

Sonic Efficacy: Mantras, Music and Placemaking in Global Southern Asia

Funded by the ERC Synergy Project MANTRAMS, this workshop brings perspectives derived from immersive ethnography, sound studies, sensory anthropology, embodied research practice and historical methods to study efficacious sounds in relation to music, body, place and ritual in global southern Asia.

Sacred sound has been employed for centuries across human cultures to bring about transformations of the body, the self, society, and the cosmos. Among the most powerful expressions are **mantras**, which stand as paramount examples of efficacious sound.

Today, mantras are used by over a billion people globally for ritual, meditation and healing. Mantras are employed by diverse secular, religious and spiritual communities (Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, New Age spiritualities, SBNR, etc.). Similar efficacious sacred sounds and syllables are used in Islamic, Christian, ancestor-worship, and animistic traditions.

In the lack of a single definition that works for its various manifestations over history and across geographical regions, “mantra” is a relational category shaped by the ways powerful syllables and sacred sounds are embedded within local sonic ideologies and musical genres.

The presentations, audio papers, and other multimodal and multisensory contributions that make up this workshop collectively explore the understudied intersections between sonic efficacy and sound practices, with particular attention to the role of mantras in processes of sonic soteriology and place-making in Southern Asia. Key themes include:

- **Sound, Music, and Music Instruments.** How do mantric practices share a sonic ideology that is common to genres of sacred sound (e.g., zikr, kirtan, bhajan, nam japa, paritta)? How is the efficacy of mantras and other sacred sounds affected or mediated by their performance, musical accompaniment, and/or amplification?
- **Healing and Soteriology.** How do mantras induce transformations of the body and the self? How are sonic and medical efficacies of mantras linked through ritual? Why are mantra practitioners often situated in the fuzzy borderland between religion and traditional medicine?
- **Place-making.** What is it that efficacious sounds *do* to the place where they are played, repeated, or amplified? How do mantras and sacred sounds contribute to inter-religious tensions and controversies surrounding competing soundscapes in diverse societies? How do local sonic ideologies and sacred cosmogonies intersect with spatial and communal belonging?

Building upon selected contributions from the participants, we will collectively work towards:

- An edited volume on *Sonic Efficacy in Global South Asia*.
- Sonic contributions to the OMnibus of MANTRAMS (omnibus.mantrams.eu), MANTRAMS’ immersive multimedia archive.
- A series of audiovisual deliverables, e.g., in the format of audio papers, audiovisual essay or audio documentary to be published as part of a multimodal Special Issue.

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

DATE	TIME (SGT)	PANEL SESSION
2 SEP 2026 (Wed)	10:00 – 10:45	WELCOME & INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	10:50 – 12:20	PANEL 1 – SOUNDS IN MOTION: TRANSLOCAL & TRANSOCEANIC
	13:30 – 15:00	PANEL 2 – SOUNDS IN MOTION: STREETS AND PARADES
	15:30 – 17:30	PANEL 3 – SOUNDS IN MOTION: MINORITIES, IDENTITIES, (DIS/EM)PLACEMENT
	18:30 – 20:00	WORKSHOP DINNER <i>(For speakers and chairpersons only)</i>
3 SEP 2026 (Thu)	10:00 – 12:00	PANEL 4 – TEXTS IN PERFORMANCE: HISTORY AND PRACTICE
	13:00 – 15:00	PANEL 5 – CONTESTED SOUNDSCAPES
	15:30 – 17:00	PANEL 6 – HEALING, EMBODIMENT, POSSESSION
4 SEP 2026 (Fri)	10:00 – 12:00	PANEL 7 – SOUNDING ENVIRONMENTAL AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN PRESENCE
	13:00 – 14:30	PANEL 8 – MUSICAL OBJECTS AND SILENT SONIC DEVICES
	15:00 – 16:30	PANEL 9 – MEDIA AND SONIC AMPLIFICATION
	16:30 – 17:30	FINAL DISCUSSION & CLOSING REMARKS

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

CAROLA E. LOREA | *University of Tübingen*
MUKUL MENON | *University of Tübingen*
DEVYANI BHOSALE | *University of Tübingen*
EDDA SCHWARZKOPF | *University of Tübingen*
YAOREIPAM MAKANG | *University of Tübingen*
TOM PETERSON | *University of Tübingen*
ISHITA MAHAJAN | *University of Tübingen*
KENNETH DEAN | *National University of Singapore*

2 SEPTEMBER 2026 • WEDNESDAY

10:00 – 10:45	WELCOME & INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	KENNETH DEAN <i>National University of Singapore</i> CAROLA E. LOREA <i>University of Tübingen</i> EDDA SCHWARZKOPF <i>University of Tübingen</i>
10:50 – 12:20	PANEL 1 – SOUNDS IN MOTION: TRANSLOCAL & TRANSOCEANIC
<i>Chairperson</i>	EMILY HERTZMAN <i>University of Toronto</i>
10:50	The Sonic Geography of Death: Efficacious Mantras, Funerary Rites, and Diasporic Place-Making among Andaman's Mappila Muslims HASEEB RAHMAN <i>Jamia Millia Islamia</i>
11:10	The Sonic Efficacy of Bava Gor's Zikr: Repetition, Resonance, and Sonic Soteriology RAKESH KUMAR <i>The Chinese University of Hong Kong</i>
11:30	Mantras as Sonic Shelter: Oral Histories of Migrant Listening between North India and the Gulf RAJESH PRASAD <i>University of Delhi</i>
11:50	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:20 – 13:30	LUNCH BREAK
13:30 – 15:00	PANEL 2 – SOUNDS IN MOTION: STREETS AND PARADES
<i>Chairperson</i>	ISHITA MAHAJAN <i>University of Tübingen</i>
13:30	Constituting the Sacred through Mantras: Place-making in the Varkari Pilgrimage PORNIMA RAJKARNE <i>National Institute of Advanced Studies</i>
13:50	Sonic Culture of Thaipusam in Singapore MIOTTO LAURA <i>Nanyang Technological University</i> RAMESH KRISHNAN <i>Sound Designer, Music Creative</i> LIM SHU MIN <i>LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore</i>
14:10	From Recitation to Loop: Zikr, Remix, and the Politics of Sacred Sound in Pakistan HASSAN ASIF <i>University of Toronto</i>
14:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
15:00 – 15:30	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK

15:30 – 17:30	PANEL 3 – SOUNDS IN MOTION: MINORITIES, IDENTITIES, (DIS/EM)PLACEMENT
<i>Chairperson</i>	DEVYANI BHOSALE <i>University of Tübingen</i>
15:30	Tengerese Mantras in Hybrid Tongues: Calling Ancestors and Making Place XINTONG CHEN <i>Cornell University</i>
15:50	The Bhajan of Bahucara Mata in ‘Garba’ Performance DANIELA BEVILACQUA <i>CRIA (ISCTE-IUL)</i>
16:10	Chanting as Infrastructure: Temporality, Sensory Order, and the Politics of Visibility in Theravāda Malaysia’s Indian Ocean Worlds TIANYU WANG <i>McGill University</i>
16:30	Contested Religious Sounds: Informed Free-Style and Sonic Efficacy in Tamil Evangelical Prayers in Paris NATALIE LANG <i>University of Göttingen</i>
16:50	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:30	END OF DAY 1
17:45	BUS TRANSFER TO DINNER VENUE
18:30 – 20:00	WORKSHOP DINNER

3 SEPTEMBER 2026 • THURSDAY

10:00 – 12:00	PANEL 4 – TEXTS IN PERFORMANCE: HISTORY AND PRACTICE
<i>Chairperson</i>	CAROLA E. LOREA <i>University of Tübingen</i>
10:00	Sonic Imagination and the Emergence of Meitei-Vaishnav Spirituality through Joydev Chongba DEBANJALI BISWAS <i>Independent Scholar</i>
10:20	Mantra as Sonic Invocation among the Tamil Siddhas and Swamigals KEITH CANTÚ <i>University of Tübingen</i>
10:40	Sonic Relationalities and Efficacies: Journeying across the Addhyātma Rāmāyaṇam Kilippāṭṭ through Recitation MUKUL MENON <i>University of Tübingen</i>
11:00	Art Music for Aristocratic Yogis: Music, Mantra, and Place-making in Nineteenth-Century Jodhpur RICHARD DAVID WILLIAMS <i>SOAS University of London</i>
11:20	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH BREAK
13:00 – 15:00	PANEL 5 – CONTESTED SOUNDSCAPES
<i>Chairperson</i>	TOM PETERSON <i>University of Tübingen</i>
13:00	Sacred Sounds, Silent Shifts: Baul Esoteric Practice in a Majoritarian Soundscape MAHJABIN AKHI <i>Development Research Initiative</i>
13:20	City of a Thousand Mantras: The Sacred Sound Landscape of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, in the Sonic Shadows of the Hegemonic Islamic Call to Prayer EMILY HERTZMAN <i>University of Toronto</i>
13:40	Vernacularizing Chant: Inculturation and Christian Sound in Contemporary Kerala GEORGE PIOUSIN <i>University of California - Los Angeles</i>
14:00	The Sound of Compassion: Mantric Practice and Embodied Discipline within Tibetan Buddhist Education in Nepal JENNIFER MORANA <i>Bicocca; Lisboa & KUSOED Kathmandu University</i>
14:20	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
15:00 – 15:30	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK

15:30 – 17:00	PANEL 6 – HEALING, EMBODIMENT, POSSESSION
<i>Chairperson</i>	LUCY MAY CONSTANTINI <i>University of Vienna</i>
15:30	Whispering Buddhist Worlds: Mantras, Efficacy, and Possessed Newar Buddhist Women AUSTIN SIMÕES-GOMES <i>University of Toronto</i>
15:50	Negotiating with Demons and Ghosts: The Efficacy of Mantrams in Sri Lankan Healing Rituals EVA AMBOS <i>University of Tübingen</i>
16:10	Chanting at the Rhythm of Faith: Sonic Efficacy and the Medicine Buddha Invocation in a Theravadā Bhikkhunī Monastery in Thailand MARIA VITTORIA NENNA <i>La Sapienza University of Rome</i>
16:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:00	END OF DAY 2

4 SEPTEMBER 2026 • FRIDAY

10:00 – 12:00	PANEL 7 – SOUNDING ENVIRONMENTAL AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN PRESENCE
<i>Chairperson</i>	YAOREIPAM MAKANG <i>University of Tübingen</i>
10:00	The Belian Bawo Mantra as Ethnomedicine: The Megis Chanting Ritual and Traditional Healing Prayers through Dayak Tribal Dance BIBI SUPRIANTO <i>Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Pontianak</i>
10:20	Bakher and the Sonic Making of Sacred Place among the Santals SUNNY DEOL MANDI <i>Indian Institution of Technology Bombay</i>
10:40	Ammonite Mantra: Sonic Explorations of Eco-Spiritual Connection GEORGE CLOKE <i>Independent Scholar/SOAS</i> KALI HONG <i>Independent Scholar</i>
11:00	Sonic Efficacy and Textual Authority: Sacred Soundscapes in the Lu Mien Tou Sai Ritual of Northern Vietnam ZHENGHANG LI <i>Hunan Normal University</i>
11:20 (40 min)	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
12:00 – 13:00	LUNCH BREAK
13:00 – 14:30	PANEL 8 – MUSICAL OBJECTS AND SILENT SONIC DEVICES
<i>Chairperson</i>	KEITH CANTÚ <i>University of Tübingen</i>
13:00	The Conch-Body and Place: Sensitive Ambivalences of Sacrality SUKANYA SARBADHIKARY <i>Presidency University</i>
13:20	Playing for the Ancestors: Sonic Efficacy and Ritual Language in Hmong Qeej Practice MANMAN YANG <i>University of Manchester</i>
13:40	Chant Contact and the Potency of Lao Buddhist Amulets FLORAMANTE SJ PONCE <i>University of Duisburg-Essen</i>
14:00 (30 min)	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
14:30 – 15:00	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK

