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JIM SYKES AND JULIA BYL, EDS.

**SOUNDING
THE
INDIAN
OCEAN**

**MUSICAL CIRCULATIONS
IN THE AFRO-ASIATIC SEASCAPE**

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FRONTISPIECE. The Indian Ocean frames a shrine to the deity Lakshmi, goddess of good fortune, at the beachside temple of Sri Singamuga Kaliamman, in Penang, Malaysia. (Photo by Julia Byl).

Sounding the Indian Ocean

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Musical Circulations in the Afro-Asiatic Seascape

Edited by

Jim Sykes and Julia Byl



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In tribute to the profound conviviality of the King's ERC crew

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Malay court poets worked their acknowledgments into the opening lines of their poems—calling themselves “humble ascetics” with knowledge and wisdom not quite up to the artistic task they were about to undertake, despite the best efforts of their teachers. Whether this trope rings true depends on the skill in their stanzas, on which the reader/reciter ultimately decides. We don’t expect our readers to recite the words of this volume, made up of fourteen essays, written by authors working in nine different countries. But, as this volume is indebted to collaborative work that has developed over more than ten years, we also recognize the limits of our individual knowledge bases. In fact, as a result of our collective Indian Ocean investigations, we can report that the “humble poet” trope is a broad one, recognizable in literary traditions from the Malay world and India to the Gulf States and Tanzania.

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Sounding the Indian Ocean began as a Call for Papers (CFP) in 2018, and a 2019 symposium held at the University of Pennsylvania: we've been working on it for some time. Two of our published articles, then, are really extensions of this volume: Julia Byl and Jim Sykes (2020), "Ethnomusicology and the Indian Ocean: On the Politics of Area Studies," *Ethnomusicology* 64, no. 3: 394–421; and Jim Sykes (2021), and "Indian Ocean Listening Stations: Governmental Ears, the Maritime Silk Road, and the New Cold War between India and China," *Diplomatica* 3: 335–61. We thank *Ethnomusicology* for allowing the reprint of a small portion of "Ethnomusicology and the Indian Ocean," and Frank Gunderson for his support during his time as editor. We also thank our contributor Andrew Eisenberg for important discussions at the workshop that shaped the volume's theoretical frame by providing access to scholarship on the Western Indian Ocean. Thanks to the University of Pennsylvania's School of Arts and Sciences for a University Research Fellowship (2019) and Research Opportunity Grant (2022), and the University of Alberta's Faculty of Arts and Department of Music for a book subvention grant (2022), which made the symposium and this open-access publication possible.

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While we provide a literature review in the introduction, some pioneering work on Indian Ocean musics deserves special acknowledgment here for widening the volume's geographic and intellectual expanse: Garrett Field on music in the Maldives (2019, 2022); Tan Sooi Beng on the Bangsawan theater in Malaysia (1993, 2011); Ron Emoff on music in Madagascar (2002); Anne Rasmussen on Qur'anic recitation in Indonesia (2010); Basil Considine on Western art music in Mauritius (dissertation, 2013); Ghazi Faisal Al-Mulaifi on the music of Kuwaiti pearl divers (dissertation, 2016); Carol Muller (2011) on South African jazz vocalist Sathima Bea Benjamin (2011); Amy Caitlin-Jairazhboy (2008) and Helen Basu (2007) on Afro-Asian musics in India and Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya (2006) on Afro-Asian musics in Sri Lanka; Kelly Askew (2002) and Andrew Eisenberg (2017) on taarab in East Africa; Shzr Ee Tan on state orchestras and multiculturalism in Singapore (2018); and Karishmeh Felfeli-Crawford on the band named Indian Ocean, and decolonizing music studies (2021). The list could be much, much longer.

In our discipline, we no longer strive for the comprehensive—a goal the vastness of the Indian Ocean places even more out of reach. Yet without the work of our contributors, our book would barely make it past the estuary. And so above all, we must thank our contributors for their steadfast collaboration and compelling insights, and the communities they worked with for forming their ideas.

Introduction

Jim Sykes and Julia Byl

SOUND, MOVEMENT, WATER, PROTECTION

The towns of Nagore and Velankanni, located just eighteen kilometers apart on the Coromandel Coast, have long anchored religious devotion in Tamil Nadu, India. Nagore is the resting place of Nagore Shahul Hamid, the sixteenth-century sheikh of the Qadiri Sufi lineage, whose *dargah* (shrine) is a major pilgrimage site. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Tamil migrants traveled across the Bay of Bengal to labor in the British colonies, they remembered Nagore's maritime travels across the Indian Ocean—west to Mecca, south to Sri Lanka and the Maldives—and built shrines for him in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia (Tschacher 2006, 231). One can imagine them disembarking and practically falling into the dockside *dargah*—built in Singapore in 1828 on the inlet (*teluk air* in Malay, near today's Telok Ayer MRT transit station)—with profound gratitude for safety across the sea. Velankanni boasts a Catholic church whose annual festival also celebrates a maritime founding story—a shipload of seventeenth-century Portuguese sailors, traveling from China to Colombo, were caught in a vicious storm and prayed to Mary for safety, promising to build her a chapel wherever they landed (Younger 2001, 113). Shrines to the Velankanni apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary—worshipped as Our Lady of Good Health (Arokiya Annai)—were built by Indian migrants across the breadth of the Indian Ocean, from Australia and Indonesia to South Africa. In her research site of Medan, North Sumatra, Julia found the shipwreck commemorated on a plaque at the Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni shrine (figure 0.1).

At first glance, we may be tempted to consider Nagore and Velankanni in India as belonging to two distinct Indian Ocean worlds—one central to the spread of



FIGURE 0.1. Mary rescuing Portuguese sailors, relief on the Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni Shrine, Medan, Indonesia. (Photo by Julia Byl)

Sufism across the eastern Indian Ocean, the other to the history of European colonization and missionization. But placing them in proximity tells another story, for both shrines exist in a Tamil milieu with a majority Hindu population, and both draw Catholic, Muslim, and Hindu devotees. Writing about a shrine to the Infant Jesus in the South Indian city of Bangalore, Vasudha Narayanan (2013, 21) describes a song she heard for the “Wondrous child, Yesu” that describes coming “to worship the flower feet” of the infant—a standard trope in the writings of the Vaishnava and Saiva saints who lived at the end of the first millennium CE (Narayanan 2013, 21). She notes that,

I had heard similar songs near the Basilica of Our Lady of Health in Velankanni, in the neighboring state of Tamilnadu. Velankanni is about eight miles from Nagapattinam and the site of a Marian appearance. Here, Mary is worshiped as Arogya Mata, the Mother of Health. Velankanni is a Christian site; Nagapattinam nearby has several Hindu temples; and a few miles down the road is Nagore, the home of a famous Muslim dargah, where the body of a Sufi saint, Shahul Hamid (15th century) is enshrined. Similar tea shops, similar music . . . and sometimes, the same Hindu pilgrims. (Narayanan 2013, 21)

As Narayanan’s example from the inland city of Bangalore shows, such religious syncretism in South India is not just a coastal phenomenon. It is not confined to the lower classes/castes, nor is it exclusively modern: the sixteenth-century Hindu king of Thanjavur Achuthappa Nayak (r. 1560–1614) famously summoned Shahul Hamid to combat the effects of sorcery (Tschacher 2018).¹ For South Indians who spread out as laborers across the Indian Ocean, and built shrines to Nagore and Arokiya Annai, divine power emerges through its spatial and territorial nature and may affect anyone regardless of their religion (Bastin 2012). As these laborers moved, unique regional formations developed out of new communal interactions. For instance, the Velangkanni complex in Medan is entered through a gate decorated with miniature traditional houses of nearby indigenous groups, and hosts Marian

devotional services in a building intentionally designed to resemble a Hindu temple.² And this in a city whose dominant groups are the Batak (34 percent), Javanese (33 percent), and Chinese (11 percent), with the 2019 census reporting Islam as the dominant religion (54 percent) followed by Christianity (37 percent).

Yet, we need to be forthright here: the goal of this volume is not just to catalog Indian Ocean syncretisms. We argue that a primary reason for studying Indian Ocean musical traditions is to understand how music can both constitute *and* cross communal boundaries. Musical scholarship in diverse Indian Ocean worlds, we contend, must attend to how instruments, people, genres, ideas, and sounds move and are listened to, adopted, and/or resignified—actions that may produce the syncretisms that serve as metonyms for intercommunal harmony, but may also help fortify distinct communities with well-maintained boundaries. For example, during the annual *kandoori* festival (the death anniversary of the Saint), a visitor to the Nagore dargah may hear the *nadaswaram*, a double-reed instrument more commonly associated with Tamil Hindu temples. But they are perhaps more likely to hear distinctive Tamil Muslim songs accompanied by tambourines or instruments like the harmonium and sitar, with diction, lyrical themes, and rhythms comparable to Muslim songs found elsewhere in South Asia (such as the Mappila songs of Kerala and the Qawwali of North India and Pakistan).³ Similarly, the long tradition of South Indian Catholic music, drawing on Western and local Tamil sources, builds its own soundworld—one quite different from the musical traditions that Dutch Catholics brought to Sumatra during the colonial period, or from the Batak melodic elements (Byl 2014) incorporated into the liturgy after Vatican II. The notion of multiple inheritances is useful here—inheritances that connect Indian Ocean musics to myriad elsewhere, while firmly rooting them somewhere.

A further consideration of musical interactions between Tamil Christians and Hindus in Tamil Nadu illustrates this point. Traditionally, the *parai* frame drum is performed by Dalits (formerly known as untouchables) at upper caste Hindu funerals (Sherinian 2013). Over the past few centuries, many Dalits have adopted Christianity, yet some musicians still play for Hindu rituals; the drum plays a part within some Tamil Dalit Christian funerals as well. When performed in an ensemble, the *parai* is often accompanied with maracas (which came from the Portuguese) and a big bass drum (from European marching bands). And there is at least an etymological (if not actual) relationship between another term for the *parai*—*thappu*—and a Muslim term for frame drum (emanating from Persia), *daf*. Despite these evidently syncretic aspects of its performance, however, the *parai* is an emblem of Tamil Dalit identity; given the history of discrimination against Dalits by upper-caste Hindus, its performance at Hindu funerals by some Christian Dalits can hardly be understood as an instance of interreligious harmony.

We began by dwelling on Indian Ocean networks and communal-cultural syncretisms because these are often perceived as the “stuff” of Indian Ocean studies; the last few paragraphs you’ve read have shown why we should approach such material with caution. Yet this caveat should not be taken as belittling the importance of Indian Ocean syncretisms for Indian Ocean populations themselves—many of whom lament their increasing erasure in the wake of modernizing impulses. Consider, once again, Singapore’s Nagore Dargah. Today, the building is an Indo-Muslim heritage museum, not a functioning shrine. When Julia visited in July 2019, the religious intimacy found at an operating dargah was missing; instead, the space boasted beautifully produced displays bearing the history of Singapore’s Indo-Muslim community and moving testimony from its members.⁴ In place of a sheikh was a docent who, though clearly versed in Islamic practice and local knowledge, insisted that the dargah was not a shrine for honoring one person but a place to understand history in the collective. The museum’s website specifies that the dargah contains no physical remains of the sheikh. An accordion in a glass cabinet offered mute testimony of past musical practices, yet the shrine was quiet that day. Walking around the back of the building, Julia snapped a photo of a cast metal sculpture of a migrant boat that commemorates the first touch of solid ground for Indians arriving on the bay in the nineteenth century (figure 0.2); the Chinese temples on Telok Air Street tell a similar story, but one oriented across the South China Sea. With land reclamation projects in the 1880s, 1930s, and 1970s, however, the shore was removed farther and farther away, a cement testament to Singapore’s inexorable capitalist momentum. The dargah, too, has been rebranded: no longer a site for devotion or ecstasy, it is now a storefront for well-produced knowledge, complete with opening and closing times.

For an operative Nagore dargah, one can travel 450 miles up the coast of the Malay Peninsula to the island of Penang, Malaysia. The distinctive white-and-green building is located down the street from the formidable Kapitan Keling Mosque in the Little India section of Georgetown. To continue narrating Julia’s travels (though Jim has been here, too): in 2019 she went to the shrine, stopping en route to tour the mosque. Though both buildings were built between 1800 and 1801, the mosque was now clearly influenced by the currents of normative Sunni belief that radiate from the Middle East through Malay Muslim imams to Malaysian Islamic communities. The devout South Asian man who led Julia and other visitors through the mosque stated that he would prefer to have the Nagore Dargah Sheriff demolished, since its teachings are at odds with Islam’s monotheism.⁵ The Sunni religious doctrine animating this wish was found in a rack near the exit, bearing pamphlets printed by a foundation based in Saudi Arabia. In this context, the discomfort of the Singapore museum’s docent with the word “shrine” becomes clear, as the veneration of



FIGURE 0.2. The replica of the boat behind the Nagore dargah in Singapore. (Photo by Julia Byl)

saints—and the work of Sufi teachers and musicians, often one and the same—is seen by many Sunnis as *shirk*, or idolatry.

Yet, Julia's experience of the Penang dargah provided a different picture than the pamphlets at the mosque. Arriving at midday on a busy Friday afternoon, she passed through a cluster of men and women sitting in the shade in front of the building, taking in a comic sung improvisation, in Tamil, that a man was directing at friends. Everybody was laughing in a knowing way, including a man who looked to be of Peranakan Chinese heritage, sitting comfortably within the mostly South Indian group. Entering the mosque, Julia sat down, offering the small but perfect oranges she had snuck from her hotel's buffet. The sheikh had invited her to come and sit in the dargah at will—like anybody else—but provided little information outside brief nods. She saw a well-dressed Malay woman in hijab seated beside the sheikh, a two-liter bottle of water in front of them. The lid was off, and he was reciting over the opening, *sotto voce*, verses from the Qur'an. Julia spoke with her afterward—she explained that she was a Sunni Muslim, but needed healing for her husband's badly injured leg and had come to Nagore for results. The woman left holding her modern handbag in one hand, the bottle of water in the other.

These stories clearly convey Indian Ocean histories of mercantilism, migratory labor and colonization, the circulation of religious teachings, and the conviviality that persists at the shrines in Singapore and Penang. Surely similar anecdotes could be told at churches for the Lady of Good Health. They also hint at the plight of Indian Ocean communities that are shaped by histories of foreign origin or mixed cultural parentage, and that appear vaguely irrelevant or explicitly threatening

to hegemonic nationalisms and ongoing international recalibrations. In many places, such forces have resulted in silencing: harmoniums behind glass, Sunni pamphlets rather than the pulse of qawwali. And yet, the Malay woman's visit to the shrine reveals a persistent alignment not explained by ethnic or religious identity, but by power and efficacy: water in an ordinary blue plastic bottle made protective through sound. Our aim in this volume is not to come down on any side of such debates—though you probably sense where our sentiments lie—but rather to understand the role of sound and music in articulating them.

SOUNDING THE INDIAN OCEAN

Providing numerous case studies ranging across the Indian Ocean—across disparate time periods and historical and ethnographic approaches—*Sounding the Indian Ocean: Musical Circulations in the Afro-Asiatic Seascape* brings together the disciplines of Indian Ocean and music studies. As glimpsed above in our discussion of Sufi and Catholic networks connecting South and Southeast Asia, the chapters in this volume explore how music helps materialize networks of connection across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and in several of its distinct locales. Our focus is not simply the well-worn tropes of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, however, nor a definition of the IOR as a site for the harmonious mixing of populations (though some of our chapters reveal one or both of these). Rather, we show how music contributes to placemaking in distinct “Indian Ocean worlds” (Srinivas, Ng'weno, and Jeychandran 2020). Instead of defining music's value in its ability to provide *either* narratives of identity formation *or* the celebration of mixture, *Sounding the Indian Ocean* explores the role music plays in both boundary formation and boundary crossing in Indian Ocean contexts, past and present. In articulating distinct ontologies for Indian Ocean musics, their relations to the more nebulous term “sound,” and their historical development through (yet also firmly outside of) colonial and modern Western influence, this volume moves beyond the static notion of mapping the musical traditions of the region's peoples to foreground questions of networks, audiences, patrons, and performances (Feener and Blackburn 2019).

We use the term *sounding* in the double sense of sonic production and listening—and measuring oceanic depths—as a gloss for both intellectual inquiry and attention to a range of musical practices.⁶ As Jim notes in a recent article (Sykes 2021), seawater has long served as a “theory machine” (Helmreich 2011, 132) that “helps us think about liquidity, circulation, seepage, and leakage” (Ballestro 2019, 415). Perhaps because of this porosity, and the potential and threat that water and coastlines hold, water boundaries “are prone to securitization” (Fischhendler 2015)—as seen in the growing cold war between India and China in the Indian Ocean, and also in the boundary policing of the region's ethnonationalists. To us,

“sounding” the Indian Ocean means navigating the role of sound in producing possibilities for understanding the porosity of maritime cultures, including attempts to promote or eschew such cultural “seepage.”

But let there be no confusion: this is a work of music studies and not sound studies. To do the latter would require moving instruments and repertoire to the margins to engage more closely with sound reproduction technologies—a valuable project, but not what we are up to here. This being said, we argue “music” as a concept has often functioned in the modern IOR to define communities against one another, demarcating ethnic and religious difference through heritage discourses. As such, within the discourses of modernity, “music” came to stand in opposition to sound (and noise)—or, perhaps, over and above it—demarcating boundaries between nature and culture as well as the appropriate placement of religious and ethnically defined practices in the public sphere.

While we see value in contesting music’s role in the production of contemporary ethnonationalisms, our goal in this volume is more modest. We contend merely that “identity” is not always the most salient framework for registering music-making in the IOR, and that to “sound” the Indian Ocean requires denaturalizing “music” as a concept and looking instead for moments of its formation and trespassing. The essays in this volume explore contexts where “music” is constituted and circulated, moving us away from merely cataloging instruments and genres to locate music at the juncture of several kinds of encounters that constitute Indian Ocean worlds: between political regimes and diverse populations, land and sea, men and women, elite and subaltern, labor and leisure, port city and littoral, multiple religious or ethnic groups occupying the same or nearby spaces, and differently constituted ears in famously plural Indian Ocean port cities.

CROSSING INDIAN OCEAN DIVIDES: HISTORY, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND MUSIC STUDIES

By registering *music*, *sound*, and *listening* as key words in Indian Ocean studies (alongside others like relationality, placemaking, and networks of memory; Srinivas, Ng’weno, and Jeychandran 2020, 12–19), our chapters stake a claim to the importance of the Indian Ocean to music history and vice versa. Indian Ocean studies is an interdisciplinary field celebrated as “a template for thinking and writing about interculturalism, globality, and transregional movements without necessarily privileging the West” (ibid., 12). Given the ocean’s vast expanse, it is understandable that the conjoined themes of mobility and connection have long characterized the field (e.g., McPherson 1993; Simpson 2006; Sheriff 2010; Moorthy and Jamal 2012; Amrith 2013; Alpers and Goswami 2019). This emphasis has emerged particularly through studies of mercantile exchange (e.g., Subrahmanyam 1990; Machado 2014; Bishara 2017; Pearson 2015), colonialism (Anderson 2010;

Rosa 2015; Sivasundaram 2020), religious networks (Bang 2004; Green 2011), and globalization (Prestholdt 2008, 2019; Hooper 2017). Much early work in Indian Ocean studies questioned how far the ocean's influence could be felt inland and how to characterize its stability and transformations over the *longue durée* (Chaudhuri 1985).⁷ Pearson's concept of the littoral (2006, 2010) has been a generative concept, highlighting key differences between port city populations (Broeze 1989) and sedentary ones living along the coasts that likewise embody histories of Indian Ocean connections.⁸ The field's early concern with the impact of the European colonial presence in the region (Pearson 1987) has given way in recent decades to exploring the ocean before the arrival of Europeans, including diasporic populations that predated the era of the nation-state (such as the Yemeni Hadhramis; Ho 2004, 2006; Hofmeyr 2010, 723). The recent growth of anthropological studies of the region has generated fruitful comparisons of local dynamics across the IOR, such as how transnational movements like Islam come to differentiate populations in coastal Kenya (the Swahili from the Giriama; McIntosh 2009) and Malaysia (the Malays from the country's Indian and Chinese minorities; Willford 2006). Despite this growth of attention to fieldwork, Indian Ocean studies maintains an emphasis on texts (Desai 2013; Ricci 2011), though scholars are turning increasingly to the visual and architectural (Barnes 2012; Shokoothy 2003).

Musicological scholarship on the Indian Ocean promises to expand on many of these themes and (perhaps less obviously) contribute to our understanding of Indian Ocean economies and histories of urbanization and media. Indeed, it is already doing just that and more (e.g., De Beukelaer and Eisenberg 2020; Eisenberg 2013; Rasmussen 2016; Eisenlohr 2018). What this book highlights, then, is not a lack of scholarship on music in the IOR but the lack of a scholarly frame. To date, there has not been an explicitly named "Indian Ocean" framework for registering the musics of the Indian Ocean rim or its islands—at least not since the beginnings of ethnomusicology in the 1950s and its ancestor discipline comparative musicology. This latter field, operative from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, produced lofty assumptions about the diffusion of musical instruments and practices across the Indian Ocean, whether it be marimbas from Southeast Asia to Africa or the *valiha* (tube zither) from Borneo to Madagascar. It also produced armchair comparisons of the tonal systems of various traditions (see Byl and Sykes [2020] for a longer discussion of this issue). Some of these assumptions were far-fetched, and others were not. The approach was increasingly jettisoned by ethnomusicology, a field that adopted its standard of long-term fieldwork from cultural anthropology. The notion of oceanic connections thus came to appear riddled with outdated, problematic terminology (e.g., "diffusions")—which was replaced by a land-centric, methodological nationalism that had the effect of erasing the Indian Ocean from music studies. Key islands in the IOR, from Madagascar and Zanzibar in the west, the Maldives and Sri Lanka in the center,

and Sumatra in the east, as well as huge land masses like South India and Saudi Arabia, were positioned as the ends of regions, rather than hubs of cultural connection. The transformation of the Strait of Malacca from traversable waters to a dividing line between colonies and nations finds parallels in the partitioning of Sri Lankan from South Indian, and Omani from Zanzibari music history. The Indian diaspora in the Caribbean has been more represented in ethnomusicology than the Indian diasporas in East Africa and Southeast Asia, closer to the homeland.

While there is indeed historical evidence for the movement of instruments and music theories across the IOR, the goal of this volume is not to exhume comparative musicology. Rather, we strive to bring ethnomusicology into dialogue with the currently booming (and ethnographically and historiographically well-grounded) field of Indian Ocean studies. What does naming the Indian Ocean as a site for the formation of connected music histories do to our understanding of Indian Ocean worlds that have heretofore been neglected or peripheralized in music scholarship? At this juncture, we contend, like many Indian Oceanists before us, that there is much to be gained from stepping outside the nation-state framework—and we stress that doing so does not require abandoning fine-grained studies of music in distinct Indian Ocean locales.

Music studies' oceanic purview has centered on the Atlantic (e.g., Floyd 1996; Goodman 2013, 2015; Treece 2020) with attention given to the Caribbean (Rommen and Guilbault 2019; Njoroge 2016), the Pacific (Lawrence 2001; Solis 2015), the Austronesian world (Abels 2011), and the Mediterranean Sea (Magrini 2003; Cooper and Dawe, 2005; Shannon 2015; Horowitz 2021). Studies of Indian Ocean musics in this volume resonate with, and at times challenge, key themes in the music histories of these maritime spaces, including narratives about slavery and plantation labor, long-distance migration, island cultures and imaginaries, tourism, the formation of creole identities, regional identities spanning multiple nation-states, and religious innovations, to name a few.⁹ Though ours is not a explicitly a work of intermediality and multimodal scholarship, our contributors suggest ways that music and sound might be integrated into IOR scholarship's sensory turn.¹⁰ Refusing to cordon off music into a domain marked "culture," *Sounding the Indian Ocean* hears maritime and world history, inspired by musical imaginaries and local musical concerns across the IOR.

MUSIC AS A POLITICAL ECONOMY

Paradoxically, the assumption that music lies outside of politics—and instead is an apolitical form of expression, entertainment, heritage, and/or devotion—explains its utility for many nation-building projects in the IOR. Arguing to the contrary, we suggest that it will be useful to define music as a political economy—in the Foucauldian sense of a "discourse on governing," with ordering capacities (familial,

kinship-related, hierarchical, communal)—rather than merely as a form of expression that needs to be situated *in relation to* politics and *within* an economy. The notion of an inherent link between music, heritage, and communal identity needs to be denaturalized and historicized, rather than simply adopted as the proper method or focal point of study.

As Ritu Birla notes, a conceptual separation between “economy” and “culture” was sedimented in nineteenth-century colonial India: “As law posed ‘the market’ as sovereign, *cultural* subjects emerged as ‘natural’ *and a priori*” (2009, 25; her emphasis). In colonial India, Ceylon, and the British-run Straits Settlements, we suggest, religious processions came to appear as the outward emergence of already-formed communal practices into the public sphere (Sykes 2017) rather than practices that emerged *in public* through their aural and visual encounters with Others (Lunn and Byl 2014). “The market” (gendered male) was dominated by the British colonists, yet thought to be governed by the invisible hand; “culture” (gendered female) was portrayed by anticolonial Indian nationalists as emerging from within the interiorized space of community, presumably untouched by colonialism.¹¹ This allowed for the perception of an unbroken connection between contemporary performers (particularly female singers) and the precolonial past (Weidman 2006). Through the process, certain musics—demarcated as “classical”—came to appear a “higher” occupation than ritual labor or music-for-entertainment, facilitating a felt connection to an abstract notion of cultural history and communal identity: something akin, indeed generative of, what Anderson (1983) termed an “imagined community.”¹²

While the above refers to British colonies, similar processes happened elsewhere in the Indian Ocean. Indeed, the legacy of culturalism (though easily overdetermined) greatly affects many of today’s Indian Ocean musicians. To take one example, Jim noticed during his fieldwork in Singapore that the government there invests in “ethnic music ensembles” related to the island’s three major communities—the Chinese, Indians, and Malays—that are positioned as though they display bounded, traditional musics whose differences must now be bridged through “multicultural collaborations” in the name of ethnic harmony. Yet, the Indian tabla and European-derived harmonium (prominent in India) are also core components of Malay traditional musics, and the Middle Eastern oud moved across the Indian Ocean to become the Malay *gambus*, while centuries earlier, a similar instrument (likely a precursor of the oud) moved across the Silk Road to become the Chinese pipa (see Byl et al. [2017] for a poem about instruments and identities in 1860s Singapore). Furthermore, Jim learned that in Singapore the institutional hegemony of Western classical music is then overlaid: one of his interlocutors lamented the tearing down of a multiethnic neighborhood that housed a “far Eastern music school” in which

Tamils, Chinese, and Malays had collaborated musically, in order to build the School of the Arts (SOTA)—a pretertiary school with a focus on Western classical music. These examples show how discourses linking music, heritage, ethnicity, and/or classicism obscure histories of musical encounter both across the Indian Ocean over the *longue durée* (in the first example) and between migrant communities in an Indian Ocean nation (in the second), with tangible effects on musicians' lives.

INDIAN OCEAN SOUNDWORLDS

Acknowledging that conceptualizations of “music” developed in the Indian Ocean in relation to imported intellectual processes (like liberalism and culturalism) undergirded by colonial law and reinforced by postcolonial discourses on multiculturalism and heritage is not to reduce “music” in the Indian Ocean to a colonial origin. Rather, it asks us to denaturalize (to “hear” outside of) the legacies of liberalism and culturalism that remain integral for understanding musical developments in Indian Ocean nations, but whose effects have never been totalizing.¹³ In this light, unique Indian Ocean musical ontologies—perhaps related to Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, and other religions, but also to Malay and Arab and Punjabi and Swahili ethnicities, to Urdu and Tamil and Arabic linguistic identities, to Balochi and Zanzibari networks, and so on—may appear to have the decolonizing potential to free us from the hegemony of European-derived constructions of music, personhood, and culture.

While we do not discount the legitimacy of variously construed Indian Ocean ways of hearing the world (we represent several in this volume), once again our aims are more modest. On the one hand, scholars need to recognize the ways that modern Western notions of music have limited what registers as music in the IOR. On the other hand, while distinct ontologies of music and sound are locatable in (and as) IOR traditions, an attempt to bound them this way risks reproducing notions of cultural isolation and purity—indeed, culturalism itself—that have made traditional musics amenable to ethnonationalism. Hindutva in contemporary India, the 969 movement in Burma, and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, as well as the destruction of non-Muslim cultural heritage in the Maldives and Bangladesh, violence against the Rohingya in Burma, against Christians in Indonesia, and the postcolonial cleansing of some Indian populations in East Africa—these all testify to the destructive power of narratives linking ethnic identity, traditional practices, and territory.

Rather than playing into such narratives of division, or naively assuming that music always facilitates ethnic harmony and interaction, *Sounding the Indian Ocean* situates music and musicians as focal points for the articulation of contestations about history, memory, locality, and belonging. Although we editors of

this volume have disciplinary orientations toward the eastern Indian Ocean (Jim in Sri Lanka and Julia in Sumatra)—a bias that is surely evident in this introduction—the volume puts musicological literature from across the IOR into dialogue. Skeptical readers may question whether it is appropriate to situate (say) Balochi and Sri Lankan musics, or Swahili and Malay musics, in the same “region.” Surely Indian Ocean music history *should* be broken up into distinct regions—even down to smaller oceanic spaces like the Mozambique Channel and the Strait of Malacca—but we contend there is much to be gained from a broader perspective. Showing how multiple inheritances are under constant (re)construction via such discourses as ethnicity, religion, and nation, the volume foregrounds histories of connection while affording comparisons between disparately placed communities with similar histories.

CROSSING INDIAN OCEAN DIVIDES: CONNECTION AND COMPARISON

The Indian Ocean is an interconnected “arena” (Bose 2006) that has been dubbed an “Afro-Asiatic seascape” (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst 2003) and an “Islamic Ocean” (Chaudhuri 1985). It contains the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal and is framed by Madagascar, the horn of Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, the Southeast Asian archipelago, and Australia. It holds a fifth of the world’s seaspace, and its rim is home to a third of the world’s population (Amrith 2013, x). On the shores of the Bay of Bengal alone live an estimated 500 million people (Sheriff 2010, 18). The region also includes “island hubs” (Schnepel and Alpers 2017) of historic importance, such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Andaman Islands, Mauritius, Madagascar, the Seychelles, Réunion, and Socotra as well as places like the Cocos Islands and Pulau Nias that are less well-known globally but just as significant to their inhabitants.

A core aspect of Indian Ocean music studies is that certain instruments, sounds, and genres moved widely and settled, connecting geographically dispersed areas of the IOR—the most famous being the oud that traveled from the Middle East to East Africa and the Malay world, including a variant from Hadhraumaut (Yemen) called *gambus* in the Malay world (Capwell 1995; Hilarian 2003; Lambert and Mokrani 2013; Kinzer 2017). According to Engseng Ho (2006, xix), Hadhramis sailed to the songs of mariner Bā Tāyī, who once wrote a poem for each direction visible from the southernmost tip of the Arabian Peninsula: “across the ocean seeking India and Java to the left and the coasts of East Africa, the *sawāhil*, to the right.” Like the generations of Hadhramis who traveled, settled, and married locals throughout the Indian Ocean, the poems of Bā Tāyī string “along ports like prayer beads, naming each for its patron saint” (Ho 2006, xix). Ho lists their ports of call: “coastal places like Kilwa, Lamu, Mogadishu, Aden, Mocha, Zabīd, Jedda, Cambay, Surat, Calicut, Aceh, Pattani, Melaka, Palembang, Riau, Banten,

Pontianak, Makassar, and Timor,” followed by landings (during the colonial period) “at the imperial ports of Dar es-Salaam, Zanzibar, Mombasa, Djibouti, Aden, Jedda, Bombay, Colombo, Penang, Singapore, Batavia, Surabaya” (xxii).

Over the course of Indian Ocean history, numerous populations settled across the breadth of the ocean, dispersed by slavery (people from Madagascar, Mozambique, and island Southeast Asia), plantation labor (South Indian Tamils), migration (Chinese and Sikhs), and European colonialism and missionization. Taken together, these migrations generated African-descended musical communities in South Asia and the Gulf states; the Cape Malay musical traditions of South Africa; Tamil diasporic musical networks linking Mauritius, South Africa, with Sri Lanka’s Hill Country, Malaysia, and Singapore; the formation of Gujarati and Sikh musical communities in East and South Africa; and the Portuguese-influenced musics of Sri Lanka, Goa, Melaka, and Mozambique—to name a few. *Sounding the Indian Ocean* calls music studies to center such peoples, places, and their musical traditions for the first time, noting connected histories and continued patterns of mobility, particularly as these affect the development of regional and local musical imaginaries.

Our volume also centers the oft-hybridized musics of some majority populations of the Indian Ocean littoral and island spaces. Some examples include: Swahili *taarab* musicians on the Kenyan coast whose musics incorporate elements from “*ngoma* traditions, Egyptian Arab music, Arab musics from the Arabian Peninsula, or Indian musics” (Eisenberg); the *tufo* genre performed by Swahili women in Mozambique, descended from the Muslim praise songs (*mawlid*) that were “introduced to the Swahili aristocratic communities (*waungwana*) by the Alawiyya Sufi Order from Hadramawt” (Hebden); Kuwaiti sung poetry set to the melodies of mid-twentieth-century Bollywood songs and made popular by a Yemeni musician who lived in Somalia as well as by a “Hadhrami troubadour of Punjabi descent who toured East Africa during the 1940s and 50s” (Lavin); the Portuguese- and African-influenced popular music genre *baila*, historically associated with Sri Lanka’s small African- and Portuguese-descended communities but performed today by Sri Lankans of all stripes, though particularly the island’s Sinhala Buddhist ethnic majority (Radhakrishnan); and the performance of *dakwa* (“the Indonesianized version of the Arabic term *da’wa* . . . which connotes strengthening the faith and encouraging others to do the same”) as mixed with Javanese melodies in *seni music Islam* (Islamic musical arts) in Indonesia (Rasmussen).

Michael Feener and Anne Blackburn (2019, 11) write that the attention to networks in Indian Ocean studies has moved toward the specific, “mapping the transregional movement of individuals and institutions within frameworks of particular communities and diasporas.” What has been missing, they suggest, is comparison. They approvingly cite Peter van der Veer’s statement that “comparison” should be conceived not primarily in terms of comparing societies or events, or institutional arrangements across societies . . . but as a reflection on our

conceptual framework as well as on the history of interactions that have constituted our object of study” (Feener and Blackburn 2019, 11; cited from van der Veer 2016, 28). We concur. While this volume eschews the outdated methodologies of comparative musicology, we encourage various comparisons: between the western and eastern Indian Ocean; between African diasporic populations in distinct Indian Ocean locales; between Muslims in Kuwait, Mozambique, Mauritius, and Indonesia; between Bengalis in Burma and the Andaman Islands; and between the Portuguese-influenced music of Sri Lanka and the Scottish-influenced music of the Cocos Islands—to name a few.

CROSSING INDIAN OCEAN DIVIDES: CONTINUITY AND RUPTURE

Indian Ocean trade and pilgrimage networks have always been routed by the annually shifting monsoon winds, called *msimu* in KiSwahili, *mawsim* in Arabic, *mosum* by Persians and Indians, and *musim* in Malay. The northeast monsoon blows southward from the northern rim of the ocean and northward from its south, creating an equatorial current in a loop from just north of Madagascar across to the south of Sumatra and western Australia. The southwest monsoon reverses course, blowing upward toward the Indian Subcontinent and the Horn of Africa, and sending ships westward toward Africa and north toward the Arabian peninsula and India. The East Africa to India trip could be made once a year; the Arabia to northwestern India trip, several times in the same period.

The monsoon facilitated not only movement but also *restrictions* on movement, requiring merchants to spend long periods in their places of trade before returning “home.” Many Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Sinhalese, Swahili, Arab, and Chinese traders had multiple families along the trade route and alternative “home bases” in each Indian Ocean port city. The aforementioned Hadhramis intermarried with local women, *becoming* “Swahilis, Gujaratis, Malabaritis, Malays, Javanese, Filipinos. They became natives everywhere” (Ho 2004, 215–16). These men, many with wives in each port, moved through the oceanic space being “put up by relatives, who might have Arab uncles married to foreign, local aunts” (Ho 2004, 215–16). This was a world where people “socialized with foreigners as kinsmen and Muslims” (Ho 2004, 215–16), which a reduction to ethnicity does not accurately capture. At the same time, the inversion of the male merchant experience was registered at home, as in the tradition of Mappila sung poetry from India’s Malabar coast, which captured the sadness and resilience of the families left behind (Haseeb 2021).¹⁴

Numerous religious networks have traversed the Indian Ocean, predating the Muslim presence, including various sects or denominations of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Certain Indian Ocean languages, like Swahili, Arabic, English, and Malay, became lingua franca across large swaths of oceanic territory,

or in the case of languages like Urdu and Gujarati, specific migratory networks. Radically diverse in themselves, these networks did not always produce mutual understanding with Others, or even an internal uniformity. Nile Green notes that there has been an “assumption that ethnic and linguistic pluralism is inherently equivalent to positive forms of social capital and beliefs that formally celebrate such pluralism” (2018, 847).¹⁵ Examining late colonial travelogues from Muslims writing in Urdu and Persian (with some Turkish, Arabic, and Swahili writings, set in “Iran, India, Arabia, Burma, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Africa”; Green 2018, 852), he shows that these writers—many of whom were on the Hajj—experienced the Indian Ocean as a space of alterity or what he calls (following Foucault) a “heterotopia.” The shock of difference was most felt, Green suggests, in the ports of Bombay and Aden.

Andrew J. Eisenberg (2017) shows that music may create *both* a sense of difference *and* a sense of connectedness to Others when he writes about Kenyan musical life that, “Arabness *reverberates* in Swahili-space, revealing its various contours and edges, [and] Indianness *resonates*, existing as a palpable yet ungrounded presence” (Eisenberg 2017, 348, italics in original). He stresses that although “being Indian in Kenya . . . means being quintessentially non-African,” the musical recordings of many *taarab* musicians “not only produce a sense of Swahili community by revealing the Indianness of Swahili intimacy, but also “reveal the deep *familiarity* . . . between Swahili and Indians” (Eisenberg 2017, 351; see also Topp Fargion 2014).

Music also articulates hierarchical relations within Indian Ocean ethnic groups while allowing for senses of continuity and rupture across broad timespans. Consider Jim’s witnessing of a Tamil Hindu *urumi melam* (drum ensemble) that performed for an audience of South Indian laborers at a Hindu temple, located on the grounds of a Shell oil refinery off the coast of Singapore (Sykes 2015). While the performers and audience formed a homogenous group (overwhelmingly young, male, and Tamil), they were differentiated by class: the Singaporean drummers—some of whom worked for well-paying tech companies—were far better off than the working-class South Indian laborers. Both the laborers and *urumi* musicians followed in the footsteps of earlier generations of South Indians who built much of the infrastructure of colonial Singapore and Malaysia, or worked on Malayan rubber plantations that, in their production of rubber for tires, were emblematically connected to global capitalism. Between 1840 and 1940, around twenty-eight million such men (and later, women) crossed the Bay of Bengal to work as laborers for the British colonists in Burma and colonial Malaya—one of the world’s largest but least known human migrations (Amrith 2013, 2). Ritual drummers lived on these plantations and performed at their temples, as several pilgrimage routes for the annual Thaipusam festival grew across the Malay Peninsula and Singapore—which today’s *urumi* drummers play at (Lai 2016). But this continuity does not signify similarity between eras: for example, while caste shaped the kangany system that governed plantation labor in colonial Malaya—the recruiter/manager

(kangany) was usually of a higher caste than the laborers, many of whom came from the lowest rungs, including the Paraiyar (drummer) caste—such distinctions are considered unimportant to today’s Singaporean Tamil youths (Sinha 2006, 106). Drumming at Hindu festivals in Singapore is a hobby and passion for drummers, *not* a caste occupation, in contrast to the plight of many ritual musicians throughout South Indian Tamil history.

Now, consider the difference between the migration of Tamil laborers to the British colonies and an earlier period of migration during the height of Portuguese colonialism, when an Indian trading community settled in the Portuguese colony of Malacca (present-day Malaysia) and intermarried with Malays, creating a distinct mixed Tamil-Malay community called the Chitti Melaka (Sarkissian 2000; Pillai 2015). *That* era of migration could hardly be more different from the perceived golden age of the civil and military voyages of the seafaring South Indian Tamil Chola Dynasty (circa ninth to eleventh century CE), which influenced religion and statecraft across mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, a source of pride for Tamils. In sum, this Tamil example demonstrates that Indian Ocean networks may be communally enclosed yet also diverse, changing over the centuries while retaining continuity, constantly separating themselves from Others yet integrating and being forever changed by encounters. We suggest that an Indian Ocean music studies will need to look for such nuance, tacking inside and outside of networks, looking for ruptures and continuities. The chapters of *Sounding the Indian Ocean* are replete with examples.

POSTCOLONIAL FRACTURES AND CONVERGENCES

Today, Indian Ocean histories of connection are often politicized or forgotten. As Amrith puts it, while it is too easy to romanticize the “polyglot traders and cross-cultural marriages” of this Indian Ocean world “in which long-distance travel [was] a common experience . . . the narrowness of postcolonial nationalism compounded the loss of connection across the region, mourned in the late twentieth-century context of rising religious violence and bloody internecine wars across the postcolonial world” (2013, 26–27). For anticolonial and postcolonial nationalist movements that created allegiances based on ethnic membership and claims to land, the existence of mixed communities or minority groups of Indian Ocean heritage became a threat or at least an afterthought: “postcolonial nations both restricted movement and reoriented the sociopolitical imaginations of people along the rim” (Prestholt 2015, 441).

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a “reconstitution of the Indian Ocean rim in the context of a multipolar world” (Prestholt 2015, 441). Writing shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York, Ho (2004 2010) noted the urgency of understanding “the history of relations between Western powers and transnational Muslim societies in the Indian Ocean,” remarking that “an anthropologically nuanced understanding of such societies as diasporas . . .

lends a useful perspective on a set of conflicts which is massively unfolding.” The connected nature of the Indian Ocean reemerged again in the wake of the 2004 tsunami (Bose 2006). Amid the destabilization caused by the Iraq War, China has engaged in numerous infrastructure and port projects over the past decade and a half to safeguard its oil exports, triggering an emerging cold war with India for hegemony in the region—greatly affecting island nations like Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Mauritius, who find themselves in debt to the Chinese. Today, “despite the disjunctures of the postcolonial era, the imagination of the Indian Ocean as a distinct region has become more, not less important” (Prestholdt 2015, 455). Although the prestige and resources of the trader has positioned some Indian Ocean communities (the Hadhramis, the Straits Chinese) to take advantage of today’s globalized world, many coastal areas, once flourishing hubs, are among the places most vulnerable to ecological disaster. Think of the coastal areas of Mozambique washed out in 2019 by Cyclone Idai, or the shores of Aceh and Sri Lanka after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami; 17 percent of Bangladesh is projected to be underwater due to climate change by 2050, while all of the Maldives may be underwater by 2100 (Ghosh 2016).

These examples may be familiar to scholars of the IOR, but less familiar to ethnomusicologists. How do “Indian Ocean musics” fit into these dynamics—these continuities and ruptures—and what can attention to sonic cultures add to IOR scholarship? The definitive (yet vague) answer is that musical expression certainly is and was present in all of the situations just described—whether in the radio waves of an early twentieth-century nationalist broadcast, in a relief concert for victims of a natural disaster, or at a religious festival in a multiethnic global city. We just need more music researchers working within an IOR frame to enlighten us with their findings.

Musicological research can benefit IOR scholarship because it relies on subtlety, whether in the close reading of a song text or drum pattern, or in the years of fieldwork needed to discern what a performer is really saying about their music, its history, or its contemporary audience. Musicological research connects well to some methodologies historically used by Indian Ocean scholars, such as archaeology and organology: tracing the lines or tone of an instrument can be solid material evidence, all the more valuable within historical periods with few written archives. Tour networks, regional pop stars, and the circulation of YouTube videos say much about contemporary cultural and economic connections between Indian Ocean nations. Music research is already demonstrating how Indian Ocean connections are downplayed in some contemporary Indian Ocean nations for nationalist reasons, such as in the rooting of authentic Arab musical expression in desert Bedouin communities in Oman (Ulaby 2012, 59). The ethnomusicologist’s goal of privileging what Indian Ocean individuals say—in their own languages—prevents us from scoping out too far or claiming too much, and inadvertently turning an individual into a subject or statistic. Paying attention to the immediacy of

music and its local meanings can emphasize the agency of Indian Ocean communities, while attention to musical evidence can tell histories in surprising ways that still sound true to a tradition's inheritors. We leave it to authors of the volume itself to *begin* to provide such musical knowledge from their own broad sites of research.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Given that we coeditors specialize in South Asia (Jim) and Southeast Asia (Julia), we have intentionally sought out scholars working elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, particularly along the East African coast and the Gulf region. Grouping chapters by theme rather than geography best suits our integrated approach to the Indian Ocean: "Listeners," "Mobilities," "Mediascapes," "Communities," and "Connections," followed by a "Conclusions." We acknowledge that many of these chapters could easily "jump ship" into a different section but contend that this grouping will allow the reader to draw comparisons between peoples, musics, and sociohistorical processes locatable in different parts of the Indian Ocean.

