. Ganga, Ganga, whatever happens, how many people will come and traffic whatever, Ganga will hold everything back."

8.1.1 Lessons from Conservation/Volunteer Tourism

As discussed in the beginning of this thesis, yoga tourism faces many similar challenges to conservation tourism as they relate to commodification and legitimacy. Actors in conservation tourism have to constantly balance scientific legitimacy against the quality of the volunteer experience (Cousins et al., 2009), in similar ways to yoga tourism actors, who have to balance making something that is seen

as a vast spiritual subject into tangible commercial products for tourists. Similarly to yoga tourism, conservation tourism is a fast expanding industry, and directors of private tour operators in the field “suggested that the sector will become increasingly dominated by large corporate travel organizations in the future, as the industry comes onto the radar of mainstream tour operators” (ibid., n.p.). Cousins et al. (2009) thus also call for some form of regulation to temper the “progressive commodification of conservation”. Without this regulation market mechanisms will rule the industry, and conservation tourism runs the risk of altogether losing its scientific legitimacy.

Regulation is also needed in the case of yoga tourism, for many of the same reasons. While there are actors who fundamentally critique the combination of ‘yoga’ and ‘tourism’, much in the same way that some feel that volunteering and tourism cannot be combined – one must either volunteer *or* be a tourist –, yoga tourism is a fact. It is a booming industry in India and with active governmental promotion, it shows no signs of slowing down. And while tourism money is looming, India must also carefully consider the impact of turning their intangible heritage into a commercial undertaking. Unlike in conservation tourism, yoga tourism is still characterized by many small and informal actors, as anyone without a formal background can potentially do and teach yoga. Thus to safeguard a popular touristic city like Rishikesh, “World Capital of Yoga”, from becoming a caricature of itself, governmental regulation could not come soon enough.

8.1.2 On the Lack of Local Identification with Yoga

In section 5.5 I discussed the general status that yoga has among much of Rishikesh’ general public as that of an *activity for tourists* rather than something they partake in or see as an important part of their life. I heard this same sentiment both from these locals themselves and from people within the field of yoga and yoga tourism. The general secretary from a larger ashram who, as mentioned earlier, was so critical of the term ‘yoga tourism’ for instance told me that “*They [locals] don’t know anything about yoga, they wouldn’t even know how to spell yoga*”. This lack of local identification with yoga is an important aspect in the continued legitimacy of Rishikesh as a spiritual and yogic place and centre for heritage tourism.

Previous research has shown the importance of local identity and community for the development of heritage tourism. Ballesteros & Ramírez (2007, p. 678) for instance write: “*when focusing on heritage tourism—a field in which the convergence of heritage, tourism, identity and community is even greater—the role of identities must be explored as a conditioning factor in the planning, management and sustainability of heritage tourism*”. Following their study on the development of heritage tourism in mining villages in Spain, they conclude that “*members of a community must value the potential of their heritage as a tourist product, in order to widen their offer; in order to do this, it is fundamental for the local population itself to establish a ‘relationship of consumption’ with its heritage*” (p. 686). In other words, there is an important role for local communities and their identification with the heritage for the

sustainability of heritage tourism. If Rishikesh wishes to sustain or even enhance its yogic legitimacy, another recommendation based on the findings of this and other researches into heritage tourism would be to take this lack of local identification with yoga seriously, and to work on providing a platform to make yoga more attainable for the local community of Rishikesh. This can be done through governmental funding, or perhaps tourists can be asked to pay a contribution to local ashrams that offer free yoga to locals. Perhaps even another yoga festival can be created, which, unlike the IYF, does not charge any admission fee and specifically targets locals and those without a background in yoga. In any case the local community will need to be involved in any further tourism development of Rishikesh and their concerns and wishes must be heard if this tourism development is to be sustainable.