15:00 – 16:30	PANEL 9 – MEDIA AND SONIC AMPLIFICATION
<i>Chairperson</i>	MUKUL MENON <i>University of Tübingen</i>
15:00	Buddha's Voice and Words in Thai Contemporary Rituals: The Amplified Suat Mon (Pali Sutra Mantra) of Buddhist Monks PIERRE PROUTEAU <i>LAMC/Université Libre de Bruxelles</i>
15:20	Mantra, Movie, Milk Tea: Recontextualization and Reappropriation of Sacred Words in Thai Popular Culture NATTAPOL WISUTTIPAT <i>Thammasat University</i>
15:40	Chanting Change, Changing Space: Dalit-Buddhist Soundscapes and Mantric Practices in Maharashtra DEVYANI BHOSALE <i>University of Tübingen</i>
16:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
16:30 – 17:30	FINAL DISCUSSION & CLOSING REMARKS CAROLA E. LOREA <i>University of Tübingen</i> MUKUL MENON <i>University of Tübingen</i> DEVYANI BHOSALE <i>University of Tübingen</i> EDDA SCHWARZKOPF <i>University of Tübingen</i> YAOREIPAM MAKANG <i>University of Tübingen</i> TOM PETERSON <i>University of Tübingen</i> ISHITA MAHAJAN <i>University of Tübingen</i> KENNETH DEAN <i>National University of Singapore</i>
17:30	END OF WORKSHOP

MANTRAMS MULTIMEDIA SHOWCASE

The Multimedia Kiosk is an interactive “sonic corner” where recordings of the work-in-progress, audio or audio-visual material produced by the members of the MANTRAMS Task Force 2 will be played. The corner is imagined as a place where attendees can get a sense of the ongoing multimedia outputs created by some of the project members. Participants can engage with the ongoing audiovisual pathways what will be published on the OMnibus archive. The kiosk will be open throughout the workshop days, and everyone is encouraged to engage with the content/recordings at their leisure. All contributors will be present in person and would appreciate any feedback or questions regarding their work. The abstracts of each of the contributions are included in the conference program and shall be made available in print at the kiosk. The space near the kiosk is free to be used for stretching or taking a few moments to breathe and relax between and during panels.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Amplification as Auspiciousness: An Illuminated Audio Essay on Mantras, Picnic Parties and Car Horns

CAROLA E. LOREA | *University of Tübingen*

Walking with the Devta: Sonic Movements Among the Deities of Kullu, India

ISHITA MAHAJAN | *University of Tübingen*

Hearing Kataragama: Soundspace, Listening, and Audio Production in a Multi-Religious Sri Lankan Temple Complex

TOM PETERSON | *University of Tübingen*

Sonic Performative Alliances and Solidarities across Diverse Naga Communities in the Northeast Region of India

YAOREIPAM MAKANG | *University of Tübingen*

The Sonic Geography of Death: Efficacious Mantras, Funerary Rites, and Diasporic Place-Making among Andaman's Mappila Muslims

HASEEB RAHMAN

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This research examines the "sonic soteriology" of funerary rituals among the Mappila Muslims of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a "victim diaspora" displaced from Malabar following the 1921 Rebellion. By attending to the efficacy of sounds such as the Thalqeen (a religious leader—the Musliyar—sitting at the head of the grave and speaking directly to the deceased), Thathbeeth (stabilizing prayers), Qira'at (recitation), and Moulid (hagiographic poetry), khathappura (the collective recitation of the Quran over seven days to honour the deceased in a temporary home built near to grave), eezhu kazhikkal (holding a majlis on 7, 14th, 40th and anniversary with moulid recitations, prayer and food distribution) this study explores how sound acts as a "verbal bridge" across the liminal space between life and death, are mediated through the efficacy of sound and the materialities of the grave, particularly in a diasporic context shaped by the historical rupture of the 1921 Malabar Rebellion. I argue that Zikr and Moulid function as efficacious sounds that perform transformations upon the body, self, and the island landscape. The burials in "foreign soil," these sonic acts help construct a "sonic ummah"—a local community bounded by sound that remains connected to the global Islamic body. These rituals are analyzed as "technologies of the self," through which islanders cultivate an ethical subjecthood and negotiate inter-religious tensions within the multi-ethnic "Mini-India" of the Andamans. The paper also examines the severe backlash faced by the traditional Sunni faction from their reformist counterparts over funeral practices, devotional performances, and various other 'innovations', which are grouped under the larger umbrella of 'Bid'a'. Interestingly, both factions accuse each other of Bid'a and authorise each of their practices using similar foundational texts of Islam. This project is presented as an audio paper, utilizing field recordings of recitations to argue that the "sonic atmosphere" of the graveyard and the Khathappura (recitation home) allows islanders to reconcile the material absence of the dead with a vibrant, sounded presence.

Haseeb Rahman is a research student in the Department of Islamic Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia and currently serves as a summer research intern at the Korea Centre, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam and a research intern at the Centre for Study and Research, New Delhi. With a postgraduate degree in Philosophy from the University of Calicut, a graduation in English language and literature and six years of rigorous training in classical Islamic sciences at a traditional Islamic seminary, Haseeb brings a unique interdisciplinary perspective to his work. His research interests span the sociology of religion, the anthropology of Islam, sonic anthropology, diasporic studies, the anthropology of death, and Indian Ocean studies. He has presented papers at national and international conferences, earning recognition for his insightful contributions. Notably, his paper, *Makhdoom II* and 'Provincialising Islamic Sharia': Customary Practices and Regionality of Coastal Malabar in *Fath al-Mu'in* and *Ajwibat al-'ajiba*, received the Best Research Award at the National Makhdoomiyam Conference at PSMO college. He recently presented a paper on the anthropology of death at the Summer School organized by Ghent University, Belgium. He also presented, focusing on material culture at the ISA RC22 International Conference held at South Asian University.

The Sonic Efficacy of Bava Gor's Zikr: Repetition, Resonance, and Sonic Soteriology

RAKESH KUMAR

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This audio paper will show the sonic efficacy of the Afro-Indian Siddi Goma-Dhamal Zikr. As an act of sonic soteriology, the most popular and powerful Zikr in western Indian Siddi Goma-Dhamal performance is “Gor Gor, Bava Gor.”

The Zikr invokes the power of Bava Gor's appellation as a multivalent conduit through repetition, connecting the Siddi performers and Siddi community members to their African ancestry and to Allah. Simultaneously, the repetitious mention and remembrance of Gori Pir's sacred name connect non-Siddi Hindus and Muslims to miracles and healing through the Siddi saint and his performing initiates. Based on my three years of ethnographic research on Siddi Goma-Dhamal performances in Gujarat, India, I will present the Bava Gor Zikr, which is intrinsic to local sonic ideologies. As an audio paper, this will include the performance of Zikr, along with field recordings of Bava Gor Zikr and voice-over narration for the audience. And how Zikr creates a form of sonic commensality to navigate Gujarat's fraught interreligious landscape.

Rakesh Kumar comes from the state of Rajasthan, India. He is trained in Indian Classical music, Ethnomusicology and AI. He recently completed a PhD in Ethnomusicology (2025) at the International Library of African Music (ILAM), Rhodes University, South Africa. His doctoral thesis focused on the artistic, religious, political and social significance of Goma-Dhamal performances in Gujarat, India. He has been a lecturer in the Department of Music at Wollo University, Ethiopia, for five years. His research interests include music of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean World, Hindustani classical music, religion and sound, digital humanities, and Ethiopian music. Currently, he is developing a project on AI technologies and Indian classical music, specifically focusing on tacit musical knowledge at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK).

**Mantras as Sonic Shelter:
Oral Histories of Migrant Listening between North India and the Gulf**

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This paper will try to listen to mantras as they travel with North Indian migrant workers between small towns and villages in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the labour colonies of Delhi, and construction camps in the Gulf. Drawing on oral history interviews and shared listening sessions conducted between 2023 and 2025 with Hindu and Muslim migrants in Hindi and Bhojpuri, I ask what repeated exposure to recorded bhajans, satsang excerpts, zikr and naam japa playlists does to bodies, moods and social relations in spaces marked by precarity and surveillance. Rather than treating mantras only as texts or liturgical forms, I follow workers' own descriptions of "feeling lighter," "sleep coming," or "home entering the room" when a cheap speaker or a phone begins to play.

Methodologically, the paper experiments with oral history as a sonic practice in itself. Life narratives are recorded together with the background hum of fans, traffic, azaan and devotional loudspeakers, and listening back with interlocutors becomes a second moment of testimony in which people comment on volume, echo and interference. Situated against the longer history of devotional sound reproduction, from cassettes to WhatsApp forwards, the paper traces how migrants actively curate overlapping soundscapes to carve out pockets of protection, while also generating frictions with neighbours, employers and other religious communities.

Engaging the MANTRAMS agenda, I treat "mantra" as a relational category that emerges from specific sonic ideologies and musical genres, rather than as a fixed Sanskrit object, and argue that migrant listening practices from below should be central to any historical account of sonic efficacy in contemporary South Asia.

Rajesh Prasad is an Assistant Professor of Department of History, Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India. He received his PhD degree from Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi under Professor Bhagwan Josh and Professor Sucheta Mahajan. Apart from teaching history, Dr Rajesh has been interviewing, editing, and writing about Oral History of Indian National Movement and freedom Fighters since the 2016. He also has the experience of interviewing the survivors of caste massacres in Bihar. He is the author of numerous articles on survivors' retelling, including the chapter on Naxalites and Caste wars in Bihar for the Violence and Society edited volume by Interdisciplinary Research Foundation, Warsaw, Poland. He also authored articles like, Historical Waves of Oral History: Reflections on New Trends and Changing Practice, International Oral History Association, Finland, 2019; and Land, Caste and Political Power: Reflections on the Struggle of Caste Communities in Bihar, Occasional Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2020. His core area of research is Folk tradition, gender and violence, caste violence, left politics and oral history.