"Listeners" begins with a chapter by Richard Williams on Indians in colonial Burma—a labor force that developed through British colonialism, which came to form the majority in the capital Rangoon (now Yangon) by the start of World War II, when they were driven out due to the Japanese invasion of 1942, the expulsion orders of General Ne Win in 1962, and the nationalization of Burmese industries from 1964. Williams uses a Bengali source (circa 1900) to explore how a Bengali Muslim man heard Burmese musical genres and sounds. Williams argues that this Bengali listener "re-sounds" the Burmese via unique poetic interpretations that provide an "imagined geography" that is neither Burmese nor Bengali but transformed by contact. Next, Andrew Eisenberg explores the life of the female Zanzibari *taarab* singer Siti binti Saad (1880–1950)—reportedly the first woman from East Africa to record a commercial music recording. Detailing her deep engagement with Hadhrami Arab and Indian musical traditions, Eisenberg sees her "mimetic appropriations" as a critical engagement with Zanzibari sociality and lived experience.

The next section, "Mobilities," highlights the ways that musical processes and traditions are influenced by networks of human sounds and movements. Ellen Hebden explores *tufu*, a music and dance genre performed by groups of women in Mozambique. Though this genre has its origins in Arab songs praising the prophet Muhammed and is still performed at local religious festivals, the genre has transcended these origins to engage political and social topics. Hebden approaches her chapter through the concept of "motility"—a word particularly appropriate for a dance tradition—which she describes as "as a way to tie people's social movements to their capacity to be spatially mobile." She explores strategies that *tufu* dancers employ as they create a space for this Indian Ocean tradition within the modern nation of Mozambique. Next, Carola Lorea's chapter centers on Bengali musicians

in the Andaman Islands—located east of India and west of the Malay Peninsula—a site infamously used as a penal colony by the British colonial government. Rather than foreground mobility, Lorea notes that the Andamans emerged for Bengalis as “critical zones of confinement, disconnection, restriction of movement.” She explores how the Matua religious movement (originating in East Bengal in the early nineteenth century) fosters social equality and draws followers from marginalized groups. Lorea’s discussion of the devotional *kirtan* genre reveals dynamics of sociability, efficacy, and sensory experience and the transformation of ritual music within an Indian Ocean community whose mobility has been limited. Finally, George Murer’s chapter explores the musics of Balochistan, a geographic and cultural region spread across the boundaries between Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Murer traces diverse musical repertoires, instruments, and poetic traditions of Balochi people across today’s thriving port cities of the Gulf states (e.g., Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Muscat), a project enabled by multisited field research in Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar—itself a virtuosic display of mobility.

“Mediascapes” contains two explorations of how technologies produce localized soundscapes dependent on transnational oceanic connections. Patrick Eisenlohr, a linguistic anthropologist who has written extensively about Mauritius, shows how a “sonic atmosphere” is created by *na’t* (sung poetry) performed by Mauritius’s Indian Muslim community. This community has connections with Sufi associations on and off the island (such as in Mumbai), and their performances are mediated by the circulation of recordings across this oceanic Sufi network. A *na’t* performance shifts among several languages—Mauritian Creole, Arabic, and Urdu. Next, Gabriel Lavin’s chapter moves from the early modern networks of Hadhrami (Yemeni) musician-poets to a discussion of the increased circulation of Arabic poetic musical genres across the Indian Ocean as a result of technologies like the steam ship, and later, the sound recording. Straddling history and ethnography, his chapter provides the reader with a sense of the musical and geographical range of these older recordings as such music finds audiences on far-flung coasts.

“Communities” begins with Inderjit Kaur’s chapter on Sikh devotional music in Kenya, set within a history of Indian migration beginning after creation of British East Africa Protectorate in 1895. Although hostilities toward Indians resulted in the exodus of around 100,000 people by the 1970s, a strong Sikh community remains today. Kaur’s chapter locates home in the Sikh diaspora at the Gurdwara Makindu—a place of worship located on the rail line that Sikhs helped to build and locus of a copy of the “scriptural guru” Guru Granth Sahib. She explores how this sacred space is constituted through sound and service for Sikh and local African communities alike. Next, the chapter by Sylvia Bruinders and Valmont Layne describes the musics of the distinctive Cape Malay community in Cape Town, South Africa, whose ancestry stems from enslaved and free Muslims who moved (or were brought) to the Cape during the Dutch and British colonial

periods. The term “Cape Malay” connects to Southeast Asia but does not stop there: the community’s origins are in the Dutch transport of enslaved Javanese to the Cape, but today refers to a heterogenous group, including those of Malagasy and Indian descent, whose ancestors used Malay as a lingua franca. In their chapter, Bruinders and Layne survey a wide array of Cape Malay musics and musicians while discussing the shifting geographical orientations of the South African coast during the colonial and postcolonial periods as it moved from a zone of trade to a “hinterland” and back again. Finally, Brian Jackson’s chapter discusses the ways that the Afro-Asian communities of Sidis (Western India) and Sheedis (Pakistan) are integrated—or not—into the broader South Asian communities that surround them. By paying attention to historical trajectories of Sufism, and contemporary performances such as the Sidi Melo festival, Jackson explores how music connects or challenges the persistent “Othering” experienced by this community, by showing the emergence of their musical subjectivities in dialogue with their minority status.

The final section, “Connections,” begins with Julia Byl’s historiographical study of the pervasive (though at times tacit) legacies of cultural influence between Southeast Asia and India. The chapter interrogates the term “Hindu-Buddhism,” used frequently by scholars of Southeast Asia not only to refer to the Indic religious legacies throughout the area but also to describe the purportedly flexible mindset that allowed these religions to be linked in the past. Although she pays particular notice to Indic legacies in Sumatra, Byl extends the discussion to refer to other religious pluralisms—including those within Christian, Muslim, and indigenous traditions—while zeroing in on what scholars mean when they gesture at religious syncretism in such a vague way. The volume continues with David Irving’s study of music within the uneven and sometimes jarring relations between the Malay inhabitants of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (today an Australia territory) and the island’s original British overseers. The Cocos islanders, Irving argues, express a distinctly local and at times autonomous identity by juxtaposing Scottish dance and Malay poetic song. Finally, Mahesh Radhakrishnan’s chapter focuses on the Portuguese Burgher music of Sri Lanka, analyzing musical meter in the *kāfriinha*, a core component of Sri Lanka’s popular music genre called *Baila* that was influenced by Sri Lanka’s small community of African descent. Radhakrishnan posits a fruitful comparison with musics in the Seychelles, Mauritius, and the Réunion Islands, paying attention to the circulation of Afro-creole and Lusophone musical legacies throughout this area, dubbing it a “bailasphere.”

The volume concludes with two short complementary essays, the first penned by Anne Rasmussen—a scholar who has significantly moved the musicology of the IOR forward through her ethnographic, musical, and pedagogical engagements between Yemen and Indonesia (Rasmussen 2010). Rasmussen explores the Islamic concept *dakwah* (a concept related to religious teaching and piety) within

a longer discussion of cultural affinities across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. She brings forward an important perspective on the formative Bandung Conference in 1955 (in Indonesian, the “Konferensi Asia-Afrika”) by exploring how music helped to form the exchange at the second such conference, ten years later. Finally, an “Epilogue” written by the editors explores the further expansion of the Indian Ocean that occurs when recording artists from the region (including South African music icon Miriam Makeba) and performing troupes (including a Tamil musical tour to New York City) bring Indian Ocean musics, social dynamics, and connected histories to a larger audience. These closing examples urge us to renew our focus on the decolonial promise of the Indian Ocean—as articulated through song by Makeba, and famously represented by the Bandung Conference described by Rasmussen in the previous chapter—in dialogue with the recent decolonial turn of music studies.

In sum, we are delighted with the ways these chapters intermingle: Balochi musicians show up in Brian Jackson’s chapter and in George Murer’s; Javanese music is present in Gabriel Lavin’s article on Arabic media flows as well as in the papers on Southeast Asia. We welcome you to log your own connections between the chapters, as this practical activity can orient readers to the logics of the Indian Ocean as surely as our theoretical offerings. While an Anglophone, North American perspective is overrepresented in this volume—given the editors’ backgrounds and scholarly networks—the volume profiles a global range of scholars (based in Australia, Canada, Germany, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, the UAE, the United States, and the UK), and several approach their research with insights from membership in the communities they study.

We should note that we faced limitations in putting the volume together. First, not all scholars who research Indian Ocean countries orient their studies around Indian Ocean themes. To organize the volume, we canvassed our scholarly networks and then put out a public call for papers; in the end, the book’s geographic spread was contingent on the contributions we received. Our most glaring lacunae, perhaps, is absence of focused studies on Madagascar, the Maldives, Kerala, Gujarat, and Goa (though some of these places do make brief appearances in the volume). The volume would have benefited from a greater engagement with colonial port cities (we just have one, colonial Rangoon, though Singapore is discussed briefly in this introduction and our conclusion) and their touring networks (such as the Parsi theater troupes that moved from South to Southeast Asia). Finally, several contributors focus on marginal populations, so we worry our volume could paradoxically wind up reinforcing the marginal status of the Indian Ocean in music studies.

Yet, the volume, as it is, does offer new perspectives. It situates Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Singapore—each now among the world’s premier metropolises—as central to Indian Ocean music studies. Such cities emerge in the volume as key urban nodes with others of historic importance (e.g., Cape Town, Zanzibar,

Colombo, Penang). The volume foregrounds key ethnic groups that have become metonymic for the Indian Ocean—such as the Hadhramis, Swahilis, Tamils, and Malays—while displaying music’s key role in establishing historically important networks like Sufism, Indic connections in premodern Southeast Asia, Portuguese colonialism, slavery, and indentured labor. If we stipulate that each essay is merely a port of call—from which readers are encouraged to travel onward—then the volume’s greatest promise is in the future scholarship that we hope will emerge as a result of the insights of these scholars and the communities that supported their research.

NOTES

1. Nor is this sort of syncretism limited in this region to Tamil populations; consider, for instance, that Sinhala Buddhists (Sri Lanka’s ethnic majority) are known to frequent Catholic churches and Hindu temples in Sri Lanka.

2. The idea for the temple came from Friar James Bharataputra, out of his work with Tamil Christians who settled Kampung Keling in Medan (see Byl, this volume).

3. See, e.g., the songs of Nagore Hanifa (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVdDTx_I35w). For a tambourine-driven Tamil Muslim folk song, see, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxKTuLk4fNA.

4. <https://ndsingapore.squarespace.com/>.

5. There is a well-documented history of violence by reformist Muslims toward Sufis in eastern Sri Lanka (McGilvray 2008), where Jim witnessed the flag-raising ceremony at the local Nagore dargah in 2008.

6. Stefan Helmreich (2015, xi) lists some meanings of “sounding”—“fathoming,” “resounding,” “uttering,” “being heard,” “conveying impressions,” “suggesting analogies”—and suggests that “the mashing up of these meanings is productive.” We agree.

7. By the 1980s, Eurocentric histories of the IOR—which held that “Europe developed a unique culture that facilitated the emergence of individualism, private property and the profit motive” in contrast to societies “dominated by archaic social structures, such as caste, and by religious ideologies” (Campbell 2008, 32)—had given way to an “Asiacentric” scholarship highlighting an Asian-driven trading network that, from the thirteenth century, stretched from China to India, the Persian Gulf, and Mediterranean (Abu Lughod 1989; Wink 1996, 1997). Chaudhuri famously segmented the Indian Ocean into three circuits (the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and South China Sea) by the eleventh century (1985, 37–39). Recently, Gwyn Campbell (2008) has critiqued both the Eurocentric and Asiatic writers for neglecting Africa, arguing that the concept of Indian Ocean Africa (IOA) is needed to “replace conventional geographical and political divisions” (2008, 40) and avoid the normative periodization scheme that hinges on Europe’s “Voyage of Discoveries.”

8. “We can go around the shores of an ocean, or a sea, or indeed the whole world, and identify societies that have more in common with other littoral societies than they do their inland neighbors” (Pearson 2006, 353; see Mukherjee [2017] for a recent critique).

9. Selected works that engage with Indian Ocean music studies include: Al-Harthi and Rasmussen (2012); Ulaby (2012); Askew (2002); Muller and Benjamin (2011); Emoff (2002); Considine (2013); Caitlin-Jairazhboy (2002); Jayasuriya (2020); Ul Ithisan (2021); Schofield (2023); Sykes (2018); Tan (1993); Sarkissian (2000); Byl (2014); Kartomi (2012); Emoff (2002); Field (2017, 2019, 2022); Groesbeck (2018); Haseeb (2021); Bond (2020); Chatterjee (2023); Boswell (2017); Jeffery and Rotter (2018); Parent (2020).

10. One model for future work on music/sound in the Indian Ocean is a project funded in 2019 by the Mellon Foundation's "Transregional Collaboration on the Indian Ocean" initiative, which aims "to facilitate dialogues between sound, music, photography, film, and climate mapping to study monsoonal changes and related shifts in both human and nonhuman lives" (<https://items.ssrc.org/from-our-programs/the-transregional-collaboratory-on-the-indian-ocean-announces-the-2020-planning-grant-recipients/>).

11. The classic articulation of the argument is Chatterjee (1993).

12. See Sartori (2008) for a demonstration of how the culture concept (he uses the term *culturalism*) emerged in late nineteenth-century India out of the British philosophy of political liberalism, which predated it.

13. Schofield (2016) suggests the term "paracolonial," a concept from Stephanie Newell that refers to the fact that "lineages of knowledge . . . continued, developed, and were born and died alongside and beyond the colonial."

14. Of course, not all restrictions on movement were produced by the monsoon winds. On the Andaman Islands as a site of convict labor and political prisoners during the British Raj, see Vaidik (2010). On Sri Lanka as a "concrete exilic site as well as a metaphor for imagining exile across religions, languages, space and time," see Ricci (2019).

15. He writes that historians have valorized the novels of Amitav Ghosh as displaying this seemingly inherent trait of the Indian Ocean, without noting that they rely on earlier works by historians who used colonial sources with an elite, cosmopolitan bias. Green quips that historians now tend to take Ghosh's portrayal of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism as a historical truth, thus reifying the problem (Green 2018, 847).

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SECTION ONE

Listeners

“There is no modesty or shame
in this city”

*What Bengalis Heard
in Colonial Burma, c. 1900*

Richard David Williams

INTRODUCTION: THE UPSIDE-DOWN PAGES

In 1903, a Bengali poet named Najir Ali published a thirteen-page poem called *Reṅguner Kābyakabitā*, which might be (very) loosely translated as “Ballad of Rangoon.”¹ In this lively composition, Najir Ali related his experiences of the Burmese port city (now Yangon), evocatively describing shipyards and sweet shops, and passionately recounting the trials of seductive women and the tribulations of bloody riots. He told his tale in a specific dialect of Bengali, known as Musulmāni or Dobhaṣi Bāṅglā, a form of the language that lent itself to Islamicate allusions and vocabularies drawn from Arabic and Persian (D’Hubert 2018b; Bose 2014). Although it was written in the Bengali script, with letters proceeding left to right, the pages of the book were arranged right to left, as a self-conscious gesture to the conventions of the Islamic book. British colonial officials collected many examples of this kind of book—often called *puthi*—and one copy of Najir Ali’s ballad was bound and archived in the India Office collections and is now in the British Library. At some later stage, a curator who was unfamiliar with *puthi* publishing practices “restored” the book and fixed the central portion of pages upside down.²

These upside-down pages serve as a helpful reminder that Najir Ali’s work defies easy categorization. The spellings are flexible, and the language alternates between global, multilingual registers and highly local colloquialisms. The author was a poet and songwriter, but called himself *teṅḍal*, equivalent to “bosun’s mate” in the idiom of the lascars (South Asian seamen; Dixon 1980,

280), as well as *mistri*, meaning “mechanic” or “artisan” and, in the specific context of Rangoon, headman or recruiter for the mills (Andrew 1933). He composed the poem as an original work, yet called it a translation (*ei ketāb āmi nije tarjamā kariyā chāpāilām*) (Ali 1903b, 13). This is puzzling, as there is no evidence of him composing in a different language first; instead, I suggest, Najir Ali saw the larger process of compiling the book, and transforming the oral, recited poem into a printed text, as an act of translation. His recollections of Rangoon had traveled: he had settled in Fatikchhari, just north of Chittagong (in modern Bangladesh, approximately 500 miles from Rangoon, as the crow flies), and his text had been recorded and “corrected” by an editor based at the new Deobandi madrasa in Chittagong,³ and was then taken to Calcutta to be printed at Islamia Press in the heart of Bengali publishing on Chitpur Road (Ghosh 2002). Few Muslim authors from this network have received serious scholarly attention, let alone working-class poets, let alone Bengalis writing in Burma.⁴

The upside-down pages also serve as a reminder that the *puthi* book challenges assumptions about how books are read or performed. Scholars working with archives are increasingly conscious of the oral life of a printed text and the active participation of both reader and audience in shaping the form, reception, and meanings of words.⁵ Far from a self-contained object intended for silent reading, the *puthi* was a receptacle of verses that would be partnered with an embodied performance, demanding gesture, tone, melody, and rhythm. In the bookish archive, these activations of the text are now the silent, invisible partner. Najir Ali’s recollections were recited and heard before they were “corrected,” inscribed in the madrasa, and then typeset and printed in Calcutta. I suggest that the resultant codex contained an oral and aural account of Rangoon, and that Najir Ali’s audience assumed the presence of implied sound rather than silence within these now upside-down pages.⁶

While exploring Najir Ali’s sense of the city through *Reṅguner Kābyakabitā*, I ask how Bengali poets and lyricists sonically engaged with their environment in Rangoon. By anticipating that his audience would listen to, rather than read, his account, Najir Ali was especially attentive to the aural imagination. Firstly, he evoked the auditory experience of the cityscape and the industries of Rangoon; secondly, he described the emotional turmoil of violence and trauma through sonic features; and finally, he focused on musical spectacle to convey the international glamour of the colonial port city. Sound provided a framework for imagining the city, its colonial institutions—particularly its technology, industry, and military presence—and its diverse, multicultural population. Inscribing the sonic sense of Rangoon in his text allowed Ali to circulate and re-sound his experience of Burma through performance, presenting the city intimately and on a human scale.

LISTEN, EVERYONE, ALL MY BROTHERS

hina nājire kahe2 sabe nahe āche kona jan
lucchā hai barmā lai chārayā utan
ebe śuna guṇigaṇ2 sarbbajan śuna sabe bhāi
reṅguner kābāya thoṛā kahiṃā jānāi

Humble Najir says(2), everything has gone, is there anyone left?
 the depraved have overtaken Burma, that contemptible land
 Now listen, virtuous ones(2)! Listen, everyone, all my brothers,
 I shall tell you a little of Rangoon’s ballad. (Ali 1903b, 3)

Najir Ali composed *Reṅguner Kābāyakitā* in couplets, following a popular Bengali meter called *paṃyār*.⁷ This style of verse lent itself to musical recitation and was conventionally performed by a singer (*bayāti* or *mūl-gāyēn*) (Roy 1999, 199). In David Kane’s ethnomusicological study of *puthi-poṛa*, the melodic reading of poetic-narrative texts, he suggested that while there is a distinction in Bengali between *gān* (song) and *poṛa* (reading), from an etic perspective there is little to distinguish this particular performance practice from “singing” (Kane 2008, 277). While there is a set of narrative-based *puthis* that constitutes the core repertoire of *puthi-poṛa*, tunes could be assigned to any *puthi* on the basis of the meter and the abilities of the singer (Kane 2008, 280–82). In Najir Ali’s text, the numeral “2” is scattered throughout the verses: usually (but inconsistently) in the first line of the couplet, by the caesura. The addition of the “2” was a common practice in nineteenth-century Bengali publishing (following earlier manuscript conventions) and usually suggests repetition of the previous word or phrase, sometimes as a plural by doubling. This numeral reflects a trace of live performance and encourages the reader or singer to repeat certain utterances in their recitation. These repetitions would technically render the lines hypermetrical, however. As David Kane notes, *puthi* poets and performers do not usually keep to the ideal *paṃyār* model of fourteen syllables, and readers lengthen or shorten certain syllables “to match the tune they are using” (Kane 2008, 170).

Besides these subtle prescriptions, Najir Ali explicitly invited his audience to listen to him during his telling. Throughout the text, the speaker momentarily steps outside of the cityscape of Rangoon and addresses his Muslim brothers directly. These interludes also serve as a moral imperative not to be seduced by the marvels he describes, for this poem is ultimately a cautionary tale about the lurid temptations of Rangoon. Scholars such as Tapti Roy and Francesca Orsini have underlined how printed books were aligned with performative practices and animated modes of “reading” (Orsini 2009; Roy 1995). In 1859, James Long observed in Bengal that “intonation, gesture etc. make a book listened to more telling, than when simply read” (Long 1859, xv; cited in Roy 1995, 46) Roy also cites a report from 1879, which describes:

reading a Tale in Musalmani Bengali, in which the auditors appear to take the most lively interest, whilst the crowd observes the utmost decorum and order, and would resent any approach to interruption; and the reader is looked upon as a prodigy of learning; the only gift perhaps which he has being a ready knowledge of the alphabet and words and fluency of reading, which is always rapid, sonorous, and musical, and must be accompanied with rapid motions of the head and body, without which he could not go on. (Roy 1995, 46–47)

Song lyrics and poems designed for musical recitation were key literary forms in this period and indicate that readers were not passively hearing descriptions of Rangoon but actively singing the city into their own experience. This style of writing on cities through songs continued into the early twentieth century: collections from the 1920s, for example, include Telugu and Tamil songs about Rangoon, and “ballads” (as defined in English-language catalogs) in Tamil on Rangoon and its sea trade.⁸

The proliferation of songs about Burma in different Indian languages, and the circulation of lyrics between publishers, readers, singers, and listeners, gestures to an arena of oceanic listening. Nile Green has discussed “sources that do not qualify as belonging to the Indian Ocean on the mere grounds that they were written somewhere in India or Africa, but instead qualify as oceanic because they actually describe the places and peoples of the ocean itself” and represent “encounters with, and accounts of, oceanic difference” (Green 2018, 847–48). By “oceanic listening,” I suggest that these printed texts, and the embodied recitation or singing of those texts, were a medium for communicating, transducing, and reproducing sounds around the Indian Ocean, between Calcutta, Chittagong, and Rangoon.

OCEANIC LISTENERS: THE BENGALIS OF RANGOON

What was the relationship of Bengalis like Najir Ali to the port city of Rangoon? In the early twentieth century, E. J. L. Andrew, the retired Assistant Protector of Immigrants and Emigrants, reflected that “Rangoon of the present day is largely an Indian city and is in no respects typical of the province” (Andrew 1933, 5). Rangoon had been acquired by the British in 1852, who made it the administrative center of their Burmese possessions in 1862. The city was strategically transformed, especially after 1885, when Thibaw Min (1859–1916) was removed from his throne at Mandalay, and upper Burma was integrated into the colonial system (Singer 1995b; Charney 2009). Rangoon became the door to the rest of the country, but also an economic center in its own right, and workers from across India were brought in to meet the demands of the rice, steel, and sawmill industries.⁹ Michael Charney has described late nineteenth-century Rangoon as:

a foreign city erected on Burmese soil. . . . Rangoon was a mimeograph of dozens of port cities scattered throughout colonial South and Southeast Asia. A person only had to squint to be confused as to whether he or she was standing in Singapore, Penang, Calcutta, or elsewhere. (Charney 2009, 18)

This characterization recalls Michael Pearson’s observations about littoral societies, which are often more closely connected to other littorals, however far overseas, than to their immediate mainland (Pearson 2006). Martin Stokes has also suggested global cities are those that are detached from their national hinterlands and characterized by their “relations with regions beyond the nation-state” (Stokes 2007). However, Charney’s comments underline how colonial structures strategically rendered Rangoon into a port city with an interregional, global citizenship, which made the city feel more Indian than Burmese.

Najir Ali lived in Rangoon over the 1880s and 1890s and was part of a larger flow of workers who came from Chittagong in that precise period. Bengali Muslims already had a long history of service in Burma, especially in the early modern Buddhist courts of Arakan (Leider 2014; D’Hubert 2018b; D’Hubert and Leider 2011).¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, Bengalis continued to migrate from Chittagong into Rakhine—the coastal province that stretches from modern Bangladesh toward Rangoon/Yangon—especially following the British occupation (1825) and Yandabo treaty (1826) and again from the 1890s (Leider 2014, 226; Leider 2016, 161). New generations of migrants were also encouraged to find work in Rangoon, especially as steamer passage rates became cheaper and demand for Indian laborers increased (Andrew 1933, 12–22). Workers came from across South Asia, from Tamil Nadu to Nepal, from Chittagong to Karachi. Most men from Chittagong were “employed in the sampan and small craft traffic and as engine-room and deck crews on ocean-going and riverine steamers” (Andrew 1933, 17). Beyond Chittagong, Bengalis were largely employed “in Government or railway or local fund service or in mercantile offices mostly in the clerical line, but some [were] shop-keepers or traders. Many [were] mechanics; in fact, Bengalees from the 24 Parganas were originally the principal technical labor employed in factories and workshops in Rangoon” (Andrew 1933, 35). Najir Ali’s composition is very much grounded in a sense of a diverse South Asian city on Burmese soil, shaped by labor flows and industry.

SOUND AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

Laura Victoir and Victor Zatsépine have interrogated the processes of creating “the colonial built environment” in Asian port cities and have considered how colonialization “was expressed in stone, iron, and concrete” (Victoir and Zatsépine 2013, 2) We might also ask, what was the role of sound in the production of colonial space and how was “aural architecture” (Blessner and Salter 2007) inscribed and archived in Bengali speech and writing? Specifically, I am interested in how Bengali Muslim workers listened to Rangoon, reflected on the sounds they heard, and re-sounded the city through poems, songs, oral performance, and print. The sounds Bengalis both heard and produced themselves provided the framework for experiencing and engaging with the city. Migrants from Chittagong competed in a very mixed,

transregional urban arena, and sound provided a resource to map Rangoon, make the city meaningful, and even make territorial claims (LaBelle 2010). Transducting the auditory experience of Rangoon into literature and performance allowed Bengali writers to articulate an echo of the city, which could then be reimagined and re-sounded back in Bengal (cf. Eisenlohr 2018; Dillon 2012, 51–91).

Najir Ali explored the spatial arrangements of Rangoon through the sounds they produced, and his portrayal of the colonial port city is very particular to his own position as a Bengali worker and lascar, and quite different from colonial depictions of the city as a self-confident monument of empire (Victoir and Zatssepine 2013, 3). Najir Ali underlined the vulnerability and violence of Rangoon and the moral ambivalence of its marvels. He described the different quarters of the city, including the high court, hospital, mosque, zoo, bazaars, Chinese shops, jail, and factories. At Dala, he overheard the extensive shipbuilding yards of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company (see Andrew 1933, 6).

*āche kal beśumār2 lok tāy hājāre hājār
kaler śabda śunite jena bijali ṭhāḍār
dekhilām camatkār2 ḍālā pār lohāri kārkhānā
dibāniśi śabda uṭhe jena parir bājanā
lokjan lakṣa koṭi2 lohā kāṭi bānāy jāhāj
iṅgrāj hekamati barā bhāsāy jaler māj
tāte loke khām śikhila2 nām jānāila chukhāni ṭeṅḍal
chārāṅ-mistri kata ṭākār kare bal*

There are countless mills, and thousands upon thousands of people:
hearing the sound of the mill is like lightning and thunder.
I saw—astonishing!—the ironworks factory on the shore of Dala:
day and night the sound rises up, like angels playing music.
Thousands, millions of people cut up the iron to make ships
following English instructions: huge, they float in the water.
The people who climb to the top of the masts, they are called *ṭeṅḍal* there,
how many *serangs* and foremen earn money by their strength. (Ali 1903b, 3–4)

Intriguingly, Najir Ali likened the sound of the metalworking to angels (*pari*) playing music. This recalls Mark Smith's observation that soldiers in the American Civil War compared bullets to buzzing bees and swarming insects, a reminder that the experience and meaning of sounds are always historically conditioned (Smith 2014). The impression of industrial sound—including water turbines—could also have a disturbing effect, as at the works at Botahtaung:

*śuna ār guṇigāna2 sarbbajan kariyā ādar
botātaṅ dekhilām kācārā kalaghar
āche kācārā jata2 abirata soṃśete ṭāne
abiśram nāi dam cale rātra dine
calite ābāj śuni2 dare prāṇi bhay kampbān
camatkār śabda tār iṅjiler tuphān*

*ānila kokāir pāni² kale tāni dila ghare ghar
iñjiler jore uṭhe tin tālā upar*

Listen more, virtuous ones, I pay my respects to all:
In Botahtaung I saw the washer mills,
There are so many washers, incessant, without rest,
unceasing, breathless, all day and night.

When you pass and hear that noise, you fear for your life, shaking in terror:
an astonishing sound of the typhoon of the engines.

Water brought from Kokaing, from the works pushed house to house,
The engines together rise up three storeys high! (Ali 1903b, 4)

Najir Ali asked his audience to listen in to the wharfs, mills, and factories along the riverside and down the streets of Botahtaung. The “typhoon” (*tuphān*) produced by the engines¹¹ can be located from his references to the Kokaing waterworks, which supplied Rangoon with water from the 1880s. Here, he was probably referring to the Compressor Station on Dalhousie Street (now Mahabandoola Road), opened in 1889, which coordinated the city’s state of the art pneumatic pump-based sewerage system (Anon. 1889; Htoon 2018). The coal-fired, triple extension steam engines that powered the station evidently produced a terrifying, yet also marvelous or astonishing (*camatkār*) sound (*śabda*). Najir Ali’s was a highly contemporary and mechanized sonic geography, where districts were dominated by resounding colonial installations. This sense of the city contrasted with older acoustic imaginaries, from inscribed pagoda bells to Mon songs describing the atmospheric sounds of the changing seasons (Nyunt 2016; Stewart 1932). It also differed from the interests of French listeners, such as André Chevrillon (1905), who noted the cawing of crows, the bells tied to ox-drawn carts, Chinese music, and Tamil temple ensembles, but not the stormy sewerage system (Chevrillon 2014, 11–14).

ECHOES OF VIOLENCE

Nile Green has challenged the increasingly popular notion of a utopian Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, and has suggested instead that

the ocean was a region of vividly perceptible difference: not only did its complex encounters generate the abstract ideologies of cosmopolitan universalism, the waves of heterotopia also produced plainer testimonies of difference, as well as sometimes of superiority. (Green 2018, 866)

Najir Ali described the varieties of different South Asian merchants he found in Rangoon: Mughals, Pathans, Maghs, Chulias, and Suratis. He commented on the wealth they amassed there, but he also told the story of the Hindu-Muslim riots that raged June 23–24, 1893, underlining the dangers as well as the multiculturalism of Rangoon. He singled out Bhugwan Dass Bagla, the prosperous Rajasthani timber merchant and banker who had made his career in Burma. Bagla had erected a temple on

Twenty-Ninth Street (Shri Satyanarayan Temple), a short walk from a large mosque (Mogul Shiah Masjid) on Thirtieth.¹² This set of streets became the center of a violent riot around Eid al-Adha, which erupted following a conflict between Hindu cow protection movements and Muslim societies who rejected the legal circumscription of cattle slaughter. This was, in fact, a local manifestation of a much larger tension that simultaneously erupted in riots across western India, the North-Western Provinces, Oudh, Bihar, as well as Rangoon (Metcalf and Metcalf 2002, 151–52).

*juddha ārambhila2 śabda haila eki camatkār
 ācambite saharete haila samācār
 śuniyā mochalmanē2 ek sthāne jamā haila sabe
 jāna diba nā chāriba garu kara jabe
 sokhā [sāthe?] āche khodā2 hārām jādā ki karite pāre
 jukti kari prabhu svāri lāṭi choṭā māre
 mārila jhāṭā jotā2 phāṭi mātā marila kufar
 jāṅga chāri bhāgilek kufar laskar
 pāche āsiyā duṣṭa2 dila kaṣṭa iṅgrājer phauj
 dariyā uthalila jena uthila mauj
 bāje bāhūrī danḱā2 nāi saṅkā kebā kāre māre
 hujuri ṭāḍārer mata astra guli pare*

the battle began(2), there was a singular noise, astonishing
 suddenly, news went about the city
 hearing it, the Muslims(2) all assembled together in one place
 “We may give up our lives, but we won’t give up sacrificing cows!”
 God is with us(2), what can those bastards do?
 joining together, calling to the Lord, they were hurling sticks
 they struck them with brooms and shoes(2), the kafirs’ heads split open.
 Kafir and lascar, as one they fled, abandoning the fight
 Sneaking up on them(2), the Englishers’ army gave them trouble
 The river surged, as though bursting with joy,
 Their many kettledrums sounded(2), no more terror, who would strike?
 Their lordships’ bullets fell like thunder. (Ali 1903b, 8)

Najir Ali described the riots in a series of sonic vignettes: they began with a sound (*śabda*), which rippled through the city as word spread; the Muslims heard the sound and responded; in the course of fighting, the combatants called out—literally “voiced”—the name of the Lord (*prabhu svāri*); and the riots only ended with the thundering of the British army’s drums and bullets.¹³ Over the following weeks, the *Rangoon Gazette* published an exchange of letters that took different perspectives on which community was most accountable (including a report of one Muslim servant’s analysis of events [Anon. 1893]) and considered in some detail how the disturbances unfolded. Ten years on, Najir Ali’s recollection compressed the sequence of days into a stirring set of verses, applying a rolling set of doublings over the beginning of each couplet to maximize the rhythmic intensity. His

attention to sound paints the riots on a human scale but also amplifies the drama: the “joy” (*mauj*) of the surging river rhyming with the British “army” (*fauj*).

Several recent studies based on Indian Ocean contexts have triggered us to have a growing appreciation of the role of sound—especially from processions and religious institutions—in negotiations and conflicts between communities over urban space in colonial ports (McCallum 2017; Sykes 2017; Lunn and Byl 2017; Byl et al. 2017). Similar concerns emerge in the contemporary English-language newspapers of Rangoon: in July 1899, there was a disturbance when a collective of Chulia Muslims refused to allow a child to be buried in their graveyard, because his father had sent him to study at a Burmese monastery, but also because “they strongly objected to the intermingling of Burmese music and Mahomedan funeral rights” (Anon. 1899). This particular case gestures to exchanges between the citizens of Rangoon that crossed confessional and ritual boundaries but also to the policing of those boundaries through the marking of ethnic and sonic distinctions.

These themes are especially pronounced in another short tract (7 pages) published by one of Najir Ali’s contemporaries, Ahmad Kabir “Islamabadi” (i.e., of Chittagong), in 1896: “If you marry in Rangoon city, the Muslim religion is drowned” (*Reṅgun sahare kalbe biye / Muśalmān dharmma jāy ḍubiye*). This succinct work was also composed in Bengali rhyming couplets, appended with an Urdu *ghazal* lyric. Ahmad Kabir’s intention was to condemn a marriage celebration in Rangoon, where a Bengali Muslim man had fallen in love with a Burmese temptress:

*sa icchāte barmmā deśe daibāt āsiyā
ki kariba kothā jāba nā pāi cintiyā
jāter bicār nāi ki likhiba ār
barmmā hindū muśalmān ār rājya yār
culiyā kiñcit bhāla bājār matan
jerabād jāter kathā nā jāy barṇan
sāmānyete ki likhiba āche nānā jāti
ihūdi kaurāṅgi kata bombāir churati
nānā jāti ei khāne kari āgaman
bibāh kariyā thāke pulakita man*

By the divine will, I came to the land of Burma.
What to do? I shall say the unthinkable.
There is no thought of tribe, what else can I write?
In Burma, there are Hindus, Muslims, and people from other kingdoms,
Chulias thinking of some good markets,
But there is no description for the “Zairbadi” tribe.
Generally, what can I write? There are many tribes there.
So many Jews, Coringhis, and Suratis from Bombay,
Diverse tribes have migrated here.
They get married and the heart is thrilled. (Kabir 1896, 1)

Ahmad Kabir was strictly opposed to interracial marriages and what he considered miscegenation: Rangoon had a diverse population, but he expected the different *jātīs* (which had a range of meanings, including castes, tribes, or races) to be preserved intact. Here, he was especially scathing toward Zairbadis, a local derogatory term for the children of South Asian men and Burmese women. Zairbadis were also discriminated against by the Burmese, who called them *Kābyā*, or “half-breeds,” and by the British. In 1901, John Nisbet declared that, as children, Zairbadis “are often of remarkable beauty, with lovely eyes, but as they grow up they are apt to develop traits of character of a very displeasing nature” (Nisbet 1901, 250). Ahmad Kabir’s clear demarcation of different communities was widely held in this period: the different South Asian communities presented themselves as distinct social groups in the public spaces of the city,¹⁴ and there were points of tension between the local Burmese population and the migrants who dominated the city’s industries (Charney 2009, 18). In their descriptions of the different communities of Rangoon, British writers could be essentializing and prejudiced. Nisbet thought that the Burmese were “not habitual liars by centuries of heredity like their near neighbours, the Bengalis of Chittagong” (Nisbet 1901, 222). However, these voices only represent one side of the story and might be heard as hostile responses to a more complicated history of sexual relationships and marriages between European men and Burmese women, South Asian men and Burmese women, and European women and South Asian men (Singer 1995b, 53, 108–10, 162).

Ahmad Kabir lamented how Muslims were abandoning the principles of their religion by pursuing beautiful—but Buddhist—Burmese women:

renguñete nānā sthāne dekhibāre pāi
bhāla manda tikta miṣṭa bibecana nāi
sūndar barmmiṇi yadi dekhe rāstā ghāte
prema karibār āse pichepiche choṭe

You can see this in various places around Rangoon:

There is no discernment between good and bad, bitter and sweet.

If they spy a beautiful Burmese woman in the street or on the ghat

In the hope of loving her, they’ll follow a little behind. (Kabir 1896, 3)

Ahmad Kabir warned that in his absolute devotion to a Burmese woman, a Muslim brother would hand over all his hard-earned savings and then marry her to great fanfare, but this was not a legitimate option, and it would be better to go to a “bazaar whore” (*bājārer beśyā bhāla tathodhik tār*) (Kabir 1896, 3). Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it appears that most male migrants from Chittagong left their families and wives at home.¹⁵ Writing in the 1930s, Andrew cryptically noted that “Chittagonians rarely have recourse to brothels but are stated to be addicted to an evil the knowledge of the practice of which would bring them within the pale of the law” (Andrew 1933, 187). While it is not entirely clear

what this meant, it does seem that writers like Ahmad Kabir and Najir Ali were very conscious of their Bengali brothers’ weaknesses and liabilities.¹⁶

The pamphlet concluded with a *ghazal* lyric—in Urdu but in Bengali script—that condenses the overall message: “There is no modesty or shame in this city” (*hāyā o śarmma kuc nehi hāy ich śaharme*) (Kabir 1896, 8). This lyric was set in *khemṭā*, which was a highly popular musical form in the late nineteenth century. Although it was a versatile setting (sometimes considered a *tāl*, but not always across all songbooks), it was commonly associated with the rhythmic hips of a dancer, so it often had a scintillating flavor. The use of this form in a pious diatribe against Burmese women and mixed marriages, and the switch between Bengali and Urdu, indicates the complexities of Rangoon as a “multilingual local” (Orsini 2015), the intersection of entertainment and preaching, and how musical or recited texts provided the tools to police racial and confessional boundaries in a multicultural city.

INDIAN MUSIC AND THEATER IN RANGOON

This Urdu *ghazal* in *khemṭā* was part of a larger constellation of South Asian musical practices in Rangoon. Very few of these practices were recorded in colonial sources, since Europeans in the city were primarily interested in discussing indigenous Burmese music and dance.¹⁷ Indian music was seen as a point of comparison or contrast. *Pwe* dances were casually translated as “nautches,” assuming familiarity with the Anglo-Indian term (derived from Hindustani *nāc*, “dance”); sometimes a military regiment would host a “Burmese nautch,” and it is unclear whether this implied Burmese or Indian dancers and musicians (Anon. 1854; Singer 1995b, 62). British commentators noted significant cultural differences around music and dance, and factored these into their racialized accounts of the Burmese, for example:

The Burmese have sweet voices and a considerable knowledge of music, far in advance of other Orientals. In India, a nautch-girl, or one who dances in public, is, by profession, one of the outcasts of society; not so in Burmah, where no stigma is attached to either actor or actress. (Anon. 1885, 279)

In India, dancing was a form of paid service, and it was not considered socially acceptable for women unless they were professional dancing girls, from hereditary families of musicians, or courtesans (Schofield 2012). This contrasted with what the British found in Burma, where the sons and dancers of officials could perform in group dances without being considered *thabin-the* (belonging to the theatrical profession) (Singer 1995a, 37).¹⁸ (Burmese scholars, writing in the 1920s, had a different emphasis and suggested that anyone engaging professionally with music—whatever their background—would be “counted among the depressed classes” [Kin 1923].) In some cases, Burmese music compared favorably to Indian:

The musical taste of the Burmese contrasts strongly with that of the natives of Hindostan, for, whilst the latter is characterised by ear-piercing shrillness and deafening loudness, the effect of the former is soft, plaintive, and melodious; indeed, Burmese music is by no means unpleasant to a European ear, and the mode of its employment in processions, as shown in our Illustration, is at once novel and ingenious. (Anon. 1860)

This preference perhaps explains why, although Rangoon increasingly became an Indian city over the late 1800s, the British in Burma paid little attention to South Asian music-making there.¹⁹ The situation differed elsewhere in Southeast Asia: over the same period, dancers and ensembles from southern and central India—often called “Kling”—in Singapore and colonial Malaya were relatively well documented through photographs and postcards (Soneji 2017).

In the realm of Indian musicology, the distinction between Burma and South Asian music was conceptually maintained; thus, in S. M. Tagore’s (1840–1914) *Universal History of Music* (1896), which is arranged by nation, Burma is given its own section, and although Tagore notes the presence of Indian instruments in Burmese organology, in his short entry he did not discuss the intellectual connections between Sanskrit and Burmese musicology, or the presence of South Asian musicians on Burmese soil (Tagore 1896, 44–49).²⁰ Tagore’s discussion drew on English scholarship, but also his own collection of musical instruments, which he said contained three items gifted to him by King Theebaw (r. 1878–85), in 1878, the year of his accession (Tagore 1896, 47).

However, following in the wake of South Asian soldiers and workers from the subcontinent, by the 1880s, singers, nautch girls, and theater companies from the subcontinent were routinely visiting Rangoon to perform in temporary theaters or the compounds of wealthy merchants (Singer 1995b, 121–23). Dancing girls and courtesans from northern India also settled in the city for longer periods of time, and while the anti-nautch campaign stormed in South Asia (Williams 2017; Morcom 2013), British administrators in Rangoon continued to assess the blurred lines between sex work and musical labor: writing about the 1920s, Andrew noted many South Asian women would

pose as dancing girls or singers but are really prostitutes. There is another class who are really dancers and singers. They are also prostitutes but they do not ply their profession openly. Their services are in great demand with well-to-do Indians, particularly Muhammadans, for parties or picnics, fairly large sums being paid for their services. It is an unwritten law that for the time being they belong exclusively to the hirer or host. But sometimes they are permitted to distribute their favours among some of the more important guests. (Andrew 1933, 187–88)

Soldiers also brought their own musical practices with them: a drawing published in the *Illustrated London News* from 1891 depicts three soldiers from regiments “composed partly of Sikhs and men of the hill-tribes of the North-west Frontier of India,” informally performing on the rabab and dholak, “amusing themselves with instrumental music after the duties of the day” (Anon. 1891).

Najir Ali barely discussed Burmese music in his poetry but gestures to the larger transregional and oceanic flows around him. In the same year as *Reṅguner Kābyākabitā*, Najir Ali published a collection of poems and songs, *Man Mahinīr Kabitā* (“Poem of the Heart’s Bewitcher”), out of Rangoon.²¹ This composition threads together versified narratives—in *payār* couplets and songs (*gīt*)—that recollect his early experiences in Burma. On the very first page, he discusses the heavenly beauty of Burmese women, especially two dancers he encountered in Mandalay and Rangoon, both of whom he named *Man Mahinī* (Heart’s Bewitcher) (Ali 1903a, 1–2). He described the sensation of being “rapt by the tempo of the instruments” (*jantratāle ābeś*), and their sweet singing, but the main focus is on their extreme beauty. The beauties of Burma are a consistent topic in our core text, *Reṅguner Kābyākabitā*, where Najir Ali warns his audience about the divine women, Persian boys (*lāundā phārachi*), and brothels (*kachabir dokān*) of Rangoon that rob men of their Muslim faith (*mochalmāni dine hāni*) (Ali 1903b, 5).