8.2 Reflection on the Methods & Suggestions for Further Research

Yoga tourism is a very fruitful and still rather unexplored field of academic enquiry, and based on the results that this research yielded I can give multiple recommendations for future research. Firstly, the methodological focus of this research was on local actors and tourists, in order to uncover how legitimacy in the case of selling yoga as a tourism product is constructed or contested from the ground up in the local context of Rishikesh. Future research could benefit from extending the methodological lens to different scales of analysis, for instance focussing on the transnational geography of yoga tourism and the rising of transnational networks of yoga schools throughout different continents. Although in its early stages of organization, there are already transnational relations forming, for instance between yoga retreats in Rishikesh and New York, whereby regularly groups from a New York based yoga school come to Rishikesh for a 1 or 2-week yoga retreat. It would be highly interesting to uncover how these networks are formed, who has the power to control the narrative and performance around yoga and how the understanding of yoga is impacted by such transnational cooperation. From the field of political science, it would be highly interesting and important to study the current Indian government stance towards yoga and the political implications of its (tourism) promotion. And from a cultural studies point of view, it would be highly beneficial to analyse further the impact of yoga tourism on the identity of local communities as well as – following Ballesteros & Ramírez's (2007, p. 678) “more recursive consideration of cause/effect relationships” – the impact of the identity of the local community on the development of yoga tourism.

The process of undertaking this research has also reaffirmed some methodological questions for me that I consider potentially beneficial for other researchers. Firstly, having an Indian friend as “guide” or informal research assistant proved to be of invaluable help for both introducing me to local interviewees and getting them to open up about touchy subjects, such as matters of pride, shame, controversial views about the West and their personal views on yoga or lack thereof. I was surprised at how quickly after making initial contact, locals would open up about such topics and I attribute this in

large part to the presence of another Indian who could both relate to them, and also serve as a fact checker to prevent locals from giving too socially desirable answers. Additionally, including the method of photo-elicitation in the interviews (for answering the first sub-question) turned out to require quite some flexibility and competency in reading the social situation, as not all pictures suited all contexts and conversations. As my fieldwork progressed I learned to be more intuitive about the inclusion of photos into the conversation, so that they would really serve to nudge the interviewee to go deeper in their explanations rather than stagnate the conversation. I did find that overall having pictures on hand to facilitate the interviews was very helpful and deepened the interviewee's thought process on what yoga means to them. Throughout the process, this research has gone through multiple transformations in terms of the research questions, theoretical focus and methods. This had both downsides and benefits. It required a lot of reflexivity both during fieldwork and afterwards, but also allowed me to really zoom in on the issues most pressing in the on the ground tourism reality of Rishikesh.

Finally, a reflection on the fruitfulness of including elements of the theory of New Materialism into this study on yoga tourism is due. In much of tourism studies, tourism is "mapped onto the reference plane of the social" and seen as a 'social activity' between 'social actors' (Gren & Huijbens, 2012, p. 159). Intangible heritage tourism in particular, even more so than other forms of tourism such as nature or adventure tourism, lends itself for such an anthropocentric lens, as the focus of this type of tourism is on intangible, cultural and human constructions. Still, this research has shown that even studies on intangible heritage tourism can benefit from extending the focus from the purely discursive to include more-than-discursive elements; New Materialism's focus on the agency of non-human and material elements beyond discursive meaning-making aspects has certainly contributed to the analysis of yogic legitimacy (de)construction, particularly in relation to place, scale, bodies and institutions. The specific extend to which aspects of New Materialism have been implemented in this research is rather limited however, as it did not form the main ontological and analytical lens but rather the main categorizations and focus remained on 'the humans of yoga tourism'. Striking the correct balance between these different theorizations at times proved to be a challenge, but my hope is that this research can serve as a probe for future research on intangible heritage / yoga tourism to consider the usefulness of extending the focus beyond only the discursive.

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Appendix I – Interview Guides

The following two guides were used for interviews with tourists and locals respectively.

Interview with Tourists

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction about research - Assure anonymity and confidentiality - Ask permission to record and take notes - Introductory questions about them, to get background information (age, nationality, information about reason for and type of trip)
Their understanding of the essence of yoga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal experiences with and background in yoga - Main motivation for doing yoga - Feelings around “commercialization” of yoga / different newer forms of yoga; [Picture 1], [Picture 2] - Yoga as Indian heritage; UNESCO [Picture 5] & [Picture 6]. Indian way of yoga more “pure?”
(Tension/) experiences in yoga tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General impressions of Rishikesh - How did they find the place they do yoga? Based on which criteria? Which information did they consult/trust? - Who do they interact with on daily basis during their stay? Talk about memorable interactions with locals / tourists - Differences between yoga at home and yoga in Rishikesh [Picture 4] - Personal experiences feeling (un)comfortable (clothing/looks/behaviour); share my own experiences as a yoga tourist - Share about IYF conflict of 2011 & [Picture 3] - Yoga teacher training/US Alliance; thoughts, experiences, brand familiarity - Thoughts on gender aspect of yoga: in the West highly feminized vs in India largely male undertaking, male gurus and yoga teachers