Constituting the Sacred through Mantras: Place-making in the Varkari pilgrimage

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This paper examines the repetitive chanting of mantra during the annual pilgrimage practice of the Varkari Sampradaya, a localized Bhakti tradition. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that mantra repetition leads to multiple forms of place-making. It operates as a performative practice of place-making and territorialization, modulating affect and organizing the pilgrimage route into a sacred audible geography. At the same time, it is not confined to external spatial transformation. Interwoven with the rhythm of cymbals, the mantra orients attention and cultivates a sensorium for the pilgrims. The invocation of names of deities in mantras invokes divinity as an imminent presence in them. Simultaneously, by invoking pan-Hindu divine names in the mantras, this localized Bhakti worship of Shri Vitthal is placed within the broader Hindu pantheon. In this account, mantra performs multiple forms of place-making: it generates interior sacred space within the pilgrim; forges a Varkari collective that cuts across caste, class, and gender in society; territorializes public space through audible assertion; and positions a regional Bhakti tradition within the wider Hindu religious landscape. Moreover, as per Bhakti ontology, mantra and deity are the same. Sound doesn't symbolize divinity but constitutes it. Here, deities emerge as active participants in the place-making process, within the body, along the pilgrimage route, and across the social and religious fields. Hence, this paper pushes the 'sonic turn' in religious studies to take seriously practitioners' claims about the ontological status of sacred sound, foregrounding how mantras, understood as divine presences, are implicated in sacred place-making.

Pornima Rajkarne is a doctoral student at the Music, Brain, and Creativity Initiative led by Dr. Deepti Navaratna at the School of Humanities of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, India. She has majored in Anthropology and bagged gold-medal during her master's degree. She is studying the pilgrimage practice of the Varkari tradition. Her work lies at the intersection of Religious Studies, Bhakti Studies, and Anthropology of Pilgrimage. Her other areas of interest are sensory ethnography, ethnomusicology, and performative traditions of Bhakti sects. She is also interested in communicating her research to non-academic audiences through various media. As a part of research communication initiatives, she has written blogs about her research, produced audio-blogs embedded with Bhakti poetry, hosted a multi-sensory experience (with photos, audios, videos, and material culture) of the Varkari pilgrimage practice at the Bangalore International Centre. She and her supervisor also arranged a concert of the Bhakti poetry as a part of this experience. In leisure, Pornima likes to read novels and write poetry.

Sonic Culture of Thaipusam in Singapore

MIOTTO LAURA

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RAMESH KRISHNAN

Sound Designer

LIM SHU MIN

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This audio-based paper examines the soundscape of Thaipusam, a four-kilometre Tamil Hindu procession held annually in Singapore. Drawing on long-term immersive documentation (2011–2016) and the vinyl record "Vel Vel" (2024), produced by the interdisciplinary collective SISTRUM, the presentation explores how sonic practices shape a ritual procession and reconfigure urban space.

Thaipusam's repertoire—comprising mantric chanting, repeated hymns like "Vel Vel," devotional songs, and spontaneous voices—is accompanied by diverse musical ensembles and amplified sound. Nadaswaram and thavil temple musicians, bhajan groups, urumi bands, and hybrid formations incorporating Western instruments coexist along the procession route from Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple to Sri Thendayuthapani Temple. Through repetition, rhythmic intensification, and collective vocalisation, sound sustains endurance and devotion. This is particularly evident in the embodied practice of kavadi carrying, in which devotees undertake physically demanding vows, often involving bodily piercings. Chanting and percussion sustain participants through experiences of pain, heat, and distance, enabling altered states and collective synchrony.

Here, mantra operates as relational and embodied practice embedded within musical textures, ritual movement, and urban acoustics. Interviews with musicians participating in the procession reveal ongoing tensions between classical influence and collective, amateur innovation within Singapore's Thaipusam diasporic sonic culture.

The paper further argues that sound actively produces place and social cohesion. As chants and percussion reverberate along Serangoon, Selegie, and Tank Road, temporarily transforming the secular streetscape into a sacralised sonic corridor. By combining sensory research with curated excerpts from Vel Vel, this contribution foregrounds listening as method and proposes sound recording as a way of documenting intangible heritage.

This presentation will be delivered by SISTRUM, an interdisciplinary collective composed of sound designer Ramesh Krishnan, architect Laura Miotto and graphic designer Lim Shu Min. Their work involves the creation of installations, exhibitions, and digital platforms enquiring into the narrative quality of sound and the environment. "Vel Vel" is a long-term project that Sistrum initiated in 2020. www.SISTRUM.sg

Laura Miotto (MSc Arch. Hons) is an Associate Professor at NTU's School of Art, Design and Media, where she co-directs the MA in Museum Studies and Curatorial Practices. With over 20 years of experience as a creative director and architectural designer, she specializes in sensorial and heritage-focused exhibition design. Her notable projects include the Borneo Cultures Museum (2022), The Posthuman City (2020), the Indian Heritage Centre (2015), and the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum (2015). In 2010, she received Singapore's President's Design Award for Quest for Immortality: The World of Ancient Egypt. Miotto's work emphasizes immersive, multisensory experiences in museums and public spaces.

Ramesh Krishnan is a sound designer. His work has been featured in museums, festivals, theatres such as "Vel Vel the Burden Dance" (2022) at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore; "Nature Remixed" at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum (2024); the Gwangju Design Biennale (2021); Wild Rice theatre production "You Are Here" (2021); and "Le Monde Flottant" with M. Briand at the Musée d'art Contemporain in Lyon (2004). He is an active member of Singapore's Thaipusam community

Lim Shu Min is a Lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore. Shu Min graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design, with a BFA in Graphic Design and a concentration in History of Art and Visual Culture. She also received an MA by Research from the School of Art, Design and Media, Nanyang Technological University. Working across print, screen and exhibitions, she has completed projects for the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore Botanic Gardens and Borneo Cultures Museum.

**From Recitation to Loop:
Zikr, Remix, and the Politics of Sacred Sound in Pakistan**

HASSAN ASIF

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In a nighttime na'at mehfil on a Karachi street, a sound engineer rides the faders while LED lights pulse in time with the reciter's phrasing. The street becomes a temporary sanctuary: city noise is pushed out, attention is pulled in, and a shared atmosphere of praise takes shape through microphones, speakers, delay, and disciplined listening. I treat these arrangements as a vernacular theory of sonic efficacy. How do repetitive sacred phrases, especially zikr loops embedded in contemporary na'at and slogans, operate like mantras, not as texts alone, but as timed, voiced, and amplified acts that reorganize bodies and places?

Drawing on six months of ethnographic fieldwork across Lahore and Karachi, I trace what I call Islamixing: the remixing of devotional sound under ethical constraint. First, I show how practitioners pursue kaifyat (spiritual intensity) through measurement and calibration, counting syllables, mapping numeric values to rhythm, and using metronome apps to hold tempo. Second, I examine how zikr-infused na'at becomes a flashpoint, with disputes over innovation, authority, and sincerity playing out through fatwas and widely circulated "correction" media. Third, I follow looped chanting into public political gatherings, where amplification and repetition do placemaking by thickening sonic presence and enforcing boundaries within contested urban soundscapes.

Hassan Asif is a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. His work traces what he calls Islamixing: the remixing of na'at (poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad) in Pakistan, and the ways it reshapes sacred performance, cultural identity, and religious authority. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Lahore and Karachi, he follows devotional sound across street mehfilis, home studios, madrasa training, television production, and archival sites. He uses Activity Theory and the concept of Muslim thought collectives to track how tools (DAWs, microphones, speakers, and sound libraries), rules, and communities align around contested standards of "proper" praise. His research sits at the intersection of sound studies, sensory anthropology, and information studies, with attention to piracy, platform circulation, and the politics of religious sound reproduction. He has published on media remix and digital technocultural practice in Pakistan, and he is committed to scholarship that takes listening seriously.

Tenggerese Mantras in Hybrid Tongues: Calling Ancestors and Making Place

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Tenggerese mantras, once etched on lontar manuscripts, now resound in the audio paper through the voices of Hindu shamans and local devotees. Blending Old Javanese, Sanskrit fragments, and the Tengger dialect, the sounds carried a distinctive sonic efficacy of hybridity, evoking the past and afar for here and now.

The author recorded the mantras at the annual Kasada ritual of the Tenggerese group in East Java in June 2024. At the foot of Mount Bromo, the shaman, bathed in full-moon light and scented smoke, recited these mantras, tracing the community's lineage to the medieval Indianized empire of Majapahit. The participants, kneeling on volcanic sands, responded with the Sanskrit syllable "dhi...", the vibrations of which threaded through the ghanta chimes, linking the living, ancestors, and the sacred volcano—Brahma's incarnation. At dawn, the Tenggerese carried animals, flowers, and banana leaves to the volcano's top and cast the offerings into the crater, receiving blessings from the deity.

In the sonic enactment, the Tenggerese mantras acted as living media, conjuring temporal depth, cosmic intimacy, and communal solidarity. The hybridized sounds leveraged Hindu authority and Majapahit heritage, subtly and covertly resisting pressures from modern Indonesian religious and ethnic policies. Through the annual communal resonance, the Tenggerese repeatedly reclaimed sacred landscapes and actively performed their ethnic identity. Attentive listening reveals that these practices are strategically mobilized, not passively inherited. Beyond localizing cosmopolitan Hinduism, Tenggerese mantras agentively sustained the minority community's place, identity, and social power, complicating the sonic and religious landscape of Global Southern Asia.

Xintong Chen is a third-year PhD student at the History Department and the Migrations Graduate Fellow at Cornell University. She specializes in Southeast Asian history, modern Chinese history, and the anthropology of senses and religions. Her PhD dissertation research focuses on sonic politics in everyday life and transcultural commons-making across Southeast Asia and China from the 17th century onwards. She has been sponsored by Cornell's Einaudi Center to conduct sensory ethnographic fieldwork and documentary film-shooting at volcanoes and seas in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and southern China. Her short film "A Package from Swatow" has screened at Kiplinger Theater, Cornell University, on Dec. 8, 2025. Her forthcoming short film, "Our Sea Commons," is scheduled to be screened at Cornell Cinema in May 2026.

The Bhajan of Bahucara Mata in ‘Garba’ Performance

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This paper focus on the Garba performance a vibrant, Gujarati folk-dance traditionally performed during the nine nights of Navratri. During this dance, the Anandno Garbo might be sung, a devotional composition dedicated to Bahuchara Mata, written by the Brahmin poet Vallabha Bhatta in the early eighteenth century. Bahucara Mata is considered the iṣṭa devtā (patron goddess) of hijras and kinnars and their presence during the garba performances is considered particularly auspicious, believed to enhance the ritual’s effectiveness.

This paper focuses on a specific group of kinnars from Anand (Gujarat) led by a mahamandaleshwara of the Kinnar Akhara, Sweeti Ma, and provides preliminarily analyses on the interactions and bonds between women, kinnars and the goddess: how the music is embodied, the Garba performed and which responses it creates in the audience. By focusing on women and hijra/kinnars—practitioners often absent in canonical sources and often marginalized in religious environment—this paper seeks to shed light on their lived experiences, interpretations, and embodiment of the Bahuchara Mata’s bhajan.

