

DR. MONIKA HIRMER

KUṆḌALINĪ IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT: TRANSMISSIONS FROM SOUTH ASIA TO THE WEST

With the broader interest in South Asian spiritual traditions, which has driven the proliferation of yoga studios, tantra festivals and workshops in Western contexts since the 1970s, Kuṇḍalinī has also become increasingly popular with Western practitioners. A female serpent energy, Kuṇḍalinī rests in Mulādhāra *cakra*, the energy knot located at the bottom of the spinal column, and underpins soteriological narratives among Western and South Asian practitioners alike: through her ascent, she unlocks the *cakras* along the spinal column and allows for divine energy to flow through the bodies of practitioners. When travelling from South Asian to Western contexts, Kuṇḍalinī encounters different epistemic-ontological configurations and interacts with context-specific cosmological backgrounds and notions of beingness—such as body, gender, humanness and divinity. Based on my anthropological fieldwork with tantric practitioners in South India and in Western contexts, in this talk I analyze Kuṇḍalinī from a cross-cultural comparative perspective. The experiences that South Asian and Western(ized) practitioners relay broadly suggest that, when Kuṇḍalinī operates within a mainly positivistic epistemic-ontological framework, she tends to manifest in rather striking and unsettling ways, whereas when she operates within epistemic-ontological contexts that are largely informed by Devī and her retinue, she is often experienced in more seamless and gentle ways. While the intense nature of Kuṇḍalinī awakenings among many Western(ized) practitioners may, at first, appear counterintuitive when compared to the smoother Kuṇḍalinī experiences shared by most South Asian practitioners, I propose that such discrepancies are not only organic but necessary when Kuṇḍalinī operates upon the distinct existential coordinates that practitioners present cross-culturally.



Dr. Monika Hirmer is a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS-E) 'Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices' at Friedrich-Alexander Universität, Erlangen–Nürnberg (Germany). Her research explores tantra, Goddess traditions, non-anthropocentric cosmologies, and decolonial studies, with a focus on South Asia. She holds a PhD in Religions and Philosophies from SOAS, University of London, and an MPhil in Anthropology of Religion from the University of Hyderabad. Monika is a certified Teaching Fellow and co-founded the open-access platform *Decolonial Subversions*, where she serves as Co-Editor-in-Chief.



Date:
Tuesday - 03 February 2026



Time:
6.15 - 7.45 PM

**Location: Big Seminar room,
Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen**

Link for virtual attendance: <https://fau.zoom-x.de/j/62556506187>



Funded by



Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation



CAS-E

Alternative Rationalities and
Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective



Friedrich-Alexander-Universität
Erlangen-Nürnberg