The colonial port city was a palimpsest of global and local sounds. In the final section of *Reṅguner Kābyākabitā*, Najir Ali related the spectacle of a Parsi Theatre production of the popular Urdu drama “Indar Sabha.” Kathryn Hansen and Rashna Darius Nicholson have recently traced the tours of Parsi Theatre companies (which began in India from 1853) around Burma, most notably the Victoria Nāṭak Maṅḍali’s (Victoria Theatrical Company) season in Mandalay in 1881 (Hansen 2018; Nicholson 2017). Parsi theater had a hybrid style, incorporating elements from European, West Asian, and South Asian theater. At the end of the nineteenth century, Hindustani served as a lingua franca in Burma, but even when the Gujarati or Urdu dialogues were unfamiliar, the north Indian songs and dances continued to delight the audiences (Charney 2009, 24).²²

Najir Ali was not describing a play he had seen himself, but rather incorporated the memory of his friend, Sadar Ali:

ār ek apurbba kathā2 mane byāthā kariyā khāyas
ek dostā kaila more racite subheś
śuna nām tān2 jñānbān buddhir sāygar
chadar āli nām buli hāikoṭer kiṅkar
bāp tān korbbān āli2 gela cali kari nekkām
janma sthal phateyābād jile caṭygrām

There is one more unprecedented tale(2), a heartache, I shall tell its qualities:
 a friend told me to compose upon it in a good style.
 Hear his name(2), erudite, an ocean of understanding:
 I call his name Sadar Ali, a servant of the High Court.
 His father was Korban Ali(2), he had gone to do good work.
 His birthplace is Fatehabad in Chittagong district. (Ali 1903b, 9)

Najir Ali describes the musical theater in some detail.²³

nāmete indra sobā2 mane lobhā dekhite camatkār
phārachigaṇe ei nāc kariche taiyār

“Indar Sabha” by name: you crave to see it, astonishing!
The Parsis have prepared this dance.

The early portion of the play sees Indra reclining in his heavenly palace, his movements choreographed to a set of bells:

*tāte ghaṇṭā paṛila2 parddā paila bijali chanacār
ādā ghaṇṭā chuṭī pāy hābā khāibār
ghaṇṭā śuni āila puni2 basila āsane
raṅga biraṅga nāc dekhe sarbbajane*

Then there was a bell, a curtain dropped like a bolt of lightning,
the bell finished and he got up to smoke.
Hearing a bell, he then comes to sit on the throne,
and everyone beheld a colourful, dazzling dance.

Paying attention to the sonic cues in the performance gives a certain immediacy to Najir Ali’s reconstruction. The play continues and the fairies start fighting while singing:

*juddhete nāṭak sundar2 gīt manuhar śunite svar
phārachi śure gāy gīt bujhan duskar
bujhite nāi pāri2 man kāri bahe nityā dam
mane kahe bairāgī hai saṅge jān
mane iccha kari2 nāi pāri paṅsār kāraṅ
debana haiyā keha bhramay reṅgun
churati magal ādi2 nānān jāti tāmasā dekhiyā
masta hai geche tār larjjāt pāiyā
āise kata sāheberā2 ghorā joṛā kariyā sājan
āścaryā dekhiyā sabe pulakita man
dekhe dui cār dhākā diyā2 ṭikaṭ liyā jata sadhugan
nāṭ gīt dekhi śuni pulakita man
dekhiyā garib loke2 man soke tāmasār kāraṅ
dhākā āṭ ānār ṭikiṭ laṅ sarbbajan
purite man ārati2 nirtti prati jāite nā pāriyā
ghare basi kare kāndan ṭākār lāgiyā*

A beautiful drama over the battle, they raised their voices in a charming song
They sang a song in a Persian tune—it was hard to understand.
[Though] not understanding the fairies, your mind holds on through every moment,
within three hours, your heart tells you to renounce the world,
but you cannot follow your heart’s desire—because of money.
The gods would say Rangoon is a trap.
Suratis, Mughals, and so on, different communities watched the drama,
they became intoxicated and then ashamed.
How many gentlemen, with their horses saddled,
Marvellous—they all watched and their hearts were thrilled.

So many virtuous ones gave 2 to 4 rupees for a ticket to watch:
 watching and hearing the entertainment and song, their hearts were thrilled.
 Poor people watched, their hearts grieving because of the drama,
 everyone took a ticket for 1 rupee 8 annas.
 In the city, not every heart could go to the lamp-ritual and the dance,
 needing the money, they sat at home and wept. (Ali 1903b, 10–11)

His description of the dazzlingly beautiful dancers is ambivalent: just as he simultaneously praised and warned against the angelic temptresses of Burma elsewhere in the poem, here he comments on how the performers were captivating but mercenary:

gīt gāy bāṅgālā bhāse2 payāsār āse mane hai khusi
cakṣe thāre gāy git macaki2 hānsi

...

dekhi dhākār bal2 nāri kala basāila bhāi
mṛdu hānsi kahe kathā mukher kāche jāi
adhare amiṃyā śrabe2 kahe sabe āsak haiṃyā
atra pṃyāri prāṅ harili ki jādu kariṃyā

She sings a song in the Bengali language and collects the money, feeling glad,
 her eyes are fixed as she sings the song, and then she breaks out in a smile.

...

See, by the power of rupees, a woman sits down to warbling, brother
 she speaks with a sweet smile, brings her face close:
 hearing her honeyed lips speak, everyone becomes a lover (*‘āshiq*).
 Here the beloved robs them of their life—what magic this is! (Ali 1903b, 12)

Misogyny aside, it is striking how Najir Ali associates a woman’s seductive power with her singing voice, a motif that circulated in Bengal and north India in the same period in discussions about courtesans and their techniques (Williams 2017). This verse also indicates how Parsi Theatre performers performed a multilingual repertoire: perhaps that evening they had noted the number of Bengalis in attendance, and had specifically chosen to sing in Bengali to appeal to the “local” audience from faraway Chittagong.

CONCLUSION

Colonial Rangoon was often called an Indian city on Burmese soil, and that is certainly the impression in Najir Ali’s poem. He discussed the solidarities and conflicts between South Asian migrants, and although he praised and cautioned against Burmese women, Rangoon itself was characterized primarily by its British institutions and Indian workers. Hence, Bengalis like Najir Ali described hearing the Parsi Theatre company from Bombay, but not the *zat pwe* (musical-dance drama) or *yokthe pwe* (puppet theater) of Burma.

Listening to this chap book in its own terms, I have suggested that at the turn of the twentieth century, Bengali *puthis* were understood as a form of inscribed orality designed to facilitate what I have termed “oceanic listening.” Najir Ali’s text had a complex history of circulation, editorial, and (re-)production between port cities—Rangoon, Chittagong, and Calcutta—and, curiously, was considered a “translation” by its author. I suggest that Najir Ali did not intend translation here as between languages, but rather as between modes of performed, read, and recited sound and speech. His work reverberates on several levels. Firstly, as a text that invites the audience to listen, the reader of *Reṅguner Kābyākabitā* was expected to consider how best to excavate rhythm and sound from behind the printed script, through repetition, gesture, and melody. Secondly, Najir Ali evoked the urban environment through its sounds and the emotional responses he had to those sounds. Thirdly, the poet compressed and narrated the trauma of the 1893 riots through episodes of noise, voice, and drums, gesturing to larger tensions over territory and communal boundaries in South Asian Rangoon. Finally, by describing a musical theater production from India, Najir Ali demonstrated the multilingual, ethnically mixed, and international flavor of Rangoon while explicitly underlining the role of class and gender in audition and highlighting the emotionally enticing and financially ruinous properties of music.

NOTES

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1. *Kābyā* refers to “poetry,” specifically of high literary value, and *kabitā* entails both “poetry” and a specific metrical form. From the form of the text, it seems Najir Ali did not mean these terms in a technical sense, and I have opted for “ballad,” which seems more appropriate given the style and content of his composition.

2. The page sequence thus proceeds (right to left): 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 7, 6, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

3. Hathazari or Darul Uloom Muinul Madrassah (established 1897, relocated to Chittagong 1901). See Riaz 2008, 117.

4. Recent and significant exceptions include Khatun (2018); Ali (2017); Haider (2018). On South Asian literary engagements with Burma, see Green (2015); Green (2018, 861–64); Sevea (2022).

5. Christopher Marsh’s discussion of Broadside Ballads is especially ear-opening. See Marsh (2004).

6. By contrast, Jitendra Narayan Ray’s prose account of Rangoon in the 1930s was presumably intended for silent reading (Ray 1938).

7. Fourteen *mātrās* (syllables with a pronounced vowel) per line, in seven feet, arranged in rhyming couplets. On *paṅār* in performance, see Kane (2008, 169–72).

8. Two of these were published in Rangoon itself (Viranna 1921; Pulavar 1926), while one was printed in Madurai (Pillai 1924).

9. For the social history of Rangoon in this period, see Kumar (2006); Noriyuki (2016); Mazumder (2013); Chakravarti (1971).

10. Arakan is also known as Rakhine, the etymology of the ethnic term “Rohingya.” I do not call Najir Ali “Rohingya,” as he does not use this term in his own texts, and he seems to have returned to Chittagong after his career in Burma. According to Jacques Leider, “Rohingya” is a relatively recent

political category, emerging over the 1950s–60s and supplanting an older spectrum of identities developed by those Muslims in Arakan who had family roots in Chittagong (Leider 2014, 216–30). On contemporary Rohingya music and memory, see Farzana (2017, 191–232). On the fluidity of ethnic categories in the longer history of Burma, see Lieberman (1978).

11. Notably, there are several unusual spellings in this composition: here the English word “engine,” which is usually written *iñjin* in Bengali, has been misspelled as *iñjil*, meaning “Gospels.”

12. The current building of Mogul Shia Mosque was built between 1914 and 1918, but there was a mosque on that site from the mid-nineteenth century.

13. It was noted in the English newspapers that, “Many respectable Mahomedans” had begged for the “Gora pultun” (white troops) to go in, for “they are a law-abiding race, and trust to the Government to protect them. But the latter [had initially] apparently thrown them over and left them to the merciless batons of a Hindu police” (Garnet-Man 1899).

14. In February 1886, to mark the visit of the Viceroy, the Marquis of Dufferin, the different societies of the city erected twenty triumphal marches branded with their community names (Singer 1995b: 131).

15. In 1927, for example, 31,274 men were registered as arriving from Chittagong, compared to only 162 women (Andrew 1933, 11, 17, 182–89).

16. Najir Ali also mentions homesickness and missing one’s parents (Ali 1903b, 7).

17. The first set of Burmese musical instruments to be sent to London were spoils of the First Anglo-Burmese War, 1824–26. They were exhibited at the Egyptian hall in Piccadilly (Singer 1995b, 49).

18. See a contemporary account of women from elite Burmese families dancing on the Viceroy of India’s visit to Rangoon in 1882 (Singer 1995b, 114).

19. On Western music and Burma, see Selth (2017).

20. On Tagore in context, see Williams (2016). The pioneering nineteenth-century Burmese music scholar, Myawadi Wungyi U Sa (1766–1853) revised and expanded the *Naralekha*, a seventeenth-century music treatise that digested the principles of classical Sanskrit musicology. See Zaw (1941).

21. This work is dated 1264 Myanmar Era, which equates to 1903–4 CE.

22. Hansen suggests that Parsi theater was less influential in Burma than in Penang and Singapore, where it had a penetrating effect on local theater practice (Hansen 2018, 31).

23. It is unclear which specific production Sadar Ali had seen. Parsi theater companies sometimes shared their stages with *zat pwe*, like the ‘large iron shed’ rented by the famous actor-manager Po Sein (1880–1952) in 1899 (Hansen 2018, 29).

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A Feeling for the Boundaries

Sounding the Indian Ocean on the Swahili Coast

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Indian Ocean Studies coalesced in the 1980s and early 1990s around a conception of the Indian Ocean as the site of an “economic and social world” (McPherson 1993) that emerged sometime in the distant past and dissipated with the rise of a “truly global economy” at the dawn of the nineteenth century (Pearson 2003, 12; Chaudhuri 1985; McPherson 1993). By the first decade of the twenty-first century, however, scholars had begun to ask whether and how the Indian Ocean has remained a “coherently definable interregional arena” even after the emergence of new modes of transportation, communication, and political-economy (Bose 2006, 12; Ewald 2000; Metcalf 2007; Vergès 2003). These questions transformed Indian Ocean Studies into a new kind of “area studies” field, one based not on a colonial or cold-war cartography but on a concern with processes and practices of “world-making” (Samuelson 2017). The purview of this field has expanded in recent years to incorporate multiple forms of world-making, including the cultural and intellectual practices that sustain translocal perspectives, values, and imaginaries (*inter alia* Declich 2018; Prestholdt 2014; Simpson and Kresse 2008; Verne and Verne 2017). This has left a wide opening for ethnomusicological research. But if ethnomusicologists are to contribute meaningfully to conversations on world-making in the Indian Ocean it will be necessary for us to look beyond the themes of cultural transmission and transculturation that are so deeply embedded in the DNA of our field due to the early influence of Melville Herskovits and his students. Recognizing that world-making in the Indian Ocean implies a “struggle with history” (Simpson and Kresse 2008), we must approach music not only as an outcome of historical processes of “culture contact” but also as a vital medium for creative and reflexive engagements with these processes. I model such an approach



MAP 2.1. Port towns and cities of the Swahili Coast and hadhramaut.

in this chapter by exploring the social resonance of musical hybridization on the Swahili coast (the western periphery of the Indian Ocean world) during a period of intensive social change (map 2.1).

SWAHILI TAARAB AND THE DAWN OF PHONOGRAPHY ON THE EAST AFRICAN COAST

A shout of “*Sahani Odeon!*” (Odeon record!) rings out as Mbaruk Talsam strikes the first tones on his ‘ud. A violin and riq (Arabic tambourine) enter a moment later, and a buoyant melody takes shape over a lightly syncopated beat. Seventeen seconds later it reaches an end, leaving only the soft decay of Mbaruk’s final note.

After a moment, Mbaruk gets things started again, this time with his voice as well as his ‘ud. Now the tempo is slower, and the rhythmic structure more complex. Time stretches, lopes, as Mbaruk intones Swahili words in his gristled tenor:

U muongo! Basahera, u muongo! (Liar! Basahera, you liar!)

Tena Basahera, u muongo! (Basahera, still a liar!).

The song then moves on to a string of words transported on a winding melody. Unlike the words that came before, these seem to hide their meanings beneath a thicket of metaphor:

Kuna kijiti kimoja kikasitawisha jengo? (Can a single stick hold up a building?)

Huna pau huna nziba huna ng’ongo (You have no pole, filling, or thatching)

Nenda ukakate miti nije nikuonye jengo (Go and cut a tree and I’ll show you a building)

Now the “*U muongo*” refrain returns, this time with additional voices, including the unmistakable, soaring voice of the region’s first true popular music icon, Siti binti Saad.

Thus proceeds the first minute of Mbaruk Talsam’s “Basahera Umuongo,” recorded in 1930 in the East African port city of Mombasa (then part of the British Protectorate of Kenya) for the German record label Odeon.¹ This is one of the earliest commercial recordings of Swahili *taarab*, a genre of instrumentally accompanied sung Swahili poetry performed at social gatherings of Swahili-speaking Muslims of the East African coast. *Taarab* took shape in the early 1900s through a creative blending of Swahili poetry traditions with aesthetic approaches and performance practices of Arab music traditions (Graebner 1991; Graebner 2004a; Graebner 2004b; Kiel 2012; Mgana 1991; Topp Fargion 2014, 37–92; Topp 1994). By the early 1930s, it had emerged as one of the most prominent forms of urban popular culture on the Swahili coast, thanks largely to the phenomenal success of recordings by a Zanzibar-based collective of musicians led by singer, poet, and composer Siti binti Saad, a woman affectionately known in East Africa today as the “mother of *taarab*.”² Mombasa-born Mbaruk Talsam, a scion of a wealthy Arab family who dedicated his life to writing poetry and performing music after losing his vision to smallpox around age ten, was a key member of this collective, and “Basahera” was among his most popular releases. Siti, the main focus on Odeon’s Mombasa sessions, can be heard singing with the chorus; and another key member of the collective, Buda Swedi, supplied the violin part (figure 2.1).

As Michael Denning describes in his *Noise Uprising* (2015), early recorded Swahili *taarab* was one among many “vernacular phonograph musics” that arose in colonial port cities in the electrical recording era. All of these musics, according



FIGURE 2.1. Siti Binti Saad and her collective in Bombay, 1929. From left to right: Maalim Shaaban, Subeit bin Ambar, Siti Binti Saad, Buda Swedi.

to Denning, cultivated new social imaginaries that were at once modern and indigenous, thereby presenting an early challenge to the colonial order. *Taarab* was perhaps special (which is not to say unique) among these musics, however, for how it fostered critical reflection on the new social imaginary it was helping to create. Before any of its sounds were ever etched in shellac, it was already a genre that sparked discussions of social norms and values. Audiences derived pleasure from uncovering social commentaries buried in the poetic texts, which employ a mode of allegorical indirection known as *mafumbo* (from the transitive verb *-fumba*, meaning “close” or “wrap up”). The stanza of “Basahera” above exemplifies the *mafumbo* style of poetic composition, though, as I will discuss, it happens to be borrowed from another genre of Swahili poetry.³ In her account of the reception of the binti Saad collective’s music in working-class Zanzibar during the interwar years, Laura Fair (2001, 169–225) describes how conversations about the meanings of *taarab* song texts that began during or directly after performance events would reticulate through the community to “spur public debate of the religious, social, and cultural principles that contributed to the constitution of community” (183–84). While she focuses mostly on song texts whose underlying meanings reside near the surface or circulated along with the songs in the form of rumors, “Basahera” can help us to imagine how this process might have unfolded in relation to songs for which this was not the case. The somewhat ambiguous surface allegory in the first stanza clearly invites interpretations relating to themes of sincerity and responsibility, which would naturally flow into discussions of social roles and expectations.

The transition to a “phonograph music” amplified the public-making potential of *taarab* by enabling listeners to imagine themselves as part of a larger community of addressees without eliminating traditional practices of social

interpretation. “In these early days of Swahili records,” writes one firsthand witness to life in Zanzibar in the 1930s,

the coffee shops and eating houses were flooded with members of the public listening to the songs of Siti binti Saad. Members of the public who played them inside their houses were astonished to hear encores from listeners outside their houses. The people were proud and pleased with this new invention in their national language. (Suleiman 1969, 86–87)

As is clear in this writer’s use of the phrases “members of the public” and “national language,” while listening to recorded *taarab* on the Swahili coast in the 1930s was often akin to attending a live performance, it was also an engagement with a public text, and therefore a way of relating to the multitude of strangers who compose the larger, imagined communities to which every modern urbanite belongs. The addition of this “stranger-relationality” (Warner 2002, 75) necessarily amplified the reflexivity of listeners’ metadiscourses by situating them as “practices of circulation” (Novak 2008) that brought disparate groups of listeners on the Swahili coast into the same broad conversation. In this way, the recorded output of the binti Saad collective constituted what might be called a *medium of social reflexivity*, a form of public culture that encouraged and enabled critical evaluation of aspects of social life.

Siti binti Saad and her collaborators were not the only Swahili *taarab* musicians to get swept up in the global “musical revolution” of the electrical recording era (Denning 2015). But they are the only ones whose recordings from this era are still widely remembered on the Swahili coast today. This holds true even in Mombasa, which was home to all of the other *taarab* musicians who recorded for international companies in this period.⁴ I contend that the binti Saad collective’s special status as virtually the only Swahili *taarab* musicians of note prior to World War II has much to do with the role of their early recorded works in fostering social reflexivity. That is to say, their music was seared into popular memory in the 1930s because it was intimately bound up with coastal residents’ experiences of thinking about, debating, and making sense of the world. To the extent that this is the case, we cannot simply credit the verbal content of this music. The members of the collective were all known for their musical abilities as well as their ways with words. Siti, for her part, was renowned for the “quality of her voice, her range of tones, resonance, nasality, and intonation” (Fair 2001, 181), and her male collaborators were all considered to be among the finest singers and instrumentalists in the region. A close listen to their early recorded output reveals that they were also incomparable *composers* who creatively combined stylistic elements from different music genres of the Swahili coast and beyond to craft the musical settings for their poems. Developing an approach grounded in Mikhail Bakhtin’s “sociological stylistics” (Bakhtin 1981), I argue in this chapter that the sounds of the binti Saad collective’s early recorded works

were meaningful (in multiple senses of the word) for coastal Swahili audiences for how they enabled critical reflection on a matter of increasing importance at the time: ethnicity.

THE HYBRIDIZED SOUNDWORLDS
OF THE BINTI SAAD COLLECTIVE

Like most of the early recorded works of the binti Saad collective, “Basahera” combines stylistic elements from different music cultures of the Indian Ocean and broader Arab world. Two key aspects of the performance can be described as generally “Arab”: the orchestration, which is typical of urban ensembles throughout the Arab world in the early twentieth century, and the use of an Arab melodic mode (in this case, *Maqām Bayāti*) as the structural basis of the melodies. Atop this broad “Arab” foundation, Mbaruk and his collaborators construct a more heterogeneous musical edifice.⁵ The instrumental prelude is a *dūlāb*, an Egyptian musical form commonly featured on Arab music recordings produced in Cairo in the early twentieth century.⁶ But the style of the song proper is not Egyptian at all. Its more complex rhythmic foundation—a compound meter involving a 3:2 polyrhythm—is typical of coastal East African music, but also of musics of the Arabian Peninsula, making it one of the elements of the performance that most directly indexes Indian Ocean connections. Meanwhile, Mbaruk’s vocal performance reflects the music culture of the Swahili coast in ways both obvious and subtle. Most obvious, of course, is his use of the Swahili language. But his vocal delivery, which is syllabic and devoid of the ornamentation that one would expect of Egyptian or Gulf Arab song, is also distinctly Swahili. At a deeper level, the peculiar melody of the first stanza is a direct reference to *ngoma* (traditional social dances) of the northern Kenyan coast, which is the original context of the “Basahera” poem. Mbaruk, who had spent years studying with master poet-musicians in the northern coastal port of Lamu, executes this reference with exquisite finesse. His melody’s convoluted motion beautifully mimics how all coastal *ngoma* singing tends to abandon form in favor of delivering an entire stanza in a single breath (Abdalla 1974), while a brief modulation to *Maqām ‘Irāq*—a mode with a distinctive, “half-flat” tonic—elicits a strong flavor of the *ngoma* of the northern coast.⁷

As Fair suggests, any Swahili *taarab* performance in the interwar years would have, to some degree, “reflected the cosmopolitan mix of Indian Oceana that came together” in Swahili port cities like Zanzibar and Mombasa (Fair 2001, 171). But not everyone would have done so to the extent that we hear in “Basahera.” It seems likely that most performances by the elite men’s orchestras that dominated the world of *taarab* on Zanzibar until the ascent of the binti Saad collective in the 1920s would have been less adventurous in combining different stylistic elements, as these groups generally remained faithful to the Egyptian style first adopted by the Sultan of Zanzibar’s court orchestra in the late nineteenth century. The binti

Saad collective's special penchant for combining a wide array of styles is partly explained by the diversity of its membership and primary audience. Members hailed from various class backgrounds and regions of the Swahili coast, and during the 1920s they composed and performed in the heterogeneous, working-class neighborhood of Ng'ambo, outside of Zanzibar's Stone Town (Fair 2001, 182–85; Mgana 1991, 40–41). But as is evident in Mbaruk's playful reference to the *ngoma* of the northern Kenyan coast in "Basahera," the stylistic approach that the collective developed in Ng'ambo during the 1920s and subsequently brought to their first recordings was not simply an organic consequence of the diverse origins and life experiences of the members and their interlocutors. It was an intentional and reflexive aesthetic project.

I use the phrase *stylistic approach* rather than *style* when discussing the music of the binti Saad collective from East Africa's early commercial recording era because their recorded works from this period don't exhibit a single style or even array of styles. To be sure, some stylistic threads weave through most of the works including an Arab-style heterophonic texture, in which all instruments and voices perform the same melody in unison but with distinct variations and ornamentations; the use of melodic modes (frequently, but not always, Arab *maqâms*); an Egyptian-style introductory prelude (*dûlâb*) as an introductory gesture; and, most importantly, Siti binti Saad's reedy yet powerful voice, which "is said to have moved her listeners to another plane of existence" (Fair 2001, 181; see also Jahadhmy, in Matola et al. 1966, 97). Beyond these threads, however, what characterizes the style of the binti Saad collective's early recorded works is the absence of a characteristic style. The stylistic approach of the binti Saad collective effectively established the musical setting of each song as its own *hybridized soundworld*, a unique "musogenic scene" (Tagg 2013, 417–85) incorporating some combination of elements drawn from *ngoma* traditions, Egyptian Arab music, Arab musics from the Arabian Peninsula, or Indian musics.

Garnering insights into the early works of the binti Saad collective might seem like a rather straightforward task, given that some of their repertoire is still performed today on the Swahili coast. But in truth, the musical sensibilities of the early commercial recording era are mostly alien to contemporary *taarab* musicians and audiences. Even the contemporary Swahili musicians who still perform works by Siti binti Saad and her collaborators are often puzzled by what they hear in the collective's earliest recordings.⁸ This may seem especially remarkable in light of the fact that there now exists a music school on Zanzibar oriented toward teaching the *taarab* as it was established by the binti Saad collective. The Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA), founded in 2001, offers formal instruction in Swahili *taarab* performance.⁹ Students there are taught to perform songs by the binti Saad collective, and a photo of Siti hangs in a place of honor in the main performance space. But while these students and their instructors are rightly

seen as heirs to the tradition of Siti binti Saad, they received this tradition from later generations who transformed it in significant ways. Notably, the late singer and drummer Bi Kidude, who was largely responsible for reviving interest in the repertoire of the binti Saad collective in the late twentieth century, brought her own aesthetic sensibility to the music, “modernizing” it and infusing it with a dose of *unyago*, a rural women’s *ngoma* danced for weddings and initiation rites (Graebner 2005; Saleh et al. 2008).

One musician from whom I was able to garner valuable information and perspectives for this chapter was Kenyan *taarab* musician Zein l’Abdin, who passed away in 2016. Zein was born in 1939 but had spent years pursuing knowledge of Swahili music of earlier generations. I had many conversations with him about the music of the binti Saad collective while conducting my dissertation research in Mombasa between 2004 and 2005. The key point that I took away from these conversations was that the songs of the collective were always, in Zein’s words, “original,” with the exception of a few that borrowed famous Egyptian melodies. While the musicians obviously engaged in a great deal of mimetic appropriation, what they appropriated were not musical utterances, but rather musical *styles*, which they plucked from music genres of the Swahili coast and wider Indian Ocean world. This is important because it raises questions of *meaning* by implying that the hybridized sounds that the binti Saad collective launched into public circulation in the interwar years did not simply “reflect” the Indian-Ocean cosmopolitanism of the Swahili coast, but also to some extent reflected *on* it.

There are few firsthand accounts available today that reveal anything of how listeners on the Swahili coast engaged with the sounds of the binti Saad collective’s early recordings at the time they first entered into circulation. While musicians and commentators handed down stories about intended and received meanings of some poems from the binti Saad collective, they did not do the same for any of the musical settings through which these poems were conveyed.¹⁰ This surely has much to do with the fact that Swahili poetry has always been viewed on the Swahili coast as a vessel of cultural knowledge worthy of preservation. But it is also possible that listeners did not talk about the sounds of the music using the sort of (meta)language that would lend itself to transmission through formal writing, as speech about music is often highly associational and metaphorical (Feld 1994, 92–93). In any event, we must look—or listen—elsewhere to approach questions of meaning in relation to the sounds of the early recordings of the binti Saad collective. That elsewhere is, of course, the works themselves, which I approach here through a sociological stylistics that attends at once to their sociohistorical context and their “internal social dialogism,” their ways of representing different musics and fostering relations between them (Bakhtin 1981, 300).

A FEELING FOR THE BOUNDARIES

To begin to understand the resonance of the binti Saad collective's hybridized soundworlds on the Swahili coast in the interwar period, it is necessary to situate them in the context of the controversies and disputes over ethnicity wrought by colonial governance and colonial capitalism. As a zone of trade and migration, the Swahili coast has always been a place where individuals and communities transition from newcomer to native. This has lent a special temporal character to identity in the region, which makes ethnic boundaries more like horizons than gateways or barriers. Since at least the nineteenth century, however, this paradigm of ethnicity has existed in tension with a competing, "racialist" paradigm that posits the existence of "mutually exclusive ethnicities or ethnic groupings" (Glassman 2000, 397). In the wake of the first world war, the British colonial administration in East Africa, seeking to assert greater control over the population and economy, instituted new laws and policies that amplified the impact of this racialist paradigm for the colonized peoples of the Swahili coast. The result was a range of new controversies and disputes over ethnic categories and boundaries among colonized subjects. In Mombasa, for example, the administration's efforts to clarify the distinction between "natives" and "nonnatives" sparked discord and even incidents of violence between two long-allied segments of the city's Swahili-speaking Muslim elite, the Coast Arabs and the Twelve Tribes. Both communities actively lobbied for "nonnative" status to escape new taxes on "natives" as well as the indignity (from their perspective) of being lumped in with "native" Africans. The administration's decision to grant this coveted status only to the Coast Arabs, albeit only for the purposes of taxation, created an ethnic cleavage in the heart of Kenyan Swahili society (Kindy 1972, 27–45; Salim 1976). Meanwhile, in the Zanzibar archipelago, the racialist paradigm of ethnic belonging conspired with the demographic changes wrought by new labor policies to foster new understandings of "Swahili" identity that served to unite some and divide others. As laborers who settled on the islands from the mainland increasingly sought to identify as ethnically "Swahili" in order to escape the social stigma and other deficits of their "tribal" origins, the islands' indigenous communities began to reject this label in favor of "ethnic categories associated specifically with the isles" (Fair 2001, 36).

Writing about the context of Zanzibar, Fair argues that the collective's hybridized soundworlds provided a bulwark against the ascendancy of the racialist paradigm of identity by providing "a musical space that widened the boundaries of belonging" (Fair 2001, 174).¹¹ There is certainly a large grain of truth in this. However, it fails to fully account for an essential aspect of the binti Saad collective's approach to sonic hybridization: its *dialogism*. When we explore *how* the binti Saad collective brought together sounds of different social groups, it becomes clear that their hybridized soundworlds do more than simply reflect the diversity of the Swahili coast. They also explore the dynamics of social difference in the region, including the tensions and contradictions inherent in any and every social identity that is tied

to it. With this in mind, I argue that for coastal Swahili audiences in the interwar period, these soundworlds ultimately did more to *objectify the boundaries of culture* than widen the boundaries of belonging. By *objectify* here I mean, specifically, *to make available for scrutiny by granting sensuous form and presence*. To borrow a turn of phrase from Bakhtin, what the binti Saad collective's hybridized soundworlds offered listeners was *a feeling for the boundaries of culture*, a kind of tactile awareness of them that enabled and encouraged reflection (Bakhtin 1981, 364).

STYLIZING THE SOCIAL

I take the phrase “a feeling for the boundaries” from Bakhtin’s discussion of “stylization” in his “Discourse in the Novel” (Bakhtin 1981, 364), the essay in which he lays out most clearly the elements of his sociological stylistics. Bakhtin defines stylization in this work as a mimetic appropriation of stylistic elements oriented toward creating “an artistic representation of another’s linguistic style, an artistic image of another’s language” (Bakhtin 1981, 362).¹² By *language* here, as elsewhere in his writings, Bakhtin means a system of communication that is “stratified not only into dialects in the strict sense of the word . . . [but also] into languages that are socio-ideological: languages belonging to professions, to genres, languages peculiar to particular generations, etc.” (Bakhtin 1981, 271–72). An “image of another’s language,” then, is an image of another’s situation in, and situated perspective on, the social world. Stylization achieves this image by setting up a productive tension, a “dialogic contrast” (364), between “two individualized linguistic consciousnesses” (362). As such, it “delineates the boundaries of languages, creates a feeling for these boundaries, compels one to sense physically the plastic forms of different languages” (364).

I argue that the mimetic appropriations that constitute the hybridized soundworlds of the binti Saad collective represent a mode of musical stylization that enabled listeners on the Swahili coast in the interwar years to feel the boundaries of and between different music cultures of the Swahili coast, and thereby to consider questions of cultural identity. “Basahera,” for example, would have offered listeners of the time a feeling for the boundaries of Swahili music culture within the broader context of commercially recorded musics in global circulation, and of coastal Kenyan music culture within the broader context of Swahili music culture. In other words, notions of Swahili cultural identity and coastal Kenyan cultural identity would have emerged for listeners in (or *as*) sensations of, feelings for, their boundaries.

Not every mimetic appropriation of an alien style constitutes *stylization*. One can simply *imitate* a style or, at another extreme, *caricature* it in a fashion that fails to “give it its due . . . as possessing its own internal logic” (Bakhtin 1981, 364).¹³ Though they sit at opposite ends of a spectrum, imitation and caricature are similar in how they assume full control over the appropriated style. This is precisely

what stylization does not do. Instead, stylization allows the appropriated style to “[reveal] its own world” (Bakhtin 1981, 364), thereby maintaining an “internal dialogism.” In general, the binti Saad collective’s mimetic appropriations of other styles are too faithful to their sources to have been heard as rhetorical parodies. Most would not have been heard as simple imitations, either, for two reasons. First, they are almost always *intergeneric* and therefore invite semiotic readings. In Philip Tagg’s terms, they are “genre synecdoches,” mimetic appropriations that “connote paramusical semantic fields—another place, another time in history, another culture, other sorts of people” (Tagg 2013, 525). Mbaruk’s appropriation of northern-coastal *ngoma* style in “Basahera” is a good example. For the most part, it would not have sounded like a simple imitation to listeners on the Swahili coast in 1930, because these listeners would have heard it as a *reference* to a place and people. (On the other hand, the Egyptian *dūlāb* almost certainly *would have* sounded like simple imitation, because of the normative status of Egyptian style in Zanzibari *taarab*.)

The second reason why most of the binti Saad collective’s mimetic appropriations of other styles would not have been heard as simple imitations by listeners on the Swahili coast at the time is that they almost always maintain an *element of parody*, despite their fidelity to their sources, by virtue of being placed within a comedic frame. The live and recorded performances of the collective almost always involved some comedic acting.¹⁴ Despite being compelled by the media technologies of the era to limit each recorded performance to three minutes (or six, with a break in the middle), the collective almost always included a brief comedic skit that illustrated or commented on the theme of the song, either at the start or in the middle of the performance. In “Basahera,” the skit comes mid-performance, at the beginning of the second side of the record. Two male characters, one of them played by Mbaruk, engage in a brief argument that would seem almost Dadaist if it didn’t relate directly to the *fumbo* (enigmatic metaphor) in the first line of the first stanza. One character, played by Mbaruk, begins by calling the second a liar and demanding to know, “When have you ever seen me trying to use a single stick to build a house?” (*Umepataje kuniona mimi nimechukua jiti moja kuja kujengea nyumba?*). The second character responds, “You always do it!” (*Daima unafanya hayo!*). The argument gets more heated from there, until it begins to get lost beneath the sounds of Mbaruk plucking his ‘ud strings, and eventually ends with the two characters gruffly parting ways as the musical performance starts up again.

The collective’s predilection for infusing their performances with comedy may have been influenced by earlier forms of musical entertainment in the working-class contexts of the Swahili coast. But it surely also had to do with the particular personalities and experiences of Siti and Mbaruk. Siti developed considerable theatrical skills while hawking pottery on the streets of Zanzibar before taking up a career as a musician (Fair 2001, 179; Robert 1967, 5). Mbaruk,

meanwhile, was by all accounts a born comedian (Jahadhmy, in Matola et al. 1966, 62; Suleiman 1969, 88). At the time that he was welcomed into the collective he was nearly as renowned for his comedy as for his musicianship. His lively performances for British and African troops in Mombasa during the latter half of World War I famously included humorous parodies of European folk songs and military marches (Jahadhmy, in Matola et al. 1966, 67; Ward 2011, 78). For this he earned the affectionate nickname “Meja Mbaruk,” which he kept for the rest of his career.

It is self-evident that the binti Saad collective intended their comedic skits to create a lively and fun atmosphere that would set their musical performances off from the mundanities of everyday life. But the skits also frame the musical performances in another, very important way: they infuse them with the “modal trope” of pervasive irony (Friedrich 1991, 30). Irony comes in many forms, but its essence is always *a hint of an ulterior meaning*. Adding irony to musical expression provokes a particular mode of reception—an “interpretive move” (Feld 1994)—oriented around the search for an underlying meaning. In other words, it inaugurates a way of approaching musical sound that is akin to how *taarab* listeners in the early twentieth century approached the poetic texts of *taarab* songs. The *mafumbo* style of early twentieth-century *taarab* compelled listeners to search for meanings deep “inside” (*ndani*) the words. While *mafumbo* is most often understood as a way of using language, one can think of it more broadly as a culturally specific way of exploiting the “power of ambiguity” to invite active interpretation (Vierke 2012). This expanded sense of the term suggests the possibility of a musical form of *mafumbo* that leverages the inherent ambiguity in any ironized musical gesture to provoke a critical engagement.

“YA DANA DANA”

I want to bring this discussion back to the ground now by considering another recorded performance by Mbaruk from the same Odeon sessions in Mombasa. This one, titled “Ya Dana Dana,” offers one of the most remarkable examples of musical stylization in the binti Saad oeuvre because the performance is explicitly framed as a critical exploration of cultural boundaries.

Like “Basahera,” “Ya Dana Dana” extends over two sides of a 78-speed record; however, I have only been able to locate a copy of the first side. The performance opens with Mbaruk and Siti speaking over each other to announce the name of the record label. Siti seems to be having fun with the task. The mellifluous “*Sahani Odeoni*,” Swahili for “Odeon record,” rolls quickly off her tongue in a playful flutter. Next, we hear Mbaruk and another man engaged in a brief conversation. Speaking in fast, slightly garbled Arabic, one of them calls to the other and coaxes him to “come see the *dāna dāna!*” All of this—the announcement of the record label and the introductory skit—lasts just eleven seconds.

The musical performance begins with a simple melody played on ‘ud, violin (or possibly *kamanja*, a traditional Arab fiddle), and *nai* (end-blown flute), backed by a steady pulse played on the jingles of a *riq*. The melodic instruments all play the same line together in a heterophonic texture, each presenting the melody in its own idiomatic fashion. But Mbaruk’s ‘ud is audibly in the lead role, supplying a quick upbeat before the other instruments join in and pushing the pulse forward with forceful articulations. The melody employs only a few pitches, rhythmically patterned in a danceable triple meter. It is set in *Maqām ‘Irāq* and emphasizes the mode’s distinctive “half-flat” tonic.

After the initial instrumental exposition, the melody repeats, this time with voices taking the lead and the instruments lightly doubling the melody while interjecting short connecting phrases. The melody is now revealed in full, with the addition of a slightly varied consequent phrase. The first vocalist we hear is Mbaruk, who performs the antecedent phrase alone. Two or three vocalists then follow with the consequent phrase. They sound distant, but Siti’s clarion voice is clearly audible among them. The words they sing are not words at all, but various combinations of three vocables: “*yā*” “*dān*” and “*dāna*.”

The meaning of “come see the *dāna dāna*” now becomes clear with the introduction of the vocables. This “*dān*” singing, which is found in genres of music and sung poetry throughout the Arabian Peninsula, is perhaps most strongly associated with the music culture of Hadhrami Arabs, an ethnic community from the Hadhramaut region of southern Yemen that has spread throughout the Gulf and western Indian Ocean regions, including the Swahili coast (Urkevich 2014, 270–71; Hassan 1998).¹⁵ Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Swahili coast has been home to a thriving Hadhrami diasporic community, established and sustained by immigrant men (and some women) who traveled to East Africa in search of economic opportunities (see map 2.1).

The *dān* vocables in “Ya Dana Dana” are not an isolated reference to Hadhrami culture. Rather, the performance as a whole is generically Hadhrami. In form and execution, it fits the mold of *dān ṭarab*, a Hadhrami genre of accompanied popular song. Unlike other forms of Hadhrami sung poetry that incorporate *dān* singing, *dān ṭarab* is entertainment music “sung for the pure enjoyment of poetry and song” (Hassan 1998, 4). Toward the end of the performance, Siti adds jubilant shouts to give a sense of the festive atmosphere of an authentic *dān ṭarab* event.

Around forty seconds into the performance, Mbaruk introduces the song’s refrain—two lines of Swahili poetry, set in a typical *taarab* meter, with the first repeated to fit the form of the melody:

Kanga mbili za mkasi, zimenikata maini (Those scissors *kangas* have cut me deeply)

Mwambie bwana afunge mlango, leo asitokaini (Tell him to close the door, he should not go out today)

As with many *taarab* refrains, this one includes esoteric references and possibly borrowed material. I am not fully confident in my translation of the first line. A *kanga* is a colorful printed cloth that typically includes a short poetic saying or message on it. Since the early twentieth century, women on the Swahili coast have commonly used *kangas* to send veiled insults and challenges to rivals. The line “*kanga mbili za mkasi*,” which literally translates as “the two *kangas* of scissors,” is ambiguous. For this translation, I have taken my cue from Abdilatif Abdalla, who believes the scissors may refer to a specific, notoriously insulting line of *kangas* that bore the image of scissors (personal communication, September 7, 2019).¹⁶

The introduction of Swahili *taarab* poetry, redolent with *mafumbo*, transforms the performance into a cultural hybrid, a combination of Hadhrami *dān tarab* and Swahili *taarab* (a kind of *dān taarab*). This hybrid is fleshed out even further as the performance continues. After the Swahili refrain there is another *dān* refrain, and then an instrumental refrain punctuated by Siti’s exhortations (in Swahili). The Swahili refrain then returns again, followed again by another *dān* refrain. After a minute and a half of this vacillation, Mbaruk sings the only full stanza of Swahili poetry in the three-minute side. As he does, Siti and a male backing musician echo key phrases in heightened speaking voices, mimicking the sort of “ecstatic feedback” that one finds in traditional settings of Arab music performance (Racy 1991; Shannon 2003, 75). The lines he sings are as follows:

Pesa zangu mbili, hanunue kibiriti (Two months’ salary doesn’t even buy matchsticks)
Ni vinani tu makanda, tenda chukua kaniki (It’s just empty grain sacks, go grab a laborer’s shirt)
Usiku kucha silali asili, kwa kuhesabu boriti (I don’t sleep at night, for I count the ceiling beams)

Unlike the refrain, the stanza connects thematically to the style of the performance, albeit obliquely, by expressing the point of view of a manual laborer, a common profession for Hadhrami men in East Africa during the interwar years.¹⁷ While grounded in reality, the conceptual linkage that is achieved at this point in the performance between the (musical) image of Hadhrami culture and the (poetic) image of struggling laborer was to some extent politically charged. The fact that most Hadhramis who arrived in East Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were peasants who had come to escape abject poverty back home positioned them as a kind of untouchable class in the highly stratified coastal Swahili society. Tellingly, Hadhramis on the Swahili coast have never been referred to as “Arabs,” a distinction traditionally reserved for communities of higher social status. During the interwar years, they were typically referred to as *Shihiri*, a reference to Shihir, the Arabian port from which the new arrivals among them had started their journey to East Africa (Le Guennec-Coppens 1989, 186; Salim 1976, 78). While this label has fallen out of use today, it remains uncommon to hear a

Hadhrami described as “Arab” on the Swahili coast, even as many of them have achieved success as entrepreneurs and business owners.

While we cannot know exactly how audiences on the Swahili coast in 1930s received Mbaruk’s Hadhrami-Swahili musical hybrid, it seems clear that it would *not* have been heard as a simple mockery (or *rhetorical parody*, in Bakhtin’s terms). The Hadhrami style is performed too beautifully for that. Upon hearing the recording for the first time, Yemeni musician and music researcher Nizar Ghanem opined that the performance bears a distinct “Hadhrami taste” (personal communication, July 8, 2019). It did not sound to him like an inauthentic imitation, much less a “gross and superficial destruction” (Bakhtin 1981, 364); it simply sounded “Hadhrami.” Nevertheless, the performance would certainly have been heard as *parodic*. The introductory skit establishes a playfulness and general sense of irony, which is then amplified by the introduction of Swahili poetry. Given that Hadhramis on the Swahili coast, as elsewhere in the Indian Ocean world, have historically “dropped their own language for the local one” within a generation (Le Guennec-Coppens 1989, 190), the idea of Hadhrami music sung in Swahili is not all that strange. But Mbaruk’s highly sophisticated Swahili poetry, with its complex *mafumbo*, is a strange fit with a performance that so vividly reflects the culture of recent Hadhrami immigrants.