Daniela Bevilacqua is specialized in Hindu religious orders, investigated through an ethnographic and historical perspective. She received her PhD in Civilizations of Africa and Asia from Sapienza University of Rome and in Anthropology from the University of Paris Nanterre. She worked as a post-doc research fellow at SOAS, for the ERC-funded Haṭha Yoga Project (2015–2020). She is currently a researcher at Centre of Research in Anthropology (CRIA, University Institute of Lisbon, ISCTE-IUL) in Lisbon as Principal Investigator of the project “Performing the Sacred: Ethnographies of Transgender Activism in the Kinnar Akhara”. She authored *Modern Hindu Traditionalism in Contemporary India* (Routledge 2018), *From Tapas to Modern Yoga. Sādhus’ Understanding of Embodied Practices* (Equinox 2024), edited volumes, and written several articles and book chapters on topics related to Hindu religious tradition, gender, and embodied practices.

**Chanting as Infrastructure:
Temporality, Sensory Order, and the Politics of Visibility in
Theravāda Malaysia's Indian Ocean Worlds**

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I approach Malaysian Theravāda identity as a translocal resonance shaped by Indian Ocean connections, rather than as a fixed inheritance. Instead, it is continuously constructed through everyday practices interweaving chanting and temporality into a narrative aesthetic. I explore how this structured narrative re-activates South Asian traditions as a spectral presence at the Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) in Taiping, Malaysia.

Returning from transnational training trajectories in Myanmar, Thailand, or Sri Lanka, SBS monastics consciously forge a Malaysian Theravāda identity rather than replicating source traditions. Acoustically, they standardize Pāli communal chanting to generate, as they claim, a distinctive auditory marker. Sustained through digital media, this circulating disciplined sound produces a new acoustic geography. Meanwhile, chanting and temporality enter the same sensory order: within a soundscape structured by Islamic daily rhythms, monastics entangle the technological materiality of calculating solar noon with the flow of chanting.

I place this case at the intersection of Malaysia's postcolonial state and global South Asian sound geographies. Through digital ethnography, I ask: how does a marginalized Theravāda group use sonic mobility and everyday sensory order to negotiate a legitimate position within Malaysia's Islamic-dominated institutional ecology? I argue SBS's acoustic practices and temporal reshaping constitute an embodied infrastructure (Simone 2004; Johnson 2015) with dual capacity. Internally, technologically mediated sonic practices profoundly configure devotees' interiority (Weidman 2006). Externally, by staging this rigorous aesthetic of correctness, SBS transforms sound into an effective place-making strategy, sustaining visibility within a competitive soundscape and re-demarcating resilient religious boundaries.

Tianyu Wang (王天宇) is a PhD student in Ethnomusicology at McGill University's Schulich School of Music. Previously, he received an MA in Ethnomusicology from South China Normal University. His scholarly work explores the intersections of sound, migration, and sensory experience. Currently, he is researching the materiality and inherent contradictions of sonic practices among the African diaspora in China, while examining shifting patterns of music consumption and listening aesthetics across overseas Chinese communities.

**Contested Religious Sounds:
Informed Free-Style and Sonic Efficacy in Tamil Evangelical Prayers in Paris**

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Tamil evangelical Christians in Paris consider themselves talking to God like to a father in their prayers, which often include wishes for health and residence permits. They emphasize that the words come to them naturally. Since the 17th century, some Protestants in India have dismissed mantras as mechanical to distinguish themselves from Catholic and “Hindu”/ “pagan” practices. However, Tamil evangelical prayers contain specific formulas that are not part of everyday conversations. Through repetition and emotional voice, these terms help those who pray to concentrate on their prayers and on feeling a connection with God. Both rapid mechanical and highly emotional prayer styles confirm approaches in evangelical Christianity that consider praying out loud as more efficacious than silent prayers. The different styles raise questions about the connection between the semantic meanings of the uttered words, their sounding and their aspired efficacy. In this audio paper and interlinked book chapter, I will examine Tamil evangelical “free-style” prayer based on anthropological fieldwork in Paris between 2019 and 2026. These first-hand observations, including sound recordings of prayers, will be embedded in an analysis of Tamil Christian worship terms as they have emerged since the 16th century in Catholic prose and prayer books and later in Protestant translations of the Bible composed by European scholars. I will investigate to what extent debates about the best worship terms that have emerged since the 18th century continue until today. My research nuances ideas of “free-style” prayer by paying attention to different perspectives on efficacious sounds.

Natalie Lang is Research Fellow at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen. Her research interests include the anthropology of religion, migration, and cities. She was Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asian Urbanisms Cluster and the Religion and Globalisation Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, and Associated Junior Fellow at the Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt. She is also affiliated to the Centre d’études et de recherches sur l’Inde, l’Asie du Sud et sa diaspora, Université du Québec à Montréal. Her doctoral thesis in anthropology received the Frobenius Research Award 2019. Natalie Lang is the author of *Religion and Pride: Hindus in Search of Recognition in La Réunion* (Berghahn Books, 2021). She co-edits the research blog *CoronAsur: Religion and Covid-19*, and she co-edited *CoronAsur: Asian Religions in the Covidian Age* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2023).

Sonic Imagination and the Emergence of Meitei-Vaishnav Spirituality through Joydev Chongba

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Verses of 12th century lyrical poem *Gīta Govinda* attributed to Jayadeva have been adapted in myriad Meitei rituals and stage-performances. The first composition of the poem known as *dasavatara-stotra*, invokes the ten incarnations of Vishnu. The narrative densities of storytelling accrue layers when the invocation is composed in different oratory styles in various languages – Sanskrit, Meiteilon and Bengali. Tracing the textual weavings and multiple manifestations of the *dasavatara-stotra*, this presentation explores the interplay of diverse forms of embodied heritage and devotional aesthetics emerging from the religious event of Kang Chingba or Jagannath Yatra in Manipur. Observed as an annual nine-day festival celebrating Hindu divinities riding chariots, Kang Chingba is replete with narrative storytelling from Gaudiya Vaishnav myths and congregational musicking – also called *joydev chongba*. Firstly, the presentation seeks to chart the cultivation of devotional aesthetics, imagining the social and relational between-ness with soundful, informal performances as sonic relations (Fa 2026; Feld 2016). Next, the ethnography aims to reveal material and public lives of Vaishnav philosophy and creativity, the formation of temporary communities around practices of listening and musicking while building on anthropology of rhythm, movement, and placemaking. This pivots on how local forms of religion inspire local cultural organisations to recognise the genealogy of artistic inflection and communal work that forms part of the complex ritual labour. Lastly, I highlight the significance of vernacular oral performance and ethnolinguistic diversity in Meitei-Vaishnav spiritual life where *joydev chongba* and *dasavatara-stotra* move beyond the text and broaden the sphere of cultural practice.

Debanjali Biswas is an early career researcher in socio-cultural anthropology and theatre, performance and dance studies, with a performing career of over two decades as a dance practitioner and a performance maker. Her work on performance cultures is situated at the intersections of marginality, precarity, and resistance. Her writings include solo and co-authored articles, book chapters, reviews, academic blogposts, and contributions to edited collections.

Mantra as Sonic Invocation among the Tamil Siddhas and Swamigals

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This audio paper analyzes the interweaving of mantras and songs used to invoke the presence of deities among Tamil Siddha / Cittar devotional communities, especially around Chennai, Coimbatore, and the Nilgiris at Śaiva jīva-samādhī tumuli, or shrines where yogins are believed to be buried. The first part of the paper introduces how alongside the larger temples of southern India there are little-studied networks of communities of men and women in Tamil Nadu who invite deities as guests on a daily basis through mantra, music and other means. These “sonic invocations” have a summoning quality in that they are designed to call the deity to arrive as a guest and inhabit either a mūrti or Śivaliṅga stone for the duration of the ritual. The second part of the paper as a case study focuses on sonic invocations at a specific shrine, Sabapathy Lingewarar Koil in Villivakkam. While the process is similar to pūjā at larger or more established temples, the paper demonstrates how the presence of a tumuli can change some mantras into being more effective than others, such as by invoking hymns associated with the guru who is buried at the site. While the audio paper is based on sound ethnography to give listeners a window into the soundscapes of these communities, it also shows how print publications and online printed text can be supplemented to help make better sense of the meaning of these mantras and songs, and how both have a symbiotic relationship in modern ritual practice.

Keith Edward Cantú is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Religions, Tübingen University, where he conducts research for the MANTRAMS project. He has formerly held research fellowships at Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School, FAU Erlangen-Nuremberg, and Jagiellonian University, and was a visiting assistant professor at St. Lawrence University. His research primarily focuses on South Asian religions, yoga, tantra, Indic vernacular languages, and the global histories of esotericism. He is the author of *Like a Tree Universally Spread: Sri Sabhapati Swami and Śivarājayoga* (Oxford University Press, 2023) and of numerous articles and book chapters on related topics.

Recitational Journeys across the Addhyātma Rāmāyaṇam Kīlippāṭṭ

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The Addhyātma Rāmāyaṇam Kīlippāṭṭ (tr. ‘The Spiritual Ramayana parrot-song’) is a 16th-century Rāmāyaṇa telling composed by a low-caste poet from Kerala, Tuñcattu Eḷuttacchan (who is popularly known as the ‘Father of the Malayalam Language’). Corresponding with its self-described sonic efficacies, that is, prescriptions for sonic engagements with the text linked to a range of personal and social benefits, Eḷuttacchan’s Rāmāyaṇam has been associated with a multivalent living tradition of recitations in Kerala. Historical texts reveal the widespread use of the Rāmāyaṇam in daily and seasonal domestic worship practices, life-cycle rituals, and indigenous education systems, primarily among middle- and lowered-caste communities. However, today, a particular strand of these practices, that is, a month-long sequential recitation of the text during Kerala’s peak monsoon month, the Karkkaṭam (mid-July to mid-August), is prominent. In the context of the popularity of the Ramayana Month, what are the characteristics of this particular adaptation of the ritual efficacies of a 16th-century text? How do reciters and listeners interpret, co-produce, and experience sonic engagements with Eḷuttacchan’s Rāmāyaṇam during the Karkkaṭam? Based on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork data, this paper attempts to contextualise the Rāmāyaṇam recitations, focusing on its sonic relationalities and histories of sounding and listening. Rāmāyaṇam journeys, comprising and accompanied by mantras, nāmams, and other sacred sounds, create correspondences of resilience, transience, devotional religiosity, and ethical transformation, while inducing socio-spatial segregation and communality.

Mukul Menon is a predoctoral researcher at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Tübingen, working as part of the ERC MANTRAMS project. His ongoing research interests include South Asian music and sonic practices, religion, and the formation of associated publics. He holds an MA in Media Arts and Cultures from Aalborg University, University of Łódź, and Danube University Krems as part of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s Program. He also completed an MA in Global Media and Communications from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, supported by the Felix Trust, and a bachelor’s degree in urban planning from the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi. Before joining academia, he worked as a planner and filmmaker in India.

