What can attention to sound contribute to our understanding of the patterns of religious change and political tension among Turkic Muslim Uyghur communities in Xinjiang, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan? How do new religious modalities circulate within Uyghur society, and how do people listen to, embody, and reproduce them? The study begins with a group of Uyghur women in a small village in southern Xinjiang, and explores the spiritual and political geographies they inhabit, moving outwards from the village to trace circuits of connection with Mecca, Cairo, Istanbul, Turkestan, Bishkek, and Beijing. It encompasses field-based ethnographic study of village ritual practices, and digital ethnography of mediated spheres of religious life, oral traditions of Central Asian Sufism, transnational flows of Qur’anic recitation and radical anashid, ideological debates and state interventions. In the fraught sphere of the discourse surrounding Islamic revivals, where dominant narratives privilege the visual in ways that routinely stereotype, demonize, and render Muslim subjects as passive Others, attending to the politics of voice and place may help us to cut through the polarized political debates, and create new narratives about the lived experience of Islam.

SPEAKER

Dr. Rachel Harris’ research is centred on China and Central Asia, and especially on the Uyghurs. She has conducted fieldwork in Xinjiang, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan over a period of twenty years.

Dr. Harris has fifteen years’ experience of teaching and doctoral supervision in the discipline of ethnomusicology, and has published two monographs and co-edited three volumes on music (Gender in Chinese Music, 2013, the ethnomusicology textbook, Pieces of the Musical World, 2015, and Theory and Practice in the Music of the Islamic World, 2018). She co-edited the journal Ethnomusicology Forum between 2004 and 2007. She currently co-convenes the Middle East and Central Asia Music Forum, and is series editor for the Routledge SOAS Musicology Series.

Dr. Harris’ current research interests focus on intangible cultural heritage, music and identity formation, soundscapes and state projects of territorialization. She works in applied ways with performance and transmission projects, including concerts, workshops, and recording projects, and worked as consultant for the Aga Khan Music Initiative (2006-16).