The ironized hybridization of Hadhraminess and Swahiliness in “Ya Dana Dana” does not offer a direct statement or commentary. What Hadhraminess and Swahiliness offer, rather, is a *feeling for the boundaries* of Hadhrami culture in coastal Swahili society. This would have been compelling for audiences of the time on the Swahili coast, I suggest, because it would have enabled them to reflect on one of the more paradoxical facets of social belonging in this society: the status of Hadhramis as both insiders and outsiders. While Hadhramis spoke Swahili and participated in the same religious and cultural practices as most other Swahili-speaking Muslims, their subaltern status kept them apart from other Swahili-speaking Muslims, encouraging a degree of insularity. Their residence patterns reflected this situation quite vividly: in Mbaruk’s home town of Mombasa, for example, Hadhramis who were fortunate enough to live outside of the migrant laborer housing settled in Bondeni, right on the edge of Old Town, the traditional neighborhood of elite Arabs and the *waungwana* (Swahili patricians) (Le Guennec-Coppens 1997, 168, n. 41).

Another paradoxical aspect of the Hadhrami position in Swahili society is that there often is no boundary between Swahili and Hadhrami *cultures*, since many “Swahili” religious and cultural practices actually have Hadhrami origins (Pouwels 1987, 32–54). Intentionally or not, Mbaruk subtly references this situation in the structure of his melody, which is built on the same relatively rare melodic mode (*Maqām ‘Irāq*) that he also uses in “Basahera” to capture the sound of the northern Kenyan coast. This is a rather subtle reference, to be sure, but it seems likely that Mbaruk and his listeners would have sensed it at some level, if only as an added bit of tension in the “dialogic contrast” of the Hadhrami-Swahili soundworld.

CONCLUSION

I have offered an account of how musicians and audiences on the Swahili coast during the early commercial recording era engaged with musical sounds as a way of reflecting on complex issues of ethnic categorization. My aim has not been to demonstrate any specific historical outcomes. Rather, in the spirit of Johannes Fabian's classic statement on African popular culture studies, I have sought to offer a view into "how perceptions, experiences and problems, are being 'worked out' in an open, never-ending process" at a particular moment in history (Fabian 1978, 329). One element that is conspicuously missing from my analysis, as I have already noted, is a discussion of how denizens of the Swahili coast may have talked about the hybridized soundworlds of the binti Saad collective when they first entered into public circulation. But as I hope I have shown, a lack of access to verbal (meta) discourses in music research does not mean a lack of access to practices of critical reflection. Musical sound can also be a medium of this reflection—and one that deserves special attention. The exploration of ethnic boundaries that took place in and through the hybridized soundworlds of the binti Saad collective can never be fully translated into words. While musical communication necessarily takes place mostly "below normal levels of ratiocination" (Christgau 2005, 415), it is not merely subordinate or supplementary to verbal communication. Verbal discourse, including scholarly writing, can only ever *mediate* musical communication. "Language," after all, as C. S. Peirce and Lady Welby averred, "is only the extreme form of expression" (Hardwick 1977, 112). Human beings also share ideas through non-verbal modes of expression, including music, and "meaning," as linguistic anthropologist and ethnomusicologist David Samuels puts it, "is richer and more complex than what can be contained in a lexical gloss of a sign" (Samuels 2004, 194).

I bring this chapter to a close by insisting on the significance (and significance) of musical communication, because I believe it to be an essential basis for an ethno/musicology of the Indian Ocean world. Ultimately, my work here demonstrates that research on musical form can serve a purpose beyond that of "imagining the Indian Ocean world" (Alpers 2002) as a "cultural milieu" (Bose 2006) (as important as this may be). It can also enable us to explore how individuals and communities of this milieu imagine the Indian Ocean world for themselves.

NOTES

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1. Digital copies of the recordings discussed in the chapter are stored in the Andrew Eisenberg Collection of East African Commercial Sound Recordings, at http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/nyuad/ad_mc_035/.

2. Siti binti Saad and other members of the collective—including Mbaruk Talsam as well as the equally renowned Maalim Shaaban—recorded their first titles in 1928 and 1929 in Bombay, under the aegis of HMV (see Graebner 2004b). By 1930, they had become the region's first bona fide media celebrities.

3. A version of the original poem is included in Abdalla (1974).

4. A couple of years after the binti Saad collective recorded their first songs for HMV in Bombay, groups from Mombasa also recorded with HMV as well as other international record companies. Initiatives by Odeon and the French record company Pathé to record Mombasan musicians in 1930 are described in official EMI documents (Graebner 2004b, 3). HMV's role in recording Mombasans seems to be less well documented, but Laura Fair was able to retrieve information from an HMV catalog from 1930–31 pertaining to a couple dozen releases under the names of four different Mombasan singers. I am grateful to her for providing me with this information.

5. The terms and concepts I use in discussing aspects of the *Maqām* system are those of contemporary Arab music theory. While this theory is taught and studied on Zanzibar today, it would not have been familiar to the binti Saad collective—especially not during the interwar years, when it was still being standardized in Cairo (Marcus 1989, 12–41). It may be impossible at this point to reconstruct how the members of the binti Saad collective conceptualized and talked about *Maqām*. The smattering of notes on the matter in Matola et al. (1966) are suggestive but raise more questions than answers.

6. A *dūlāb* is often used in Arab music to quickly and efficiently establish the feeling of a melodic mode (*maqām*) (Farraj and Shumays 2019, 145–46; Touma 1996, 106). For this reason, it was often used on recordings of Arab music during the shellac era (roughly from the first decade of the twentieth century until the end of World War II), when recorded performances were limited to three-minute increments.

7. A “half-flat” pitch in *maqām*-based music is a diatonic pitch lowered by (approximately) one quarter-tone. Modes with a “half-flat” tonic generally resolve down to the tonic by a 3/4-step interval, producing “an unusual feeling of tonicization and resolution” (Farraj and Shumays 2019, 388). In most cases, including the one under discussion here, a *maqām* with a half-flat tonic is built on the *Sikāh* trichord, classically spelled E half-flat, F, G. These include *Maqām Sikāh*, *Maqām 'Irāq*, and *Maqām Huzām*, all of which fall in the *Sikāh* “family.” The modulation in this part of “Basahera” moves from *Maqām Bayātī* on G (the song's primary mode) to *Maqām 'Irāq* on A half-flat, by tonicizing the second scale-degree of *Maqām Bayātī* on G. Even today, the sound of a half-flat tonic is common in *ngoma* traditions of the coastal islands of northern Kenya and southern Somalia. One can hear it, for example, in this recent performance of *vugo* (a women's *ngoma*) from Chundwa Island: Anonymous, “VUGO LA TCHUNDWA2 LAMU,” Salim Ahmed, November 29, 2018, video, 14:13, <https://youtu.be/UWYz7op6584>.

8. Werner Graebner (2004a, 173–75), Hildegard Kiel (2012), and I have each held focus group interviews with accomplished Zanzibari musicians (different musicians in each case) aimed at gathering reactions to some of the earliest *taarab* recordings. (My interview was carried out with members of the Dhow Countries Music Academy *taarab* orchestra during their visit to NYU Abu Dhabi on September 26, 2019.) Graebner reports that his interviewees were “[astonished] that the music was so kaleidoscopic and that it featured quite a number of elements from local *ngoma*-dances” (174). Both Kiel and I found our interviewees puzzled by certain aspects of the recorded performances, including the melodic modes that were used, which they could not always identify.

9. For a brief history of DCMA, see Topp Fargion 2014, 184–89.

10. The only published compilation of poems by members of the binti Saad collective, *Waimbaji Wa Juzi* (Matola et al. 1966), contains a number of commentaries on the meanings of the poems from the last surviving member at the time, Maalim Shaaban, but almost no information about the musical settings of any of the poems.

11. Fair builds on Janet Topp Fargion's (Topp 1994) work on the history of Zanzibari *taarab* in developing this theoretical perspective and credits her with the idea that the music was in some sense about "belonging."
12. Bakhtin adopted *stylization* from the Russian formalists, who used it to mean an overt appropriation of a foreign style that was too playful to be considered simple imitation but not playful enough to be considered parody (Ogden 2005, 528). Bakhtin added a sociological dimension to the concept by conceptualizing it as a mode of "double-voicing."
13. The former extreme in music is sometimes referred to as *pastiche* (though this term is rarely used beyond Western contexts). The latter is often referred to as parody, though Bakhtin's phrase "rhetorical parody" is probably more appropriate.
14. On comedic performance in the live performances of the collective, see Fair (2001, 224).
15. Hassan (1998, 4) explains, "The word *dān* is derived from *dandana* which translates literally as 'humming' or 'singing to oneself', meaning a melody without words. By extension, it also refers to any song using phonetic derivations from the word *dān* such as *dāna*, *dānī* etc."
16. It is also possible to understand the line as referencing the fact that *kangas* are normally sold as a single piece of cloth containing a matching pair that must be separated by the consumer with scissors. In either case, Mbaruk seems to be playing with the vivid imagery in the common Swahili idiom "*kukata maini*," which is a way of saying "to hurt (someone's) feelings" but literally means "to cut the liver."
17. The reference to *boriti*, which I have translated as "ceiling beams" but specifically refers to mangrove poles, might also be heard as a reference to dockwork, which many hadhrami men undertook in that period.

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SECTION TWO

Mobilities

Swahili Covers, Sufi Prayers, and Liberation Hymns

Women's Mobilities in Competitive Tufo Dance Associations in Northern Mozambique

Ellen E. Hebden

INTRODUCTION

It was 9:00 a.m. and Dona Helena's *quintal* (yard) was a flurry of activity. Several women were tying colorful strips of cloth and purple jacaranda flowers to the interior of the *mpantaney* (figure 3.1)—a large open-air shelter made of wooden poles and *macubara* (woven palm fronds)—while a small group had congregated around Paula, who sat perched on a white plastic chair beneath the shade of a mango tree; spread across the ground in front of her were an assortment of plastic basins, pots, utensils, and three small charcoal cook stoves. She was giving a master class on how to cook prawn samosas to members of Associação Cultural Estrela Vermelha (Red Star Cultural Association) in Pebane, a coastal fishing town in Mozambique's Zambézia province (see map 3.1). Founded in the 1960s, Estrela Vermelha of Pebane (henceforth EVP) is a competitive dance association that performs *tufo*, a "traditional" song and dance genre owing a rich heritage to East Africa's Swahili coast. This morning, the group was finalizing preparations for a *carrama*, an annual, multiday event that brings together *tufo* groups from the same club for singing, dancing, and feasting.¹ Hosting a *carrama* in Pebane had been EVP's dream since re-forming after the civil war ended in 1992, so this was a highly anticipated moment, and the association—twenty female dancers, four council members, two drummers, fifteen nonperforming members, and many



FIGURE 3.1. *Tufo* dancers inside the *mpantaney* at the closing ceremony of a *carrama* hosted by Estrela Vermelha de Pebane in Pebane, Mozambique, September 17, 2017. (Photo by author)

ancestors—had been planning for months to host four invited groups, some traveling from long distances.

Later that evening during the welcoming ceremony, one such visitor, Estrela Vermelha from the port city of Nacala, entered the stage to dance. Within minutes, Samira,² an EVP dancer, grabbed my hand, pulling me from my spot at the edge of the audience to a plastic chair in the front row. “Sit here, and record *everything*,” she instructed, her voice breathless from excitement. “These women are the real owners of *tufo*. They are *ashinène*!” In Makhuwa, the primary Bantu language in northern Mozambique, *ashinène* means “original owner” or “first-comer.”³ It is a label that designates authority and knowledge and can be used to refer to ownership of land, a language, or a cultural practice like *tufo*.

Months later, EVP members were still talking about the group from Nacala. Their dancing, they concluded, had raised the overall quality of the *carrama* because it demonstrated mastery over the oldest iteration of *tufo*, which takes its basic movement pattern—the head and torso reclined, and moving in a pattern from right to left, forward and backward—from the Sufi *dhikr*, the transcendental recitation of praise poetry (Trimingham 1980, 103). In *tufo*, the beauty of these movements is amplified by its synchronous performance, demonstrating control



MAP 3.1. Map of Mozambique. (Courtesy of the United Nations)

over both the individual dancer's body and the collective.⁴ Ten to twenty women, seated in rows and adorned in matching uniforms and jewelry, sing and dance in unison. Their right arms are extended and sweep across the body in long graceful motions, while they mark time by moving their shoulders up and down to the deep, steady cadence of the principal drum, the *kapurra* (figure 3.2).



FIGURE 3.2. A dancer from Chimpimpi de Tibone in Pebane exemplifying the traditional *tufu* posture. (Photo by author)

While all dance associations that perform *tufu* are familiar with these movements, what distinguishes a good group from an exceptional one is the way they perform with feeling and show off their unique style (*maneira de gingar*), inviting spectators to become “intoxicated by the performance” (Gearhart 1998, 108). Estrela Vermelha from Nacala was lauded as a group that *knows* the genre, because they had sparked joy with their mastery of aesthetic form and feeling. As a result, they earned the status and respect that aligns with the label *ashinène* and would be invited to perform again. But this group also knew how to leverage their knowledge by asking the hosting group to pay for their return journey. This expense was not in the festival budget, but EVP scrambled to collect additional funds to comply with this request—how could they say no to a group who traveled so far, increased EVP’s prestige as hosts, and, as one dancer put it, “lifted the spirit of Pebane.”

Tufu performances create the potential for movement across form and scale—from microlevel movements of the body to large-scale movements of people (King and Skeldon 2010)—in that dancers can gain access to geographic, social, political, and sometimes even economic mobility if their singing and dancing is well received by the audience. In this essay I discuss how dancers creatively and strategically use performance aesthetics as a “field of possibilities” that they can appropriate to increase their movement opportunities by analyzing how EVP selects

and prepares song repertoires for three performance events: a regional *carrama*, a national political meeting, and a local recording session. I draw on fourteen months of ethnographic research with competitive dance associations that perform *tufo*; between 2016 and 2018 I lived in Pebane, Mozambique, and was a member of EVP, learning the art form, attending rehearsals and meetings, traveling to local and regional events, and performing with this group.

I begin by outlining the history of *tufo* as a product of several migrations within the Indian Ocean arena that have produced an aesthetically diverse, flexible genre of music and dance. Then, I turn to the concept of mobility as a theoretical and empirical frame for analyzing the social significance of *tufo*. More specifically, I discuss sociological and musicological uses of the term *motility* to propose that “aesthetic agency” (Bohlman 2011) is a movement strategy appropriated by dancers. Finally, drawing on ethnographic data collected at rehearsals, performances, and in postperformance reflections, I demonstrate how dancers work within the conventions of the genre to showcase their knowledge of *tufo* in order to bolster their reputation while considering the potential of aesthetics to facilitate *actual* forms of mobility in the future.

MOVING THROUGH *TUFO*: HISTORIES OF MIGRATION, POLITICS, AND TRAVEL

Tufo is a genre born out of musical migrations across the Indian Ocean and along East Africa’s Swahili coast. Oral histories trace its origins to Saudi Arabia, where it was first practiced by Prophet Muhammed’s followers when they welcomed the Prophet to Medina, then known as Yathrib, by singing praise songs accompanied by frame drums (Lutero and Pereira 1980, 19). As Arab traders and religious scholars moved west along well-established maritime routes, they introduced new ritual practices to coastal East African communities, leading to the development of many syncretic religious rituals between Muslims and non-Muslims.⁵

Comorian scholar Sheikh Habib Salih introduced a new style of *mawlid* in Lamu, Kenya, in the 1880s that merged the praise poetry of the *dhikr* with the drumming and dancing of *ngoma* competitions that had long been an important part of social life throughout southern and eastern Africa (Gearhart 1998; Bang 2003, 149–50).⁶ Though these innovations were met with strong resistance from the religious establishment, Salih’s *mawlid* brought orthodox Islamic traditions into a public space where they became more accessible to the poor and nonliterate. Moreover, the Africanization of Islam challenged deeply entrenched class hierarchies and attracted thousands of new followers in the early twentieth century as the *turuq*⁷ expanded into the interior (Gearhart 1998, 97). Further innovations, such as the inclusion of instruments and religious texts in Swahili and local dialects, meant that sacred practices were also adapted for secular occasions like weddings and birth ceremonies (Fair 2001, 180–81).

The sociopolitical context in Mozambique at the turn of the twentieth century, however, differed significantly, as the Muslim chiefly clans along the northern coast were busy fighting political and territorial encroachment from the Portuguese. While the dominant Sufi Orders, the Qadiriyya and the Shadhuliyya Yashrutiyya, established themselves in Ilha de Moçambique and Angoche in 1896 and 1904/1905, they did not proliferate until after 1930, when the Portuguese consolidated their colonial power and built new transport and communication infrastructures (Bonate 2007, 67).

The late expansion of the Sufi Orders in Mozambique was consequential for ritual practices. While in Kenya and Tanzania, the merger of the *dhikr* with *ngoma* practices instituted drumming into many Islamic celebrations, this did not happen in Mozambique. Rather, tensions over the changing ideas of Islamic orthodoxy provoked by the Sufi Orders sedimented around debates over the permissibility of drumming in the mosque, and *dhikr* and *mawlid* ceremonies. While, according to Bonate (2007, 67), drumming was a common feature of Muslim festivals and funerals prior to the arrival of the Orders, it was outlawed from these ceremonies as the Orders expanded between 1930 and 1963.

Tufo was introduced on Ilha de Moçambique by a Qadiri sheikh in the early 1930s during this volatile period of religious and political transition (Arnfred 2004, 43). First labeled as *mawlid*⁸ and performed only by men, the ritual underwent several changes in this new context: as a practice that included drums, it was secularized, deemed a dance society activity, and renamed after the drum of the tambourine family that often accompanies Islamic celebrations around the world—*ad-duff* in Arabic, *dufu* in Kiswahili, and *adufu* in Portuguese (Farmer 1993, 621). In northern Mozambique, it became *tufo* following Makhuwa language pronunciation, where the *d* becomes a strong dental *t* (Lutero and Perreira 1980, 19).

Women became involved in *tufo* when men from the local Muslim associations asked them to come “brighten” (*brilhar*) their soccer games. Abdul Satar, a member of Pebane’s first *mawlid* group, recalled, “When *tufo* started, men were busy playing soccer and invited women to dance *mawlid*, but the women started another culture, and it became *tufo*.” As women grew the practice, they adopted the names and uniform colors from the soccer teams for their *tufo* associations and modeled their group structure after the *turuq* (Arnfred 2011).

After independence in 1975, further changes occurred to the genre when Frelimo,⁹ Mozambique’s ruling party, adopted a Marxist-Leninist platform. Under the umbrella of national culture, *tufo* and other “traditional” dances became designated as folklore and were incorporated into an official program of welcome ceremonies, political events, and commemorative days. Cultural groups were in service to the state, and revolutionary hymns sung in Portuguese, Mozambique’s lingua franca, became an important part of the repertoire. Several groups even changed their name to reflect socialist ideology. For example, the country’s first *tufo* group, Mahafil Islam in Ilha de Moçambique, became Estrela Vermelha

(Red Star), in homage to the international socialist symbol, and also the nickname of the Frelimo security forces (Arnfred 2004, 61). When Mozambique transitioned to a multiparty democracy after the civil war ended in 1992, the genre became further embedded in politics as many groups aligned themselves with political parties (Teixeira 2007). In the last decade, moreover, cultural policy makers have taken steps to preserve *tufu* as national cultural heritage by preparing its nomination to UNESCO's list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2012, though the application was never completed.

Today, *tufu* is expanding throughout rural and semiurban areas in northern Mozambique, countering the trend among other *ngoma* genres in eastern Africa, which have declined or disappeared in recent decades (see Gearhart 1998; Hill 2000; Fair 2002). In Pebane, for example, three new groups formed in a period of eight months in 2018, a substantial increase from the eight groups active when I arrived in November 2016. The genre's growing popularity can be explained, in part, in terms of the benefits competitive dance societies offer. Women describe their motivations for membership as a constellation of local and regional travel for performances, community development, social visibility, play, and the feminine beauty practices associated with *tufu*. Consequently, embodying histories of migration, women's desire for travel, and their social and political advancement, *tufu* is a genre that integrates mobilities across form and scale.

PERFORMANCE AS POTENTIAL: MOTILITY AND "AESTHETIC AGENCY"

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, mobility has emerged as a key concept-metaphor among scholars studying the increasing movement of people, objects, and ideas that characterize the globalized world.¹⁰ While mobility often signifies progress, freedom, or modernity, it is also depicted as deviant or rebellious, as is evident in the disturbing, negative portrayals of transnational migrants or refugees. Movement, moreover, can only be understood in relation to stasis, and one example of this is the symbiosis between "roots" and "routes" in narratives of geopolitical identity formation (Friedman 1998, 151–52). Geographer Tim Cresswell (2010) argues that these conflicting meanings of mobility—as shaped by sociocultural and historical contexts—are what give mobility its status as a "resource" that is contested, negotiated, and managed. Moreover, who is mobile, and the ways in which groups are physically, socially, and economically mobile, matters politically (Adey 2006; Bissell and Fuller 2011).

In contemporary Mozambique, where physical, social, and economic mobility are perceived as a means for advancement, the differential politics of movement are evident along lines of class, region, political affiliation, race, and gender. Government rhetoric, corporate advertising, and popular music laud the nation's advancements, yet nonelites—often moving on foot as state officials, foreign

diplomats, and aid workers move along the crumbling roadways in all-terrain SUVs—underscore the ways in which mobility has become profoundly inequitable (Paasche and Sidaway 2010; Groes-Green 2013; Archambault 2012, 2013). Furthermore, as growing numbers of men are stuck at home, unemployed, women’s mobility is increasing as they pursue work in parallel markets to feed their families (Sheldon 2002), countering movement patterns during the colonial era dominated by male labor migration.¹¹ In the north of the country, *tufó* plays an important role in increasing women’s movement opportunities as successful, well-connected groups travel locally, regionally, and in some cases nationally, to perform at events. This travel also allows dancers to expand their social networks and cultural and economic capital, as they form friendships with members of new groups and meet potential patrons at performances. At the same time, the increase in mobility that many dancers enjoy has led to tensions in intimate relations, and more specifically, marriage, as men fear their wives’ increased visibility and freedom of movement will attract wealthier suitors and lead to divorce (Hebden 2020).

These tensions reinforce Cresswell’s contention that mobility is more than just the physical act of moving; mobility politics also encompass the representations of movement that give it shared meaning and the embodied experiences of moving that give it subjective meaning (2010, 160). When analyzed as an integrated system, mobility is a form of power that can be both enabling and repressive. However, while Cresswell defines mobility in terms of *actual* movement, I extend this definition to include the *possibility* for movement and the strategies people adopt to actualize mobility—what Vincent Kaufmann terms as “motility” (2002)—in order to also consider the imagined forms of future movements that could materialize through the construction and maintenance of social networks in *tufó*.

Motility is a concept borrowed from the biological sciences to describe movement that is “yet-to-be-realized or might-never-happen” (Leivestad 2016, 140). In the social sciences, it has gained theoretical currency as a way to tie people’s social movements to their capacity to be spatially mobile, or put differently, the way a group or individual transforms potential into actual mobility (Kaufmann and Montulet 2016, 45). According to Kaufmann, motility depends on one’s *access* to different forms or networks of mobility, their *competence* in recognizing and using access, and their ability to *appropriate* access and skills—which could refer to the strategies, values, perceptions, and habits that are meaningful in relation to movement (Kaufmann 2002, 1). In the context of *tufó*, aesthetics is one such “field of possibilities” that dancers can appropriate as movement potential.

Philip Bohlman’s concept of “aesthetic agency” contributes a musicological perspective to these sociological understandings of motility in that it highlights music’s ability to sustain physical mobility by accommodating multiple political meanings, which people can appropriate (2011, 150).¹² According to Bohlman, music is “spatially malleable and mobile” (2016, 168), it can move and be moved, and its aesthetics carry forms of knowledge that, depending on the context, can

adopt or express different meanings. In other words, aesthetics can propel movement in spite of outside forces. At the same time, performers appropriate aesthetics for their own political ends.¹³

As a genre that accommodates multiple historical influences and meanings, *tufu* aesthetics are malleable and have the potential to sustain other forms of movement, depending on a group's access, competence, and appropriation. In the next section, I show how women strategically use the particulars of sound, lyrics, rhythm, and choreography in *tufu* performances to pursue new forms of movement that they deem valuable.

HISTORY, POLITICS, AND POP MUSIC: THE APPROPRIATION OF AESTHETICS IN THREE EXAMPLES

In the context of competitive public performance, the visual, kinetic, sonic, and affective textures of *tufu* weave together as forms of capital that can raise a group's status, or alternatively, destroy their reputation. Selecting repertoire to perform at a public event is therefore serious business, and in EVP rehearsals this is a collective decision open to debate. Group members choose lyrics, melody, tempo, choreography, and uniforms that speak to the event's theme and the anticipated audience. If they do this well, they may receive invitations to perform at additional events, which translates into future possibilities for travel. Returning to Kaufmann's definition of motility, dancers access new forms of mobility through event invitations. Their competence in using this access, however, depends on their skill as a group, which includes their ability to successfully show off their knowledge of the genre's conventions, their ability to energize (*animar*) the audience, and their ability to secure the appropriate patrons or funding that facilitate their actual travel.

However, as the following three examples illuminate, dancers also appropriate the "aesthetic agency" of *tufu* when selecting performance-specific repertoire to maximize their future mobility potential. There is more to group success than technical skill, energy, and fundraising; success is also achieved by the expert pairing of lyrics and melody, for example, to praise a visiting government official, or by embodying piety in the choreography for an Islamic song at a wedding. Each of the following examples highlight the ways in which women debate and select song repertoire that caters to the theme, audience, and purpose of an event while also strategizing for their own advancement.

Example 1: Historical Migrations and Knowledgeable Movements

Twenty-five women were packed inside the mud brick clubhouse, as EVP was meeting to practice choreography in preparation for the upcoming *carrama* they had been invited to attend in Nampula, northern Mozambique's largest city. While the drumheads were warming up in the fire outside, Amina, the *anuno*

mwanene—the queen or “owner” of the group—led us in song, accompanied by Fatima, who sang a countermelody, matching the volume and timbre: “*Allah hu allah. ya rabi salama, siku ya kiama, moto ya kasema.*” This is an old song with Kiswahili lyrics that evidences the genre’s Islamic heritage. Amina told me later that it is about judgment day—*siku ya kiama*—and is a reminder to think about the end of life, “when the fire is going to call us.” This song would be included in the *carrama* repertoire, but there was some confusion among the dancers as to how it should be choreographed. Is this better seated or standing? “*Opatchera okilati*”—you have to start seated because it is a *carrama*—asserted Safiana, Pebane’s Head of Culture, who was attending the rehearsal to help the group prepare.

At *carramas*, like the one I described in the introduction, protocol is strictly observed. A performance begins with the stage entrance (*entrada*), where dancers coordinate an opening choreographic sequence with the drums while moving into formation. From there, they transition to a seated position for their first several songs in order to display their knowledge of the genre’s performance conventions. EVP dancers were aware of these rules, and group members agreed that this song, as an opening selection, must be danced seated. But when a young dancer from the back row asked, “How fast should we be moving?” this sparked another debate. Elder members, who no longer dance but still participate as advisors to the group, argued that the song must be danced at a slow tempo because originally it was a prayer. When a few of the younger, more forthright dancers pushed back, Safiana was forced to intercede and chastised the group members for their indecisiveness. “You are going there to show them what you know,” she reminded the dancers, “so demonstrate that you *know*. But you must go with certainty so that the other groups don’t say that this group doesn’t know.”

To know, in this context, is to have mastered the history, affects, and aesthetic form of the genre—to correctly embody the shared conventions that have circulated through time and across space. Musical genre, argues Fabian Holt, is not only “in the music,” but in the “minds and bodies” of groups of people who share its conventions (2007, 2). Conventions are founded by what Holt calls “center collectivities,” which are “specialized subjects that have given direction to the larger network that sustains and creates the genre’s identity” (Holt 2007, 20). While Holt’s conception of “center collectivities” emerges from his study of genre in American popular music, and includes a wide range of authorities and corporate companies that are largely urban based, “center collectivities” works well to explain how genre conventions are created and circulated in the *tufu* network because it aligns with Makhwa matrilineal “first-comer” ideology through which authority has historically been determined. As direct descendants of the first and oldest *tufu* groups, those from Muslim-majority coastal towns like Ilha de Moçambique, Angoche, and Nacala in Nampula province, and Moçimboa da Praia in Cabo Delgado, are considered the owners of the practice, or *ashinène*—the label EVP members attached to Estrela Vermelha of Nacala-Porto. *Carramas*, which bring

together geographically dispersed groups from the same team network, are events at which these “center collectivities” reinforce and correct genre conventions, and where team identity is celebrated through aesthetic display. For dancers from places like Pebane, where *tufu* was introduced later through internal migration down the coast, it is important to demonstrate that even though they “aren’t the owners of this culture,” as one elder asserted, they have been acculturated and know the sounds and gestures that form the basis of *tufu*, correctly embodying its historical “roots.”

The aesthetic “roots” of *tufu* as a genre emerge from multiple historical “routes.” Cultural and postcolonial theorists like Paul Gilroy (1993), Stuart Hall (1994), James Clifford (1997), and Susan Friedman (1998) argue that roots and routes move dialogically back and forth and are “two sides of the same coin: roots, signifying identity based on stable cores and continuities; routes, suggesting identity based on travel, change, and disruption” (Friedman 1998, 152). *Tufu* narrativizes the disruption, displacement, and intercultural encounters of slavery, colonization, and migration through song, sound, and body movement. The aesthetics of body movement in traditional *tufu* are a dialogue between rootedness and routeness in the most literal sense—as a seated dance, the lower body is rooted to the earth while the upper body mimics the movement of the dhows across the Indian Ocean. These aesthetic narratives tell the story of multiple intercultural encounters in the second half of the nineteenth century: Hadhrami migrations to East Africa, the expansion of the Sufi brotherhoods down the Swahili coast, and the movement of slave trade caravans inland, destroying some Makhuwa chiefdoms through slave raids while “saving” others through conversion to Islam. The sounds and gestures introduced in northern Mozambique through the Islamic ritual practices that were circulated through these migrations gave rise to *tufu* half of a century later. Today, these “roots” create new “routes” to mobility for groups that correctly embody this knowledge at a *carrama* (figure 3.3).

While dance practices are a part of processes of inclusion as individuals are acculturated into a community through dance (Ness 1992; Buckland 2002; Hamera 2007; Gilman 2009), they also reveal hierarchies of power and social exclusions (Desmond 1999). In *tufu*, these processes of inclusion and exclusion are revealed, in part, through critiques of the kinetic dynamics of body movement—the factors of rhythm, speed, force, duration, muscular tension, and relaxation that we feel when we move our bodies. Diedre Sklar argues that kinetic dynamics can combine to produce vitality affects—the complex qualities of kinetic energy that are embodied in movement, like a surging, explosion, crescendo or diminuendo, that are culturally encoded dispositions (Sklar 2008, 95). While kinetic dynamics are not always visible, they are critical to the ways in which memory, communication, cultural knowledge, and values are embodied through movement (Sklar 2008, 88). A group can learn how to dress well, sing beautifully, and compose socially relevant songs. But in *tufu*, how well one performs “the *feeling* of gesturing” (Noland



FIGURE 3.3. Estrela Vermelha de Pebane performing a gesture that mimics holding AK-47s during their performance for Mozambican Women's Day, 2017. (Photo by author)

and Ness 2008, xx), which is both body- and culture-specific (Sklar 2008), is determined by the speed and force of shoulder movements, and a dancer's gestural vitality, evident in the way she "shows off" (*gingar*).

The politics of mobility are often revealed through movement's constitutive parts: motive force, velocity, rhythm, route, experience, and friction (Cresswell 2010). In this EVP rehearsal, debates over force, speed, and vitality of gesture revealed how the politics of kinetic dynamics are embedded in broader hierarchies of knowledge. Several group members devoted significant attention to correcting the movements of a new dancer, Regina, who was moving her shoulders up and down with too much enthusiasm—a telltale sign of a novice, yet one that could threaten the reputation of the entire group if not corrected. They first described the quality of the movement's feeling to Regina, then tried to physically manipulate her right arm posture by pulling her fist back, prying her clenched fingers apart, and drawing the elbow away from the body. But nothing worked, and soon she was moved to the back row, a technique used to hide inexperience within the group ranks. Later, my friend Isa explained that for the dance to be considered *tufo*, "you can't move the shoulders with too much force. The up and down movement must be subtle." These must be pious, controlled movements, and when a group—or group member—betrays their ignorance of these kinetic dynamics at a *carrama*, other groups gossip about their poor performance and dismiss them as amateurs.

As Yolanda Covington-Ward (2016) shows in her work on gesture in Congo, micromovements of the body can have broader consequences for social and political life. Similarly, the politics of force, vitality, and speed of gestures in *tufo* are

connected to women's sociospatial movements. A dancer's ability to embody and correctly perform the kinetic dynamics that define the practice can determine their inclusion or exclusion from the wider network of *tufu* groups. When they fail, the results can be disastrous for the group. For example, one of the four groups that attended EVP's *carrama* in Pebane performed with sloppy choreography onstage during the opening ceremony. Their collective movements were not synchronized and one of their dancers moved from her waist. This revealed the group's ignorance, and the general consensus among dancers was that the group did not know how to dance *tufu*. Exasperated by their lack of discipline, the queen of another visiting group declared, "This isn't even *tufu*! This is something that they just invented now." While this reflects poorly on the hosting group for inviting such amateur dancers, the implications are far more severe for the offending group. Several of their members reported that they overheard people insulting their dancing, and their president considered leaving early with the group in protest. But it is the longer-term consequences of their breach of protocol that might have the most impact—it was later decided by EVP that they will not invite this group to future events.

When contrasted with the overwhelming success that the group from Nacala enjoyed after their performance at the same *carrama*, the disparity in group experience and reception underscores why EVP was so anxious about their upcoming performance in Nampula. EVP's song selection was strategic—they chose a seated dance taken from the Islamic repertoire that would permit them to show off their knowledge of the culturally encoded kinetic dynamics of movement that form the basis of evaluation at a *carrama*. Ideally, this would raise their profile and make a lasting impression on those in attendance, leading to future invitations. In this context, groups must draw on the genre's roots to ensure future success, because as Sabir, a *tufu* trainer, told me, "Without these events, a group will disband. They would have nothing, or no one to dance for."

*Example 2: Sound Politics as the Struggle Continues
(A Luta Continua)*

Group preparations for a political event highlight different aesthetic choices as dancers appropriate an alternative skill set. In July 2017, Mozambique's vice minister of fisheries came to Pebane for a meeting with provincial leaders, and EVP was one of four groups invited to perform. The two groups designated to close the meeting waited outside for four hours to be ushered into the meeting room to dance three songs for the distinguished guests, who spent most of the performance playing on their smartphones. During the performance, the *chefe do bairro*, a local neighborhood authority, presented several wrinkled 100 meticaís notes to a dancer in the front row as a tip.¹⁴ Afterward, I commented to an elder dancer that it was nice the group was presented with money after waiting for so long to dance. She shook her head and whispered that the *chefe do bairro* was only trying

to encourage the others to give, but to no avail. After our performance, the dancer gave him back his money.

Tufo performances are critical components of these political events because they mobilize audiences: the drums signal an event is taking place, calling community members across great distances. Moreover, dancers work hard to energize (*animar*) these political gatherings and official meetings, despite little to no material reimbursement. Their participation is often obligatory: with eleven groups in Pebane Vila, the district's administrative headquarters, competition between groups is intense, and declining an opportunity to perform for a prestigious visitor means an esteemed group might lose their place at the top of the list, putting future invitations at risk.

At rehearsal several days after performing for the vice minister of fisheries, the dancers were abuzz with excitement. Amina was beaming when she told the group that the minister liked their songs and wanted to bring the group to perform at the eleventh Frelimo Convention in Maputo, Mozambique's capital city, in September. EVP was invited to perform at the Frelimo party headquarters in Pebane two days later to showcase their potential as the right group to be selected for this honor. At this rehearsal, they were learning a new song to unveil at this audition. The lyrics had been written by a group member's husband who is literate in Portuguese, the required language at government events. Their poetic strategy was flattery, praising government officials to show off the group's political ambitions and performance abilities.

With pride, we salute Engineer Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, father of the Mozambican nation, son of the Mozambican people, master of national unity and peace, enemy of hunger, poverty, injustice, discrimination, and malice.

To speak about Nyusi is to speak of national unity and peace, of real change, of development and of the eradication of poverty.

Association Estrela Vermelha of Pebane, a *tufo* cultural group, and the community from this fishing capital of Mozambique, believes that they will have everything with Nyusi ...

The women sang each line slowly, trying to set the lyrics to a melody they frequently use. Equilibrium between the lyrics and melody are an important component of communication in *tufo*. While groups have more aesthetic control over the performance of political songs, in that they often compose new lyrics and incorporate choreographic innovations, thematically they are confined to nationalist sentiments. Moreover, setting political content sung in Portuguese to Islamic melodies originally used in religious celebrations where songs were sung in Arabic or Swahili, often results in aesthetic incongruence.

This was the problem the women of EVP were having today. While the first phrase of the lyrics worked well with the melody, they ran into problems when they reached the line "master of national unity and peace." The lyrics did not fill

up the entire melodic line. Normally when this happens, they repeat a phrase or important word, a strategy that allows them to fit the lyrics within the melodic structure without sacrificing content. Occasionally, they will even cut superfluous words, but this was a political praise song where every word mattered. Finally, with frustration building, Amina decided to try the lyrics with a different melody. The lyrical phrases fit more naturally within the contours of this melody. Pleased, the rest of the group agreed that this would be the song they sing at the Frelimo headquarters, and they continued with their rehearsal until the song was committed to memory.

While the group members felt they performed well at their audition, the Frelimo Convention came and went and their formal invitation never arrived. It was not the first time this had happened: EVP often captured the attention of potential patrons, who extended invitations to perform at events that never materialized. This underscores the contingency of motility and the limits of aesthetic agency. While aesthetics present possibilities for movement, the actual movement is contingent on larger social, economic, and political forces over which they have no control. For EVP, however, this is no deterrent. It was still an opportunity to make themselves known—signaling possibility for future movement, while adding another song to their repertoire for the next Frelimo event.

Example 3: Swahili Cover Songs and Creativity

Several weeks before I finished fieldwork, EVP asked me to record them with my camera dancing at several important sites around Pebane. They wanted to capture their talent on film for local circulation, with broader ambitions to sell these recordings and raise funds for group travel. But they were also cognizant that an American audience might one day watch the recordings, and ideally, they hoped for an invitation to someday perform in a foreign country. We devoted an entire afternoon to this recording session, and EVP dancers chose several iconic sites around Pebane where they wanted to be filmed: the beach, the airport, the port, and in front of the Petromoc petrol station—significantly, all places of coming and going. This was also a unique performance sequence for the group in that there were no thematic restrictions like there are with political or ritual events. They were therefore able to select songs that were meaningful to them as a group.

The repertoire that EVP selected was a combination of traditional *tufu* songs and original songs in Makhuwa-Moniga—the local language—imbued with locally meaningful messages. Notably missing were political songs and revolutionary hymns, yet in their absence, alternative historical alignments were made audible. After a year of learning as a group, I was familiar with the songs they performed during the recording session, with the exception of one. When I later asked Amina about it while we were reviewing the recordings with the group, she labeled it as a *baile*, or dance song. Another dancer added that, “It’s Swahili music called Sina Makosa. This is a song we dance to at *Veterano*,” referring to the

50+ dance club in Pebane where elders partner-dance to dance-band music from the 1960s–1980s. “Sina Makosa” is a hit song released in 1979 by the Kenya-based group Les Wanyika, popular in East Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. In their cover version, EVP adapted the song to work within the conventions of *tufu*—slowing down the tempo, replacing instrumental accompaniment with the interlocking rhythm of the four *tufu* drums, and singing the song as a call and response—revealing the flexibility of the genre to absorb outside influences and songs.

While a *carrama* demands a mastery over kinetic dynamics, and political events are thematically restrictive, other community events like weddings, circumcision ceremonies, or parties are far more entertainment-oriented. A group wants to get noticed, make an impression on the crowd, and cultivate a celebratory atmosphere. Performing the popular songs that circulate through local dance clubs is a strategy that *tufu* groups have adopted in recent decades to reach the widest possible audience and develop their fan base. Regional pop songs by Makhuwa artists like Dama Ija are a favorite, as is Swahili music, and increasingly, Brazilian hits.

However, in national culture discourse, policy makers express concern for protecting *tufu* as an example of Mozambique’s intangible heritage for the purposes of attracting international tourists, and pop songs are described as a corrupting element. During an interview in 2013, one cultural program officer based in Maputo described *tufu* as being “at risk” of losing its traditional characteristics because there were no civil or social organizations in place to protect it—ignoring the important work that *tufu* associations themselves do to preserve and innovate the genre. They complained that some *tufu* groups have started to integrate *samba* into their performances, citing an example of a Roberto Carlos song they had heard performed by a *tufu* group during a recent visit to the north. “Young people like this modern *tufu*,” they argued, “so there is an urgent need to safeguard the original *tufu* by implementing a standard practice of professionalism.” For the cultural officer, this was a problem to be solved through policy work. Innovations that challenge the idea of *tufu* as national folklore, moreover, were rebellious acts and threatened the stability of the national cultural imaginary.

Song choice is an act of political and historical alliance. By selecting and adapting a Swahili pop song rather than a *marrabenta* song,¹⁵ for example, EVP was acknowledging spheres of sonic and choreographic influences based on ethnic, religious, and regional identities that betray the unifying rhetoric of “national culture” developed after independence. Instead, many of the songs that EVP selected to perform during the recording session exemplified what Anne Pitcher terms, “memory-from-below” (2006, 89) because they conveyed locally meaningful historical cultural narratives that do not conform to ideas of Mozambicanness (*moçambicanidade*) disseminated from Maputo. Jesse Weaver Shipley writes that in the Ghanaian genre of *hiplife*, “Musical products accrue value through newness, but this newness is carefully groomed to appear to have links to the past” (2013, 269). In *tufu*, as well, performance innovation must still conform to the historical

conventions of the genre, but newness is often incorporated through these cover songs that have specific social value for dancers and audiences at the periphery of the nation-state.

Aesthetic creativity and programmatic innovation are skills that can be appropriated for a group's social advancement or geographic movement. Mussa, the secretary of EVP, told me one day on our walk to rehearsal that other groups in town complain that EVP is always invited to perform at events. Many claim this is politically motivated because EVP supports Frelimo, and both the Head of Culture and *chefe do posto* (district authority) grew up in the group and still have strong family ties. "But that's not the reason," Mussa explained. "Estrela is the only group that writes new material. They perform new songs. *That's* why they get all the invitations, because they advance *tufu*."

CONCLUSION

These examples, drawn from one association's *tufu* repertoire, reveal the ways in which *tufu* aesthetics, as a form of embodied knowledge, are appropriated in different contexts as possibilities for movement, or motility. When the intended audience are those in the dance community, dancers demonstrate skill through performing the histories of movement that define the genre. With politicians, in contrast, praise and political recognition are deployed, as song crafting skills might materialize into actual movements. Dancers articulate their knowledge of Mozambique's political past and present through language, lyrics, and melody, in order to present model patriotism as a strategy to secure longer-term political patronage that might fund their activities. Finally, a group may tap into regional histories of cultural circulation to show off their creativity. Their talent is highlighted through song diversity, reinforcing their reputation as a knowledgeable group that accurately captures the life experiences of people in the region.

What is also apparent through these processes of negotiation, debate, and appropriation is the ways in which dancers envision music and dance as connecting to other forms of mobility across form and scale. Choreography is connected to social advancement; melodic movement to travel. In rural, impoverished areas like Pebane where decrepit infrastructure limits physical movement, and gender norms often constrict women's social and economic mobility, the "aesthetic agency" of *tufu* represents possibilities for movement, regardless of whether or not actual movement takes place.

Histories of the Indian Ocean arena emphasize how ritual practices have transformed as social, political, and economic alliances have been formed, broken, and reconfigured. *Tufu*, as a case study, prompts us to think about these connections and movements across different scales and consider other forms of capital that circulate, such as song, gesture, and melody. Historical migrations, whether for religious, social, or economic reasons, have shaped the sonic and choreographic

landscape along the coast of East Africa. The religious celebrations that moved people in Saudi Arabia, and are still moving people in Zanzibar, have acquired new meanings in Mozambique.

Amid today's economic precarity and recurrent political instability, mobility as an adaptive technique for survival is critical. *Tufo* aesthetics offer strategies through which women pursue these critical forms of actual movement. One popular *tufo* song from Pebane district recalls that "our men earn their livelihood from fishing"—a line that is always met with an enthusiastic response from the audience. Everything that has sustained these communities, from past and present, has come from the Indian Ocean, whether religion, culture, or food needed to survive during the civil war. *Tufo* dancers do the same, using choreography, song, rhythm, and melody from the Indian Ocean to quite literally move them forward.

NOTES

1. *Carrama*, or *karama*, derives from the Swahili word *karamu* (feast/party). Feasts were a central part of *ngoma* competitions, religious rituals, and life-cycle events throughout the western Indian Ocean (Gearhart 1998, 110).

2. I use the real names of *tufo* associations and their elder group leaders to document the history and development of the genre in Pebane, but I have used pseudonyms for current group leaders, drummers, and dancers in my ethnographic descriptions.

3. Firstcomer status is historically and socially significant in northern Mozambique's coastal communities, and, along with matrilineal clanship (*nihimo*), has been an important criterion for determining authority (Bonate 2007).