**Art Music for Aristocratic Yogis:
Music, Mantra, and Place-making in Nineteenth-Century Jodhpur**

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Over the first half of the nineteenth century, Maharaja Man Singh (r. 1803-1843), the ruler of Marwar in northern India, radically reimagined the political and religious life of his kingdom. A disciple of the Nath Yogis, Man Singh cultivated a new political imaginary based on his devotions, and appointed Yogis to senior roles in his administration, displacing the traditional Rajput elite. From his court in Jodhpur, Man Singh commissioned significant cultural projects that monumentalised Nath cosmology, creating a new, courtly aesthetic. Over the course of his reign, Nath Yogis acquired significant properties and fashioned themselves as a political and aristocratic elite.

Man Singh was a prolific musical composer, and thousands of his compositions were preserved both in manuscript anthologies and oral tradition. These include devotional genres (especially kirtan) as well as lyrical poems (pada) intended for performance in courtly art music. In this paper, I examine this corpus to explore how Man Singh incorporated mantras and sonic theology in his compositions and consider how the dimensions of a mantra could be reinterpreted and articulated through musical aesthetics. Given the specificity of the political context surrounding Man Singh's compositions, I assess how these mantra-oriented musical practices were entangled in place-making processes and the fashioning of Jodhpur and Marwar as a Nath kingdom.

Richard David Williams is a Reader (Associate Professor) in Music and South Asian Studies at SOAS University of London. Focusing on early modern and colonial north India, his research explores music, sound, and performance in literary, courtly, and religious contexts, ranging from bhakti networks in Vrindavan to Bengali migrant workers in colonial Rangoon. His first book, *The Scattered Court: Hindustani Music in Colonial Bengal* (2023) traced the musical connections between north India and Bengal in the nineteenth century, and considered how musical ideas and practices evolved in response to colonialism. He is currently working on several projects, including a history of rāgamālā literature in Brajbhasha, a translation of a seventeenth-century Dakani Urdu Sufi romance (*Gulshan-i-'Ishq*), an edited volume on the cultural history of eighteenth-century South Asian literature, and a journal issue on music and manuscripts in global perspective.

**Sacred Sounds, Silent Shifts:
Baul Esoteric Practice in a Majoritarian Soundscape**

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The Bauls of Bengal constitute a syncretic esoteric tradition wherein song functions not merely as cultural expression but a tool of spiritualness through which practitioners cultivate both self and space. While Baul music has been celebrated within Bangladeshi cultural discourse as emblematic of secular syncretism, contemporary majoritarian Islamic nationalism increasingly frames these same sonic practices as religious transgression requiring regulation. This paper investigates how such sonic regulation operates not merely as external prohibition but as a transformative force that alienates practitioners from the acoustic ecologies through which their spiritual and cultural identities have been historically constituted. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Baul practitioners in rural Bangladesh, I examine how constrictions of audibility fundamentally reshape practitioner's relationships to sonic efficacy. This paper explores how such regulations produce a form of displacement where identities and expressions are continuously negotiated. Thus, this work contributes to broader conversations concerning sonic efficacy, and the politics of sound in Southern Asia by attending to how contests over religious difference are waged through the regulation of audibility itself.

Mahjabin Akhi is a Research Assistant at the Development Research Initiative (dRi) and MANTRAMS (Mantras in Religion, Media and Society in Global Southern Asia) project, based in Bangladesh. Her academic work focused on post-modernism, effects of visual media in cultural transmission and a particular emphasis on studying body and sexuality. She is interested in the intersections of media studies, identity politics, globalization and vernacular knowledge systems, curious how marginalized communities deploy sound and storytelling as practices of resistance. Outside academic engagements, she likes working as an illustrator, exploring "unpopular" issues.

**City of a Thousand Mantras:
The Sacred Sound Landscape of Singkawang, West Kalimantan,
in the Sonic Shadows of the Hegemonic Islamic Call to Prayer**

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This paper describes one aspect of the dense sacred sound landscape of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Borneo. As a city with a remarkable concentration of Chinese religiosities — including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and New Religious Movements — alongside an emergent syncretism between Chinese Folk Religion and Dayak animistic traditions, Singkawang provides an important site to study, lesser-known, esoteric and secretive sacred sound traditions, against the backdrop of a public-facing and public sounding Islam. Based on participant observation and ethnographic research this paper focuses on the use of mantras, recitations, prayers, and sacred music in spirit-medium practice, arguing that these elaborate and idiosyncratic ritual repertoires constitute an alternative sacred soundscape in the city — one that functions as a counter-frame of religious being and knowing against the hegemonic sonic landscape of Islam both locally and across Indonesia more broadly. The sonic and embodied dimensions of this sacred way of being and knowing contribute to Chinese Indonesian subjectivities, which have historically been foregrounded by questions of political and economic subjecthood. Drawing on over a decade of fieldwork with Hakka Chinese Indonesia spirit-mediums, this paper uses contextual exegeses of mantras drawn from a range of linguistic and religious traditions (Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Islam, and Chinese Folk Religion) to describe both their sonic efficacious within their ritual contexts and sonic efficacy created by a religious counter-soundscape in the context of lived religious pluralism and minority religious identity in contemporary Indonesia.

Emily Hertzman is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research explores mobility, identity, religious practice, and politics in Southeast Asia. She earned her Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Toronto and holds B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of British Columbia. She conducts research primarily with Chinese Indonesian communities in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, and in Jakarta, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. Before joining the Department of Anthropology as a Research Associate in January 2024, she was a Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalization Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (2020–2023), and Richard Charles Lee Postdoctoral Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto (2017–2019). She is an editor of *CoronAsur: Religion and Covid-19* (University of Hawaii Press, 2023). Her work appears in *Global Networks*, *Modern Asian Studies*, *HAU*, and *Indonesia*, among others.

Vernacularizing Chant: Inculturation and Christian Sound in Contemporary Kerala

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This paper examines the vernacularization of liturgical sound among Syrian Christians of Kerala, a community historically defined by its use of Syriac chant. Over the twentieth century, particularly in the wake of colonial encounter and the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, Syriac gradually gave way to Malayalam, and liturgical music absorbed elements from Carnatic, Western, and cinematic idioms. These musical transformations were framed within the theological language of inculturation, often articulated as a recovery of an imagined pre-colonial past in which Christian practice was presumed to resonate harmoniously with local “Indian” forms.

Within sections of the Syro-Malabar community, this aspiration has taken sonic form in experiments such as *bharateeya puja*, which incorporate Carnatic ragas, bhajan styles, and performance aesthetics associated with Hindu devotional genres, thereby provoking significant debate. Critics within the Church question whether these adaptations dilute the Syriac chanting heritage and unsettle established liturgical authority. Beyond ecclesial space, Hindu right-wing groups interpret these practices as covert strategies of appropriation and conversion within a polarized soundscape where classical music is increasingly coded as upper-caste and Hindu.

Drawing on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork, the paper examines how different Syrian Christian communities distinguish themselves through chanting traditions that anchor them to particular regional pasts and caste-inflected hierarchies while mediating claims to land, history, and social location. It further considers how vernacular liturgical experiments mobilize ideas of spiritual transformation, authenticity, and cultural belonging, arguing that liturgical chanting emerges as a charged arena in which theology, spatial belonging, and social aspiration are negotiated in contemporary Kerala.

George Pioustin is a PhD student in the department of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles. His research interests include performance traditions within Indian Christianity, Indian classical music, music and migration, as well as minority studies, and he has extensively presented research papers at various international music conferences. George is a recipient of the Fellowship in Indology instituted by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, for the ‘Outstanding Persons in the Fields of Culture’, UNESCO- Sahapedia Fellowship 2017, Serendipity Arts Grant 2018, among other accolades. A trained Carnatic vocalist, George also writes for the arts supplement of India's leading national newspaper, *The Hindu*. He is currently serving as the Editor in Chief of *Ethnomusicology Review*.

The Sound of Compassion: Mantric Practice and Embodied Discipline within Tibetan Buddhist Education in Nepal

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This paper explores the understudied intersection between mantric practice and pedagogical violence in Tibetan Buddhist monastic schools in Nepal, challenging conventional assumptions about the soteriological efficacy of sacred sound. Drawing from four months of engaged ethnography (October 2025-February 2026) across two monastic institutions, I investigate how mantras function not only as vehicles of spiritual transformation but as technologies of bodily discipline within hierarchical educational structures.

While scholarship on mantric efficacy emphasizes transformation of consciousness and healing, my fieldwork reveals how mantras operate simultaneously as instruments of normalization within systems characterized also by normalized physical violence, restricted agency, and profound gender inequalities. The daily sonic architecture—approximately 23 daily bells punctuating time, collective recitation of prayers, ritual chants marking teacher entrances—shapes students' bodies and subjectivities through repetition, creating what I term "somatic orthodoxies" that persist even when doctrinal belief is personally rejected.

This research interrogates three key tensions: (1) How mantras produce embodied compliance in contexts where vocation is largely absent and students are placed rather than called; (2) How the sonic ideology of compassion (karuna) coexists with theologies of "compassionate violence" that justify corporal punishment; (3) How digital soundscapes (TikTok mantras, Bollywood songs, smartphone devotionals) create alternative sonic worlds within monastic space, revealing generational negotiations between preservation and transformation.

By foregrounding the voices of child monks and nuns (besides principals, Lamas, Khenpo, Geshe, and Rinpoche) as ethnographic interlocutors through participatory methods (Photovoice; collaborative mini-ethnographies), this paper unsettles romanticized narratives of Tibetan Buddhist education. It proposes that understanding mantric efficacy requires attending to the material conditions, power relations, and systemic violence within which sacred sound is embedded, practiced, and, sometimes, resisted.

Jennifer Morana is a Master's degree student in anthropology at the University of Milan-Bicocca, Kathmandu University School of Education, and Ullisboa University of Lisbon, specializing in the anthropology of education and religion. Her research strongly focuses on the relationship between beliefs and imagination; she examines the intersection of religious practice, pedagogical violence, and youth agency in contemporary South Asia. She presented at the World Anthropological Union Congress 2024 the panel titled "Staroverstvo: Multidisciplinary investigation on Slavic paganism in contemporary Slovenia," and her visual ethnography was featured in the 2026 Calendar "Portraying Religion and Health," produced by the IUAES Commissions. Her dissertation, "Pedagogies of Compassion: Engaged Ethnography within Tibetan Buddhist Education," documents four months of immersive fieldwork in two Tibetan monastic schools in Nepal (October 2025-February 2026). She designed and developed the Anthrospective project as part of AnthroDay 2025 Milano, employing participatory action research with youth in both European and South Asian contexts. Her work challenges Orientalist imaginaries while centering children's voices as knowledge producers.

**Whispering Buddhist Worlds:
Mantras, Efficacy, and Possessed Newar Buddhist Women**

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In the living rooms of Newar Buddhist female mediums (dyaḥmām) in the Kathmandu Valley, mantras are whispered and blown into rice grains, incense, ritual brooms, and water. This paper examines how such sonic practices generate efficacy in contexts of healing and possession. Focusing on women possessed by the Buddhist goddess Hārātī, I analyze mantras as sonic relational media whose efficacy emerges through interactions between deities, dyaḥmām, devotees, and material substances.

I ask how the whispered sounds of possessed women transform ordinary items into time-limited medicine or a broom into a healing instrument. I approach mantras as embodied sonic technologies enacted through breath, proximity, and performance. Their efficacy, in these often-marginalized contexts, resides in their insertion into specific relational webs: blown into rice for a particular devotee and their specific affliction.