Interview with Locals

Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction about research - Assure anonymity and confidentiality - Ask permission to record and take notes - Introductory questions about them, to get background information (age, job, how long have they lived in Rishikesh etc.)
Their understanding of the essence of yoga	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal experiences with yoga; how did they get familiar with yoga (personal journey) - Does general public practise yoga? [Picture 4] - Feelings around “commercialization” of yoga / different newer forms of yoga; [Picture 1], [Picture 2] - Yoga as Indian heritage; UNESCO [Picture 5] & [Picture 6]. Indian way of yoga more “pure”? Relation to meditation, Ayurveda etc. - What do they consider the main motivation for tourists vs. locals to practise yoga? Is there any difference here?
Experiences/role in yoga tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thoughts on other yoga schools/teachers - Method of advertising - Experiences with yoga tourism/tourists. Memorable interactions with tourists & general views on yoga tourists. - Thoughts about IYF & Share about IYF conflict of 2011 & [Picture 3]. - YTT certificates & US Alliance; regulation of yoga tourism - Personal experiences feeling (un)comfortable with the behaviour/body of tourists; if appropriate, share my own experiences as a yoga tourist

Appendix II – The interviewees

The following two tables contain basic information about the interviewees, as well as the received compensation for locals. Names have been changed to guarantee anonymity.

Tourists:	Name	Sex (M/F)	Age	Nationality	Type of yoga tourist
1	Gunpreet	M	34	Indian	Traveling without clear itinerary, trying out yoga here and there
2	Elizabeth	F	27	Indonesian	In Rishikesh for a 200-hour yoga teacher training at one specific yoga school
3	Jessica	F	48	Australian	In Rishikesh for a 300-hour yoga teacher training at one specific yoga school
4	George	M	24	American	In Rishikesh for a still undecided yoga teacher training
5	Anne	F	26	Dutch	In Rishikesh for a 4 week yoga- and spiritual retreat at one specific ashram
6	Ryan	M	23	Indian	In Rishikesh for a 1 week yoga- and spiritual retreat at one specific ashram
7	Kayla	F	30	Canadian	In Rishikesh for a two-week yoga course at one specific ashram
8	Sabrina	F	26	Canadian	Traveling without clear itinerary, trying out yoga here and there
9	Robert	M	26	German	Traveling without clear itinerary, trying out yoga here and there

Locals:	Name	Sex (M/F)	Age	Type of yoga actor / Job description	Paid, yes/no & amt. in rupees
10	Benjamin	M	18	Lower level employee at yoga retreat & hotel	Yes, 100
11	Nidhi	F	48	Manager of yoga retreat & hotel	No
12	Arjun	M	37	Employee at popular tourist yoga restaurant	Yes, 100
13	Jay	M	47	Owner of small yoga clothing shop and tailor	Yes, 100
14	Hardev	M	38	Lower level employee at hotel	Yes, 100
15	Haripreet	M	71	Manager of high-end yoga hotel and restaurant	No
16	Krishna	M	75	Meditation teacher with own tourist enterprise	No
17	Girish	M	32	Yoga teacher at ashram	Yes, 100
18	Deepak	M	25	Yoga teacher trainer & general	Yes, 200

				staff member at yoga school	
19	Aazim	M	25	Yoga bookshop owner	Yes, 100
20	Sapna	F	30	Yoga teacher employee at yoga school	Yes, 150
21	Daniel	M	31	Yoga teacher and owner of ashram	Yes, 150
22	Fathima	F	40	Yoga teacher at ashram	Yes, 150
23	Johnny	M	35	Yoga teacher and owner of own yoga school	Yes, 200
24	Lakshmi	M	49	Yoga teacher and owner of own yoga school	Yes, 200