4. The accommodation between individual and collective control within the dance—as well as shared aesthetic features such as sacred texts and pious movements, matching uniforms, competition and spiritual elation, and grounded, seated dancing that synchronizes moving bodies en masse—are noted in Gearhart's (2000) account of a *rama* group in Lamu, Kenya, and Lambek's description of *mawlid al-Barzanji* in Mayotte (Lambek 2006, 173). These similarities in sound, choreography, text, and dress, speak to what Prita Meier and Allyson Purpura describe as the "aesthetics of cosmopolitan mobility" (2018, 13) that are prevalent throughout the material culture and performing arts in the Indian Ocean arena.

5. For overviews of *mawlid* in East Africa, see Schimmel's *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975, 216–17) and Knappert's *Traditional Swahili Poetry* (1967, chap. 5). See Loimeir and Seesemann's edited volume, *The Global Worlds of the Swahili* (2006) for discussions of *mawlid* in Mayotte (Lambek 2006), Kenya (Kreese 2006; Seesemann 2006), and Zanzibar (Nuotio 2006).

6. *Ngoma* (*ikoma*, *nsoma* in Mozambique) is a form of competitive popular culture that was historically a mechanism for expressing clan disputes and neighborhood rivalries. There are different types of *ngomas*, though they have common features like team competition and rivalry, music, drumming, dance, theater, and costuming. See studies by Ranger (1975), Strobel (1979), Franken (1987), Geiger (1997), Gearhart (1998), Fair (2001), Askew (2002), Ntarangwi (2003), Meintjes (2017), and Gunderson and Barz's edited collection *Mashindano! Competitive Music Performance in East Africa* (2000).

7. The Arabic terms *Turuq* (pl.)/*tariqa* (sing.) refer to the organizations or brotherhoods devoted to mystical aspects of Islam.

8. Like in Tanzania and Comoros, there is a distinction made in Mozambique between the purely religious *mawlid* that is performed in mosques and on religious occasions by *tariqa* initiates and a

secular or semiseccular *mawlid* that is open to everyone during religious and life-cycle celebrations. The flexibility of the practice may also explain its survival in a religiously tense, colonial context, at a time when Islam in northern Mozambique was suppressed by the Catholic colonial authorities. See Bonate (2007, chap. 3).

9. Frelimo is the acronym for Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, or the Mozambican Liberation Front, which has been in power since 1975.

10. For example, the launch of the interdisciplinary social science journal *Mobilities* in 2006 marked the formalization of what has been called the “mobile turn” (Urry 2007) or “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006).

11. Labor migration is a prominent theme in scholarship on southern Africa because it has been a significant driver of societal change during the twentieth century. However, it has largely been studied as a masculine phenomenon, reflecting a broader historical treatment of women as immobile, while mobility, travel, and migration are naturalized as men’s domain (See De Bruijn, Dijk, and Foeken 2001; Barnes 2002).

12. The term *motility* has a much earlier history in musicology, as well, when in the early twentieth century it was adopted to describe and analyze the relationship between music and bodily motion. See, for example, Hornbostel’s comparative study of European and African music (1928, 49) and Adorno’s critique of Stravinsky (1980, 178).

13. While music and mobility has received considerable attention in studies of sound, migration, identity formation, and globalization (Granger et al. 2016), the relationship between music and immobility is still largely unexamined. Notable exceptions include Titus (2016) and Steingo (2015; 2016).

14. Tipping (*kutunza* in Swahili) is common practice at *ngoma* events in coastal East Africa. For more on tipping and its politics, see Askew (2002, 139–42); Gearhart (1998, 48–49); and Edmondson (2007, 2, 44–46, 92).

15. Marrabenta is a popular dance genre from Maputo with influences from South Africa, the United States (jazz and soul), and local rhythms such as Magika, Xingombela, and Zukuta (see Laranjeira 2010).

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An Untouchable Kīrtan

Sonic Liberation on the Andaman Islands

Carola Erika Lorea

Music is such a thing: it can rescue from death, or it can kill you.

—BHUBON CHANDRA BISWAS

That's how Bhubon Chandra Biswas started to tell a story the first time that I had finally managed to meet him. The jolly seventy-five-year-old uncle was regularly hopping from one all-night kirtan (*kīrtan*) to the next, and it had been a truly hard task to find him at home.¹ He moved to the Andamans in 1958, when he was sixteen. After migrating to India as refugees, his family, originally from East Bengal (what is now called Bangladesh) had lived on railway platforms for six months. Then they enlisted for the possibility of resettling on the islands. While earning a living as a fisherman for over thirty years, Bhubon Biswas cultivated a strong passion for music and singing and regularly played in local religious festivals. This story was passed down to him from his guru. It is a tale of the centrality of kirtan, but also an indication that there is strong and cohesive community assessment about how the music should sound, and what are the repercussions on the listeners' body and sanity, if these criteria are disrespected.

Songs and music were playing during one kirtan. At the time of giving the *cālāni* [final acceleration of rhythm and intensity] the drummer struck the drum out of beat (*betāl*). It is such a painful thing to hear that everybody was physically suffering from it. Then the leader of the musicians took a stick and beat him so hard that the guy accidentally died. Then the police came, . . . the leader of the group of musicians was found responsible for the drummer's death. He was then arrested and sentenced to death. . . .

Before the death penalty, the magistrate asked if he had a last wish. The musician said: "Magistrate Sir, I want to play music in one last kirtan. Please organize one

gathering, celebrate and enjoy all together, and I will just quietly sit in the back and play music for the main singers.”

The Magistrate fulfilled his last wish: he sent invitations, . . . invited some singers and musicians, and in the evening they sat for the singing session. The main singer was singing his song and then finally, at the time of giving the *cālāni*, the convict struck the drum off-beat (*betāl*). Everybody started feeling so sick for [hearing] that! The Magistrate exclaimed: “For God’s sake, why would you play like that, you are killing us!”

The musician explained: “Sir, this is exactly why I had to beat that drummer with a stick! I did not mean to kill him. It was a big disgrace that he accidentally died. But now you understand why I had to beat him?”

The Magistrate stood silent. He reflected for a while, and then he said: “You are graced!”

If we consider stories as embodying a community’s ethos and as ways to understand the self and the world, then what this story can tell is certainly that music is not a matter to be taken lightheartedly. Drumming in particular has been described in several societies as closely connected with the cult of the dead and communication with the spirits, while in South Asia, where several low-caste communities ritually perform as drummers for funerary rites, it is also widely associated with notions of ritual pollution and untouchability. Kirtan music can transport the listeners from one realm to the other, and vice versa, navigating multiple liminal zones.

Among Bengali low-caste practitioners on the Andaman Islands, kirtan can be quite literally a matter of life and death. During the ecstatic sacred dance at Matua kirtan sessions (*mātām*), it is common for the most dedicated dancers to fall unconscious, lie on the ground, and roll on the dusty floor completely absorbed and overwhelmed by the sound of the *ḍaṅkā* drums and the repetition of the Hari mantra, *haribal*.² As my interlocutors have witnessed, at times the entranced devotees do not come back from that condition and never stand up again, a cause of death that is known as *bhāb’samādhi*, equated with the deepest state of meditation. Apart from these rare lethal occasions, the sacred dance of Matua kirtan is more commonly described as a healing and salvific practice. Playing the *ḍaṅkā* is itself supposed to regulate inhalation and exhalation, accomplishing the same results as the yogic techniques of breath control (referred to as *śvās praśvāser kāj* in the vernacular, or *prāṇāyāma* in classic yoga). Women devotees told me that a number of madmen and drunkards regained sanity after practicing the *ḍaṅkā* drum. Some reported that a paralyzed person got healed during one such festival, ending up jumping and dancing at the sound of the *mātām*. These are just a few among the innumerable stories of the miraculous healing potency of kirtan. When somebody falls seriously ill or is in critical conditions, it is common practice in the Bengali villages of the Andaman Islands to organize a kirtan.³ At the same time, elderly people wish to pass to a better life while attending kirtan. Dying in such circumstances would be considered a great fortune, since kirtan soundwaves can literally wash the sins away.

Enveloping the village with the resonance of its salvific sound, congregational singing is seen as a valid instrument to restore normality and order, and to renew

social relationships of trust and reciprocity after disruptions, such as natural adversities, illnesses, a long separation, or even a political Partition and the subsequent displacement across the Bay of Bengal. With an analysis of Matua kirtan on the Andaman Islands, this chapter shows how sounds can contribute to research on island societies, and how islands, in turn, can contribute to the study of the soundscapes of religion, caste, and displacement.

ISLANDNESS AND MATUA KIRTAN

What is the importance of islandness to understanding sonic practices? Edward Alpers brought attention to the “island factor,” proposing to integrate the role and the history of islands in our otherwise continental-centric understanding of the Indian Ocean. Recent literature on small islands has proposed to turn “islandness” into an explicit empirical and methodological issue (Alpers and Schnepers 2018, xix). Scholars interested in songs and sound cultures have often based their research on islands (e.g., Barney, Mackinlay, and Bartleet 2009), but without necessarily taking “islandness” forward as an analytical category.⁴ Anthropologists of the old days have often worked on islands as epitomes of exotic societies removed from outer influences.⁵ More recently, scholars interested in processes of creolization and hybridity have explored the sonic productions of islands as the sites of fusion, contamination, and the *mélange* of genres and identities.⁶ Often a product of displacement, slavery, indentured labor, or diaspora, island musics have figured as eloquent examples of resiliency and cultural change, be it the *jahaji* music of the Caribbean (Sharma 2007), the Indian devotional songs performed in Fiji (Manuel 2009), the sounds of Moharram celebrations on Trinidad (Korom 2003), the sonic dimension of Islam on Mauritius (Eisenlohr 2018a), or the “disconnected connections” of Puerto Rican *jíbaro* music on Hawai‘i (Solis 2011). The music and dance complex has come to represent, for several of these people, a “performance of homeland” (Lorea 2017), or a “surrogate ancestor” (Solis 2011). This essay contributes to this scholarship by discussing the relations between islandness and sound cultures as a fertile terrain of possibilities, nurtured by a constant tension between retaining and adapting, between separating and connecting multiple traditions, shores, and subjectivities.

The social imaginaries of islands as finite, virgin places, sparsely populated and easily controllable (Alpers and Schnepers 2018, 124), has made islands the ideal locale and the social laboratory “in which to materialize the colonial will” (McCusker and Soares 2011, xi) as well as postcolonial plans of exploitation (see Sen 2017), colonization, militarization, social engineering, and human “garbage dumping” policies (Zehmisch 2012, 9). This reminds us that, despite recent romanticizations of island hubs in the Indian Ocean as places of mobility and cosmopolitanism, and as meeting points for transnational flows of people, items, and ideas, islands also remain critical zones of confinement, restriction of movement, and forced isolation (for example, as places of detention, indentured labor, quarantine, waste disposal, and so on).

The Andaman Islands reflect precisely this double profile: they are places of connections and disconnections. The Bengali diaspora on the Andamans has articulated itself through oral narratives, rituals, and cultural practices inscribed into the interstices of this polarity. Such interstices are the very attribute of what I mean by islandness: the ambiguity between insularity, intended as produced isolation, and liminality, resulting from the conflation of both or many shores of the surrounding ocean. In this sense, the islandness of the Andamans is at the same time the terrain of cultural encounter at the confluence of multiple seascapes and soundscapes, and also the feeling of insularity that is culturally and politically produced rather than “naturally,” geographically, or physically given. The configuration of Bengali religious and cultural expressions on the islands has taken the shape—and the sound—of the polarity between resilience and innovation, between tenacious loyalty to traditional forms, perceived to come “from back home” and from “back then,” and continuous adaptation to new ecologies and social surroundings. This is the main point that my essay illustrates through a discussion of the meaning of kirtan sessions among the Matua community of Bengali devotees on the Andaman Islands.

In South Asia, kirtan is a large umbrella name for devotional music that normally involves singing the name and the praises of god within participatory and congregational sessions (Beck 2018). In Bengal, kirtan is associated with the sixteenth-century Vaishnava devotionalism diffused by the saints Caitanya and Nityananda (Chakravarti 1985; Sanyal 2012; Graves 2017a, 2017b), who popularized it and turned it into a weapon of mass religious movement (Bandyopadhyay 2004, 80). The Matua movement⁷ continued and renewed this tradition, creating a distinctive ramification of kirtan, with new song texts, music instruments, and performance style (Bairagya 1999, 307). The Matua religion emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century in the Faridpur district of East Bengal. Its founding prophets, Harichand Thakur (1812–1878) and his son Guruchand Thakur (1847–1937), rebelled against Hindu casteist norms and created a separate religious identity to mobilize the Namashudra caste (*namaḥśūdra*), whose members were stigmatized as polluting and “untouchable.”⁸ At present, the community counts numerous followers (fifty million according to the leaders of the organization Matua Mahasangha). Imbued with ecstatic devotionalism, the Matua community originated as a caste-based movement of the Namashudra people, combining a theology of egalitarian devotional love (*prem bhakti*) drawn from popular Bengali Vaishnavism, with the emphasis on remunerative work, disciplined conjugality, and social upliftment (see Bandyopadhyay 1997; Lorea 2020). The earlier territorial unity of Matua leaders and devotees has been severely disrupted by the Partition of India (1947). Matua followers are now found both in southern Bangladesh and, to a greater extent, in several Indian states, islands, and borderland areas.

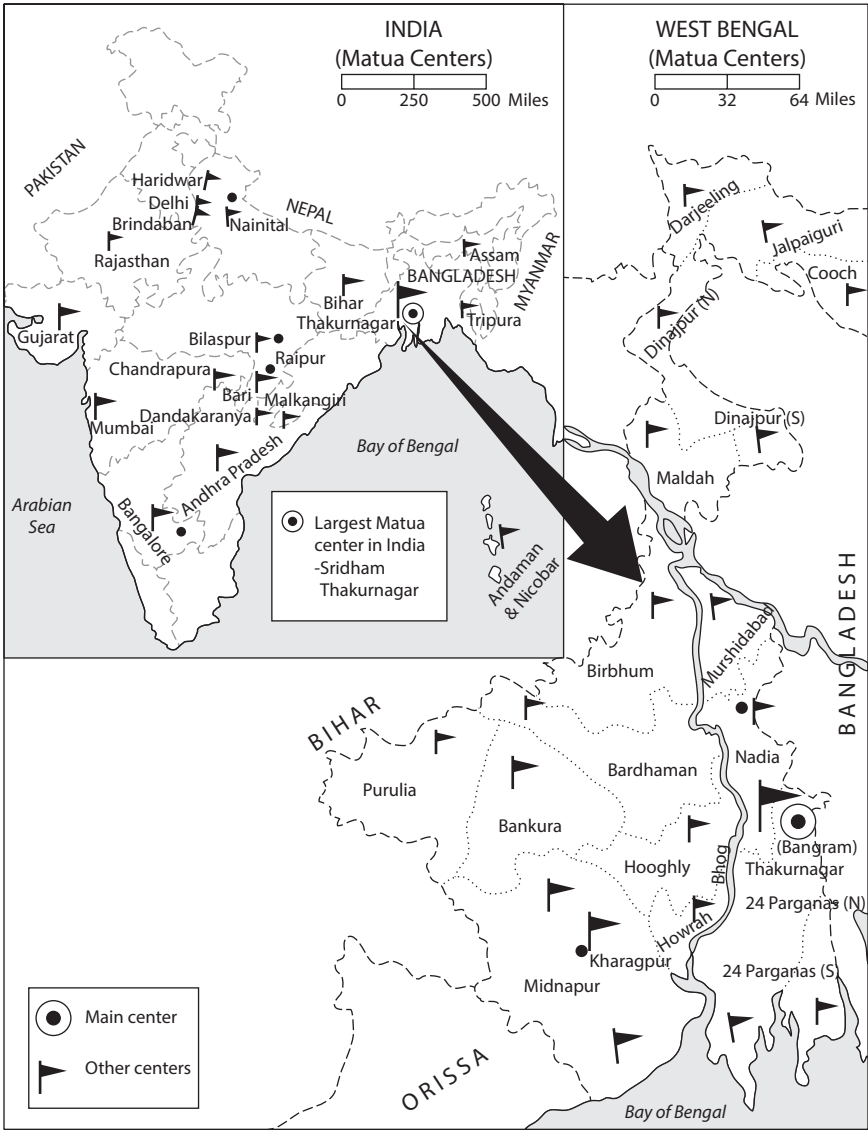
Just like island societies porously conflate both or many shores of the surrounding ocean, religious sounds envelop participating bodies and blur their individual confines. Sharing a sounded experience of devotion entails the weakening of boundaries between bodies, as sound envelops and often enters, reverberates in,

and is sensed by the entire body and the collective body of participants (Eisenlohr 2018a, 39). In Matua congregations, the most important instrument, considered to be a Matua cultural icon and the revolutionary legacy of the founding gurus, is the big bass drum named *ḍankā*, appreciated for its loud sound and for the power of its intense vibrations, which enter the body, make the earth tremble, cause heart patients to get healed and the local network towers to stop working.⁹ These local understandings of the power of sacred sound remind us that vibrations are felt on and under the skin, closely relating the sensory experiences of sound and touch, two overlapping zones of perception (Herbig 2018; Yau 2018) that have a prominent and synesthetic place in Matua kirtan performance.

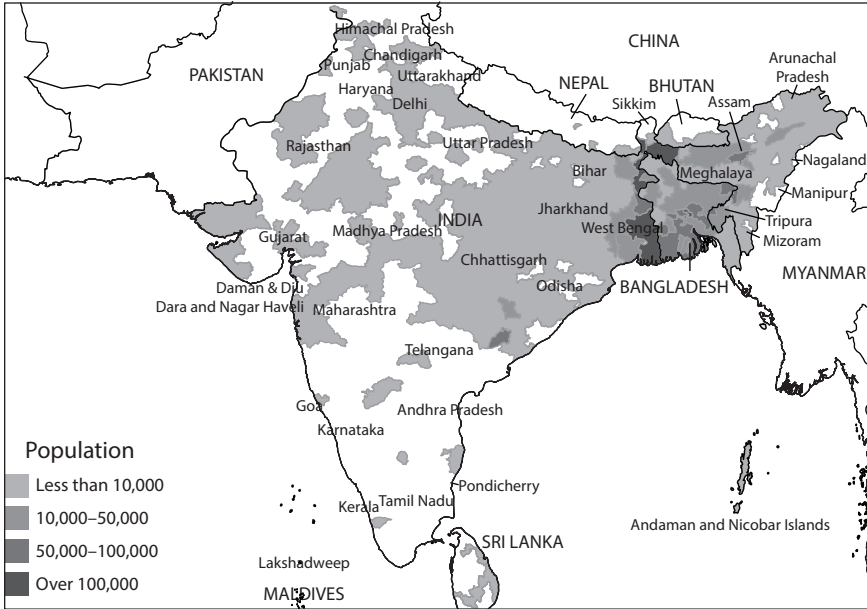
A distinctive trait of the Matua style of kirtan is that it always starts and ends with a drumming session led by *ḍankā*, *kām̃ṣi* (gong), *siṅgā* (buffalo horn), and the incessant repetition of the sacred name (*haribal*), accompanied by a vigorous and ecstatic dance (*mātām*). Matua kirtan is also distinctive for collective weeping and what I term a ritual display of “touchability,” the sensorial experience of mutual touch as displayed on the kirtan arena. Participants hug each other in particular moments of the congregational singing session. They touch each other’s feet. They shed tears together. The devotees revere one another by exchanging garlands of flowers, and the hosting party welcomes the other participants by marking their foreheads with a flower dipped in fragrant sandalwood paste. Reciprocating embrace and shedding tears together have long been interpreted as an affirmation of a bond of social solidarity between those taking part in it (the first comprehensive discussion on these themes being based, of all places, on the Andamans islanders; Radcliff-Brown 1964, 245). Sounded and tuneful weeping like the one enacted in the kirtan mode of communication portrays social relations of obligation and reciprocity, which cannot be underestimated in a context of insularity and displacement.

I suggest that kirtan in this archipelagic context is an act of community building for displaced people who wish to assert their territorial presence, affirm their religious identity, and heal a profound sense of isolation through a shared experience of sound. I build on a growing corpus of literature on music and identity-making in diasporic contexts (e.g., Purewal and Lallie 2013; Mooney 2008; Poole 2004; Ramnarine 2007; Tewari 2011; Townsend 2014), on congregational singing (e.g., Nekola and Wagner 2017; Ingalls Sherinian, and Reigersberg 2018), and on the relationship between religious soundscapes and place-making (e.g., Tamimi Arab 2017; Weiner 2013) to articulate the theoretical liaison between sound, people, places, and identities. These conceptual frameworks are frequently based on urban, mainland-centric, and North Atlantic contexts. This contribution attempts to bring islandness and local voices of archipelagic singers-practitioners to the forefront, emphasizing a local discourse on congregational singing and dancing in a nonurban, non-Western, and oceanic context, and it does so by building on the narratives collected from displaced Bengali performers, who are often simultaneously spiritual gurus for their community.

This essay employs ethnographic sources like oral narratives, life stories, and oral exegeses provided by Bengali devotees, gurus, musicians, and listeners who



MAP 4.1. Map showing the main Matua centers in India according to the information provided by Matua leaders of institutionalized branches. Reproduced with permission from Birat Bairagya (1999).



MAP 4.2. Approximate distribution of Namashudra communities according to the data of the Joshua Project, a Christian organization that organizes the data of missionary groups. Source: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/print/17756/IN.

kindly shared their time and knowledge during my fieldwork on the Andaman Islands between 2017 and 2019. Having conducted fieldwork with the Matua community also in West Bengal and southern Bangladesh, my statements in regard to Matua practices on the Andaman Islands are often informed by comparative views.

This multisited fieldwork has allowed me to look at the “island factor” in a larger sense. In my broader research I argue that the Matua community has experienced islandness and a sense of displacement on the mainland as much as in the Andamans. Resettled in sparsely populated areas unfit for cultivation, such as Dandakaranya, and in remote refugee colonies and camps on the borderlands of West Bengal, Namashudra settlers have experienced marginalization and forced isolation not only in archipelagic and littoral contexts but also in landlocked sites of resettlement around the Indian Ocean (Kudaisya 1996; Mandal 2011; Sen 2018; see map 4.1 and map 4.2).¹⁰ In this sense, islandness—and the affective sounds it produces—is only partially related to the natural geography of a circumscribed place surrounded by the sea, and it has more to do with the politics of unequal distribution of power operating along discriminatory lines of caste, gender, religious identities, and geographies of displacement.

A PAIR OF DRUMS AND CYMBALS

All the residents are peasants. 80% of them cannot write their names, they sign with their thumb. But they are all the owners of ten acres of land. . . . There is Durga Puja, there are singing sessions of Kirtan with drums (*khol*) and cymbals (*kartāl*), there are rural folk songs. . . . What else could one need? (Cakrabarti 2012, 86)

These words from the diary of a government officer appointed as “Colonisation Assistant” in charge of supervising the rehabilitation of some thousands of refugee families from East Pakistan on the Andaman Islands, struck me for the centrality accorded to congregational singing in the local life of the early Bengali settlers. Following the Independence and Partition of India in 1947, a massive flow of refugees from East Bengal (by that time, East Pakistan) entered the new and hastily drawn Indian borders. Displacement continued in steady waves and intermittent peaks for several decades, followed by another major stream during and after the 1971 Bangladesh war of liberation. Particularly from 1950 onward, low-caste refugees from rural East Bengal came to occupy pavements and railway platforms and sought shelter in government camps (Mallick 1999, 106; Sen 2014, 45–72), often enduring abominable conditions (Mandal 2011, 211). Most of them were sent, through government rehabilitation schemes, to far regions and sparsely populated areas. One such plan, disturbingly named the “Colonisation Scheme,” directed the relocation of several thousands of refugee families—officially 3,695, probably about 18,000 people (Biswas 2009, 21)—on the Andaman Islands, an archipelago in the Bay of Bengal located at 1,300 kilometers from the Indian mainland.¹¹ As the officer’s diary implies, displaced people from East Bengal were selected from the refugee camps almost exclusively among low-caste peasants with very little or no formal education (Sen 2018, 133). The need to promptly put jungle-covered areas of the Andaman Islands under cultivation after independence to exploit the profitable timber resources and enhance the supply of food for the growing local demand motivated the selection: almost exclusively Namashudra and other low-caste refugees. Families with young, strong, able-bodied working males were prioritized. Candidates’ calluses, hands, and arms were examined to assess their familiarity with manual work. Namashudra people were preferable, given the higher classes’ stereotype that sees them as hard-working, strong, resilient, capable of adapting to new environments, and used to struggle against natural hindrances, coupled with a supposed propensity to be requiring less and very united.¹²

Embarking from Kolkata on the SS *Maharaja* vessel for a four-day-long journey across the Bay of Bengal, the refugee families crossed the black waters (*kālāpāni*) that used to be traversed by the prisoners sent to the penal settlement of Port Blair under the British regime, never to return. Before the journey, the first batches of refugees were given by the government of West Bengal an assortment of useful items and utensils to travel with: agricultural tools, home building tools, manure, seeds of familiar vegetables, some clothes, some pairs of Bata shoes to protect their

feet from thorns, leeches, and earth crabs, and also, some drums (*khol*) and cymbals (*kartāl*) to play kirtan and practice folk songs (*lok-saṅgīt*) in order to “increase mental strength and keep away the sense of desolation” (Raychaudhury 2004, 101, 143). It was clearly understood that kirtan has a special place in the everyday life of low-caste people from rural East Bengal.

Since their first arrival in March 1949, the Bengali settlers on the Andaman Islands had to endure physical hardship and desolating isolation. In the place where I have conducted most of my fieldwork, on North Andaman, the ship used to come once per month, leaving the feeling, for the remaining twenty-nine days, of being “outside of the world map” (Cattopadhyay 2006, 148). Apart from a few families from Kerala, there were only East Bengali people around the Diglipur settlement of North Andaman, which soon came to be known as “Mini-Bengal” (Cakrabarti 2012, 40). Villages were set up at a great distance from one another, and even mundane needs such as purchasing salt, visiting a doctor, or reaching a primary school entailed a day-long trek in knee-deep mud. To make sure that the purpose for which they had been relocated to the islands was exploited fully, the administrators suggested a policy preventing the refugees from traveling to the mainland.¹³ Hostages in their new home, they upgraded from landless peasants to landed farmers but lacked the manpower to take care of extensive and scattered plots of land. The families resettled through governmental schemes were soon reached by relatives, by disciples of the same gurus, by acquaintances from the same caste, neighborhood or village; in sum, by numerous migrants from East Bengal, connected by diverse networks and inspired by various motivations. Independent migrants moved to the islands outside of governmental schemes, at times buying property, other times encroaching on forest land or occupying revenue land, according to their means and connections.¹⁴ As a result, the Bengali-speaking population on the Andaman Islands represents at present the biggest community of residents.¹⁵ This numerical advantage did not translate into a significant political agency or representation. Unlike other states of India, with their own elected governments, chief ministers, and members of parliament, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands constitute a Union Territory, governed directly by the central government.

The tangible musical instruments that the refugees carried along on their journeys, together with their intangible repertoires of songs, tunes, rhythms, religious knowledge, and oral traditions from East Bengal, were promptly deployed in the new home space of diasporic resettlement. Other instruments were newly made, substituting traditional kinds of woods with the new materials found in the local forests. The precious *pedauk* tree (*Pterocarpus dalbergioides*) was found to be very appropriate to carve out of its gigantic trunk the mandatory *ḍaṅkā* drum, a cultural symbol of the Matua community. The goat skin, typically used for the drums, was replaced by the skin of the ubiquitous deer whose proliferation was regularly threatening the crops. When transportation improved to connect the remote

archipelago to the mainland, new instruments were shipped, harmoniums were ordered, booklets of songs were purchased, and a transregional and transnational network of items, singers, and preachers started to circulate between the shores of the eastern Indian Ocean. The Radio Centre, which opened in 1962 in the capital city of Port Blair, started to hire Matua singers to perform folk songs (*lok-saṅgīt*). Whether they sung the religious songs of the gurus from their homeland or the more popular repertoire of folk songs that was commodified in mainland Bengal at the time, remains uncertain, as most of the tapes in the Radio Centre's archives dating prior to the 1990s were damaged or lost during the 2004 tsunami. However, what we can surely assess through literary, oral, and ethnographic sources is that congregational singing sessions were and remained paramount events of social life, religious learning, emotional expression, and somatic healing.

The biggest festivals on the Andaman Islands up to now are represented by the annual congregations of the Matua devotees in Tugapur, Havelock, and Pahargaon, where thousands of people assemble to play and listen to kirtan, and to dance energetically at the rhythm of countless *ḍaṅkā* drums (Andaman Sheekha 2017). Madhumita Mazumdar studied the religious experience of the Matua followers of the Andaman Islands. One respondent “categorically stated that had it not been for the weekly kirtans in the small Matua temple . . . life would have been truly hard to sustain” (Mazumdar 2016, 188). The shared experience of devotion embodied through participation in congregational singing and dancing created togetherness, belonging, and networks of emotional support. These helped the Matua devotees face the experience of loss, displacement, traumatic memories, tremendous isolation, and physical exhaustion, which figure prominently in the memories of the first decades after resettlement. Music was then much more than a relief from the boredom of dark village nights: as eloquently related in the opening narrative, it was rather a matter of life or death.

HUGS, TEARS, AND DISPLAYS OF TOUCHABILITY

What is it that kirtan *does* to those who listen? What is it that kirtan does to those who sing it (the *kīrtanīyās*)? What are the sonic, haptic, and synesthetic interactions between singers and listeners? Mr. Boral, a retired forest guard and passionate Matua singer living in the outskirts of Port Blair, replied without a hint of hesitation:

First of all the *bhāb* needs to be there. A greater amount of *bhāb*. In the course of singing s/he [the *kīrtanīyā*] will get entranced by *bhāb*. . . . Getting into *bhāb* then the listeners get tears in their eyes. Listening to those words, they will start crying.

In this Kali Yuga, people's minds are restless, they cannot stay focused. For this reason our Harichand Thakur has created the instrument called *ḍaṅkā*. It has a terrifically loud sound. . . . As far as the sound reaches, there will be no danger. . . . Excluding exterior thoughts and worries and just repeating *haribal*, ultimately a person is

not able to hear any [exterior] sound any longer, but only the sound of *haribal*. If someone calls her, s/he won't hear, s/he won't notice. Moreover, s/he gets to exercise, inhale-exhale, breathe in–breathe out. We don't call Harichand Thakur in the right manner nowadays. If we were calling him in the right way, we would not grow a big stomach. When your body stays healthy then your heart-mind also stays healthy. And in our path, without playing the *ḍānkā* drum, there is no possible kirtan.

To be a good kirtan singer has less to do with musical formation and competencies and more to do with emotional characteristics as well as moral ones. Of course, one should know the melodies and the rhythmic patterns, the conventions of the genre, and the emic taxonomies of songs. One should master the sophisticated norms that establish which songs are suitable for which time of the day, and the complex subtleties that regulate the sequence of which song should be performed next and why. But all this, my respondents would unanimously assert, is secondary. What really matters is *bhāb*, an emotional characteristic that is referred to as measurable and palpable. The *bhāb*-filled voice of the *kīrtanīyā*, conducted through the sound waves of congregational singing, provokes a high tide of *bhāb* (*bhābodāy*) in the listeners' hearts. This surging of *bhāb*, moving like a swollen river, will cause an overflow that translates into the outpouring of tears from the devotees' eyes. Like the qualities of the voice of a good *na't khwan* discussed by Patrick Eisenlohr (2018b), a *kīrtanīyā*'s singing is appreciated when it stirs this ecstatic feeling, moving the participants to tears.

Mr. Boral provided an understanding of the role of sacred sound in Matua congregations that masterfully condensed the various exegeses that I encountered throughout my fieldwork in several “islands,” terrestrial as well as maritime, inhabited by displaced Matuas. This role is apparently paradoxical. Sound works as a shield (“It has a terrifically loud sound. . . . As far as the sound reaches, there will be no danger”): it builds a barrier to block everything exterior in order for the devotee to focus intimately and solely on their inner life. At the same time sound spreads and envelops the space, diffusing and claiming spiritual sovereignty over a place. Shared and felt collectively, the vibrations create community, as they make individual barriers fade away. The islands inhabited by Matua devotees in postcolonial South Asia are surrounded by a separating ocean, while allowing flows of intercultural and intersubjective connectivity to take place. In a similar way, sacred sounds enclose the devotee, protecting them from external influences while embracing space and reducing differences between individual members of the devotional collectivity.

Before the start of any kirtan session of the Matua community, during congregational singing, as well as after the end of each *mātām*, the devotees, regardless of their age, gender, or the role they played during the ritual gathering, hug each other for three consecutive times, or bend toward each other's feet, gently touching them, and reverentially bow while on their knees, leaning with their foreheads toward the ground. Hugging dissipates the social hierarchies at play outside of the kirtan



FIGURE 4.1. Frame from a video of *mātām* taken by the author during a Matua gathering in Wandoor, South Andaman, organized by late Matua guru Manik Gosain (2018). Devotees dance, drum, pray, and clap hands in the dimly lit temple full of sweet incense smoke.

arena. As often reiterated by participants, during kirtan everybody is equal, men and women, elders and children, wealthy and poor. Mutually hugging and taking blessings by touching each other's feet reinforces the fundamental belief in equality among humans that is central to the anti-casteist Matua ethos. More broadly, it reinforces the bonding of mutual obligation and care, which underlies the constitution of the sense of community and solidarity. Infringing bodily barriers through affective touch, by sharing a sounded experience of devotion through intense vibrations partaken by every individual body, and by overflowing with tears in the collective, riverine ecstasy of *bhāb*, kirtan participation transforms individual members into one collective body of devotion (Csordas 1997, 109).

Tears and hugs as gestures symbolizing reciprocity and social bonds constitute an aesthetic code of the kirtan genre. As part of its unwritten conventions, a kirtan gathering is interpreted as particularly successful if more people were moved to tears and hugging. If lots of people cried, you know it's been a good party. At the same time, if some of the listeners draw aside and fail to merge among the devotees by hugging and tearing, this behavior is interpreted as elitist and snobby. It was often commented on with contempt when audience members from a higher class, the urban educated, or the nouveau riche among the villagers, whose social status improved thanks to the remunerative cash crop of the betel nut, did not cry and did not wish to mix with the crowd of hugging and bowing devotees. Likewise, Namashudra refugees resettled in borderland areas of West Bengal felt compelled to organize a separate kirtan festival, different from the one collectively

organized by the dominant caste (*māhiṣya*), because people did not like hugging and weeping: once they even “obstructed our senior member to hug,” enough of an outrage to start their own kirtan event, as Tetsuya Nakatani’s research revealed (2011, 79). This clearly shows that hugs and tears during congregational singing tighten communal bonds also by excluding and othering those who fail to take them as fundamental conventions of the genre, breaking the formalities of proper behavior during kirtan.

CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS:
ISLANDS OF SOUND BETWEEN CONSERVATISM
AND HYBRIDITY

Seventy years have now passed since the first ship loaded with agriculturist refugee families reached South Andaman. When the issuing of passports and visas became necessary in order to visit the ancestral villages in the “imaginary homeland” (Rushdie 1992) of Bangladesh, now a predominantly Muslim country, East Bengal became more imaginary and less of a homeland: a place of memory and affect rather than a place of pilgrimage, contact, or return. Yet those who can afford it would visit at least once the annual Matua festival in Orakandi (Bangladesh), the ancestral home of the founding prophets. More commonly, devotees would regularly visit the annual Matua fair in Thakurnagar, West Bengal, where descendants of the founding gurus have resettled. All the singers whose narratives have been included in this paper have been once or multiple times to these and other sacred places that represent diasporic “hearts” (Falzon 2003) of the Matua community on the mainland. At the same time, Matua preachers and singers from the mainland regularly visit the Andaman Islands to initiate new disciples and maintain the connection with the old ones. Huge crowds gather to pay homage to renowned gurus from the mainland (Andaman Sheekha 2012), themselves displaced gurus, resettled in other new homes far away from southern Bangladesh.

Despite and together with the feeling of isolation, on some parts of the Andaman Islands the Bengali community lived side by side with the Local Born (descendants of the convicts of the penal settlement of the British era), and with communities of displaced Sri Lankan Tamils, Burmese, Karen, South Indian migrants, contracted laborers from North Indian tribes (locally known as Ranchi; see Zehmisch 2017), aboriginal groups (especially the Onge, on Little Andaman, and the Jarawas in South and Middle Andaman), nurturing with each of these a different amount of otherness, interaction, and competition for resources. From the Burmese, many Bengali settlers learned the art of hunting with dogs (Sen 2018, 150); from the Onge they borrowed construction techniques (Som 1994); from the Ranchis they learned to make alcohol with herbs collected from the forest (*janqli mad*); from the South Indian Tamil community Bengali women adopted jewelry fashion, hairstyle, and food such as *idiyappam* and *dosa*. In this respect, the singers

and the musicians that I have interacted with respond to the imagination of islanders' lives as "messy, cosmopolitan, multifaceted, and mobile" (Alpers and Schnepel 2018, xviii).

Islands have been romanticized as quintessential hubs of encounter and hybridity. These encounters and intercultural exchanges, though, have seldom operated in a power vacuum and in apolitical manners. Bengali lives on the Andaman Islands have been marked, and still are marked, by unequal access to the privilege of being "connected." Mobile networks are almost nonexistent in the places where I have conducted fieldwork. One phone call out of ten would go through, on a lucky day.¹⁶ Roads are in atrocious conditions, and instead of taking a back-breaking twelve-hour bus ride to the capital city of Port Blair that goes through two ferries and a convoy crossing the protected (so to speak) tribal forest, one would rather embark on the eighteen-hour ship journey that leaves twice per week—but no fortune teller can ever say when the ship will actually depart.¹⁷ It comes as no surprise that Matua participants on the Andaman Islands refer to themselves as "frogs in a well." A profound sense of isolation and disconnection separates them from the cultural hubs of the Matua community, and from their gurus—most of them residing in southern Bangladesh, in West Bengal, or in Uttarakhand.

Distance and disconnection is also translated with the anxiety of losing consistency in ritual practice, compared to the mainland Matua community. As a product of familiarization and adaptation to new ecologies, Matua performances on the Andaman Islands use locally produced instruments that slightly differ in material and therefore sound qualities from those in use on the mainland. The earthen *khol* has been widely substituted by the wooden *ḍhol*, also because the former is associated with the music sessions of the competing *Kṛṣṇa panthis*, or orthodox Vaishnavas. The abundance of saltwater fish, introduced as part of the daily diet, justified its glorious entry in the field of religious offerings on the gods' altar (*bhog*)—this is seen as an aberration in the temples of mainland Bengal and by the other Hindu communities on the islands. In several Matua congregations on the islands a different *guru bandanā* (invocation, the first song that opens a kirtan session) is used. These are just a few examples of cultural dynamism and ritual change that islanders-devotees justify with creative narratives, showing that islandness coproduces meanings and shapes sensory engagements with, and experiences of, sacred sounds.

However, at least in their perspective, the Bengali community has responded to displacement with tenacious attachment to the traditions perceived as old, authentic, belonging to a common past. Like many subaltern diasporic identities, Bengali devotees on the Andaman Islands have felt the urge to maintain musical and performative traditions as an indispensable tool of rootedness, a practice of identity (Mooney 2008; Poole 2004). This quality of traditional music in contexts of displacement is intensified by the islandness of the Matua practitioners. Isolation produced a desire to vigorously retain traditions associated with the temporality

of a past unity in undivided Bengal and the spatiality of the lost sacred homeland that gave birth to the founding gurus. Compared to the development of the kirtan genre in other sites of the Matua community on the mainland, practitioners on the Andamans resolutely preserve a style that is interpreted as ancient (*paurāṇik*). Whereas in many other areas of the Matua diaspora on the mainland the repertoire of kirtan songs has been constantly expanded by new compositions (see Bairagya 1999), on the Andaman Islands, apart from very few exceptions, the songs performed are mostly those composed by the earliest saint-composers, Tarak Gosain and Aswini Gosain.¹⁸ This recalcitrant attitude to change has aroused a certain criticism on the part of the higher-caste, urban-educated Bengalis. According to a retired music teacher, himself a displaced person of East Bengali origin, resettled in North Andaman, the Matua practitioners have preserved a “very ancient style” that “does not work for the modern age,” but despite his attempts to promote modernized and shortened versions of the devotional songs, he failed to change the musicians’ mind, because they are “very rigid in their conservative opinion” as a result of their “lack of education.”¹⁹

The portrait of Matua practitioners and their music as unsophisticated, rustic, conservative, superstitious, and narrow-minded reflects a matter of class and caste status rather than musical taste (Chandola 2012), and it is often presented by wealthier Bengalis residing in the capital city of Port Blair, revealing how ocean sound cultures can be contested territories of social tensions and hierarchies (see Williams, this volume). Oscillating between faithful preservation of the old songs and the dynamic adaptation to new material and acoustic ecologies, the performance of kirtan on the Andaman Islands is a powerful stage on which islandness shapes sensibilities and identities. As with many diasporic identities (see Korom 2000), they emerge as fluid, multiple, and situational, reminding us, from the middle of the Bay of Bengal, of the unsettling and liquid nature of tradition.

CONCLUSIONS

Introducing islandness in the research on music and soundscapes can offer a new angle to understanding the sensorial and aesthetic experience of religious sound in a context of isolation, displacement, and also multiculturalism and hybridity. This essay has explored how the diasporic sound culture of Matua devotees and their migrated repertoires of songs and sacred dance operate in a place experienced as insular, distant, remote, and also vernacularly cosmopolitan (Werbner 2011). I showed how islandness is characterized by ambiguity between connection and disconnection, and by an underlying tension between fidelity and innovation. Furthermore, Matua kirtan events are themselves islands of sound. Like a detached land surrounded by water, the devotee’s body is shielded by sacred sound, which filters external distractions and allows them to focus on spiritual accomplishments.

At the same time, just like islands are the laboratory of cultural mingling and social fusion from various shores of the surrounding ocean, sound pervades the space and is shared by participants, weakening interpersonal barriers, suspending hierarchies, and wrapping the community into a single body of devotion.

During “Colonization Schemes” based on discriminatory caste lines and aimed to exploit untouchable refugees’ labor for the higher goal of socioeconomic development, kirtan’s displays of touchability valorized and dignified low-caste practitioners as mutual recipients of devotion and care. Traveling back and forth between the shores of the eastern Indian Ocean, Matua songs, which were already perceived as “songs of self-assertion” with a “levelling impact” back in East Bengal (Bandyopadhyay 1997, 39–41), acquired revived significance, transplanted their meaning, and renewed their promise of entertainment, ecstatic bliss, and a sonic theology of liberation. Singing and dancing in the Kali Yuga is seen as the most simple, direct (Sanyal 2012, 445), and time-effective method (*sādhana*) to achieve liberation. As my participants would highlight, it is the path of working men, and women, who cannot sit in meditation for twelve years like the old sages of Hindu mythology, practicing austerities and restraining from productive work and reproductive conjugal life. Because it does not need expensive offerings or elaborate ceremonies—like those celebrated by high-caste Brahmins—it is the ideal path of low-caste individuals who endure the dehumanizing stigma of untouchability. Kirtan conventions such as collective crying, mutual hugging, and the ritual display of touchability, in this context, can be seen as more than a functional reiteration of social bonds. Together with the songtexts’ teachings, melodies, and rhythms, Matua kirtan is an anthropopoietic performance that shapes identities and sensibilities, asserting the participants’ dignity and conception of equality while pursuing the thorny path toward liberation—intended as freedom from sins, diseases, and from social injustice.

NOTES

1. “Kirtan” is an umbrella name for congregational singing in devotional or ritual settings across South Asia.

2. “Matua” is a religious movement born in nineteenth-century East Bengal among a Dalit group of so-called untouchables (*caṇḍāl*). The condition of the entranced Matua dancer-devotee being completely absorbed as if intoxicated during *mātām* is often called *bhābābeś*: possessed by *bhāb* (Sanskrit *bhāva*), a very dense and complex noun, which in the context of devotion in South Asia can be translated as the emotion of divine ecstasy (McDaniel 1995).

3. For the same practice in West Bengal, see Sanyal (2012, 192). “Kirtan” is a generic category, used (for example) for ISKCON’s “Hare Krishna” chanting as well as for Sikh devotional music. “Matua kirtan” refers to the specific style of kirtan performed by the Matua devotees, which includes singing from the corpus of Matua verses, drumming, weeping, hugging, and trance (*mātām*). Among Bengalis on the Andaman Islands, all forms of gathering for devotional music are called “kirtan.”

4. Some notable exceptions include Dawe (2004) and Baldacchino (2011).

5. Among the “classics” of cultural anthropology, see Malinowski’s seminal work on the Trobriand islanders, Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), or Radcliff-Brown’s *The Andaman Islanders* (1964 [1922]).

6. Social scientists have looked particularly at the islands of the Caribbean and the western Indian Ocean as sites to anchor their reflections on creolization; see Kamau Brathwaite on Jamaica (1971), Thomas Hylland Eriksen on Mauritius (1998), Françoise Vergès on Réunion Island (1999), and Stephan Palmié on Cuba (2006).