Mantras used by dyaḥmām are often evaluated against a presumed Sanskritic or male-centered orthodox center, leading to their classification as “magic,” derivative practice, or even “invention.” Shifting attention to these so-called margins not as peripheral but as generative sites, I ask how Buddhist sonic practices are actively produced on their own terms within women’s ritual spaces. By centering women’s ritual labour, I show how unequal access to mantra-sound structures ritual authority and gender hierarchy. Thus, the paper collapses the divide between instrumental healing and soteriology, arguing that efficacious sounds used by possessed women are simultaneously employed as cures and as means to pursuing the dharma in these Newar Buddhist spaces.

Austin Simões-Gomes (PhD University of Toronto, 2026) works on Newar religion in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, with a particular focus on possession, divination, and healing practices among Newar Buddhist women known as dyaḥmām. His doctoral dissertation, *The Goddess Will See You Now: Possession, Divination, and Healing in Kathmandu Valley Living Rooms*, examines possession by the Buddhist goddess Hārātī as a cultivated and relational form of ritual labour situated in the semi-public living room. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, ritual observation, and Newar-language materials, his work foregrounds women’s ritual expertise and brings female-centered religious practices, often marginalized, to the centre of Newar religious life. Across his research, he addresses questions of intersubjectivity, cohabitation between deities and humans, material and verbal ritual efficacy, and the agency of deities within lived religious practice.

Negotiating with Demons and Ghosts: The Efficacy of Mantrams in Sri Lankan Healing Rituals

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What role do mantrams play in interactions with other-than-humans? Based on research with traditional performer lineages on healing rituals in Sri Lanka, I will argue that the efficacy of these rituals lies in ensuring the successful communication with their main protagonists, in the case of the healing tradition under discussion, demons and ghosts.

I will show that mantrams are central in this endeavour in two main regards. First, mantrams are among the most powerful devices in the repertoire of aesthetic and performative techniques that ritual practitioners have at their disposal to interact with other-than-human agents. Second, because they form a crucial part of the guru muṣṭi or secret knowledge kept within performer lineages, mantrams significantly shape the manifestation of ritual authority which is likewise central for the success of a ritual.

Drawing on performative and semiotic approaches to ritual, the paper aligns ritual semantics with the wider context of ritual performance including the power relations that shape it, to establish that it is indexical iconicity that turns mantrams into such powerful tools. It will thereby also link the idea of sonic efficacy with notions of cultural capital and cultural competence to illustrate the transformation of healing rituals in contexts of socio-political change.

Eva Ambos is a cultural anthropologist specialized on Sri Lanka. She has been working on religion, performative and ritual traditions, emotions, memory and heritage. As part of her role as an external collaborator with MANTRAMS, Eva will conduct research on the use of mantrams in Sri Lankan religious practices with a focus on gendered religiosity and affect.

**Chanting at the Rhythm of Faith:
Sonic Efficacy and the Medicine Buddha Invocation in a
Theravadā Bhikkhunī Monastery in Thailand.**

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This paper examines the chanting of the Medicine Buddha invocation in a Theravāda Bhikkhunī monastery in Thailand as a sonic practice whose efficacy lies in faith, vibration, and collective bodily attunement. Based on ethnographic research, it attends to rhythm, breath, faith and collective synchronization as the conditions through which chanting is understood to be efficacious, capable of producing bodily, affective, and communal healing and transformation.

At the center of this practice is Bhikkhuni Dhammananda, who has translated the Medicine Buddha Sūtra into Thai for the first time. The rhythm of the chant, as she explains, simply “came” to her. Having set the text to rhythm herself, she remains highly attentive to the necessity of correct cadence and pronunciation, often lamenting the difficulties her sāmaṇerī face in maintaining both rhythmic flow and Sanskrit articulation.

This account highlights not only the healing efficacy of chanting but also the transnational processes of de-bordering through which the Medicine Buddha Sūtra takes on new life and new rhythm in the voices of Thai Bhikkhunī. Repetition here is more than the recitation of a fixed text; it becomes an embodied practice animated through voice and capable of generating tangible effects. As Venerable Dhammananda insists, listening alone is insufficient: “chanting is vibration.” This vibration must enter the body, bringing with it a different energy aligned with a cultivated quality of mind and sustained through collective synchronization. To chant together is thus to cultivate inspiration, strengthen faith, and experience healing as a resonant, embodied practice that foregrounds sound as an anthropological site of faith and transformation.

Maria Vittoria Nenna has a background in economics and a Master’s degree in Anthropology from the University of Milano-Bicocca. She is currently a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Sapienza University of Rome. Her research engages sound studies, embodiment and de-bordering processes. She examines Buddhist chanting as sonic matter that reconfigures the boundaries between text, voice, and body, generating affective and political counter-geographies. Focusing on Bhikkhunī in Thailand, she explores how chant operates as a lived and embodied sonic practice marked by struggles for recognition, legitimacy, and gendered religious authority.

The Belian Bawo Mantra as Ethnomedicine: The Megis Chanting Ritual and Traditional Healing Prayers through Dayak Tribal Dance

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The Balian Bawo mantra is not only a traditional healing ritual but also a form of communication between the Dayak tribe and their ancestors through a magical dance and song on the island of Borneo. The dance is accompanied by songs in the form of mantras and rituals, as a prayer to God for a person's healing. This study examines how the Balian Bawo Mantra, as ethnomedicine, is practised through traditional songs, music, and dance. How do the mantras from the songs, music, and dance influence the healing of diseases among the Dayak tribe? This study uses a literature review with an ethnomedicine approach to examine the Dayak tribe on the island of Borneo. This study found the following results: (1) there is spiritual healing and cleansing through song, music, and dance in the Mantra Belian Bawo; (2) song, music, and dance in the Mantra Bawo are magical traditions among the Dayak tribe; (3) the sounding of the gangsa bracelet is used as a musical beat and a call to the spirits. Thus, the Belian Mantra is a traditional art form that emerged from singing, music, and dance among the Dayak tribe.

Bibi Suprianto is a scholar of religious studies who grew up and developed as a native Malay and Dayak in Indonesia. He is a lecturer at IAIN Pontianak and an alumnus of the Centre for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) at Gadjah Mada University (UGM). She is concerned with research on religion, ecology, religious anthropology, ethnography, gender, and decolonisation from the perspective of the Dayak and Malay communities in Indonesia. She is active in various conferences, both nationally and internationally. Bibi Suprianto also writes actively for various journals worldwide. She is one of the editors-in-chief of the Journal of Religion and Decoloniality.

Bakher and the Sonic Making of Sacred Place among the Santals

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This paper explores the sonic efficacy of bakher, a ritual invocation, among the Santal indigenous community of eastern India. While Santal religious life is often described as “Bongaism,” a belief in multiple deities (bonga), I argue that this cosmology is acoustically enacted rather than merely doctrinal. Though bakher may be loosely translated as prayer, it is fundamentally dialogic and relational. Through it, Santals address deities, renew ties with land and forest, and seek protection from illness, misfortune, and ecological imbalance. Sound does not accompany ritual; it renders it effective. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork (2020-2025), I examine festivals such as Baha, Sohrai, and Magsim, where sacred place is constituted not through monumental architecture but through performative utterance and collective participation. During Magsim, the bakher begins, “Johar Gaunsai Marang Buru...,” calling for prosperity, rain, and well-being while naming fields, forests, rocks, and trees, thereby situating the community within a living sacred ecology. Likewise, the Jaher song, “Jaher ma ho Jahera...,” describes the grove through its rocks and sarjom trees, affirming divine authorship through repetition. The sacred emerges as it is sung into relational presence. Ritual singing, drumming, and dancing generate charged sonic environments that enable rum bonga (spirit possession), a palpable vibration through which the body becomes a temporary dwelling of divine presence. I argue that Santal ritual sound functions as placemaking and ecological negotiation, periodically renewing sacred geography through collective resonance.

Sunny Mandi is a PhD scholar and Teaching Assistant at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India. He is currently engaged in research on Santali Binti, and performance tradition, with a working title, “Dwelling in the ‘Slash’: Embodiment, Inscription, and Digital Mediation of Santal Binti Performances.” He has also been a Visiting Fellow at the Graduate School of Information and Communication, Meiji University, Japan, as part of a collaborative project titled “Comprehending Pedagogies of Performance Studies.” His research interests broadly include Performance Studies, performance auto/ethnography, oral tradition, cultural studies, and Indigenous studies, with a particular focus on festivals, rituals, and ceremonies. He also maintains a strong interest in literary translation and creative writing in English, Santali, and Bengali.

**Ammonite Mantra:
Sonic Explorations of Eco-Spiritual Connection**

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Ammonite Mantra is a soundscape + mantra celebrating environmental stewardship and more-than-human spirituality in a time of socio-ecological rupture. This audio letter is a collaboration between the British sound artist/researcher George Cloke and the Korean shaman Hong Kali.

Korean shamanism is a tradition dating back centuries and is sewn into the fabric of social and religious life. HONG Kali is part of a new generation of young female shamans reinterpreting 'mudang' within a modern context. Kali listens to the divine call of spirits at environmental sites near her shrine, reconnecting with more-than-human entities and spiritual currents.

Ammonite Mantra combines environmental soundscapes of mountains, streams, insects and birdsong recorded near Kali's shrine with instruments from Kali's ritual practice such as chimes, gongs, and Baoding balls. These soundscapes are guided by Kali's spoken-word mantra, which pays respect to the environment and calls for unity and interconnection in an age of social discord and ecological decline.

Through textured environmental soundscapes and Kali's attuned spiritual perspectives, Ammonite Mantra encourages the act of connecting to beings outside of ourselves to find tranquillity, peace and resonance.

George Cloke is an environmental humanities researcher and audio-visual artist from the UK. A recent CHASE AHRC-funded PhD Scholar, his research examines river ecologies and contemporary art practice in Asia. His moving image and sound works have been championed by the BBC, Barbican Centre, Ivan Juritz Prize, Asia Culture Centre and Busan International Short Film Festival. His creative practice explores themes of ecological awareness, more-than-human entanglement and attentive listening.

Kali Hong is a shaman, social activist and author, currently based in Paju, Korea. Kali is part of a new generation of young female shamans reinterpreting 'mudang' within a modern context. A self-described "queer, feminist, vegan shaman", Kali begins 'gut' (rituals) by soaking beans instead of slaughtering animals, and listens to the call of divine beings through the whispers of the wind, trees and rocks.

**Sonic Efficacy and Textual Authority:
Sacred Soundscapes in the Lu Mien Tou Sai Ritual of Northern Vietnam**

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The Tou Sai (hanging the twelve Daluo lamps) represents the most significant initiation rite for the Lu Mien (Red Dao) in northern Vietnam. Sharing religious roots with the Yao communities of China, this ritual serves as a site for ontological transformation, integrating initiates into a Daoist cosmic bureaucracy under the "Three Pure Ones." In this highly textualized tradition, the efficacy of the ritual is not merely a product of the written word, but is fundamentally realized through its sonic performance. This paper explores how vocal chanting and instrumental music operationalize and reproduce textual authority, thereby establishing the ritual's sacred legitimacy.

I argue that the Tou Sai ritual functions through a performative sonic system where sound animates the script. The ritual master's stylized recitation of liturgical texts—such as kemun and diwen—constitutes a speech-act-like practice that functions as a vernacular instantiation of sonic efficacy, resonating with broader mantric traditions of Southern Asia. Parallel to this, the suona (shawm) and percussion ensemble provide a framework for improvisation and variation, creating a dynamic soundscape that mediates between the human and divine realms. By examining the interplay between fixed liturgical texts and codified instrumental sounds, the paper analyzes how sonic practices perform place-making by ritually constructing a sacred cosmos. To reflect the sensory nature of these findings, the research will be presented as an audio paper, incorporating field recordings to be archived within the OMnibus multimedia platform.

Li Zhenghang is a PhD candidate in Ethnomusicology at Hunan Normal University, affiliated with the Research Center for Ethnic Minority Music Culture in Southern China. Supervised by Professor Zhao Shufeng, his research focuses on the ritual music and ethnographic soundscapes of the Lu Mien across the borders of China and Southeast Asia. His published work includes a study on linear musical cultural spaces in *Ethno-Arts Quarterly* and a comparative analysis of Lu Mien Panwang Dage (The Epic Song of Panwang) scripts in the *Journal of Xinghai Conservatory of Music*. His current doctoral project investigates the intersection of vernacular Daoist performance, textual traditions, and the sonic construction of sacred space in the Zomia highlands.

The Conch-Body and Place: Sensitive Ambivalences of Sacrality

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The conch-shell and sounds have been most revered in Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, its acoustic considered as essentially mantric, in striking harmonic balance among the conch-blower's body, home/temple, and the cosmos. I focus on particular sonic and social affects and efficacies generated by the object's materiality and audition in the creation of consecrated senses of place. These spatial experiences are strong, distinct, and yet also carry intensely contested meanings. Such contentions, I argue, ensue precisely because the conch is a hallowed and thus vulnerable object, who's ambivalent—even opposed—extremes are addressed through sensitive debates and practices of place-making. My presentation shall be based on fieldwork in West Bengal and Odisha; and developed along three ethnographic/ideological registers. First, while the pilgrimage town of Puri is known as the sankha-kshetra (conch-land), conches are disallowed from being blown inside the Vishnuite Jagannath temple. Yet, among the lower castes of Rauls and Munis in Puri's Ganjam district, two conches being blown simultaneously by a single person is a ritual-performative act dedicated to Shiva. Second, vastukars (Indian architecture practitioners) explain that the conch potentially has both powerful positive and negative impacts on the domestic space. Third, in recent protests against a brutal rape in Kolkata, conch-blowing was a much-debated act on Kolkata's night streets, given its Hindu symbolisms of war and domesticity. Through diverse spatial appropriations—of community, private, and public spaces, and extreme affects—of silence and resounding, the conch's mantric efficacy is analysed as passionately deliberated, precisely due to its embodied potency.

Sukanya Sarbadhikary is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Presidency University, Kolkata. She works at the interface of the anthropology of religion, embodiment, and materiality, religious studies, and philosophy. She locates the body, senses, experience, and consecration in the interstices of natural and cultural lives, and philosophical traditions. She is also trying to merge these concerns with imminent understandings of planetary anxieties, to think about how sacralities may impact and respond to new vulnerabilities. Her first book, *The Place of Devotion: Siting and Experiencing Divinity in Bengal-Vaishnavism* (University of California Press) was published in 2015. She is currently working on the overlaps of the marine and social lives of the *turbinella pyrum* (domestic conch), analysing what becomes of this long-held sacred object with precarious marine ecological habitats and climate. The work spans across the Indian Ocean's Gulf of Mannar, Sri Lanka, Indian states along the Bay of Bengal coast, and Bangladesh.

**Playing for the Ancestors:
Sonic Efficacy and Ritual Language in Hmong Qeej Practice**

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This paper examines sonic efficacy through the ritual practice of the qeej, a bamboo reed instrument central to Hmong cosmology. Based on ethnographic filmmaking in a Hmong community along the Sino–Vietnamese border in Yunnan Province, China, the study draws from the film *Playing for the Ancestors* (2020, 36 minutes), officially selected by the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) Film Programme (Lisbon, 2020) and the Society for Visual Anthropology Film and Media Festival (SVAFMF, 2021).

Among the Hmong, the qeej is not understood as music in a purely aesthetic sense. It is a ritual language capable of transmitting denotational messages to the realm of spirits and ancestors. During funerary ceremonies, qeej masters perform specific melodic-textual sequences that guide the soul of the deceased, narrate cosmological origins, and ensure safe passage into the ancestral world. The instrument is said to “speak” in a spirit language intelligible to ancestors and trained ritual specialists.

Rather than treating sound as symbolic representation, this paper argues that qeej performance operates as cosmological mediation. Sonic practice here does not merely express belief—it enacts ontological continuity between the worlds of the living and the dead. Through this case, I propose that sonic efficacy lies in sound’s capacity to organize relations across visible and invisible domains.

Finally, I reflect on ethnographic filmmaking as a methodological mode of listening, asking how visual anthropology might attend to sound as action rather than atmosphere.

Film link: <https://filmfreeway.com/projects/1867601>

Manman Yang is a visual anthropologist and documentary filmmaker, Chevening Scholar (24/25). Research focuses on migration, gender, religion, and spirituality, with sensory ethnography and participatory filmmaking as core methodologies. Trained at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology and Beijing Film Academy, with 10 years of cross-cultural fieldwork and documentary production experience in China and the UK, led 30+ documentary and exhibition projects. Work spans migration/diaspora, cultural heritage, and science communication, commissioned by British Science Museum, NHK, iQIYI, and other international platforms, officially selected twice in the Society for Visual and Anthropology Film and Media Festival (SVAFMF) and the EASA film program. Committed to bridging anthropological insight with cinematic storytelling to foster cross-cultural understanding and exploring the possibilities of multimodal research methods in contemporary anthropology and other fields of social science.

Chant Contact and the Potency of Lao Buddhist Amulets

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How sacred sound shapes religious objects' materiality and efficacy has remained understudied. Drawing on over a year of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Laos (April 2024–December 2025)—participant observation at consecration rituals and interviews with Buddhist monks and amulet practitioners and renters—I address this gap by conceptualizing chant contact, a process through which Lao Buddhist amulets activate, increase, or maintain their potency by keeping their reach within efficacious sound, such as Theravada chants (*paritta*) and formulaic incantations (*khatha*). Building on my interlocutors' statements, I identify three modes of how efficacious sound travels with potency and permeates amulets (chant contact's *modus operandi*). The first is invocation, or how chanting appeals for the Buddha's mercy (*phoutthakhoun*)—the carrier of apotropaic and auspicious power—to inhabit the amulet. The second is portable activation: how the everyday recitation of short *khatha*—dependent on amulets' technological mechanisms—helps amulet renters cultivate transcendental virtues (*barami*). The third is inscription through vibration: how a few practitioners import ideas from fringe science to describe how sacred sound vibrations transform amulets' internal material structure. An amulet becomes more potent if it is repeatedly exposed to chant contact during sacralization ceremonies in temples (e.g., *pouksék*, *sômphôtphra*), domestic rituals, and/or periodic reinforcement by monks and occult masters. Losing an amulet's potency (*suam*) due to a gradual loss of chant contact is dangerous, for it has potential material, spiritual, and karmic repercussions. Chant contact thus makes potency not only a matter of the senses but also a relational and consequential sound-in-motion.

Floramante SJ Ponce is a social anthropologist with extensive experience in development-induced displacement, actual and spiritual forms of energy, and Chinese infrastructure in Southeast Asia, particularly Laos. He published his works in journals such as *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*; *Asian Anthropology*; *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*; *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies*; *Southeast Asian Affairs*; and *Population, Space, and Place* (Forthcoming). His book-in-progress examines the subjects of Chinese hydropower projections. When Dr Ponce started his postdoctoral fellowship at the ULB's LAMC (Belgium), he shifted his interests from electrical power to cosmological and spiritual forms of power. He specifically investigates how the external power that Lao amulets can muster helps fix Lao people's broken interiorities, which are caused by post-pandemic economic shocks, societal and digital transitions, and ecological disruptions. He has recently joined the 12th Cohort of the KWI International Fellowship as a postdoctoral researcher in Essen.

Buddha's Voice and Words in Thai Contemporary Rituals: The Amplified Suat Mon (Pali Sutra Mantra) of Buddhist Monks

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This presentation will investigate the reenactment of the Buddha by monks in ceremonies and rituals of provincial Thailand through sound. In Theravada Buddhism as predominantly practiced in Thailand (even if Mahayana and Tantric are also latent), the monks' most proffered repertoire is called *suat mon* (sutra mantra) consisting of psalmodes of the Buddha's words (sutra) taken from canonic and extra-canonic sources. Mantra refers to its efficacy on the audiences and the world. Monks are considered images (*rup*, *rupa*), or organs (*ong*, *ongsa*) of the Buddha: they are on their way to Enlightenment. In many ways, they instantiate the Buddha's presence to the laity's eyes and ears. During the ceremonies, the monks make a constant use of sound systems, an electro-acoustic apparatus driven to loud emissions, to amplify their voices. Are these loud performances part of the reenactment of the Buddha's utterance? Do the sound systems allow for a better efficacy of the *suat mon*? Could that mean that the louder, the more efficient the psalmodes are? In order to answer these questions, I will gather references of the Buddha's performances in texts, as well as in the discourses of the monks and in the population. I will also analyze the performances of the monks during rituals in order to better understand the characteristics of the Buddha's voice, and the role of sound systems. In the way, we will also get elements of the Buddhist sonic ideal, its effects on Thai society, and its cohabitation with other existing sonic ideals.

Pierre Prouteau, ethnomusicologist and anthropologist of sound, is interested in the effects of music, sound, and technologies that mediated it on individuals and societies. His PhD thesis, defended in 2021, and entitled "Buddhism, Bodies and Machines – the Sound Systems of Thailand" (Nanterre/EHESS, GIS Asia Thesis Award in 2022), analyses the potential and impacts of sound systems on humans and non-humans in Thailand in political, poetical, and aesthetical terms. Fieldwork ethnographer and Thai-Lao languages specialist, he pursues engaged research on the relationship between sound, technologies, and intense forms of the collective. He is the author of "The Dual Fate of the Twin Horns – from United States anti-communist weapon to the Phetchabun processional bands' sound system (Thailand)" (in *Asian Sound Cultures – Voice, Noise, Sound, Technology*, Routledge). After being postdoctoral candidate in the EU-funded project DeCoSEAS (Decolonizing Southeast Asian Sound Archives, 2021-2024), he taught ethnomusicology at Nanterre University before joining ULB.