7. The term “Matua” means maddened, intoxicated, or drunk. It derives from a derogative appellation, which was then adopted and proudly appropriated as a term of self-assertion. According to the holy book *Śrī Śrī Harilīlāmṛta*, outsiders used to look down on the ecstatic devotees and called them mad, drunk, or lunatic (*matṭa, mātāl, mātoyārā*). The founding saints appropriated and reinterpreted the term in a positive light, denoting those who are mad in divine love (Sarkar 1916, 59, 67, 94).

8. Untouchability is a discriminatory practice diffused in South Asia, based on relations between ritual pollution and traditional occupations of marginalized groups. The official category of “Untouchables” has been replaced since 1936 by the administrative term “Scheduled Castes.” Since the 1970s, activists have popularized the term *Dalit* (oppressed) to describe these communities, influenced by the champion of Dalit rights in modern Indian politics, B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956). The terms for self-reference, however, largely vary regionally and historically. Namashudra people, officially termed *Chandal* (a derogative term to address polluting outcaste groups) prior to the 1911 Census, dislike the self-appellation of Dalit because of their views on Ambedkarite politics, but they widely share memories and narratives of untouchability. In literary and oral narratives they refer to their community as *aspr̥śya* (untouchable), *patita* (fallen), or *pichīye parā mānuṣ* (backward people).

9. Fieldwork notes from Thakurnagar, West Bengal, February 4–5, 2018.

10. Dandakaranya is a region that spans across the contemporary Indian states of Odisha, Andhra, Chhattisgarh, and Maharashtra. In the Ramayana, Dandakaranya is the dark “forest of punishment” inhabited by demonic creatures where Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana spent some years of their exile.

11. For a detailed history of the resettlement of the refugees on the Andaman Islands, see Biswas (2009) and Sen (2018, 115–59). Following a chronological order, Bengali refugees were resettled in several areas of South Andaman, Middle Andaman, North Andaman, Havelock Island, Neil Island, and lastly Little Andaman. The official schemes started in 1949 and continued in several waves and in different modalities until 1971.

12. For example, see how the low-caste refugees appear in Raychaudhury (2004, 168–75) and Cakrabarti (2012, 28–38).

13. From the 1951 office memorandum of the Deputy Commissioner on the Andamans (in Biswas 2009, 5): “These refugees should not be encouraged to leave these islands as it entirely defeats the purpose for which they were sent over here at a great cost to the state. . . . It makes loan recovery difficult. . . . I would suggest that the refugees would not be allowed to leave these islands until such time they clear the entire amount outstanding against them.”

14. These migrants are known in the local political discourse as “people without.” The details of their history of migration are absent from official archives. My collection of oral histories suggests that Namashudra migrants connected by ties of kinship, caste, village, or religious network started to arrive in the 1950s following the first resettlement schemes, but independent migrants started to arrive in increasing numbers after the 1971 Liberation War and its aftermath.

15. According to the last official survey, the Bengali speakers on Andaman and Nicobar Union Territory are 108,432, or 28.49 percent of the population, which makes them the largest ethnolinguistic community (Government of India, Census 2011), followed by native speakers of Hindi (19.29 percent), Tamil (15.20 percent), Telugu (13.24 percent), Nicobarese (7.65 percent), Malayalam (7.22 percent), and other linguistic minorities. Of the total settlers under Colonization and Rehabilitation Schemes operating from 1949 to 1980, 80 percent were Bengali (Biswas 2009, 21).

16. Update since the last version of this essay: The much-awaited Chennai-Andaman & Nicobar (A&N) undersea optical fiber cable was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in August 2020. Contracted by state-run telecom firm Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, the submarine cable system bolstered voice and data connectivity across the Andamans. Access to such connectivity, especially during a pandemic, remains unequally shared (see Lorea et al. 2021).

17. According to Sen (2018, 129) in North and Middle Andaman by the end of 1956 only one mile of new roads had been built. The situation was so tragic that the chief commissioner decided to convert a captured Chinese pirate boat into a passenger carrier.

18. Tarak Sarkar (1847–1914), a *kabigān* performer, and his disciple Aswini Sarkar (1873–1929; both known with the honorific spiritual title of Gosain) are the oldest composers of songs in praise of Harichand Thakur. See Sarkar (1900) and Sarkar (1915).

19. Personal collection of fieldwork notes, Mr. Talukdar, Diglipur, December 17, 2018.

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Baloch Musical Repertoires and Culture Production in the Post-Maritime Gulf Metropolis

George Mürer

Wandering through a modestly sized supermarket in a peripheral section of Dubai one scorching hot day in July 2006, I came across an aisle solely devoted to coconuts. They were separated into bins based on specifiable origin and pedigree—Kenya, Ethiopia, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Oman, Philippines. The logic of this variety seemed to speak as directly to communities who favored coconuts from their own home regions as it did to a brisk trafficking in agricultural products. The Gulf port city of the pre-oil era has today been absorbed into the post-maritime Gulf metropolis, whose civic demographics are shaped by new economies, labor patterns, and jet-age networks of commerce and transsettlement.

In this chapter, drawing on fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2017 in Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait, I focus on the Baloch¹ citizenry of the Arab Gulf states while centering the circuitry of the Indian Ocean that has long bound together cultural spheres sited on disparate shores of the Indian Ocean littoral. Baloch society in the western Indian Ocean region presents an extremely complex picture when viewed through the lens of cultural texts and arts. The large Baloch communities sited in the Arab Gulf states attest to this history and this complexity as they navigate between a distinctive peninsular identity and a Balochistan-facing nationalism in which a rich heritage of cultural arts, including music, dance, and poetry, is proudly enshrined. My argument here is twofold. First, a geographically expansive, historicized perspective is needed to conceptualize and identify the ways in which the Indian Ocean as an “inter-regional arena” (Bose 2002, 368) is clearly legible in major

coastal towns of the eastern Arabian Peninsula. Second, Baloch, by virtue of intersecting with an array of otherwise culturally discrete groups such as Peninsular Arabs, expatriate South Asians, and slave-descended communities of East African heritage, confound the boundaries between these groups, between Baloch and non-Baloch, and between Gulf citizens and guest laborers. Musical and ritual contexts offer clear illustrations of these dynamics. Elsewhere,² I have devoted in-depth considerations to the ways Makrani Baloch culture has been reproduced, resited, or reconstituted in urban Peninsular environments. Here my focus is a unique Baloch positionality within western Indian Ocean networks, historical and post-maritime.

CULTURAL FLOWS AND DEMOGRAPHIC ENTANGLEMENTS IN THE URBAN GULF

It is challenging to approach the social and cultural character of the Gulf metropolis holistically. Underlying a veneer of cosmopolitan prosperity are the extremes of socioeconomic inequality created by the *kafala* system, whereby states and their ruling elites strictly control—through the instrumentality of private sponsoring entities—mammoth imported foreign labor forces, who come largely from countries struggling with poverty and unemployment. While numerous studies (e.g., Gardner 2010; Ahmad 2017; Lori 2019) confront the unforgiving circumstances and politicized bureaucracies guest workers must endure, curated cultural constructs such as “Gulf music” too often favor a serendipitously affluent *ḥaḍar*³ society’s collective self-imagining.

The incongruity of the unregulated power of the *kafeels* (sponsors) and the hyperregulation of the guest laborers has prompted human rights campaigns that are not exactly welcomed by officials or the public—the ubiquitous presence of hardworking (and in many cases overworked and abused) Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, Filipina/os, Bengalis, Indonesians, Eritreans, and Moroccans is rarely openly acknowledged in a socially conscious manner, and it does not take much to strike a nerve.

For instance, when asked to perform an Emirati accent for laughs on a Lebanese talk show, the Palestinian-Jordanian singer-comedian-actress Mayis Hamdan opted for an over-the-top impression of a Filipina boutique worker in Dubai, a performance that angered many Filipina/o social media commentators, who felt she was unjustly ridiculing a population who labor intensely and with dignity in disadvantageous circumstances to support their families, and generally display a solid command of English.

Overseas Filipina/o workers are conspicuously excluded from the panoramas of Gulf cosmopolitanism customarily cast in the mists of an Indian Ocean-inclined maritime past. It was a shock one Sunday in Kuwait to witness what turned out to be a regularly held church service in the makeshift setting of a hotel mezzanine

terrace. Filipina/o residents had left their ubiquitous posts at coffee shops, mall outlets, hotel reception desks, and supermarket check-out lanes and come together powerfully, audibly in a way that challenged their invisibility, shattering the monotonous, businesslike atmosphere of the lobby with a boisterous eruption of singing and clapping. When Indonesians and Malaysians are afforded roles in narratives concerning Indian Ocean society, it is mainly in the context of interactions with religious, mercantile, and musical currents from Hadhramawt.

Inspired by music emanating from Aden, Shihr, and Mukalla throughout the twentieth century (see Lavin this volume), the Kuwaiti genres of Adeni and Yamani⁴ represent a creative license to completely dismantle any boundaries separating South Asian, Cairene, Yemeni, Hijazi, and Gulf cultural orientations. Pakistani musicians are fixtures in these circles, while young Kuwaiti singers, violinists, and percussionists immerse themselves in popular Qawwali and filmi music, inspired by examples set by Hadhrami performers such as Mohammad Jum'ah Khan and Ali al-Khanbashi.⁵ Even given the omnipresence of South Asian laborers and entrepreneurs, the wild popularity of Bollywood, the great volume of Pakistani and South Indian eateries, this intermingling is much more of a hidden gem than an overt facet of Gulf society—it is percolated discreetly in the privileged settings of *diwāwīn* and *jalsāt* (customary—usually all male—private gatherings of varying size).

Baloch, while deeply entrenched as a cultural presence in the region through centuries of migration, are chronically underacknowledged on the surfaces of Gulf society. In several Gulf states, notably Oman and Bahrain, a considerable portion of the armed forces and police and security services are Baloch. These and other available vocations may translate into positions of relative privilege, but Baloch are often typecast as soldiers or even mercenaries, and there are firm lines governing the extent to which Baloch communities can assert their support for Baloch independence or even publicly showcase their cultural identity (map 5.1).

Fellow Gulf citizens might not easily distinguish Baloch as comprising a discrete group, since the longest established communities are—in their public presentation—completely assimilated into Peninsular Arab culture, while more recent arrivals and guest workers may be perceived as Iranians or Pakistanis. Nonetheless, the Arab Gulf States stand out as a part of the world where Baloch have a recognized, established position within the social fabric, whose superficially rigid contours they certainly complicate.

Understanding the geography of the Gulf as inscribed through Indian Ocean infrastructures of mobility and cultural contact requires a fluid engagement with a multiplicity of frames. Major Gulf cities consist in part of historic “quarters” (Arabic sing.: *hara*) associated with specific groups such as Yemenis and Hadharim⁶ in cities like Jeddah and al-'Ain, or Bastakis in Dubai and Bahrain (Stephenson 2018,



MAP 5.1. Map of key regions mentioned in the text around the western Indian Ocean littoral. (Map courtesy of Phoebe Hwang)

176). The Abdelaziz section of Doha represents a concentration of mainly South Asian guest works who live in barracks-like compounds, while Hawally in Kuwait City is populated by people from almost anywhere except Kuwait.

The Deira section of old Dubai is equated with conspicuous displays of “low-end globalization,” where migrant traders oversee a chaotic shopping district overflowing with cheap goods (Mathews, Lin, and Yang 2017, 108). As Pelican (2014, 283–84) writes of Deira,

a number of areas have informally been named after different nationalities. Most popular is Nasser Square, named after the late Egyptian president. But there is also the “Sudanese masjid” (mosque), the “Somali quarter,” and the “Ethiopian street” with ethnic shops and restaurants. Yet as my host Murad outlined, these names often relate to historical linkages, such as the nationality of the imam who initiated a congregation or the first occupants of a quarter. Today, they may no longer strictly apply as a result of the quarters’ transient character.

Singapore likewise has its Kampung Arab where Hadhrami heritage peeks out here and there through an increasingly opaque Singaporean palimpsest.

Social milieus throughout and across the Gulf are deeply imprinted by legacies of the slave trade, which have given rise to terms like Afro-Arabian, Afro-Iranian, or Afro-Baloch, while contemporary flows from Africa are no less pronounced. In latter-day Dubai, as in Guangzhou (Mathews, Lin, and Yang 2017, 14–16), certain neighborhoods are characterized by nightlife, cafes, and restaurants catering to resident African traders and laborers. At the same time, Swahili language and Zanzibari cuisine and music in Muscat and Salalah are emblematic not merely of an avowed “African” ancestry but also of Arab and Baloch Omani households who have been repatriated from Zanzibar, which was ruled by Oman until the mid-twentieth century. Recognizing these tensions and complexities helps us to grasp the extremely nodal position into which Baloch have settled over time.

BALOCH IN THE GULF AND WESTERN INDIAN
OCEAN IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The majority of the Baloch in the Arab Gulf States hail from the Makran sub-region of Balochistan, which lies directly across the Gulf of Oman (alternately, Gulf of Makran) from the Arabian Peninsula. A notable subset, concentrated in the UAE and in Oman's Batinah region, comes from the westernmost portion of Makran, an area that falls within the eastern portion of Iran's Hormozgan province and is part of a zone of cultural gradation between Baloch and Gulf Persian cultural landscapes, comprising subregions, languages, dialects, and cultural repertoires that have ended up represented on both sides of the Gulf. In the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain, Achomi and Bastaki communities with roots in southern Iran maintain their languages as well as architectural features, notably the *badgirs* (wind towers) that mark their neighborhoods (see Stephenson 2018, 176), while Willem Floor (2010, 8) points to residential quarters of the south Iranian port city Bandar-e Lengeh designated as Rudbari, Minabi, Bastaki, and Balochi. Mingling topographic resonance with emotionally saturated mood, the taxonomy of Baloch *zahiroks* (melodic-modal entities that form the basis for composition and improvisation) includes Bashkard and Rudbar as the names of specific *zahiroks* (see Badalkhan 2009, 236).

There are famous examples of premodern Baloch poetry where the action revolves around naval exploits in the Persian Gulf or Indian Ocean, or descriptions are offered of journeys to the ports of Oman (see Mürer 2022, 8–9). Hammal, the subject of one widely known epic narrative, was a Baloch naval warrior—or pirate, depending who you ask—who fought to repel Portuguese colonists who sought to control the Persian Gulf. He was captured and imprisoned—in Southern India or in Portugal, in varying accounts (Badalkhan 2000, 159)—but continued resistance prevented the Portuguese from capturing the Makrani port of Pasni (Dashti 2012, 154; Baluch 1977, 351–54; Badalkhan 2000, 155–60). When Sabir Badalkhan (2000, 159) writes that, “in mourning for Mir Hammal, Baloch women still do not wash or comb their hair on Saturdays,” the significance of Saturday can be found in these verses:

Shanbeh e rôcha sar mashôd brâtânî gohâr
Shanbeh pa brâtân shar na int shânzdeh pa peta
Shanbeh e rôch o shânzdeh gon shus saâta
Shanbeh e rôcha Hammal e shâga nûl kuta
Hammal pa shâg o shâg pa mânil bû'in zera

Thou sister of thy brothers, do not wash thine [head] on Saturdays
 Saturday is not auspicious for brothers, [and] the sixteenth of the moon not for fathers;
 Saturday, and the sixteenth of moon, with their ill-omened hours,
 deprived Hammal of his boat and the boat of its blue sea. (Baluch 1977, 354, 357)

As we shall see, encounters with European Indian Ocean imperial powers strikingly crop up in other textual and ritual settings, as the politics of power and military might always exert direct, tangible effects on the communal lives of ordinary citizens, shaping the outlook, needs, and hardships they articulate through song, dance, and cathartic exertions.

TEXTS IN CIRCULATION

Forms of ritual knowledge, learning, doctrine, and practice speak clearly of the spatialized networks in which they are embedded. Despite the transregional importance of languages such as Persian, Urdu, Swahili, Malay, Dutch, Tamil, and Portuguese across the Indian Ocean region, it is the Arabic language that is inextricable from Muslim learning and practice, retaining a centrality from Zanzibar to Makran to Java. While Hadhrami Arabs from coastal Yemen have played a significant roles as agents in the transmission of this knowledge, other local littoral populations, notably WaSwahili⁷ in maritime East Africa and Baloch in the Gulf region, have been the recipients. The Baloch groups have thus developed intimate, localized relationships with ceremonial idioms and texts for which the Arabic language has been designated a conduit of spiritual authority.

Of the Arabic texts that are incorporated into ritual contexts across the Indian Ocean, the recitative of the life of the Prophet formally called *Mawlid Sharaf al-Anam* and less formally known as the *Barzanji*, after its author, Ja'far bin Isma'il al-Barzanji (d. 1764), is especially prominent and provides examples of intersections between Baloch and Hadrami circuits of mobility and settlement. The distribution of the *Barzanji* follows a geographic logic that recalls established maritime routes and patterns of migration, both voluntary—as with the distribution of Hadhrami 'ulama' across the Indian Ocean—and forced—as with the colonial importation of indentured labor from South and Southeast Asia to South Africa. The *Barzanji* is widely recited in Indonesia, where popular, often mediated songs expressive of Muslim piety—*sholawat*—are often based on extracts from its text (Rasmussen 2010, 180). Among the Cape Malays of South Africa, who until 1793 could only practice Islam in secret, Dutch written in the Arabic script emerged as a language of Islamic learning, and recitations of the *Barzanji* came to be set to multipart harmony arrangements recalling strains of European hymnody (Dangor 125–26; al-Zawiya Singers 2011).

It is important to note that *mawlūd* texts have grown over time from chiefly commemorating the Prophet's birthday to accommodating an array of votive and healing functions, ranging from inaugurating a new house to seeking guidance and blessings with respect to a personal practical challenge to addressing spirit possession. In Barka, the first town of the Batinah region north of Muscat, the main group of available specialists for a core range of ceremonial enactments,

including the recitation of the *Barzanji* as well as *lēwa* and *mālid* (to be discussed presently), are Baloch.

Among Mapilla Muslims in Kerala, the *Barzanji* is complemented by a condensed *mawlid*⁸ text known as the *Manqus Mawlid*, attributed to Zainuddin al-Makhdum al-Malabari, a sixteenth-century Qaderi sheikh and jurist of Hadhrami origin (Kuzhiyan 2016, 434–35). Ines Weinrich (2020, 27–30) makes the case that the introduction of the *manqus mawlid*, composed several centuries after the *Barzanji*, should be contextualized not only by transpositions of Muslim learning from Hadhramawt to Malabar following routes of maritime expansion and settlement, but also within the conditions brought about by the Portuguese, especially conflict and disease. It had been established by that time that *mawliūd* texts and *mālid* ceremonies could be employed to supplicate God, the Prophet, and an array of Sufi sheikhs (*mashāyekh*) for assistance and protection. Weinrich reads the *manqus mawlid* as a short, ceremonially oriented text heavily modeled on the *Barzanji* and as containing discernible allusions to plague outbreaks that accompanied Portuguese colonial incursions in the sixteenth century (Weinrich 2020, 27–30).

These texts, the ideas shaping their delivery, and associated ceremonial performances took form through networks binding Hejaz, Egypt, Iraq, Andalusia, and Hadhramawt as core sites of Muslim learning and scholarship (Weinrich 2020, 21). Over time then, *māliids* have come to represent a “traveling text” in their perambulations as ritual forms every bit as much as Weinrich argues they do as a literary genre of pious narration. For example, the choreography of the *maulidi ya homu* ceremony performed in Zanzibar, which has become something of a presence at international music festivals, closely matches that of the *huwwamah* row of performers of Omani *māliids*, with *homu* the Swahili variant of that term. Ellen Hebden (this volume) describes adaptations of the *Maulidi ya Homu* in northern Mozambique, first as a women’s dance called *tufo* (after the term *duff*, which designates in Arabic and Persian the frame drums used in the ritual) and then as a political performance employing Portuguese texts in praise of Mozambique’s ruling political party.

Anne K. Bang (2003, 148–49) emphasizes that while *mawliids* have been widely performed since the thirteenth century, with Hadhramawt a core site, the nineteenth-century Hadhrami scholar and Ba Alawi sheikh ‘Ali Bin Muhammed al-Hibshi (known in Indonesia as Habib Ali al-Habsyi⁹) was particularly instrumental in transmitting a reenergized embrace of *mawliūd* texts and *mawlid* ceremonial settings to East Africa, Malabar, and Nusantara.

As an extension of this same circuitry, in which Hadhrami ‘*ulama*’, Omani empire, and the Shafa’i school of Islamic jurisprudence all overlap or intersect at various junctures, *māliids* are common in Makran, southern Iran (where they are also called *mashāyekh*), and Oman. In Muscat, I have observed *māliids* representing a mixture of Omanis of Arab, East African, and Baloch heritage as well as *māliids* that were conducted within a clearly delineated Baloch community setting.

BAKHÛR/SÛCHKĪ: RITUAL ENVIRONMENTS

One of the famed commodities of the western Indian Ocean world is frankincense—in actuality a range of plants, some varieties more prized than others, that are chiefly harvested in South Arabia (Dhofar, Mahra, and Hadhramawt) and the Horn of Africa. This is an ancient trade that actively continues to the present. The incineration of frankincense, a material process, is framed within dense structures of belief that align with texts, musical performances, and ritual proceedings. One of the verses from the *Barzanji* that is commonly emphasized as a refrain during *mālid* ceremonies evokes the fragrance of frankincense filling and honoring a sacred space—the tomb of the Prophet (Holmes Katz 2010, 149). Incense used in spirit possession ceremonies such as *zār*¹⁰ and *mālid* is called *bakhūr* in Arabic and *sūchki* in Baloch and is a potent component of the vivid ritual sensorium.

The first *mālid* I attended was with a Baloch friend who regularly attends such occasions. Together with a handful of former school friends—now adults—he maintains a WhatsApp group to navigate the ritual terrain in and around Muscat. This little cohort coordinates to attend various spirit possession ceremonies, often meeting at an inconspicuous roadside location to transfer to a single vehicle. Their investment in these events varies. One is known to host *mālids* himself. Two others, a set of twins, are habitual *huwwamah* participants—they described for me how they jointly harbor a spirit, who enables them to access each other's eyes and ears when they are apart. The fourth, my Baloch contact, is chiefly drawn in by curiosity and can be openly critical in his assessment of how people conduct themselves within the ritual settings.

The *mālid* was in the courtyard of a villa on a palm-lined residential street in a Baloch section of Azaibah, a neighborhood today quite central within Muscat's expanding urban landscape, which has spilled continuously northward and inland from its historical port, corniche, and fort districts, Old Muscat, Matrah, and Jibroo. The main officiant, known as the *mu'alleem*, presided over two facing rows of men—the principal singers (*ṣaf ar-ra'īsī*) and the respondents (*ṣaf al-huwwamah*),¹¹ who chanted in a responsorial fashion, at first unaccompanied but then increasingly propelled by strongly accented, hypnotic rhythms on the frame drums (*tārāt, duffūf*, cf. Hebden, this volume). People were seated in the courtyard roughly divided by gender and family unit.

As the ceremony gained momentum, it transitioned from a solemn, pious commemoration to an animated gathering focused on individuals whose resident spirits were activated by the chanting, drumming, and clouds of *sūchki*. When people, inhabited by spirits, become *por* (Balochi, “filled”), they enter into a violent state, thrashing about, convulsing, wracked by contortions and grimaces, sometimes seeming to present themselves as objects of ridicule, making grotesque sounds or assuming comical voices. The first response to individuals becoming *por* is to fumigate them with *bakhūr/sūchki*, an action called *tashmīm*.¹²

Community and household dynamics are upended and inverted by the force of the spirit presences. One woman, driven into a state, gestured to a man and indicated via pantomime that he was a drunk. Since it was the spirit of the *Pir-e Baghdad* (i.e., Abdelqadir Gilani)—and not her—who was levying this accusation, she would not be held accountable for it. At the same time, I had to wonder if this individual was singled out because he was vulnerable, powerless, already ostracized, so that he could be the public object of a woman's contempt without upsetting the day-to-day chain of authority.

Shortly afterward, a man became *por*, rising up on his knees and rhythmically thrusting his upper body right and left in the manner characteristic of *zār*, *guātī*, and *mālīd* possession ceremonies. His wife was seated close by holding their infant child. Suddenly, in the throes of his involuntary paroxysms, he seized the baby and held it facing him as he continued to thrash to and fro propulsively. Alarmed, the woman and another, perhaps his mother, delicately entrained to his motions and deftly made the sudden move to relieve him of the child. Upon being taken from his father, the child—who had been completely spellbound by the violent swinging motions—began to shriek and cry uncontrollably to the point where it was promptly handed back to its father, whose violent thrusting had only accelerated. Such dramatic spectacles clash with the reserve and immaculate presentation that characterize day-to-day public life in Oman.

Owing to sensitivities surrounding the physical-emotional comportment of participants, I was never permitted to film these ceremonies. I could record sound however, as attendees often do. On one subsequent evening at a Baloch friend's apartment, happily absorbed in listening to my friend's wife's sister recount a visit to Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's shrine in Sindh, I was getting ready to meet the same small group and accompany them to another *mālīd* ceremony. Meanwhile, my friend was preoccupied with devising a tactic to facilitate my filming the ceremony. What if he lent me this ballpoint pen that concealed a teeny digital video camera and I wore it inconspicuously in my breast pocket? He loved gadgetry—drones and the like. I would not consider flouting this community's boundaries or code of propriety. "No one will know you are filming," he said. "Abdelqadir [Gilani] will know," I said, and immediately his wife and sister-in-law emphatically concurred.

How *mālīds* and other spirit possession ceremonies are variously framed—as superstitions, as religious devotion, as emotional therapy—bring forth neither schisms nor contradictions so much as a vivid sense of the multidimensional world people inhabit together. Farhat Sultana (2013) writes of how *guātī* ceremonies in Gwadar are suppressed and frowned upon in periods when communities want to demonstrate their conservative religiosity, but that they repropagate as a potent domain of Baloch cultural performance when the nationalist struggle is inflamed. While also structured as *zār* ceremonies, *guātī*¹³ ceremonies in Makran rely on repertoires whose musicality is considered purely Baloch.¹⁴ In the *guātī* context, the rhythmic strumming (*panjag*) and emotive modal constructs (*zahirōk*) that

form the basis for Baloch musical genres such as *shēr*, *sōt*, *likū*, and *nāzenk* are present in a more relentlessly repetitive and fragmentary¹⁵ form. While *guātī* ceremonies are common in Makran and Karachi, in Muscat, *mālid*s are a much more common approach to addressing the various forms of distress traditionally diagnosed as deriving from spirit possession.¹⁶

Another core component of these densely interwoven ritual complexes is the *dammāl*, vigorous devotional dancing and drumming performed at shrines, most iconically by disheveled *malangs*¹⁷ in ragged attire. In particular, the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan, Sindh is acutely associated with *dammāl*. The shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar attracts large numbers of Baloch pilgrims, especially women. At possession ceremonies in Makran and Muscat, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is one of the most explicitly engaged spirits (see Mürer 2022, 15).

From the point of view of rhythmic character, aside from enabling ecstatic dancing, it is held that a crucial aspect of Qalandari *dammāl* is that the formula “*dam a dam mast qalandar*”¹⁸ should be audibly legible in its rhythmic articulations. *Dammāl* performance permeates *guātī* ceremonies in Balochistan and entwines with *ngoma*¹⁹ ritual techniques among communities of East African heritage in Sindh, Gujarati,²⁰ and coastal Karnataka, communities colloquially—and in some senses pejoratively—known as Sidis or Sheedis (see Jackson, this volume). At the Gori Pir shrine in Gujarat, the term *dammāl* becomes interchangeable with *goma* (from *ngoma*)²¹ in festivities that explicitly celebrate the African origins of both the shrine’s *pīr* and his Sidi devotees (see Catlin-Jairazbhoy 2006; Basu 2008; and Jackson, this volume).

Tradition holds that Bava Gor²² made his way to Gujarat via Makran and Sindh, and there are also important shrines in Karachi that are focal for the Shidi community (Basu 2000, 257–58). As Brian Jackson (this volume) points out, in Pakistan (especially in the Karachi environs), the concepts Shidi and Afro-Baloch are often entangled. A professional *surōz*²³ player from Gwadar on a sponsored visit to Muscat explained to me that specific *guātī* melodies are required for Shidi spirits.

If the agency of Hadhrami ‘*ulama*’ is especially pronounced in the transmission and distribution of the *mālid*, the integration of figures like Bava Farid Ganjishakar and Lal Shahbaz Qalandar into *mālid* contexts is emblematic of the geography inhabited by Gulf Baloch, whose radial perspectives take in proximate worlds that equally encircle Makran and the coastal eastern Arabian Peninsula.

TODAY: BALOCH ARTS IN OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL SPACES

Substantial numbers of Makrani Baloch in Muscat are recent arrivals who maintain strong connections with Balochistan, but the Baloch term Mashkati (“from/of Muscat”) is applied to more long settled communities. While their origins are in Makran—or in many cases in East Africa via Makran—they speak a distinctive Baloch dialect that has evolved from Makrani Baloch, accumulating Omani

Arabic vocabulary and inflections and a variety of local slang features. The distinction between Makrani and Mashkati Baloch can be acute or extremely fluid, depending on the context.

Mashkati Baloch weddings spill out into public areas in the historically Baloch-populated quarters of Jibroo, Matrah, and Sidab or in more recent extensions of the city into which Baloch have been transplanted, such as Khoudh, Hail, Maabelah, Amarat, or Wadi Hattat. The music is hard driving, propelled by a drum kit, bass, and a dense percussion section. A synthesizer adds repetitive motifs, and the singing generally involves call and response patterns geared toward building excitement that culminates in an explosion of drumming and a frenzy of dancing. Tightly coordinated pauses and changes in time signature heighten the sense of tension and release. These weddings are *the* place for youth culture on display in Baloch Muscat. With a range of fashions from a sort of designer hip-hop look to futuristic glasses and beards cropped in angular patterns, they are crucial settings for observing how Mashkati Baloch position themselves culturally—predictably somewhere between Gwadar, Karachi, Mumbai, Dubai, Zanzibar, and Tehran (see Mürer 2019). The jumble of musical referents yields an almost amorphous nebula, yet one that has been distilled and finessed by successive generations of young wedding musicians in the back streets behind the Matrah corniche and the dusty lots amid Maabilah’s half-built apartment blocks. One of the most consistent rhythmic-motivic components in this repertoire is the exuberant circle dance called *l̥ewa* (figure 5.1).²⁴

L̥ewa is unfailingly included in any inventory of Oman’s traditional arts (see Mellah 1998; Kathiri 2005 and 2022; Shidi 2008; Shawqi 1994; and Christensen, Castelo-Branco, with Barwani 2009). These arts (Arabic: *funūn*—a term often used in lieu of music) are performed at national festivals and have been written about in detail by scholars, some foreign, some affiliated with the Omani Center for Traditional Music (OCTM), which houses a remarkable audiovisual archive. In recent decades, *l̥ewa* performances have receded in communal life while being maintained as a regulated expression of a complex Omani history and national heritage. Mounting *l̥ewa* as folkloric pageantry is a pattern that extends across the Arab Gulf States and to southern Iran and Karachi, these last two settings being marked by more freely imaginative interpretations (see Mürer 2019).

Emirati scholar Aisha Bilkhair (2021, 134–35) depicts *l̥ewa* as a potent festive idiom for which people develop a craving and that marks or references events and situations of national import, “such as the wedding of Shaykh Mohammad bin Rashid (the current ruler of Dubai and the vice-president of the UAE) [and] the return of Shaikh Maktoum al-Rashid after heart surgery.” Among the old guard of Muscat Baloch musicians who rose to prominence once a religious ban on music was relaxed when Sultan Qaboos took power in 1970 and whom



FIGURE 5.1. Baloch wedding band performing at a wedding party (*nadinag*) in Seeb, Oman. (Photo by the author)

I met during my period of fieldwork, a drummer named Tallab was known for welcoming Sultan Qaboos with his *dohol* (Baloch name for a large double headed drum known in Arabic as *rahmani* and Swahili as *chapuo*) whenever Sultan Qaboos arrived in Oman from abroad (see Mürer 2022). While Tallab at that point was too aged to participate, festive drumming again welcomed the sultan in 2017 when he returned from a lengthy period of cancer treatment in Germany.

In Muscat and Karachi, *lĕwa* is often understood as a Baloch—or Afro-Baloch—genre, practiced by Baloch communities while emblematic of ties to East Africa. Although *lĕwa* as a music-dance idiom does function as an expression of Baloch identity in Oman, UAE, and Karachi, many Baloch do not consider it to be representative of Baloch culture, regarding it instead as belonging to descendants of slaves who today have come to speak Baloch.

In his survey of popular song in Bahrain, ‘Aissa Mohammed Jasem al-Malaki provides examples of texts used within *lĕwa* performances, which he says contain many “unknown African words” (Al-Malaki 1999, 122), pointing to the need for much more extensive, informed analysis. For one example, he identifies a melody as *dingomārō*²⁵—the name of a spirit—and provides a short text that opens with the words “*bikā zumar huwa lĕwa bikā zumar huwa*” (Al-Malaki 1999, 126). It seems likely that *bikā zumar* is an approximation of *mpiga zumari*—Swahili for player of the double-reed shawm commonly called *mizmār* in Arabic and *sūrnāi* in Persian and Baloch (see Mürer 2019).

In Oman, it is essential for traditional *lēwa* performances that they take place by the sea. This fact may further point to a history where—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—British and French vessels moored at the harbors of Muscat and Matrah were invested with the authority to free Omani slaves (of African origin) who physically presented themselves to them in accordance with a series of international treaties incrementally abolishing slavery (Cox 1925, 196).²⁶ Freed Omani slaves were known for their musical ensembles celebrating these powers and the freedom they had bestowed when the occasion arose (Cox 1925, 196).

At Baloch wedding celebrations in Muscat, *lēwa* is a dance segment rooted in its ritual context. The large-format, youth-driven wedding bands also weave explicit *lēwa* themes, chants, and drumming patterns into upbeat pop songs, creating a push-and-pull tension that aligns with dramatic increases and decreases in the intensity and density of drumming textures and the dynamic regulation of the leader's vocalized exhortations.

A POST-MARITIME ERA OF REMIXED ROUTES AND POLITIES

At a wedding in Liwa, a coastal town in Oman's Batinah province, I heard the familiar strains of a Muscat Baloch wedding band emanating from a tent whose occupants were fully enclosed by its colorful, embroidered fabric. This was the women's space for celebrating the wedding, and they were inside dancing to a recording of one of the main bands active in Muscat (almost certainly Muna or Nawras or Ayla). In Baloch culture, there are unambiguously manly dances in which men dance in prescribed formations, but spontaneous, freely expressive dancing that manifests in intense, intimate encounters between individuals is acutely gendered as feminine, and is only acceptable in some degree of seclusion. In male environments, transgressions disrupting this moral code are what make a festive occasion lively and engaging, while male dancers presenting as women are commonly part of the professional entourage of a Muscat wedding band.

While the women danced the evening away in that tent, hundreds of seated men lined the perimeter of the open-air village clearing, in much the same fashion that men sit along all the interior walls of a mosque to mark the passing of a community member. In each case, a newly arrived guest will travel along the rows of seated men, shaking each of their hands and greeting them before taking his own seat. Musical commemoration of the wedding is more compact and precisely sequenced in this setting than for the women, but with live music consisting of a bagpipe (variably *habbūneh*, *qīrbah*, or *hīzak*, *hīzak* being a specifically regional Baloch term) player and several drummers (*dholi*) who play the *kāsīr* and *rahmānī* (or *jurūw* and *marsūz* in local Baloch terminology) double-headed drums. The

leader sings through a megaphone. It is striking how these long-settled Batinah Baloch communities offer a gendered diptych where the males present a tableau of seamless continuity through time and across the Gulf while the women are positioned on the twenty-first century, Arabian side of the rupture with the ancestral *mulk* (Baloch term for home region).

The dancing, colloquially known as *tamāshā*, takes the form of a large circle that becomes a procession (*malag*) (see Christensen, Castelo-Branco, with Barwani 2009, 190), whose climactic peak is marked by an almost convulsive shaking of the arms and shoulders, a motion known as *chamag*. The style of dancing and the posture of the drummers, who face each other as they process, are continuous with neighboring southern Iranian festive music and dance idioms and, among Baloch, specific to communities in the eastern Hormozgan province of Iran. Apart from key research by Iranian scholars (e.g., Darvishi 1373/1995, 63), the close intertwining of south Iranian and western Makrani Baloch musical culture is not often brought under consideration, especially when sited on the Arabian Peninsula.

A recent Iranian film called *Dingomaro* (2014, by Kamran Heidari) profiles a musician in the south Iranian Gulf port city of Bandar-e Abbas who proclaims the presence of this spirit inside of him as a powerful manifestation of his African identity, which he closely links to his music, which ranges from reggae to soul to Bandari wedding dances. I noted that wherever the word *dance* appears in the English subtitles for the film, the term that is actually uttered on-screen is *chamak*, a close cognate to the Baloch term previously cited.

In his discussion of the effects of the decline of the pearling industry and the explosion of an oil economy on Kuwaiti society and culture, Yacoub Yusuf al-Hijji points out that, when the oil industry emerged as an alternative to the danger and physical demands of pearl diving and seafaring, dhows owned by Kuwaiti captains and merchants were sold “to traders in other parts of the Gulf to be adapted for engines and put to whatever uses their new owners saw fit” (Hijji 2010, 132). A clue to these other uses follows a page later: “While the last Kuwaiti short-distance trading *nakhoda*, Yusuf Al-Hashil, embarked on his final voyage in 1965, there are still today numerous motorized dhows from the ports of Iran and Pakistan lining the creeks of Dubai and Sharjah, for example” (Hijji 2010, 133).

The shift in dhow usage from pearling and long-distance craft to motorized trans-Gulf transport is—along with the world of short-distance smuggling via speedboat—an outgrowth of the short-distance intra-Gulf routes known as *al-qīṭāh* (Hijji 2010, 93–95; Stephenson 2018, 13). The routes have fostered tight-knit linkages that continue to this day despite mounting tensions between US/Saudi Arabian and Iranian spheres of influence.

In contrast with such short-distance, trans-Gulf circuits, Baloch culture has also been imprinted by commodities in circulation along larger-scale routes that align with Engseng Ho’s “inter-Asia” (Ho 2017) through which he centers

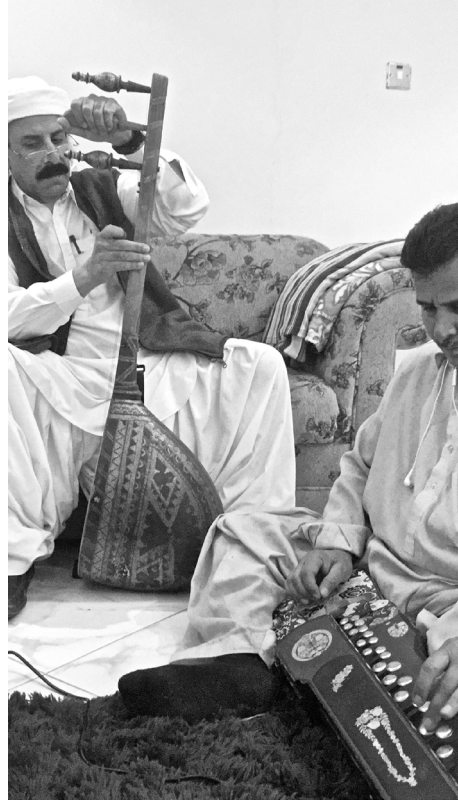


FIGURE 5.2. Makrani Baloch benjū player with Makrani Baloch poet holding tambūrang in Kuwait, 2016. (Photo by the author)

the Indian Ocean to encapsulate a sphere of intensive interaction that can be regarded from a contemporary perspective as well as through a deep, *longue durée* historical lens. One striking example of an intersection on this scale in a Baloch context is the twentieth-century introduction of the keyed zither known as the *benjū* (figure 5.2).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, during roughly the same period that Japan developed and implemented methods of producing artificial pearls, which led to the decline of pearl diving in the Gulf, instruments used for courtly and folk repertoires in Japan experienced a dramatic technological reimagination in the wake of new cultural and industrial vistas inaugurated during the period known as the Meiji Restoration. The *koto* plucked zither was redesigned with fewer strings and fitted with typewriter-style keys as a fretting mechanism and named the *taishōgoto*, thereby celebrating the Tashi period for this surge in innovation (Malm 2000, 194; Charles 1994, 101; Jinko 1986; Johnson 2003, n. 3). The *taishōgoto* held a certain novelty appeal and by the mid-twentieth century had made its way to ports around the Indian Ocean littoral. Upon arrival in South Asia, it was

renamed *benjū*, after the banjo.²⁷ In Karachi, its potential for Hindustani *raga* interpretation was explored, and a succession of Baloch musicians gradually adopted it for contemporary *sōt* performances (see Brian Jackson's discussion in this volume of the famed *benjū* player Bilawal).

Ultimately, the Makrani Baloch musician and instrument maker Joma Surizehi enhanced its design (Surizehi 2006), and his son, Abdurrahman Surizehi, developed an enchanting textural template by integrating the *panjag* (rhythmic drone strumming patterns) and melodies of various Baloch popular and folk idioms, drawing heavily on *guātī* and *dammāli* repertoires.

Each Baloch folk instrument—the double fipple flute *dōnelī*, the open belly fiddle *surōz*, the skin belly lute *rubāb*, the jaw harp *chang*, the rhythmically strummed drone lute *tambūrag*—has its own distinctive sonority and sense of melodic-rhythmic patterning. The *benjū* was a modern addition to this traditional music spectrum, but its rich acoustic sonic properties have extended the palate of folk repertoires, while its electrified iteration has become a staple of contemporary Makrani Baloch studio recordings and live performances.

CONCLUSION

Musics in circulation through maritime routes and port cultures are emblematic of a complex circuitry whose paths range from those that appear to have stabilized over time to those that shift, flicker, and redirect in unpredictable surges. In May 2022, a Baloch culture exhibit was inaugurated in Mombasa's historic Fort Jesus Museum with contributions and support from an international community of Baloch cultural activists. Meanwhile, Baloch literary organizations, poetry salons, and communal festivities continue to imprint the cultural landscapes of Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait. If the Gulf and the western Indian Ocean are culturally defined through fluid confluences of idioms and geocultural signifiers pointing to Bantuphone East Africa, the Horn of Africa, Makran, Iraq, Iran, Hejaz, Hadhramawt, Sindh, and Punjab, it is perhaps the Baloch communities who are most broadly conversant in this full spectrum, their historical experiences as a coastal society under the auspices of an intercontinental Omani empire ensures their membership in a dramatically variegated array of cultural milieus, no matter how firmly Baloch tend to cling to a proud ethnonationalism in the context of their struggle against cultural negation.

NOTES

1. Baloch is currently a more widely accepted rendering in English-language texts than Baluch, which was more common in the past and which the reader may be more used to. The vowel in the second syllable is generally pronounced as somewhere between “oh” and “oo.”

2. See Mürer (2021; 2022).

3. The binary construct *ḥaḍar/bedū* is a trope—often problematized today—whereby the cultural character of long-settled, culturally porous urban societies on the Arabian Peninsula is sharply contrasted with the values, comportment, and outlook of Bedouin lineages.

4. Parallel to my work on Baloch in the Arab Gulf States, I conducted fieldwork on these genres in Kuwait between 2013 and 2017.

5. For background on Mohammad Jum’ah Khan and Ali al-Khanbashi, see again Lavin this volume.

6. Plural of Hadhrami.

7. Swahili plural noun for coastal Swahili-speaking Bantu people.

8. I should distinguish here between *mawlūd* (narratives of the Prophet’s birth), *mawliids* (commemorations of the Prophet’s birth in which *mawliids* are recited), and *mālids*, spirit possession ceremonies in northern Oman and coastal Makran that draw on both *mawlid* sequences and *zār* ceremonies and seek to appease the spirits of important Sufi figures such as Abdelqader Gilani, Ahmad al-Rifa’i, and Ahmad al-Badawi, who are believed to have taken possession of a human host.

9. As a testament to his continued resonance, a text attributed to him, “Robbi Inni,” is widely performed to this day in Indonesia both in *Orkes Gambus* contexts (including by non-Arab Bugis performers—see Mürer [2013]) and in a style of cantillation informed by Qur’anic recitation.

10. For select descriptions of *zār* and closely related rituals in the Gulf region, see Bilkhair (2006); Gharasou (2008); Khosronejad (2013); and Boulos and Ayari (2021).

11. For detailed descriptions of the sequences of segments, content, and terminology associated with these ceremonies, see al-Faruqi (1985) and Shidi (2008, 254–67), but note that al-Faruqi does not discuss the variety that I am writing about, where the pious *mālīd* of coastal Oman is merged with the *zār* ceremonial template. Shidi (2008, 256–57) gives a good sense of how this came about as he enumerates the *mashāyekh* (sheikhs) who authored key texts for praising the Prophet adopted within this ceremonial idiom, many of whom turn up as spirits in possession-oriented *mālīds*. Al-Faruqi points to the belief that the spirit of the Prophet is present during the ceremony once sufficient praise has been offered.