**Mantra, Movie, Milk Tea:
Recontextualization and Reappropriation of Sacred Words in Thai Popular Culture**

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Mantra is often associated with the sacred space, but this association can be blurry at times. Rather than focusing on the well-trodden path of the ritualistic and magical implications of mantra, my presentation approaches mantra as a vocal performance. More specifically, it explores the circumstances in which the performance of a mantra is reappropriated and recontextualized in Thai popular culture. Yet, these changes still heavily draw on the inherently sacred sense of mantras. My presentation traces the trajectory of a specific phrase of an invented mantra that first appeared in a Thai comedic film, *Holy Man 3* (2010). Through close-reading media analysis, I show how this mantra gains its parodic edge through the added musical elements. As this mantra went viral on social media, it was later adapted into a chorus of a song with the mantra's reciter as the singer. And more recently, a Thai milk tea company named its shop after the mantric phrase and hired the original reciter as the presenter. With these turns of events in mind, I draw on the ethnomusicological approach towards the socio-cultural contexts of sounding this mantra. I ask, what does it mean when one plays with and parodies a mantra? How do musicking and sounding work together to secularize the very act of performing a mantra? How do these actions in turn open up playful but creative ways of participation with and meaning-making of mantras? My presentation contributes to the relationship between mantra and the sonic-musical-aural cultures in general.

Nattapol Wisuttiapat is an ethnomusicologist and Thai classical music practitioner. He received his PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Riverside, in 2022, was a former postdoctoral fellow at NUS, and has been a lecturer at the Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology at Thammasat University since 2023. As a trained Thai classical musician, his primary research interest is in Thai classical music, focusing on the issues of gender, sexuality, and queerness that inform musical performances and shape the musician's social lives. He has also developed a critical inquiry towards sonic and aural cultures in contemporary Thailand. Recently, he has been thinking and writing about various forms of live music trucks in Bangkok from the perspectives of sound studies and about how this interdisciplinary discipline can broaden the horizon of music scholarship. Apart from his academic and musical endeavours, Nattapol likes running, football, and cats.

Chanting Change, Changing Space: Dalit-Buddhist Soundscapes and Mantric Practices in Maharashtra

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This audio paper engages with the sonic landscape by recording and attentively listening to the sounds present in sacred spaces such as Buddha Viharas and places marked by cultural significance for the Buddhist community across Maharashtra. It attempts to understand how sonic practices such as japa, Vandana, sacred chanting, and slogan chanting transform physical spaces of cultural importance marked within the annual Dalit calendar, such as Chaityabhoomi in Mumbai, Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur, and Bhim Tekdi in Aurangabad, to name a few, and how the mantric practices, music, and moments of silence contribute to processes of place-making. The audio paper addresses the marginalisation of sound and the privileging of script within mantric practices, the dominance of visibility in Western conceptions of space, and the centrality of the written word in academic scholarship and it does so by exploring the intersection of religious sounds and place-making through a focus Dalit-Buddhists sonic practices. It aims to understand how these sonic practices shape and transform both physical and social landscapes, creating forms of social agency and reasserting collective identities through sound. What's more, the amplification of sounds and vocalisation of mantric practices are creating a constant negotiation of space within which these sonic rituals are performed, especially within the context of a diverse society marked by competing religious soundscapes and political contestations.

Devyani Bhosale is a doctoral candidate in the department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at University of Tübingen. She is part of the MANTRAMS project as a predoctoral researcher. She has an interdisciplinary background in South Asian Studies with a focus on anthropology. She holds a master's in development, environment, societies and history in South Asia from Heidelberg University, Germany. She also holds a Master's in Social Work in Dalit and Tribal Studies and Action from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India. Devyani's research for MANTRAMS focuses on the role of sonic elements such as mantras, chanting, greetings, and slogans, in the assertion of Dalit identity, visibility, and resistance in urban spaces of Western India. Her research aims to understand how these sonic practices shape and transform both physical and social landscapes creating social agency and reasserting identities. Additionally, by focusing on the marginalised voices of Dalit women, her research explores how sound, silence, and listening reclaim agency within male-dominated public soundscapes.

**Amplification as Auspiciousness:
An Illuminated Audio Essay on Mantras, Picnic Parties and Car Horns**

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Drawing on ethnographic research on mantras and sacred sound practices in India, this illuminated sound paper is a multimodal work towards a South Asian sonic theory of amplification as auspiciousness. Rather than approaching amplification primarily as a technical operation of increasing volume, I examine it as a culturally and ritually charged modality through which auspiciousness is shared, circulated, and made present in space. Through sonic ethnography of festive and everyday soundscapes—including picnic-season loudspeaker cultures, vehicular honking, and ritual performances—I show how amplified sound is frequently associated with safety, vitality, protection, joy, beneficial fruits, and the assertion of presence. The paper then expands beyond electroacoustic sound reproduction to explore forms of amplification that may remain entirely inaudible. Focusing on mantras and kinetic practices such as spinning prayer devices, I examine how motion amplifies sacred formulas through the agency of wind, fire, electricity, and the human body. Here, amplification operates not only through loudness but through circulation, repetition, and diffusion, complicating dominant understandings of sound as something apprehended primarily through hearing. This argument addresses three gaps in existing scholarship. First, studies of amplification in South Asia have largely focused on urban noise and religious contestation, while overlooking other spaces, like villages, pilgrimage sites, wildlife sanctuaries, and ashrams. Second, amplification is commonly understood as a modern electroacoustic technology, whereas ethnographic evidence reveals longstanding non-electroacoustic forms of amplifying auspiciousness. Third, whereas scholarship often links amplification to public audibility, this paper highlights technologies that diffuse mantras through space without making them audible, thereby complicating the binary between public and private sound. Together, these cases suggest a broader South Asian sonic ideology in which amplification constitutes a central mode of producing auspiciousness and making place.

Carola E. Lorea is a Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Tübingen. She is the PI leading the research team "Sonic Efficacy" within the ERC Synergy project MANTRAMS. She was a senior research fellow at ARI in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster (2018-2023). Her recent monograph (*Communities of Sound: Religion, Displacement and Caste in the Bay of Bengal*, Wesleyan University Press 2026) listens to untouchability and migration across South Asian borderlands.

**Hearing Kataragama:
Soundspace, Listening, and Audio Production in a
Multi-Religious Sri Lankan Temple Complex**

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The Kataragama temple complex in southeastern Sri Lanka is arguably one of the country's most significant and sonically-rich religious sites. Made up of numerous temples and shrines, many of which are within earshot of each other, Kataragama's religious diversity leads to a shared and negotiated sacred soundspace, within which the confines of individual sites, practices, and even religions appear to overlap and mix. Here, Buddhist, Islamic, Vāḍḍa, and Hindu sounds—each made according to particular ontological and metaphysical systems—can become audible simultaneously. How, then, is this complex medley of sound/s, its spatial and temporal intersections, and its immersion of individual sites and practices made sense of, negotiated, and heard?

During fieldwork, I collaborated with participants to record soundwalks through the temple complex. These recordings were made using multipattern microphones, allowing them to narrow and widen the recorded field of sound in response to ontological changes in the soundspace: i.e, if *kāvāḍi* music suddenly became audible over chanting (as it often does), we could shift from a 360° stereo field to a mono shotgun pattern and minimise the extent to which this ontological sonic change could be heard in our recordings. In doing so, this methodology aimed to create opportunities for participants to render their listening practices and experiences of this dense multireligious soundspace into audio, affording new ways of hearing how attendees understand and navigate these sounds. The following audio is a work-in-progress soundwalk collaboration with one of my participants.

Tom Peterson is a Postdoctoral Researcher with the *MANTRAMS* team at the University of Tübingen and an Honorary Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of Music at SOAS, University of London. With interests in sound arts and their histories in South Asia, his research to date has considered ontologies and metaphysics of Theravada Buddhist chant, colonial song collecting, methodological approaches to colonial sound archives, and sociocultural histories of sound and song in Sri Lanka. His research project for MANTRAMS explores the cosmological and social dynamics of sacred sound in Kataragama, a multi-religious temple complex in southeastern Sri Lanka. His work has been published in the journals *Asian Music* and *Fontes Artis Musicae*, and he has publications forthcoming with *Ethnomusicology*, *The Ceylon Journal*, and *Music & Letters*.

Walking with the Devta: Sonic Movements Among the Deities of Kullu, Western Himalayas

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In the Kullu region of Himachal Pradesh in India, where hundreds of deities exist as rulers of their territories, the experience of moving with the deity is kinaesthetically rich and sonically dynamic. All activities associated with the deities occur in the presence of sacred sounds and music. To coexist with the deity, in many ways, is to listen to deity, and to be attuned to their soundful presence.

This piece is centred around Binani Mahadev, the deity or *devta*, who resides in the village Binan in the Kullu district. The *devta* has been invited to visit the houses of one of the village's residents. Once the music starts playing, the *devta's rath* (chariot-body) begins its journey from the temple, and travels through a path that winds downhill, passing through different parts of the village. The rhythm of drumming changes at different intervals, to signal different activities taking place along the way: stopping at sacred spots around the village, receiving offerings and *dhoop* outside houses on the way, or dancing at the village festival grounds. The listener walks as part of the loud, soundful procession, alongside the *devta* in his *rath*, accompanied by *gurs* (mediums), insignia bearers, musicians, priests and other temple functionaries. The sonic experiences convey an atmosphere collectively produced by sacred and mundane sounds, a common phenomenon in the cosmopolitical landscape of the Western Himalayas.

Ishita Mahajan is a postdoctoral researcher working as part of the MANTRAMS Project's Task Force 2. Her current research focuses on the sonic repertoire of the deities in Kullu, and the larger Western Himalayan region in northern India. She did her PhD in Religious Studies from the University of Edinburgh, where her focus was on the idea of sovereignty of territorial deities in the Kullu district of the Western Himalayas in India. Her research interests include the anthropological study of sacred sounds and music, their role in ritual settings, everyday life, politics of identity, and place-making in the Himalayan context. As part of the Sonic Efficacies workshop, she is presenting a draft audio paper

**Sonic Performative Alliances and Solidarities across
Diverse Naga Communities in the Northeast Region of India**

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What do Mantras sound like in the context of Naga people in the northeast India and Northern Myanmar region? In my attempt to respond to this question, I draw on ethnomusicology and sound anthropology to explore different chanting, prayers, and work songs sung among different Naga ethnic communities. Focusing on the recurring sounds, repetitive actions, sensorial experience and vocal synchronicity during political rallies and while engaging agricultural activities in the field, I unpack the performative sonic practices in negotiating the everyday contestations between indigenous Naga identity and Christian morality, within the backdrop of ethnic tensions, and the continued political struggles with the Indian State.

Yaoreipam Makang is a postdoctoral fellow with the MANTRAMS TF2 at the University of Tübingen and an assistant professor at the University of Delhi, India. His research explores ideas of personhood, religion, and more-than-human relationality through oral traditions, rituals, songs, and other performative iterations. Intertwining the sacred, ritualistic, and performative aspects of Naga sonic practices, his current project examines how sound formulates indigenous relationality and kinship practices among the Nagas in Northeast India and Myanmar. His research has been supported by the *Charles Wallace India Trust*, the *India Foundation for the Arts*, and the *Experimenter*.

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