12. Bilkhair (2022).

13. The terms *guāt*, *rīḥ*, *bād*, and *pepo* mean “wind” in Baloch, Arabic, Persian, and Swahili respectively and are employed in analogous circumstances to refer to invisible but powerful spirit beings capable of traversing vast expanses of land and sea.

14. For discussions explicitly relating *guātī* rituals to *zār* ceremonies and elaborating their social context, see During (1989; 1997); Sultana (1996; 2013); and Boyajian (2015).

15. By “more fragmentary” I mean what Ali Jihad Racy (1994, 49) calls “active motivic reiteration,” where short phrases are repeated indefinitely.

16. For a discussion of a circle of Baloch musicians in Muscat who perform—in some senses replicate or reconstitute—*guātī-dammālī* ceremonies in a capacity that strikingly straddles a nebulous amateur/professional divide, see Mascagni (2022).

17. Devotees of specific historical sheikhs, *malangs* are known for their dedicated participation in commemorative events involving drumming, dance, and ecstatic utterance at Muslim shrines, most particularly in the Indus valley vicinity, as well as for an ethos of poverty, eschewing wealth and respectability in favor of an all-consuming, intoxicated devotion to spiritual life.

18. “Breath by breath, the *qalandar* is [ever more] drunken/intoxicated” (See Wolf [2006, 255] for a discussion of this formula and its meaning in South Asian Sufism.) Frembgén (2011, 72) cites informants as specifying multiple *bols* (formulaic utterances) that can be heard in the same *dammālī* rhythms: “*Qalandar pāk*”; “*dam mast Qalandar*”; “*La ilaha illa Allah*”; “*‘Ali ‘Ali ‘Ali Haqq*”; and “*yā pāk yā pāk*,” and these too align closely with the content of Baloch *guātī-dammālī* chants.

19. A term that occurs across numerous Bantu languages representing drums, dance, and healing ceremonies centered on drumming and dance (see Janzen [1992, 197]).

20. Prita Sandy Meier (2004, 88–89) points to the period when, in the wake of international treaties abolishing slavery, imperial British naval forces would patrol the seas and seize individuals being trafficked as slaves, often bringing them to Bombay or Surat and freeing but also stranding them.

21. In an article concerning musical arts and government policy in Oman, Majid al-Harthy (2021, 168) cites Joseph Osgood as reporting in the mid-nineteenth century that the term “gooma” was widespread in Muscat, referring to dance performances accompanied by drumming involving men and women dancing together or men dancing with swords (1854, 106–8, cited in al-Harthy). To this day it is easy to find on YouTube examples of male sword dances accompanied by drumming and the *zumari* in the Lamu archipelago—quite possibly a legacy of the Mazrui branch of Omani imperial rule.

22. Bava Gor is said to have been initiated in Baghdad as a follower of the *ṭarīqah* (Sufi order/path) of Ahmed Rifa’i (Basu 2008, 234). In Salalah, in the Dhofar region of Oman, Ahmad Rifa’i has his own regular ceremony, known as Ahmad al-Kabir (Shawqi 1994, 20).

23. A resonant double chamber fiddle with a unique intonation that is probably the most revered instrument within Makrani Baloch traditional music repertoires.

24. For much more extensive discussions of *lĕwa*, see Sebiane (2007, 2014, and 2017); Bilkhair (2021); al-Shidi (1329/2008); and Mürer (2019).

25. The names *lĕwa* and *katmiri*—the latter a segment of a traditional *lĕwa* performance (as well as the name of spirit possession ceremony in Zanzibar)—and texts invoking spirits such as *dingomārō* all have origins in the Bantu cultures of East Africa (Bakari 1903, 159, 162; and see Mürer 2019; al-Harthy 2010, 226; Sebiane 2014, 63).

26. For further discussion, see Sebiane (2014; 2017); and Mürer (2019).

27. In Swahili contexts in Tanzania and Kenya, where it is used somewhat minimally as a musical element, the instrument has retained the name *taishōgōto*. I thank Andrew J. Eisenberg for alerting me to this and providing examples.

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SECTION THREE

Mediascapes

Sonic Atmospheres in Mauritian Devotional Islam

Sensing Transoceanic Connections in a Creole Society

Patrick Eisenlohr

Movement constitutes transoceanic spaces such as the Indian Ocean world. Sonic practices as atmospheres make such multilayered movements and connections palpable. The recitation of na't among Mauritian Muslims is an example of how sound and sonic practices can provide somatic evidence for transoceanic links in the Indian Ocean world. As is the case in India and Pakistan, Muslims of Indian background in Mauritius have long engaged in the recitation of Urdu na't, devotional poetry in honor of the Prophet Muhammad. In this chapter, I examine the interplay between this Indian poetic tradition associated with the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at Islamic reformist tradition with the sonic dynamics of vocal performance. In particular, sonic dynamics of vocal performance are responsible for the powerful effects of pious transformation that my interlocutors spoke to me about during my field research. To this end, I draw on a neo-phenomenological analytic of atmospheres taking atmospheres to be emotions poured into space that intermingle with sentient bodies in order to understand how vocal sound can bring about such transformations. The discursive and sonic dimensions of the na't genre are closely interrelated. Nevertheless, by approaching the sonic through the paradigm of atmospheres I treat the sonic as a modality of knowledge and meaning-making that is in principle independent from the discursive aspects of voice. Understanding sonic religious practices such as reciting na't as atmospheres is also useful because it helps one grasp the role of sensory knowledge in the making and sustaining of transoceanic connections.

Ever since the 1980s, recordings of na't, first from India and Pakistan, and since the 1990s also recordings by local na't khwan, have circulated in Mauritius.

They have provided influential models of vocal performance so that recitation of the genre is nowadays thoroughly integrated with media practices. At the same time, the cultivation of this devotional genre inspired by Sufi traditions has long been a focus of sectarian disputes among Muslims in India and Pakistan as well as Muslims of Indian background throughout the Indian Ocean world. Among Muslims of Indian background, such disputes have become part of larger concerns of Islamic authenticity in locations that are well connected to, yet far removed from, the South Asian homelands of their ancestors. At the same time, the mediatic circulation of *na't* raises the question of the technical reproducibility of sonic atmospheres and their transformational effects (Eisenlohr 2018).

For followers of the *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at* (Sanyal 1996), the artful recitation of *na't* is one of the chief means of bringing about the presence of the Prophet in his role as a mediator between Muslims and God. This is very much in line with this reformist tradition's openness to Sufism, which distinguishes it from the contemporary stances of other, more purist South Asian reformist traditions, such as the schools of Deoband and the *Ahl-e hadith*. The discursive dimensions of the poetry are of great significance; however, the vocal and sonic aspects of the performance are at least as important. The sonic materiality of the performance and its effects on listeners are a decisive dimension of the performance, indispensable for its success as an act of religious mediation and interaction with higher powers. A successful performance provokes profound bodily sensations among those present that many speak of as the feeling of being moved and carried away to a better place. In the discursive framework of this Islamic tradition, with its special emphasis on devotion to the figure of the Prophet, this more desirable place is often identified with Medina, considered to have been the prophet Muhammad's favorite city.

The vocal performance of *na't* is the main part of ritual gatherings known as *mahfil-e mawlad* that are held on important days of the Islamic ritual calendar, such as the Prophet's birthday, the death anniversaries (*'urs*) of major Sufi saints, or auspicious events in people's lives such as weddings, moving into a new house, or the passing of important school exams. The reciting is often collective but is usually led by solo reciters known as *na't khwan* who are known for their voices and skill in reciting this devotional poetry, and regarded as models to be emulated when performing the poetry. The performance of *na't* both expresses and stirs feelings of love and attachment for the Prophet among those present, aiming to turn them into better Muslims in the process. Mauritian Muslims who follow the *Ahl-e Sunnat* tradition are concerned about the perceived authenticity of the poetry. This is first of all related to long-standing sectarian disputes in South Asia and its diasporas about the extent to which the exuberant personal veneration of the Prophet expressed in *na't* poetry is legitimate. Opponents of the *Ahl-e Sunnat*, such as followers of the school of Deoband, manifest in Mauritius above all through the strong presence of the transnational missionizing movement *Tablighi Jama'at* as well as proponents of the *Ahl-e hadith* tend to consider the profuse

personal praise and exaltation of the Prophet in na‘t poetry as dangerously exaggerated, elevating the Prophet to a God-like position and thereby diluting the unicity of God. Aficionados of na‘t poetry have in turn defended the practice by citing hadith according to which the Prophet himself was fond of the poetry and sanctioned its recitation, and have counterattacked their opponents, accusing them of insufficient respect for the Prophet. As the texts of the poetry are such a delicate issue, Mauritian Muslims who are fond of na‘t often make sure that the poetry is sufficiently authorized, for example, through having been composed by eminent scholar-saints, such as Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi, the founder of the Barelwi tradition (Eisenlohr 2018). Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi was known as a prolific composer of na‘t who wrote na‘t poetry in moments of divine inspiration such as when he felt the presence of the Prophet in front of him (Khan Barelwi n.d.). Another reason for the major concern about the authenticity and legitimacy of the na‘t poetry recited in mahfil-e mawlood stems from the diasporic context of Mauritius, where Muslims are a minority and perceive themselves as being relatively far removed from the center of religious authority in the Muslim world. In contrast to this widespread perception, Mauritian Muslims are in fact closely connected to several centers of Islamic authority, not only in India and Pakistan but also elsewhere. Much of this diasporic anxiety about orthopraxy is related to the dominant multicultural model of Mauritian nation-building, which privileges a group’s ownership of a major religious tradition pointing to origins beyond Mauritius as a chief means for inclusion into the nation. The question of who then stands for authentic Islam also matters for cultural citizenship, as Muslims are one of the officially recognized “communities” of Mauritius.

These sensibilities about textual authenticity notwithstanding, the perceived appropriateness of the vocal style and voice quality in the recitation of na‘t is important for the effectiveness of the performance, as several of my interlocutors told me that they considered the sonic dimensions of the voice even more important than its discursive dimensions. They told me how they found the sound of the voice of a particular na‘t khwan so moving that they felt carried away by it. The stirring of pious emotions and the palpable sense of the spiritual presence of the Prophet that the performance of na‘t poetry aims to bring about thus hinges on vocal sound and its qualities. Nicholas Harkness has called this intertwining of vocal sound and sociocultural values the “phonosonic nexus” (Harkness 2014, 12). Pointing at the expected co-presence among specific qualities of vocal sound, certain social actors, and particular social and cultural values, this notion emphasizes how the sonic dimensions of the voice can, under certain conditions, stand for sociocultural values and actors’ stances to them. For my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors, the recitation of na‘t among Mauritians actively provokes pious emotions and bodily sensations of being carried away to a better place. Even more, vocal sound brings about such sensations and emotions in a way experienced as going beyond one’s agency and intentionality.

An analytic of vocal sound as atmospheres explains not only the co-occurrence of vocal tones and particular sociocultural values but also accounts for its transformative somatic effects on those within its range. Understanding sound as atmospheres draws attention to the ways in which its sonic materiality intermingles with felt-bodies. Such processes of transduction then result in suggestions of movement felt by those exposed to the vocal sound of na‘t recitation. These suggestions of movement become a key part of the emotional force behind this devotional vocal practice, providing the bodily felt evidence for the promise of salvation that is central to this form of devotional, Sufi-inspired Islam.

SONIC ATMOSPHERES

In order to understand the effects of vocal sound on participants in a mahfil-e mawlud one has to pay attention to its dynamic movements. Especially, the widely circulated recordings of the na‘t genre in Mauritius demonstrate how an array of obvious sonic parameters is exploited to this effect (Chady 2001, 2003). Na‘t khwans’ voices in these recordings feature a great dynamic along the parameters of loudness, pitch, and timbre. On top of this, another feature of the recordings is the application of a reverb effect throughout. This results in the impression of spatial wideness, this echo-effect citing listeners’ experience of the azan, the Islamic call to prayer reverberating in a built environment. In crucial moments of the recitation, the na‘t khwan’s voice displays an intensification along several of these dimensions, not just an increase in loudness and pitch but also a shift of acoustic energy toward the frequency bins of the 3,000–5,000 Hertz range, resembling what Sundberg (1974) has called the “singer’s formant” with pronounced vibrato. Vocal sound thus enacts a marked sonic movement, a motion that is a sonic icon of a spiritual movement of the devotees present in this religious context toward Medina and a poetic image of the presence of the Prophet himself. The image of traveling to Medina in order to personally encounter the Prophet is a stock theme discursively elaborated in na‘t poetry. But a movement that several of my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors described as the experience of being lifted up and taken away to a better place is also quite literally enabled and carried out through the dynamics of vocal sound through the ways such a sonic force affects the felt-bodies of those involved in the practice. The question is how vocal sound can actually function as more than a metaphor for discursive themes of a religious tradition such as the particular South Asian tradition of devotional Islam I am writing about here. Where does its peculiar force come from, which some of my interlocutors in Mauritius spoke about as really overpowering?

I suggest that an analytic of atmospheres can account for the somatic effects of vocal movement my interlocutors described for this ritual setting centered on the recitation of na‘t poetry. I hereby draw on recent work on sound and music as atmospheres (Abels 2013, 2018, 2022; see also Eisenlohr 2018; Riedel 2019). According

to new approaches in phenomenology, atmospheres are entities emitted by persons, objects, or their constellations. Gernot Böhme refers to them as “ecstasies of the thing” (Böhme 1993, 122). They fill a predimensional space, enveloping and intermingling with felt-bodies who sense atmospheres in a holistic manner that is upstream from definite sensory impressions. The phenomenological distinction between the physical body (*Körper*) and the felt-body (*Leib*) is crucial here, as the felt-body often reaches beyond the boundaries of the physical body, into what is felt to pertain to the body, but being outside its physical boundaries. According to Hermann Schmitz, atmospheres are akin to feelings occupying the predimensional space of the felt-body. “Feelings are atmospheres poured into space and powers that seize the felt-body (*Leib*)” (Schmitz 2014, 30). Atmospheres are not objects or things but fleeting phenomena that come and go, such as pain, the weather, or silence. “Emotions are atmospheres poured out spatially. An atmosphere in the sense intended here is the complete occupation of a surfaceless space in the region of experienced presence. This surfaceless space, apart from emotions, can also be occupied by the weather experienced as enveloping you or by (e.g., festive, pregnant or calm) silence” (Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011, 255). Sound and sonic phenomena such as musical figures enacted by a voice are a very tangible example of atmospheres. They are fleeting and nonpermanent but have an eminently material existence. They cannot just only be sensed by the hearing apparatus but in a much more comprehensive way, by potentially the entire body. This is why it is justified to speak of sonic instead of acoustic atmospheres because the entire range of traveling energetic and vibratory phenomena they compose very often exceed the limits of the human hearing apparatus. Very importantly, atmospheres contain suggestions of motion (*Bewegungssuggestionen*) (Schmitz 2014, 85). According to Böhme, sound and music as atmosphere is a “manipulation of space as it is experienced by the body” (Böhme 2000, 16). The sonic dynamics of vocal sound in na‘t performances that I described thus can be understood as atmospheres, effecting suggestions of motion on the felt-bodies of those participating in a mahfil-e mawlud, or those listening to recordings of na‘t recitals in other contexts.

SOUNDING THE INDIAN OCEAN IN RELIGIOUS NETWORKS

The Indian Ocean has a long history of deep and long-term interconnectedness (Alpers 2014; Bose 2006; Chaudhuri 1985), in fact, some have even seen the Indian Ocean as the “cradle of globalization” (Moorthy and Jamal 2010, 9). Running against many North Atlantic intellectual sensibilities connected to the notion of the cosmopolitan, religious traditions and networks have been among the foremost dimensions of such transoceanic connections in this part of the world. Especially, Islamic traditions and links have played an important role in establishing multilayered routes and connections across the ocean (Eisenlohr 2012; Ho 2006;

Ricci 2011; Sheriff 2010; Simpson 2009), comprising not just the spread of religious knowledge and practices, but also migration, trade, tourism and pilgrimage as well as political alliances, and also musical traditions (Rasmussen 2016). The sonic practices embedded in particular Islamic ritual contexts can undergird these ties by investing them with a particular felt quality. I contend that the production and cultivation of sonic atmospheres like those in na‘t recitals provide a particular kind of somatic evidence for such transoceanic ties that give the links to places of religious authority beyond Mauritius a certain self-evident character beyond words. As is evident from my example of na‘t recitation, such sonic practices build and maintain relationships to several of such places at once. First of all, they are a central component of a larger complex of piety centered on the person of the Prophet Muhammad. The ardent wish to be close to the Prophet that these devotional practices enact from a Sufi-inspired perspective often comes down to the expressed wish to travel to a holy land elsewhere in this Indian Ocean world, in this case Medina. At the same time, the practice of reciting Urdu devotional poetry in Mauritius also points to the predominantly north Indian origins of most Mauritian Muslims, the part of the Indian Ocean world where the genre emerged and from where its practice reached Mauritius.

It would be wrong, however, to imagine the recitation of na‘t as a straightforward kind of cultural baggage that the ancestors of Mauritian Muslims brought with them when they migrated from India to Mauritius in the nineteenth century, most of them from present-day Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. They were in a large majority impoverished indentured laborers brought to Mauritius to work on the sugar plantations, replacing the slave workforce after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 until the end of the indenture system during World War I (Carter 1995). Their ritual practices were more influenced by caste affiliation and the regional and rural background they shared with their fellow indentured laborers who later identified as Hindus than by any clear-cut religious boundaries. The waves of religious reformism that brought about the emergence of a Hindu “religion” and new modern forms of reformist Islam from the middle of the nineteenth century onward had not yet touched the rural peripheries from which the ancestors of Mauritians with Indian background departed for Mauritius. In other words, for the vast majority of Indian migrants to Mauritius, the sociocultural worlds they left behind in northern India were not yet influenced by the modern religious reformist movements that dominate the field today and that caused the emergence of hard religious boundaries between Hindus and Muslims, as well as in the case of Muslims, strong boundaries between followers of various reformist sectarian traditions. These modern Indian reform movements only made their presence felt in Mauritius after 1910, when Hindu activists of the Arya Samaj started working in Mauritius, soon to be followed by their competitors from the Sanatan Dharm tradition. Among Muslims, the *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama‘at* movement established itself in Mauritius through Muslim Gujarati trader networks in

the 1920s. This reformist tradition, characterized by a synthesis of ‘ulema-based Islam and Sufism then quickly became the dominant form of Sunni Islam in Mauritius. Much of the emphasis in this tradition is on a complex of piety around the figure of the Prophet. The recitation of *na‘t* is in turn one of the hallmarks of this Sufi-influenced veneration of the Prophet what the *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama‘at* stands for. In fact, the founder of this tradition, Ahmad Raza Khan Bareilwi (1856–1921), was known to be a prolific composer of the genre. That is, the recitation of *na‘t* is a practice that only became established through modern Islamic reformism, after migration from India to Mauritius had already ended. Recitation of *na‘t* thus enacts a transoceanic connection that is properly diasporic insofar as it only emerged long after migration. It is the product of a new orientation to a place of origin and the religious authority connected to it.

A cosmopolitan set of Indian Ocean “mobile societies” (Ho 2017), in this case Gujarati trader communities, has long played a crucial role in the deep religious transformations that have taken place among Mauritian Muslims since the period of migration from India. The Islamic networks through which various kinds of reformism reached Mauritius from India were for a long time almost exclusively in the hands of the Gujarati trader communities, who spread around the Indian Ocean region in the nineteenth century in the wake of Empire (Markovits 1999) and had entered Mauritius as free immigrants with their own capital, continuously maintaining dense networks of kinship, trade, and religion with India. These endogamous and highly mobile groups with their long-distance networks in the Indian Ocean world became the exponents of an Islamic cosmopolitanism that many Mauritian Muslims who are descendants of working-class indentured laborers from north India have more recently sought to emulate (Eisenlohr 2012).

The reasons for the spread and popularity of performative vocal practices that signal affiliation with a major Indian Islamic reformist tradition cannot be reduced to the impact of religious activism from India channeled to Mauritius by the well-connected and often wealthy Gujarati trader families found not just in Mauritius but throughout the Indian Ocean region. The internal dynamics of a post-plantation Creole society also played a crucial role in the process of religious reformism and purification that turned Indo-Mauritians into either Hindus or Muslims in the course of the twentieth century. As a former sugar colony with no precolonial population whose inhabitants all have origins elsewhere, this Creole society has been profoundly shaped by the experience of slavery and indentured labor. As in other Creole worlds in the Caribbean with which Mauritius shares a fair range of historical commonalities, race played a supreme role in the archipelago’s social and economic structure. With a Franco-Mauritian community historically in control of most of the land and the sugar industry, slaves, indentured laborers, and other migrants from around the Indian Ocean world became part of Mauritian society through processes of racialization that simultaneously assigned them particular economic and social roles in a plantation colony. In Creole societies such as in

Mauritius and the Caribbean, groups tend to be demarcated and set in hierarchical relationships by race. In colonial Mauritius, “Indian” was not a neutral designation of origin but referred to a rather inferior racial category. The existence of a small group of well-to-do Indians did not fundamentally change this reality. Members of the economically and at the time also politically dominant white and colored (*gens de couleur*) elite often looked down on Indians as racial others and because of what they considered their questionable non-Christian ritual practices. The twentieth-century process of “religionization” that both Muslims and Hindus engaged in also has to be understood in this colonial Creole context where the claiming of a recognized major religious tradition such as Hinduism or Islam offered an escape route from racialization (Eisenlohr 2022). The modern Indian reformist movements thereby provided sought-after resources for Mauritians of Indian background to elevate their standing from inferior racial others to proponents of the respectable major “world religions,” Hinduism and Islam. Transoceanic religious networks, initially almost entirely controlled by Gujarati trader families, provided the impetus for turning Indo-Mauritians with specific caste-based and rural ritual practices into followers of modern Hinduism and Islam. However, the conditions of a Creole society in which race ruled supreme also played its part. Finally, the lasting transformations of Mauritian society through religionization came about through the official recognition and privileging of religious difference as a main mode of demarcating groups in Mauritian society. An important part of this was the institutionalization and teaching of so-called ancestral languages tied to religion, among them Urdu, in schools. This policy started after World War II in the final decades of colonial rule and was completed by the postcolonial Hindu-dominated governments after independence in 1968. Accompanying this shift was the enshrinement of religion as a major category for distinguishing groups in Mauritius in the census, the constitution, the political system, and through the extension of state subsidies and state recognition to non-Christian religions such as Hinduism and Islam. All in all this signaled a momentous shift from a plantation society built on racialization to the present model of Mauritian nation-building, religion-based multiculturalism. The shift from racialization to religionization was empowering for Mauritians of Indian origin because it asserted the autonomy and respectability of Hinduism and Islam and the full recognition of their followers as a community. Nineteenth-century indentured migrants were not yet able to assert this claim and had to undergo the inferiorizing regime of racialization instead. In short, modern reformist religious movements from India enabled Mauritians of Indian origin to greatly improve their standing in the Creole society of Mauritius and to leave behind racial stigma. This is the Mauritian background informing Islamic devotional practices such as the recitation of *na‘t*. Taken at face value, the practice appears to be a cultural import from north India, falling within what the Mauritian state officially labels as “ancestral culture.” However, reciting *na‘t* and the long-distance connections that can be felt in it is part of the drama of a

Creole society, where newcomers from different parts of the Indian Ocean world struggled to establish themselves, seeking to improve the terms of their incorporation in Mauritian society.

SENSING TRANSOCEANIC CONNECTIONS

So far, I have introduced the recitation of *na't* among Mauritian Muslims as an atmospheric practice that exerts somatically felt suggestions of movement on those taking part in it. In the context of a devotional tradition centered on the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad, such visceral invitations to movement merge with the discursive call to travel to Medina to personally encounter the Prophet, a leitmotiv of *na't* poetry. On the other hand, I have discussed the recitation of *na't* as part of a much larger process of establishing modern reformist religious networks between Mauritius and India that only set in years after migration from India to Mauritius had finally ended. This process involved the extension to Mauritius of the deep processes of religious transformation in colonial India that produced modern Hinduism and the modern reformist schools of Islam in South Asia, channeled through cosmopolitan and mobile Gujarati trader communities that had spread throughout the Indian Ocean world in the wake of Empire. However, the political-economic and social setup of colonial Mauritius also played a crucial role. Ultimately, the dynamics of Mauritius as a Creole society built on the logics of racialization made alignment with the new, standardized version of major religious traditions from India irresistibly attractive for Mauritians of Indian origin who inhabited an inferior position in the racial hierarchy of a colonial plantation society. It propelled a shift from race to religion as the chief group-making discourse in Mauritius, becoming the single most important criteria of marking communal boundaries in the final decades of colonial rule, culminating in the enshrinement of religious difference in the census, constitution, and the political system after independence, along with state recognition and promotion of presumed “ancestral languages” with chiefly religious significance, among them Urdu. These dynamics of religionization proved highly empowering for Mauritians of Indian origin, and in combination with their numbers, their rising dominance in politics and their economic ascent enabled them to leave behind racial stigma.

The Indian Ocean as a cosmopolitan and highly interconnected space that long predates colonial networks has often been considered the distinctive characteristic of this part of the world from a global perspective (Chaudhuri 1985; Alpers 2014). Historians have pointed out how the Indian Ocean has been a zone of movement and interconnections that fly in the face of modern methodological nationalism and the received boundaries of area studies that have conventionally divided the Indian Ocean world into Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, while Australia as a European settler state always fell out of the frame of the Indian Ocean’s non-Western “regions.” In a salutary intellectual operation, historians and

members of other scholarly disciplines have pointed to the inadequacy of these North Atlantic political and academic demarcations of “areas” in the Indian Ocean world that has always been defied by long-standing histories of movements of people, religious traditions, political forms of authority, goods, and ideas across such boundaries. Mauritius and the Mascarenes present a rather extreme scenario in this regard, because as an archipelago in the southwest Indian Ocean uninhabited before colonialism it never belonged to any established land-based “area,” becoming the home of Creole societies exclusively composed of people with origins elsewhere. As such, there are few places where the theme of multilayered transoceanic links is more pertinent, as is also evident in Mauritian musical traditions (Servan-Schreiber 2010).

Recent approaches to transregional spaces, including transoceanic spaces like the world of the Indian Ocean, have emphasized the role of movement in creating these spaces. Far from being preexisting grids or containers, such spaces come into existence through human routes, connections, and links that are built, sustained, and transformed through the travel of people, capital, goods and other material objects, ideas, as well as practices and institutions like religion. Such crisscrossing connections also constitute the Indian Ocean as an “aesthetic space” (Verne and Verne 2017). The recitation of *na‘t* is a small example of these much larger and multifaceted ties. It can, however, help us understand a key dimension of such transoceanic links, its felt and atmospheric qualities that often evade discursive rendering. As discussed earlier, atmospheres exert their power through somatically palpable suggestions of movement. Sonic practices such as the recitation of *na‘t* are a particularly evocative example of atmospheres, because the sonic as traveling energetic flows transgresses boundaries, including bodily boundaries, in obvious ways. Those exposed to the power of sound and the sonic will feel the passing of sonic energy through them as suggestions of motion, pointing at the processes of transduction that are central to the perception of sound, whether through the hearing apparatus or other parts of the body.

Sonic practices are especially important in this context, because the subtle sensation of movement central to the atmospheric articulates with the larger theme of movement as producing transoceanic worlds. The atmospheric provides a particular register for experiencing movement, in this case movement that makes the Indian Ocean region a lived transoceanic space. It does so by enabling the somatic registration of aspects of such movements as bodily present, and therefore as self-evident.¹ It makes possible the feeling of such movements beyond words, but also in a diffuse multilayered way that cannot be reduced to single sensory impressions, exceeding them in a holistic way instead. In other words, the recitation of *na‘t* is, alongside its more obvious character as a practice of spiritual intercession in a Sufi-inspired tradition, also a means of providing seemingly irrefutable somatic evidence of transoceanic connections. This is not just a matter of parallelism between atmospherically induced suggestions of movement exerted on felt-bodies

and the various forms of ties through movement that constitute a transoceanic space. The recitation of this devotional poetry makes the truth of these connections felt in the flesh.

Provoking suggestions of movement through the sonic in the recitation of Urdu na‘t is, however, no automatic process that yields the same results for everyone and in any setting. The processes of transduction that result in somatically felt suggestions of motion in participants of a mahfil-e mawluḍ are central to the power of na‘t to generate atmospheres. Such suggestions of movement also intersect with body memories. These are not just aural but are properly sonic “archives” of the felt-body, because they comprise the traces of felt movement beyond the acoustically perceivable. It does not need to be pointed out that these “archives” are not the same for everyone. Such body memories of movement are the outcome of long processes of socialization. In the case of na‘t recitation, the sectarian differences and antagonisms the practice has long become embroiled in play a crucial role in the formation of such sonic archives in the flesh. Many Salafis would appreciate the beauty of a na‘t khwan’s voice, but would not be atmospherically moved by the performance. This recalls the observation by Hermann Schmitz that atmospheres can also be merely observed, and that a spreading atmosphere does not necessarily seize everyone in the same way. From a Salafi perspective the notion of making the Prophet appear in person through sonic practices in order to gain his intercession with God is blasphemous. For someone committed to that tradition, the sound of na‘t poetry would not be associated with the vivid experience of traveling to Medina to be in the presence of the Prophet, as it would not be part of that person’s body memory. Atmospheric suggestions of movement generated by sonic practices therefore need to intersect with such body memories of movement, including those contained in sonic “archives,” for their power to unfold.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have introduced the recitation of na‘t poetry among Mauritian Muslims as an atmospheric practice that generates sonic and somatic knowledge of transoceanic connections in the Indian Ocean world. Na‘t recital is not a kind of cultural “baggage” that ancestors of present-day Mauritian Muslims brought from India when they migrated to Mauritius. It is a key devotional practice common among followers of a major Islamic reformist movement, the *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama‘at* that only emerged in India at a time when migration to Mauritius was already in full swing, and that only reached Mauritius in the 1920s, quickly establishing itself as the locally dominant form of Sunni Islam. The recitation of na‘t is therefore a sonic religious practice that points to links between Mauritius and India that emerged only after migration from India had already ended. The popularity of the practice was due to the expansion and missionary efforts of a modern Islamic piety movement. However, its spread was also driven by the internal

dynamics of a Creole society in which people of Indian origin, together almost 70 percent of the population, aimed at empowerment through replacing race with religion as the main principle of making and demarcating “communities” in a post-plantation society.

I have argued that an approach to the sonic as atmosphere is particularly suited to gain a better understanding of why sonic practices, including music, can be such powerful modes of knowledge of long-distance connections, including trans-regional and transoceanic ties. The theme of motion is central in this respect, connecting the kinds of movements that constitute a particular space, including the transoceanic world that is the focus of this volume, and movement as experienced by the felt-body. The recitation of na‘t is one way to make the truth and import of such Indian Ocean ties palpable. It therefore constitutes a kind of sonic knowledge of its own, irreducible to discourse, providing somatic evidence for the transoceanic connections that play a major role in the lives of Mauritian Muslims.

NOTE

1. See Kabir (2021) for a different approach to the role of movement and motion in the felt aspects of transoceanic links in the Goan mando song-and-dance genre whose practice summons body memories that link the Indian Ocean with the Atlantic world.

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Arabian Passings in Indian Ocean History

*Troubadours, Technology, and the Longue Durée,
1656–1963*

Gabriel Lavin

In July 2013, I had my first of many visits to Kuwait after a year living in Cairo. During a drive back from an all-night jam session, the voice of Lata Mangeshkar rang through a friend's car speakers. He said, "You see? This music is the basis of Kuwaiti music. Kuwaiti music is closest to this Indian style." Then he played some homemade cassette recordings of various Kuwaiti artists, singing classical and colloquial Arabic poetry to melodies taken from mid-twentieth-century Indian films. One of the cassettes featured a version of the song "Ya Rahmin" that I later learned was made popular by a Hadhrami musician who grew up in Somalia, Ali al-Khanbashi. Collaborating with the eminent Hadhrami poet Husayn Abu Bakr al-Mahdar, who wrote the poem "Ya Rahmin," al-Khanbashi sang the words to a melody taken from the 1969 Hindi film *Ek Phool Do Mali*. During an interview with *Qanat al-Hadramawt* (the Hadhramaut Channel) in 2016 about his musical career, al-Khanbashi said that "Ya Rahmin" was received negatively by traditionalists throughout Yemen after its release. He quoted critics of the song, saying, "This song is useless! Its rhythm is African!" Despite such criticism, al-Khanbashi noted that the song made a splash throughout the Gulf after a major Kuwaiti label, RamCo, recorded the song for a cassette release.

Songs like "Ya Rahmin" that have an "Indian coloring," *sabghah hindiyyah* or *lawn hindi*, form a significant part of the Kuwaiti genre called 'Adaniyyat, the music playing on my friend's cassettes. It features instrumentation common throughout Arab countries (including the oud, qanun, and violin), classical and colloquial

Arabic poetry, and a variety of rhythmic, melodic, and improvisational elements derived from Egyptian, Indian, and Hadhrami musics (Mürer 2017). That Lata Mangeshkar could be viewed as the essence of Kuwaiti music, and that an Arabic poem composed to a song from a 1960s Indian film could be denounced for having “African rhythm” in Yemen, suggests that such transactions be considered under the rubric of the Indian Ocean world. At the same time however, one must ask whether the creative borrowings from Indian film soundtracks in Somalia, Kuwait, or Yemen are categorically different from those occurring anywhere else in the world. Pondering the integrity of the Indian Ocean as a frame to study modern musical genres like *ʿAdaniyyat*, this chapter will turn to Indian Ocean history, and specifically to brief microhistories of people, texts, and technologies. Moving from early modern poets like Ibn Maʿsum al-Madani (d. 1707), who traveled from the Hejaz to Mughal India in 1656, to recording artists like Muhammad Jumʿah Khan (d. 1963), a Hadhrami troubadour of Punjabi descent who toured East Africa during the 1940s and ’50s, the chapter will consider how modern technologies like printing and later the phonograph interfaced with existing human and textual movements throughout the Indian Ocean, setting the stage for more recent artists like Ali al-Khambashi.

By exploring the circulation of specific people, texts, and technologies, the chapter demonstrates how categories like African, Arab, and Indian, including any abstraction of “Indianness” or “Africanness” they could potentially signal in a song like “Ya Rahmin,” are contingent and transient notions. By probing microhistories, such abstractions start to seem less inevitable and, at times, like less productive points of departure for the study of music and the Indian Ocean. This is particularly true when they are cast in the shadow of elaborate crossings and affiliations that occurred before modern nation-state borders and continentalism. Nonetheless, “Arabian passings” simply refers to my reliance on secondary and primary sources in Arabic, and I attempt to make no claims about what abstract categories these sources represent other than what is made explicit by their authors. In this approach I am inspired by historians like Nile Green (2018) and Sujit Sivasundaram (2017), who have advocated for writings of Indian Ocean history that are attuned to the ways vernacular sources appreciate cultural differences and negotiate “the materiality of different ships” themselves (Sivasundaram 2017).

The Indian Ocean is a productive frame for studying globalization and modernization, an alternative starting point for global histories of cultural and economic exchange (Bose 2006; Chaudhuri 1985, 1990; Sheriff 2014). As many point out, the *longue durée*—that is, long-term socioeconomic movement and transformation structured by environmental phenomena like the monsoons—constructs an internally coherent “world” of cultural diversity and connection between coastal societies past and present. But as seen with critics of “Ya Rahmin,” the *longue durée* has perhaps generated many conflicting worlds, which complicate the nationalist, religious, and ethnic categories scholars use to measure and define

cosmopolitanism and globalization (Simpson and Kresse 2008). Furthermore, some historians have claimed that the seat of British power in India, spurred by modern communications and steam travel, uprooted the environmental “deep structures” of the *longue durée* in favor of militarized, technological capitalism in an empire that sprawled from East Africa to the Malay Archipelago during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, greatly overshadowing previous Portuguese, French, and Dutch colonial powers (see Pearson 2003, 190–91). During this time, people living under British and other European colonial bureaucracies increasingly had to choose between two-dimensional legalistic ascriptions of Arab, African, Malay, or Indian despite historically fluid and complex forces shaping these identities. For better or worse, such orderly abstractions, or what Engsang Ho (2006:247) has metaphorically called the “Chinese boxes” or “Russian dolls” of colonial administration and constitutional nationalism, continue to find new life as the scholarly parceled grains of ethnic and racial difference, distilled into theoretical elixirs regarding cosmopolitanism and hybridity in the study of the Indian Ocean.

Nonetheless, perhaps older and newer layers of Indian Ocean globalization are present in the careers of musicians like Ali al-Khanbashi, and similarly in the opinion of his critics, who were indifferent to the fact that the African rhythm of a Bollywood song was propelled by the circulation of cassettes and films between India, Somalia, Hadhramaut, and Kuwait. Culture in the *longue durée* remains less studied among Indian Ocean historians, so here I contribute by exploring transformation and continuity in the mediums of cultural exchange, be they mobile troubadours and poets or technologies like print and the phonograph. Certainly, culture in the Indian Ocean world is neither defined solely by colonialism nor capitalism, yet neither is it simply a result of environment and geography. Thus, critical consideration of how (or if) the *longue durée* continues after the technological transformation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is worthwhile, if only to help prevent the Indian Ocean “world” from becoming simply another geographical teleology that reifies rather than complicates cultural categories derived from colonial administrations, nation states, and the continentalist penchant of area studies.

THE ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

If there is a fountainhead for Arabian passings in Indian Ocean history, or what Ronit Ricci (2011) has described as an “Arabic cosmopolis,” then it is undoubtedly the place of the language’s origin: the Arabian Peninsula. Because of its intermediate position between Africa and Asia, the Arabian Peninsula has served as a gateway to the riches and resources of India and China for many empires and civilizations in North Africa and Southwest Asia. In the imaginaries of both ancient Greek and medieval Muslim geographers, Arabia was often considered a part of

“inner India,” a region that stretched from Western India to Ethiopia (Reese 2018, 20–24). Historically, the south of the Arabian Peninsula was more fertile and gave rise to powerful civilizations extending back to the Himyarite kingdom of Yemen, which in the early common era had an alliance with Rome as a producer of frankincense and as a trade intermediary with India.

Before the modern oil industry, coastal trade linking maritime economies with inland regions was profitable, but many people were compelled to migrate to East Africa and India, pursuing trade in dried fish, dates, horses, or pearls. In exchange for these locally produced commodities, traders in Arabia would import wood, silks, spices, weapons, or other resources from Africa or Asia hard to come by in the local desert environment (Sheriff 2010, 41–61). Slavery was common practice in the Arabian Peninsula throughout history and existed well into the twentieth century, resulting in forced migrations to the region from Africa as well as India and Southeast Asia. Indeed, the historical prevalence of slavery throughout the Indian Ocean should serve as a corrective to those who would posit utopian or peaceful cosmopolitanisms in the *longue durée* (Hopper 2015).

The Arabian Peninsula is also the birthplace of Islam, which played a fundamental role in unifying economic and cultural movements throughout the Indian Ocean via trade and the pilgrimage to Mecca (Alpers 2014, 40–41; Pearson 2003, 62). Islam spread throughout the Indian Ocean primarily through mercantilism, forming a high degree of synchronicity with local customs (Ali 2016). Within Sufi networks like the ‘Alawi order, which originated in the Peninsula’s southern region of Hadhramaut in modern-day Yemen, music and poetry were a staple of religious practice and an affirmation of faith, especially among *sayyid* religious and cultural elites. Sayyids were purported descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and were responsible for spreading certain literary and poetic practices associated with Islam around the Indian Ocean, including Sufi litanies like the *Ratib al-Haddad* or musical instruments like the *qanbus*, *qanbus*, or *gambus*, an Arabian plucked lute (Bang 2014; Ho 2006, 50–51). Musical rituals, or *sama’*, of the Hadhrami ‘Alawis or other Sufi organizations based in Mecca, were practices that historically attracted converts to Islam and galvanized spiritual activity across the Indian Ocean (Freitag 2003, 280; Laffan 2014; Reese 2001, 49–68).

Music was also an important part of life on Arabian ships, or dhows, providing entertainment for sailors and travelers throughout the *longue durée*. These trading vessels and pearling ships, and later steamships, played a fundamental role in transporting the people, texts, and technologies explored in this chapter. The slave trade also brought musical traditions such as the *tambura* from East and Central Africa to the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Harthy 2013). Along with pearl diving songs, such music has continued importance to the way identity and maritime heritage are remembered, preserved, and performed in the region today (Al-Rifai 1982; Al-Mulaifi 2016).

EARLY MODERN POETS AND TROUBADOURS

One early modern Indian Ocean troubadour is actually more of a legend, a musician named Yahya ‘Umar who traveled from Yemen to India where he spent most of his life. Poems credited to Yahya ‘Umar often include a mixture of Urdu vocabulary, including praise of beautiful Indian women: the apparent result of his sojourns and love affairs throughout the subcontinent (Ghalabi 1993, 19). In this regard, his story recalls earlier medieval Arab travelers like Ibn Battuta, who married within littoral societies wherever he went. Yet sources conflict as to when Yahya ‘Umar lived or what his precise origins were. Some say that he lived during the late seventeenth century and was a mercenary who traveled with religious scholars to India (Ghalabi 1993, 19). Others have traced the early modern narrative of Yahya ‘Umar from the Yafa’ region of Yemen to North India through a textual analysis of his poetry (Khalafi 2006). Interestingly however, one of the oldest written sources on Yahya ‘Umar dates to the early twentieth century and was a tale told to the British colonel Douglas Craven Phillott (d. 1930) by an unnamed Hadhrami man employed at Fort William in Calcutta. With the help of an Arabic teacher named R. F. Azoo, Phillott translated the tale “Story of Yahya ‘Umar, the Guitar Player (a True Story)” to English with a series of Hadhrami tales told by the unnamed man, and published them in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* during 1906 and 1907.

The story goes that Yahya ‘Umar traveled from Sana’a to Baroda in Gujarat, married a wife there, and divorced her after fifteen days before traveling to Madras and Calcutta. After leaving Baroda, his former wife died after giving birth to their child, a girl. Returning to Baroda years later, Yahya was fixed to marry another wife. On the wedding night, his new wife-to-be realizes that Yahya is her father after he plays his “guitar” (*qabus*) and sings for her, beginning each song by singing his name “Yahya ‘Umar.” The daughter recognized her father’s name because of a ring he left his wife with his name engraved on it, which she inherited after her mother’s death. After realizing he nearly wed his own daughter, Yahya left with her the following day back to Yemen where he married her to a fellow tribesman after their arrival. The anonymous Hadhrami narrator concluded the tale by clarifying that he himself did not attend the wedding (Phillott and Azoo 1907, 650–51). The story’s Arabic transcription also calls Yahya ‘Umar an *mqabis*, or “*qabus* player;” which Phillott and Azoo translated as “guitar player.” The *qabus* (also *qanbus*, *qambus*, or *gambus*) is a small plucked lute made from a single piece of wood with an animal skin sounding board played historically throughout East Africa, Arabia, and Southeast Asia. Although its origins are disputed, many scholars claim the *qanbus* originated in Yemen and spread to other littoral regions of the Indian Ocean (Hilarian 2005, 2006, 2007; Lambert 2013). In any case, the story relayed in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* is among the earliest primary sources documenting the instrument’s circulation throughout the Indian Ocean.

Despite his mysterious origins, Yahya ‘Umar’s story has remained quite popular among scholars and musicians since its initial publication in India. His identity and origins have been contested throughout modern Yemen, caught between the nation’s conflicting twentieth-century political geographies. There is much at stake in claims to Yahya ‘Umar’s legacy as his poems are widely sung throughout the Arabian Peninsula today in the genre *sawt*, while many commentators in Yemen have interpreted his popularity in the Gulf states as a “pillaging” of their national cultural heritage (Lambert 2001). In the 1990s, UNESCO classified Yahya ‘Umar’s instrument, the *qabus* or *qanbus*, as the intangible cultural heritage of Yemen, making an appeal that it was used to play the classical music of Sana’a, Yahya’s purported hometown and the modern capital of Yemen. But like the tale of Yahya himself, the historical resonance of a musical instrument between India, the Malay Archipelago, East Africa, and the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula was difficult to pin down in a late twentieth-century nationalist framework.¹

However, there was another early modern traveler from Arabia whose whereabouts and origins are less of a mystery but also less remembered. A seventeenth-century poet from the Hejaz named Ibn Ma’sum al-Madani (d. 1709) wrote an entire memoir about his journey from Mecca to India called *Solace of the Sojourner and the Wise One’s Counsel*, providing a unique Arabic account of Mughal India. Ibn Ma’sum came from a prestigious line of poets and religious scholars whose genealogy and family history spanned from the Hejaz to Persia. In 1656 he left Mecca for Hyderabad at the bidding of his father, who was an Islamic scholar in the service of Abdullah Qutb Shah (d. 1672). When his father mysteriously died in 1676, Ibn Ma’sum feared a conspiracy against his family within the court of Qutb Shah’s successor, Abdul Hassan, and fled to Burhanpur, then under the control of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. Just a few years before his death, Ibn Ma’sum returned with his family to Mecca; however, upon seeing his homeland changed after a long absence, he moved to his ancestral home of Shiraz where he spent the remaining years of his life (Madani 2006, 5–6).

In *Solace of the Sojourner*, Ibn Ma’sum wrote about a long layover in the Yemeni port city of Mocha on his way to India. Fitting for the passage, Ibn Ma’sum dedicated a long digression to coffee, including stories about its purported popularizer, the Sufi Ali b. ‘Umar al-Shadhili, who is buried in Mocha, and poems extolling coffee’s merits.² The following he claimed to have heard from a friend, who saw it written on the door of a coffee house in Syria; its erotic verses laud coffee’s global circulation on trade routes from India to China during the seventeenth century (Madani 2006, 88–94).

I am the beloved of a dark hue,
undressed in *finajin* (serving cups).

The essences of India perfume me,
while I make the rounds in *al-Sin* (China).

Yet unlike Yahya ‘Umar, and despite a prolific literary career writing many volumes of poetry, there are barely two stanzas by Ibn Ma’sum sung throughout the Arabian Peninsula today. They are yet another nod to worldly substances: “The morning wine is a must, so why do you lull back to sleep?” (Muhammad 2009, 172).

ARABIC PRINT, ARAB MERCHANTS,
AND THE GENESIS OF SAWT MUSIC IN COLONIAL INDIA

During the seventeenth century, commodities like coffee were not only enticing poets like Ibn Ma’sum but also joint-stock investors in early Dutch, French, and English East India companies. During the eighteenth century, European colonization in the Indian Ocean world culminated with the English East India Company’s takeover of Bengal during the 1760s. Under company rule (and the Crown’s after 1858), Indian colonial port cities such as Bombay were developed into industrial centers of global maritime trade, serving as pivotal maritime nodes for sailors from Kuwait, Bahrain, and other regions of the Peninsula during the nineteenth century (Bishara 2014). Under colonial jurisdiction, economic activity in India also galvanized alternative networks and forms of exchange, especially among Muslim pilgrims or other individuals who co-opted the technological “colonial grid” of steamship companies and telegraph lines for their own purposes (Alavi 2015). Furthermore, many regions around the Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Peninsula, became territorial extensions of British India. This included the Aden Protectorate (1839–1937) and later Bahrain (1880–1947), while other regions of the Arabian Peninsula such as Kuwait remained under British “protection” (Onley 2008; Willis 2009). Steam shipping and the Suez Canal, opened in 1869, greatly compressed space and time throughout the Indian Ocean while integrating it more extensively with the Mediterranean, Pacific, and Atlantic. Space-time compression during the nineteenth century also brought more Muslim pilgrims to the Arabian Peninsula than at any time in history, while Sufi networks between the Hejaz and places like Southeast Asia were greatly invigorated, leading to exchanges of music, poetry, and instruments like the *qanbus* or *gambus* that were to become amplified by early sound recording (see Laffan 2014).

With innovations like lithographic printing, British India also became a center for modern Arabic print during the nineteenth century. Printing presses in Bombay and Calcutta produced the first printed editions of what were to become staples of Arabic literature (including *One Thousand and One Nights*) between 1814 and 1818 (Green 2008, 147). Published at Fort William in Calcutta in 1811, a collection of poems, dialogues, and short stories called *Nafhat al-Yaman* or *Breezes from Yemen* (figure 7.1) was written and compiled by a Yemeni scholar named Ahmad al-Ansari al-Shirwani, who moved to Bengal from the Hejaz in 1808 (BaMutrif 2009, 66). Al-Shirwani’s *Breezes from Yemen* was used thereafter for Arabic education throughout colonial India; it remains a highly regarded literary text today and

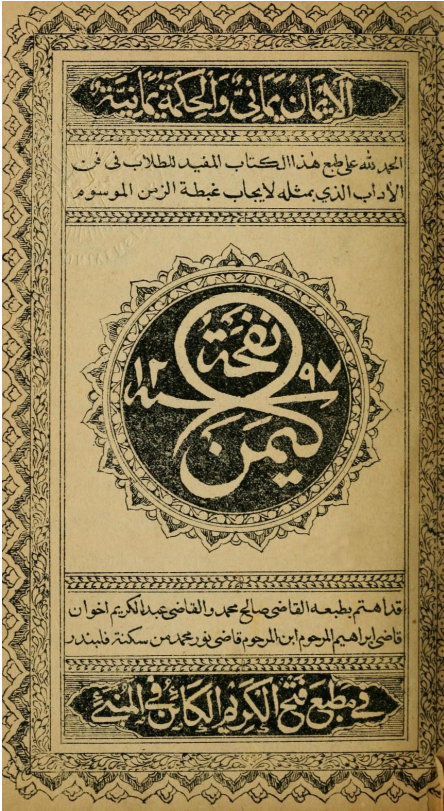


FIGURE 7.1. An edition of *Breezes from Yemen*, Bombay, 1880. (University of Toronto Libraries)

was even translated to English in 1907 (Phillott 1907, i–ii). The book also includes poems of the *tilmia'* (lit. “to polish”) style, which “polishes” classical Arabic poetry with Persian and Turkish motifs, words, and phrases. One such *tilmia'* poem in *Breezes from Yemen* is titled “Li shadin adni al-hasha,” or “There’s a pretty little gal that hurt me,” that al-Shirwani credits to Abbas b. Ali al-Makki al-Yamani. Due to wide circulation of *Breezes from Yemen*, “Li shadin” and other poems featured in the book remain well known today, being employed as lyrics in the renowned musical style of the Gulf called *sawt*. An example of how poems from mobile texts like *Breezes from Yemen* could be circulated later by phonograph recordings, “Li shadin” was turned into a song and recorded during the 1930s for His Master’s Voice by ‘Abdullatif al-Kuwaiti (figure 7.2), who is considered one of the Gulf’s earliest commercial singers (Salhi 2018). Furthermore, the melody chosen by al-Kuwaiti to carry the poem “Li shadin” is known as a *sawt hindustani*, or “Hindustani melody,” as it presents a major scale (or *maqam ‘ajam*) with cadences that regional scholars broadly attribute to Indian folk traditions (Dukhi 1984, 218–22; Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991, 145).



FIGURE 7.2. HMV recording of “Li shadin,” manufactured in India, c. 1937. The title on the label, “Lih Diyun,” is a misprint. (Courtesy of Ahmad AlSalhi)

While the multilingual poem “Li shadin” was the work of mobile scholars like al-Shirwani between Arabia and Bengal, the musical style *sawt* also developed on cultural networks between Yemen, the Gulf, and India during the nineteenth century, a history that is distinctly manifest in the circulation of the “Hindustani” melody performed by ‘Abdullatif al-Kuwaiti on early *sawt* recordings. Yet authorship credit for the Hindustani melody of “Li shadin” belongs not to him, but to ‘Abdullah al-Faraj (d. 1901), a renowned poet and singer who lived in Bombay from 1836 to 1877. Al-Faraj is often credited with innovating and introducing *sawt* to the Gulf after returning from India and settling in Kuwait in the late nineteenth century. The son of a wealthy Arab trader, al-Faraj grew up living a lavish lifestyle in Bombay and inherited his father’s estates. He spoke Arabic, Urdu, and English, having attended public schools in Bombay while studying Arabic with private instructors (Ulaby 2012). Some claim that these instructors were from southern Yemen and that he also learned from Yemeni singers and musicians at evening poetry gatherings (Ali 1980, 5–7; Dukhi 1984, 47–48; Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991, 134–54). Others have suggested that al-Faraj learned music from the Hadhrami aristocrat Shaykh Ali al-Harhara (d. 1901), who became a famous singer in Bombay during the nineteenth century and reportedly died after being poisoned by a jealous courtesan who fell madly in love with him (Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991, 138).

Indian courtesans are common in stories about ‘Abdullah al-Faraj who, according to one legend, was so in love with a beautiful dancer that he invented a new style of music:

‘Abdullah al-Faraj was a rich Kuwaiti trader who settled in India and fell in love with a professional dancer. Since his attempts to approach her resulted in nothing but tepidity, he resorted to gimmicks to get her attention. One night, he bought all the admission tickets to the theater where the lovely dancer performed, and invited a hundred Kuwaiti sailors who were in India for trading ventures. When the moment came for the beautiful dancer to enter the stage, ‘Abdullah al-Faraj signaled all the sailors to stand up and exit the theater leaving her alone with no audience, . . . when she returned home, she found ‘Abdullah al-Faraj under her windowsill with his oud in hand singing while the sailors played along with *mirwas* and clapping. It is said that these were the first songs of the modern *sawt*. (Matar 1980, 110)

While this account was an oral history recorded by scholar Bulis Antwan Matar, who conducted fieldwork in the Gulf during the 1970s, similar exchanges are corroborated in a memoir by S. M. Edwards called *By Ways of Bombay* (1912), which speaks of a courtesan named Nur Jan singing for wealthy Arab merchants in Bombay. The scene was depicted in the book, along with other images of everyday life in Bombay, by the visual artist M. V. Dhurandhar, whose sketch shows two Gulf Arabs and perhaps a Levantine Arab seated on the floor in front of Nur Jan, who is accompanied by two musicians playing sarangi and tabla (figure 7.3).

While the Indian tabla is a percussion instrument commonly used in *ʿAdaniyyat* performances in Kuwait today, the *mirwas* mentioned in Matar’s account of *sawt*’s genesis in India represent another genealogy of musical connections between Arabia and the Indian Ocean. *Mirwas* are the small cylindrical drums used to accompany a singer playing the oud in *sawt* performance and are comparable both in construction and playing style to *mirwas* drums played in southern Yemen and in Yemeni derived genres in Indonesia (Capwell 1995). Rather than the oud, ʿAbdullah al-Faraj most likely played the *qabus* or an instrument called the “Indian oud” or *ʿud hindi* during the nineteenth century (Salhi 2015a: 46–59). The legend of the lovely courtesan aside, it is widely accepted that al-Faraj integrated musical elements from Yemen, India, and the Gulf region, compiling a repertoire that began to be formalized as *sawt* by his musical heirs like ʿAbdullatif al-Kuwaiti at recording studios in Baghdad in 1927: the dawn of recording popular music from the Gulf (Salhi 2018). Including the recording of “Li shadin” previously discussed, these recorded *sawt* performances are the earliest remaining echoes of ʿAbdullah al-Faraj’s hybrid style of music. Yet like the legend of Yahya ʿUmar and his plucked-lute *qabus*, *sawt*’s transregional genesis between Yemen, India, and the Gulf during the nineteenth century has resulted in much subsequent nationalistic debate about its origins, be it over the instruments, poetry, melodies, or other aspects of *sawt* performance (Ghanim and al-Qasimi 1991; Lambert 2001).

Although published oral histories are the primary means of reconstructing ʿAbdullah al-Faraj’s life, his collected poems or *diwan* was published in Bombay in 1919 (h. 1337) under the auspices of his cousin Khalid b. Muhammad al-Faraj. In the *diwan*’s 1953 reissue published in Damascus, Khalid al-Faraj recalled his cousin’s legacy as one of the western Indian Ocean:

He grew up in India and was greatly influenced by that country’s music as he had learned from teachers there. In documents he left behind, I have seen written musical notation with comments in his handwriting, indicating his mastery in these arts. Arabic singing from the coasts including Adeni melodies, which are influenced by Sudanese and African tunes, were also a great influence on him. He cultivated and combined these with Indian tunes to compose melodies of the Arab Gulf that echo through radio broadcasting stations to this day. (Faraj 1953, 14–15)



Nur Jan.

FIGURE 7.3. Nur Jan sings for Arab merchants in Bombay, c. 1900. (Edwardes 1912, 103)

It is noteworthy that Khalid al-Faraj decided to use the nationalistic term “Arab Gulf” (*al-khalij al-‘arabi*) to define a regional musical style that, to him, was a mix of “Indian,” “Sudanese,” and “African” musical elements. It is also noteworthy that he did not view ‘Abdullah al-Faraj’s training in modern musical notation as a Western or British influence but as an Indian influence. Yet Khalid al-Faraj’s use of the term Adeni or “*‘Adani*” to designate a mixed Arab, African, and Indian musical style was not a product of his cousin’s time but a contemporary one of the 1940s and 1950s when he penned these words. This was a time of rising nationalism, cultural exchange, and phonograph industries in the southern Arabian port city of Aden. Nevertheless, Khalid al-Faraj perhaps viewed a continuity in the *longue durée* between the patterns of exchange that defined his cousin’s career in India during the nineteenth century and those of in his own time propelled by phonograph recordings and radio.

ARABIAN PASSINGS ON EARLY SOUND RECORDINGS FROM JAVA TO KENYA

By 1914, record companies from the United States and Europe established centers of production and distribution in Egypt, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, and India, which all became important centers for the circulation of phonograph technologies throughout the Indian Ocean (Alsalhi 2018; Gronow 1981, 1983; Kinnear 2016; Racy 1977; Yampolsky 2013). Edison phonographs were in global circulation at least since the 1890s with the earliest evidence of their use, in networks of interest for this chapter, being a *fatwa* on the phonograph for Quranic recitations written in 1899 by a Hadhrami legal scholar in Java, Sayyid ‘Uthman b. al-‘Aqil al-‘Alawi (d. 1914). Although he did not outlaw the phonograph, Sayyid ‘Uthman stated that there could be no heavenly reward (*thawab*) for listening to a Quran recitation using the phonograph because of the machine’s status as an “instrument of amusement” (Kaptein 2014, 195–97). In 1905, the Dutch orientalist and friend of Sayyid ‘Uthman, Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, gave a phonograph to his Meccan associate in Batavia (Jakarta), Muhammad Taj al-Din, who sent it to his brother Jamal in the Hejaz to produce what are the oldest surviving recordings made on the Arabian Peninsula (Urkevich 2015, 220–21; Van Oostrum 2012). An early ethnographic project conducted by way of the Dutch East Indies across the Indian Ocean, this is also one of the phonograph’s earliest documented uses on the Arabian Peninsula.

While the dawn of commercial recordings produced for Gulf markets is often placed to 1927 in Baghdad, and to 1938 in Aden in southern Arabia, there was an even earlier era of commercial recording featuring musical and vocal traditions from the Arabian Peninsula. Yet rather than taking place in the Middle East, it happened before World War I in Southeast Asia where music and recitational styles from the Hejaz and Yemen were recorded by firms like the Columbia

Phonograph Company. These shellac disc recordings feature Quranic recitations and religious poetry, labeled as “Hejazi” or “Meccan,” in addition to some of the earliest commercial recordings of the *qabus*, the same instrument purportedly played by Yahya ‘Umar. While the story behind these records, which are currently in the private archive of ethnomusicologist Ahmad AlSalhi, are the subject of my ongoing research, in 1911 the Columbia Phonograph Company contracted a certain “Sech Abdullah Bin Saleh Bin Motlik,” an Arab “Hadji,” to be the company’s agent in Surabaya and to curate “a list of native Malay, Indian, and Arab records of wide scope” (Bill 1911, 30). Early endeavors of multinational recording companies were obliged to consider local tastes and markets by hiring local representatives in order to secure marketable products. Here, it seems that Abdullah Bin Motlik, “an Arab of high power and standing in his community,” was the ideal agent in Java to help Columbia tap into various local markets, including those revolving around unprecedented numbers of Javanese pilgrims making their way to Arabia on steamships every year.

The interwar period saw an explosion of the recording industry worldwide due to the development of electronic recording and cheaper manufacturing. In 1930, a catalog for the al-Sakaf (al-Saqqaf) brothers trading company was issued in Aden; it advertised a large number of Kuwaiti *sawt* records produced in Iraq during 1927 and 1928 (Salhi 2015b: 30–41). During the early 1930s, British intelligence noted the prevalence of His Master’s Voice recordings produced in India, and that Japanese-made gramophones were sold widely in the bazaars of Muscat and throughout the Arab sheikdoms of the Gulf.³ While traveling on a Kuwaiti dhow in the western Indian Ocean during 1938, Alan Villiers noted a group of men from Java lugging a gramophone on board and playing records from Syria and Egypt while the ship sailed down the coast of East Africa to Zanzibar (Villiers 1940, 75). Although at the moment they were closer to where the recordings were produced, the men may have purchased the records on the other side of the Indian Ocean in Java where in 1931 the journal of the Rabitat al-‘Alawiyya, an organization founded by Hadhrami sayyids, advertised “Arabic, Egyptian, Syrian, and Other Records” at the store of Shaykh Muhammad b. Hasan ‘Arifan (*al-Rabita* 1931 [h. 1349]). Later that year, Villiers recalled his Kuwaiti host, captain or *nakhudha* Ali b. Nasir al-Najdi, playing gramophone records featuring “the most famous Egyptian diva,” perhaps Umm Kulthum, as they lounged after a dinner in Zanzibar (Villiers 1940, 191).

Furthermore, and much like print in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the recording and film industry in India had a massive influence in coastal regions of the Indian Ocean governed by the British Empire. Foreshadowing the cultural movements noted in this chapter’s introduction regarding Ali al-Khambashi’s “Ya Rahmin,” musicians in Aden began to follow musical trends in India by taking melodies from Indian films and replacing the lyrics with Arabic

poetry, either in colloquial or classical style (Lavin 2021). Many Gulf musicians also traveled to Bombay to take advantage of India's modern industry, making recordings with the National Gramophone Company of India or even starting their own subsidiary labels, which would record and manufacture records for distribution to local markets throughout the Arabian Peninsula from the 1930s through the 1950s (Kinnear 2016; Salhi 2018).

As such vignettes of commodity movement demonstrate, Arabian passings became globalized via recording technology during the early twentieth century. Yet it is also clear that industrial commodities like phonographs and shellac discs were transported and distributed on previous networks of exchange and circulation: within Sufi organizations in Southeast Asia, pilgrimage routes, Gulf bazaars, or on the decks of *dhow*s. While musical movements became intensified and more complex, they were negotiated on both archaic and modern networks. Yet within the years leading up to World War II and its aftermath of shifting international political boundaries, rising nationalist sentiments, and developments in radio broadcasting, Indian Ocean exchanges continued to be brought into the fold of modern communications, media, and transportation, further eroding the environmental scaffolding of the *longue durée*. While musical and poetic exchanges became amplified by media technologies, they also became more codified in a complex web of ethnic, nationalistic, and consumer market categories and abstractions. Having explored exchanges elsewhere throughout the Indian Ocean, the chapter now turns to Arabia itself and the colonial port of Aden—the first place to have commercial music production on the Arabian Peninsula.

MUHAMMAD JUM'AH KHAN, 'ADANIYYAT,
AND THE QUESTION OF "INDIAN COLORING"

Local production of records was established on the Arabian Peninsula in Aden during the 1930s. Particularly, the brothers Husayn and Ali al-Safi, who served as agents for the international Odeon and local Aden Crown Record labels, helped turn Aden into a pivotal center for the development of commercial music in the region (Lavin 2021, 14). Maritime connections of the colonial port city were reflected in these companies' genre classifications on record labels, based on emerging regional, ethnic, and national categories: *Hindi* (Indian), *Sumali* (Somali), *Kuwayti* (Kuwaiti), *Hadrami* (Hadhrami), *Sana'ani* (Sanaani), and *'Adani* (Adeni) to name a few. The genre term *'Adani* was later popularized by the Adeni Musicians Club, a group of musicians who attempted to innovate an authentic musical style by adapting nationalist ideas of the modern Arab renaissance, or *nahda*, to the realities of living in a British colonial port during the 1940s. Since Aden was a maritime pivot point between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, it was equally connected to the media powerhouses of Cairo and Bombay, while the

Adeni Club's music was equally influenced by imported Egyptian and Indian film music (Lambert 1993). The "Adeni" label written on commercial records signified the unique musical blends occurring in Aden during the 1940s and 1950s. The label was even adopted by Gulf recording artists like the renowned Omani singer Salim Rashid al-Suri working in Bombay and Bahrain, signifying the influence of Aden's musical movement throughout the Western Indian Ocean (Lavin 2017). Yet the introduction of ethnic and regional commercial labels like "Adeni," "Indian," and "Somali" coincided with the increasing reach of colonial bureaucracies and nationalist sentiments, with records providing a new medium for not only the production and circulation of musical culture but also the possibility of stamping two-dimensional categorizations on it. Still, affiliations ascribed to people via texts and technologies remained fluid, recalling earlier Greco-Muslim notions of an Indian Ocean geography that stretched from India to East Africa. Perhaps modern imaginings of "inner India" present themselves in written histories of Muhammad Jum'ah Khan, a Hadhrami recording artist whose family history and life story spanned between the Punjab and Kenya.

Muhammad Jum'ah Khan (d. 1963) was the son of 'Abd al-Razaq Khan, a Punjabi military conscript from India who married a Hadhrami woman during his service for the Qu'ayti Sultanate during the late nineteenth century. Founded during the 1860s and covering the southern coastal region of Hadhramaut, the Qu'ayti Sultanate remained mostly autonomous from British India until the 1930s, drawing its power from military, economic, and political connections with the Nizam of Hyderabad. Muhammad Jum'ah grew up in the Sultanate's capital, Mukalla, learning to play a variety of instruments including the clarinet, *qabus*, and harmonium (BaWazir 1961, 249–53). In fact, it was not until the interwar period that he began playing the oud, which was not widely used throughout the Arabian Peninsula until this time, with Yahya 'Umar's *qabus* or 'Abdullah al-Faraj's "Indian oud" being the instruments of choice for Arabian troubadours (Salhi 2015a). Muhammad joined the Sultan's military band, which played a mix of European and Indian music, and eventually took a leadership role while adding Hadhrami folk songs to the repertoire. When the Qu'ayti Sultanate formally came under British protection in 1936, Muhammad Jum'ah was relieved of duty because he could not read music, and the entire band was replaced by musically literate recruits from India: one of the various modernizing reforms instituted by Sultan Ghalib al-Qu'ayti during the 1930s (Fari' 1993, 110–12; Freitag 2003, 400–443; Naji 1983, 129–33).

Out of work but a musician of considerable renown, Muhammad Jum'ah Khan traveled to Aden where he made recordings for Odeon sometime during 1938 and 1939. Afterward, he and his travel partner, violinist Said 'Abdillah, went to East Africa as hired musicians on a Kuwaiti dhow, captained by Ghanim b. 'Uthman who was transporting a hull of salt to Mombasa ('Amari 1985, 23–32). Muhammad and Said provided musical entertainment on the ship and also held concerts after their arrival in Mombasa. Parting with their Kuwaiti hosts in Kenya, they

made their way back to South Arabia, performing for musical patrons of the Hadhrami diaspora in Somalia and Ethiopia along the way. These travels were not without considerable difficulty due to the outbreak of World War II, and according to Said ‘Abdillah narrative, they were lucky to have made it back to Mukalla after trouble with British customs in Somalia and being shipwrecked on their way from Aden to Mukalla, finally making it home in a small fishing boat (‘Amari 1985, 23–32). Regardless, Muhammad Jum’ah and Said ‘Abdillah continued their recording sessions in Aden after the war and later made a second trip to perform for prominent members of the Hadhrami diaspora in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Djibouti. Muhammad Jum’ah also traveled to perform and record in Kuwait, the only place where he appears to have recorded for record companies outside of Aden. These were produced by the Kuwaiti company Bou-Zaid Phone around 1960, manufactured in Germany, and included labels with the “Adeni” genre classification.

While Muhammad Jum’ah is often remembered in Kuwait as the pioneer of mixing Indian melodies with Arabic poetry (the “Indian coloring” referred to in this chapter’s introduction), such influences appear to be less pronounced in his corpus of commercial recordings, unlike other artists of that time in Aden, who were more obviously influenced by Indian popular music. Among such musicians was Muhammad’s brother, Ahmad Jum’ah Khan, who played harmonium and studied with an Indian music teacher, Azim al-Din (BaWazir 1961, 253–54). In his history of Hadhramaut published in 1961, Said Awad BaWazir praised Ahmad Jum’ah’s musical innovations, which he claimed flawlessly combined classical and colloquial Arabic poetry with “Indian” melodies played on the harmonium (BaWazir 1961, 253–54). BaWazir also pointed to Ahmad Jum’ah’s recording career, while not as prolific as his brother’s resulted in a few releases with South Arabia Records featuring the harmonium, Indian tabla, and the *riqq*, a percussion instrument commonly used throughout the Arab world. However, unlike his brother, Ahmad is not remembered for being a traveling musician and was apparently less influential.

Because of his Punjabi background and his “Adeni” recordings produced in Kuwait, Muhammad Jum’ah is widely remembered as the pivotal founder of the *‘Adaniyyat* style throughout the Gulf today, having paved the way for Hadhrami diaspora musicians like Ali al-Khanbashi and other singers in Kuwait during the late twentieth century (Lavin 2021, 20). Muhammad Jum’ah’s longtime travel partner and violinist, Said ‘Abdillah, also moved to Kuwait, as did many other musicians from Yemen and South Arabia, and especially after South Arabia’s independence when civil war broke out during the late 1960s while the petroleum industry flourished in the Gulf (Lavin 2021, 20). In addition to Muhammad Jum’ah’s recordings with Bou-Zaid Phone, Said ‘Abdillah’s residence in Kuwait is perhaps why Muhammad Jum’ah’s is commonly regarded as the harbinger of the *sabgha hindiyya* or “Indian coloring” and *‘Adaniyyat* there today. Yet in 1961, just two years before Muhammad Jum’ah’s death, historian Said BaWazir remembered him as more of a Hadhrami national figure who, enabled by Aden’s early recording industry

and his travels to East Africa, cultivated a localized popular music inspired by Hadhrami and Egyptian musical influences as much as Indian ones (BaWazir 1961, 249–53). And while it is often synonymous with “Indian coloring” in Kuwait, the “Adeni” musical label was originally a product of an artistic movement oriented toward Arab nationalism in Aden, a former colony of British India.

CONCLUSIONS

The story of Muhammad Jum’ah Khan demonstrates the complex circulations of ethnic, national, and market categories like “Adeni” or “Indian” throughout Indian Ocean networks, which were reinterpreted with the movement of the technologies and people that carried them during the early twentieth century, much as they were with Ali al-Khambashi’s “Ya Rahmin” mentioned in the introduction. As Indian Ocean scholars have noted, “cosmopolitanism” perhaps reveals itself best where identities and cultural categories are inconclusive, floating within historical disjunctures between many complex maritime passings layered over time (Simpson and Kresse 2008). Contention over the origins of Yahya ‘Umar and ‘Abdullah al-Faraj’s *sawt* similarly demonstrates how previous Arabian passings facilitated by people, texts, and recordings clash with the contemporary world order, which is often defined by national and ethnic abstractions derived from the colonial era that perhaps more often obscure previous histories of exchange and connection.

Yet this chapter has tried to emphasize that these human, textual, and technological movements, both the old and new, intersected a variety of archaic and modern networks that overlapped in complex ways, making it difficult to characterize them purely as products of either global imperialism, capitalism, cosmopolitanism, or even the *longue durée*. Indeed, in 1959 the South Arabian political activist and renowned musician Muhammad Murshid Naji lamented the popularity of Indian music in Aden as the result of “Indian colonization” rather than the labor of local musicians—often of mixed Indian, Somali, and Arab parentage like Naji himself—or even of British imperialism (Naji 1959). As such, lending an ear to vernacular sources composed by Arabic speakers who actually lived historical eras of transformation in the Indian Ocean *longue durée* reveal not just intersection between “Indian,” “African,” and “Arab” milieus but historical contention and contingency surrounding the very practices and people who defined these identities musically and culturally.

NOTES

1. I have been in communication with individuals who were associated with this project and obtained some of the UNESCO documentation relating to it thanks to Paul Hughes-Smith, a member of the British-Yemeni Society.

2. The editor of the reprint of al-Madani's text (2006), Shakr Hadi Shukr, has clarified al-Shadhili's full name in a footnote as Ali b. 'Umar b. Ibrahim al-Qurshi al-Sufi al-Yamani al-Shadhili (88). British Library, London (August 2018), India Office Records: IOR/L/PS series.

3. Intelligence obtained from files IOR/L/PS/12/3736A, 3834 and 3797.

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SECTION FOUR

Communities

Making Pilgrimage, Making Home

Sikh Sacred Soundings in Kenya

Inderjit Kaur

The Kalasinghas (as Sikhs from India are addressed in Swahili) have a multigenerational history in East Africa, but little scholarship has been done on them. As a people, Sikhs are known to be particularly mobile, and the Afro-Asiatic seascape has been a significant part of their worldwide migration, dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. A minority faith community from the Punjab region of India, Sikhs form less than 2 percent of the Indian population but make up a good 10 percent of diasporic Indians. Sikhs who settled in Kenya, as well as those among them who subsequently migrated to Western countries, have a deep sense of belonging to Kenya. Most consider Kenya, rather than India, more directly and affectively as home and do not harbor a desire to “return” to India. They distinguish themselves from Indians in their ways of life, identifying instead as Kenyans.

In this chapter, I elaborate on the role of sacred sound in enabling this sense of belonging, in particular through its centrality in the development of a new pilgrimage site in Makindu, Kenya. In contrast to the earlier literature on pilgrimage that focuses on it as a process of liminality, I argue that the development of this new pilgrimage is a “homing” enterprise—a way of deepening the sense of home, in a new country, in a mobile world. Based on ethnographic research, with online fieldwork,¹ I show that it was sacred musicking that planted the seeds of this pilgrimage site and energized its development, and it is sacred sound that continues to infuse it with sustained vibrancy.

The role of sacred song in the lives of Sikhs in and from East Africa has not been directly studied. In an investigation of the community networks through which Indian merchants gained a sense of belonging in twentieth-century Kenya, Misha Mintz-Roth (2019) mentions prayer halls, though without elaborating. In a

study of the political, economic, and social impact of Sikhs in Kenya, Job Mulati Chebai (2001) recognizes the role of Sikh places of worship and sacred recitations in forging a sense of community among Sikhs. In her pioneering study exploring the social lives of the (twice immigrant) Kenyan Sikh community in the United Kingdom, Parminder Bhachu (1985) finds it to be committed to preserving its “East Africanness” through networks and marriage alliances.

My ethnographic findings too show the significant role of networks and religious practices, along with the centrality of musical worship. Focusing on sacred soundings, song and chant in particular, I show how sound has been and continues to be essential to processes of homemaking. Indeed, from my observations when visiting Sikh places of worship in various countries, the key role of sacred sound as affective connective tissue could be made for all diasporic locations.² What is unique about this story is the development of a pilgrimage site in a diasporic location with no Sikhs resident in the immediate vicinity, and the ways it includes the indigenous local population.

RHIZOMATIC BELONGING WITH SACRED SONG AS CONNECTIVE TISSUE

Drawing on my interlocutors’ worldviews, I conceptualize multiple belonging in a world constantly on the move with the notion of the rhizome as put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987, 21).

It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overfills. It constitutes linear multiplicities . . . which can be laid out on a plane of consistency.

The center (middle) for Sikhs, I propose, is their primary scripture Guru Granth Sahib. Sikh identity stems from it and grows with diverse nuances in different locations. The connection is provided by scriptural song. My elder interlocutor, the late Seva Singh Mandla, who was born in Kenya and moved to the United Kingdom in his middle years, told me:

First, I was a British citizen [British East Africa], then Kenyan citizen [in the independent nation-state], now British citizen [in the United Kingdom]. I am proud to be Kenyan, British, and Sikh.

When I asked him which nation Sikhs felt closer to, his reply was squarely:

Sikhs felt as Sikhs. Sikhs have their own identity. Sikhs were able to practice their own religion. Guru Granth Sahib [scripture] is the focus of our attention. Our Guru Granth Sahib speaks. Gurbāni (scriptural verse) gives us directions for every occasion.

Key to engendering rhizomatic belongings in Sikhs globally, is the central role of a scripture that is a hymnal (of about 6,000 songs) along with the nonhierarchical

institutional structure of Sikhī (Sikhism in English; lit. teachings). Sikh worship consists primarily of singing and chanting scriptural verses, *sabad*, and is part of Sikh everyday life, from the personal and family level, to the public with congregational worship at the gurdwāra (public place of worship). At all these levels, practice is independent of a higher overseeing institution.³ There is not a hierarchical system of clergy organized by a central authority, though there are professional *granthī* (learned in the scriptures) and *rāgi* (cantors), and any Sikh can perform any of the liturgical and ritual functions of worship. Sikhs (lit. students) understand themselves as disciples of their scriptural Guru (spiritual preceptor), the Guru Granth Sahib, and hold a deeply affective relationship to it. Wherever Sikhs have settled, the Guru Granth Sahib has accompanied them, forming the center around which Sikh networks developed, engendered by everyday sacred musicking of scriptural songs. With a perfectly mobile Guru, the disciple becomes highly mobile too.

My interlocutors from Kenya across the board spoke of the significant presence of sacred sound in their lives there, at home and in gurdwāray (pl. of gurdwāra), and how listening to sacred song and chant, eating a ritual communal meal, and participating in various service activities was a fulfilling aspect of their social, emotional, and spiritual lives. Rani, who now lives in the United States, particularly remembers the occasions of *akhand pāth* (continuous complete recitation of the Guru Granth Sahib over forty-eight hours), which typically culminates in *sabad kīrtan* (singing of scriptural verses).

Akhand pāth kinne pyār nāl rakhde si [We did *akhand pāth* with so much love]. We were hardly ten, and we were taken to the *gurdwāra*; we did *sevā* [service]. Getting there the night before, washing the *gurdwāra* floor, drying it. Women would get there ahead of time, make the menu . . . freshly made food . . . serve the *langar* [ritual communal meal]. Also, *akhand pāth* at home. My duty was to make *badāmāñ da dudh* (milk with almonds) at 10, to serve the *pāthī* (chanter) at night.

Savinder Kaur Bhogal, who moved to the United Kingdom when she got married, reminisces about her parental home:

We had Guru Granth Sahib Ji at home and it was a norm for the whole family including the children to get up around 2 am to recite Gurbani and do Asa Di Var [Song of Hope], which was followed by Parshad [sweet wheat flour pudding] that we children enjoyed.

The practice of everyday immersion in a sacred soundscape hails back to Punjab. In village life, it was customary to start the day with an aural experience of sacred verses. Village folk on their way to work would on a daily basis make a stop at the gurdwāra to take a sip from the aural pool of sacred sound. With the advent of the public announcement system, it was common for villages to broadcast sacred chants during the wee hours of dawn. Anthropologist Murray

Leaf writes in his book, *Song of Hope: The Green Revolution in a Punjab Village*, how he was woken up in the early morning hours in a village he names Shahidpur, by the PA system broadcasting the Asa Ki Var [Song of Hope]. When he asked his local friend, it was explained to him that this was not an unusual feature of that morning, or that village, but rather, as Leaf puts it, “before the first light of every dawn, the entire Punjab was, one might say, ablaze with song” (1984, 16).

Rhizomatic belongings are supported by the sacred song-texts themselves, as in the following examples (with links to recordings on YouTube). In fact, a framed translation of the first line of the first quote below hangs on a wall at Gurdwara Makindu.

ਜਿਥੈ ਜਾਇ ਬਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸੇ ਬਾਨੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਜੇ ॥
ਗੁਰਸਿਖੀ ਸੇ ਬਾਨੁ ਭਾਲਿਆ ਲੈ ਧੁਰਿ ਮੁਖਿ ਲਾਵਾ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib [1604] 1704, 450)⁴
Where my True Guru dwells, that place is pleasing.
It is that place that the Guru's Sikh seeks and embraces.⁵
www.youtube.com/watch?v=8x4xTKZ00BA; accessed May 1, 2022.

ਧੰਨੁ ਸੁ ਦੇਸੁ ਜਗਾ ਤੂੰ ਵਸਿਆ ਮੇਰੇ ਸਜਣ ਮੀਤ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ਜੀਉ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 96)
That land is blessed, where You dwell, my Beloved Friend.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-tWuhCf8xc; accessed May 1, 2022.

ਮਨੁ ਪਰਦੇਸੀ ਜੇ ਥੀਐ ਸਭੁ ਦੇਸੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 767)
If the heart-mind-soul becomes a stranger, all lands becomes alien.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qE1oQJLSBdU; accessed May 1, 2022.

The last quote points to an understanding of belonging in an experiential sense. In this sense, the homeland can become a place of estrangement and a new land can provide the sense of feeling at home. Such a focus on the experiential has been used in phenomenological approaches to understanding the nature of home. These studies have elaborated on being at home as a lived experience of locality (Brah 1996) and related to the presence or absence of an emotion or affect (Gurney 1997; Ahmed 1999). Ways of being at home have been discussed as grounded in activities (Jackson 1995), in social relations (Somerville 1997), and expressions of social meanings and identities (Wardhaugh 1999). Importantly for my analysis, it has been argued that rather than passivity, there is active and intentional production of home (Mallet 2004). Indeed, as a *sabad* instructs:

ਆਪਣ ਹਥੀ ਆਪਣਾ ਆਪੇ ਹੀ ਕਾਜੁ ਸਵਾਰੀਐ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 474)
Yourself improve your daily affairs.

In the context of diasporic belongings in particular, mobility and travel become aspects of dwelling (Clifford 1997), and it is in this sense that I explore here the meaningfulness of pilgrimage to Gurdwara Makindu for Sikh devotees in and from Kenya.

PILGRIMAGE AS A WAY OF MAKING HOME

Recent scholarship on pilgrimage has broadened the conversation from the Turnerian framework of liminality to posit pilgrimage as a form of cultural mobility in a world constantly on the move. In *Reframing Pilgrimage* (2004), Simon Coleman and John Eade shift the analysis from exceptionality to one of the everyday social and political. As part of mundane cultural mobility, pilgrimage is seen less as starkly extraordinary and separated from society and more as part of the constitution of meaning through everyday social, cultural, and political processes. Drawing on John Urry's explication of the significance of physical travel in social life in terms of the benefits of "intermittent corporeal co-presence" (2002, 57), Coleman and Eade point to pilgrimage as having the same potential. I combine this with Urry's discussion of intermittent physical proximity as sustaining family life for people with many locations of home, to argue for the making of a new pilgrimage within a diasporic location as a way of constituting home there.

For my interlocutors pilgrimage is about the embodied and embedded experience of reliving certain feelings related to being at home. Shared worship-related activities within a framework that emphasizes temporal longevity of the community in that location engender feelings of comfort and contentment.

The last time I visited Makindu it was in 2004 after having climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and ended in Makindu where the family had arranged Sri Akhand Paath [nonstop recitation of the entire Guru Granth Sahib, taking two days].⁶ I was there for three days in absolute heaven. I don't have any more words to describe the tranquility and the serenity of the place attached to the emotions that we felt.

—Surjit Singh Bhalla

It is a historical site, this for me is like a pilgrimage of going to Hazoor Sahib [historical gurdwāra], India, and I always look forward to go to Makindu to pay my respects and enjoy langar prepared by the locals.

—Onkar Singh Bhogal

I want to be part of the atmosphere . . . *sangat naal* [with the congregation].

—Avtar Singh Thethy

A key dimension of this corporeal co-presence is sound. As a primarily vibratory entity that transmits materially (Friedner and Helmreich 2012), sound connects bodies through corporeal transmission of affect (Brennan 2004; Kapchan 2015; Kaur 2016). In the context of devout worship in particular, sacred musical sound has the potential to enhance the sense of corporeal proximity and engender a congregation of "sonic bodies" (Henriques 2011), bodies that know through the sensation of sound. Such an "aggregation of the affected" (Born 2013) is crucial to the atmosphere my interlocutors seek and enjoy in pilgrimage. Given the centrality of congregational musical worship in Sikh culture, sonically constituted corporeal

co-presence is part of the feeling of home. In explicating this fundamentally constitutive role of musical sound in pilgrimage, I add to scholarly explorations thus far of pilgrim songs as musical performance of the sacred journey (Bohlman 1996) and of the noisy soundscape of pilgrimage eliciting tolerant listening from pilgrims (Wood 2014).

THE MAKING OF A NEW PILGRIMAGE SITE WITHIN A DIASPORIC LOCATION

Routes and Roots

Historic Sikh sacred sites date back to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, to the founding and early development of the faith. Most of these are now (after the partition of Punjab in 1947) in Pakistan, a nation estranged from India (where most Sikhs live). Pilgrimage to these sites is state controlled with heavy restrictions on the number of pilgrims and their itinerary within Pakistan. For Sikhs this pilgrimage retraces the roots and routes of the founders of the faith. For the thousands of Sikhs whose families had to migrate at the time of the partition from the newly carved Islamic state of Pakistan to an ostensibly secular Hindustan (India),⁷ it is also a deeply emotional visit to the land of their ancestors. For Sikhs in and from East Africa, Gurdwara Makindu has developed as a sacred site that traces the arrival of their ancestors to this land about a hundred years ago. In this case, roots have resulted from routes.

Sikhs were initially brought from British India to the British East Africa Protectorate at the end of the nineteenth century, along with other Punjabis and Indians, as indentured labor to work on the Kenya-Uganda rail line from the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa to Kampala. The journey was long and arduous, in wooden dhows and rough seas. However, Sikhs from Punjab continued to venture out independently to East Africa over the first half of the twentieth century for better socioeconomic prospects. When colonial East Africa obtained independence in the mid-twentieth century, many Sikh families, concerned with their lot within emergent African nationalism in the newly formed nation-states of Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya, migrated to the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. However, many stayed put.⁸

My family originates from Punjab, and in 1935, my father came to Kenya. He was a schoolteacher teaching Urdu, the salary was very low. Therefore, my grandad trained him to be a carpenter. He used to make wagon wheels for the British army. At some point to better his life he decided to travel to Kenya and work as a carpenter. He traveled to Kenya on a dhow. My father worked there as a carpenter for a Sikh family and was paid very little salary. With the help of his friends, he started his own factory manufacturing furniture. In a short time, he became a successful businessman. He never wanted to leave Kenya and passed away in Kenya in 1987.

—Onkar Singh Bhogal

Another interlocutor, Rani, who was born in Kisumu, East Africa (now Kenya) in the 1950s tells me that her grandfather had migrated from his village in Punjab, India, in search of better job prospects, and a life unhampered by caste.

My grandpa was well educated, but was not getting a job in his village because of his caste. He was downgraded. I'm not going to take it, he said. He was adventurous. When he went back to visit, they said, Oh, you live in Africa? Do you live in trees? He was not happy to go back there; *koi lor nai utthe jān di, koi respect nahi karda* [There is no need to go there, no one respects].

Seventy-year-old Pritam Kaur, who has raised a family in Nairobi, Kenya, and now is a widow living alone, was quite clear: "*koi sanu kahe india chale jao*, [if someone says to us, go to India] no no! We like it here."

Sacred Soundings as Seed and Sustenance

As is the case for most early locations of Sikh gurdwāray in East Africa, Gurdwara Makindu is on the rail line. Makindu station was one of the depots used for refueling and water supplies. A number of Sikhs were stationed there. The story goes that, along with their non-Sikh friends, they began to congregate under a tree to sing songs of divine praise. Soon, on that very spot they made a small shed for worship.

In 1926, a gurdwāra was constructed on a concrete slab with corrugated tin. The Sikhs stationed at the rail depot met at Gurdwara Makindu regularly to sing and chant scriptural verses. All night singing sessions were a particular favorite. Devotees carried from India a special copy of the Guru Granth Sahib, which was hand printed and, at 2,450 pages, much larger and heavier than the mechanically printed version of 1,430 pages.⁹ These devotees, traveling in wooden dhows on treacherous seas, are known to have carried the heavy scripture, not packed in luggage, but ceremoniously on the top of their heads with an attendant fanning a ceremonial whisk. The presence of the special copy of the scripture attracted many Sikh visitors—those passing by made a stop at Makindu station to visit the gurdwāra. The Makindu station and gurdwāra flourished for some two decades.

With the advent of the diesel engine, however, the Makindu station was no longer needed as a depot, and employees were moved to other locations. The gurdwāra was locked and left in the care of an African Kenyan by the name of Gwalo. Every now and then, a Sikh passing by would stop and go to the gurdwāra to pay respect to the scripture and conduct its ceremonial opening, reading, and closing.

The story of the subsequent rejuvenation of Gurdwara Makindu indicates how critical sound has been to the making of this pilgrimage site. My interlocutor, the late Sewa Singh Mandla, told me that a contingent of Sikh musicians was instructed by their spiritual guide, Sant Baba Puran Singh of Kericho, to conduct monthly

kīrtan sessions at Gurdwara Makindu on full moon weekends (*pūranmāshi*). Sewa Singh was part of this contingent. In his words:

We would go there on a Friday. We cleaned up, properly, nicely; spread white sheets. We would start kīrtan, go all night, do Asa ki Vār in the morning. Vadde babji [spiritual guide] told us: You have to do this every pūranmāshi. So once a month we did kīrtan there. Gradually, it became popular.

Thus, it was sacred sound that sowed the seed of Gurdwara Makindu as a sacred site and that revived it as an active place of worship and pilgrimage. The singing and chanting of scriptural verses continue to be an integral part of the spiritual experience for Sikh pilgrims visiting this site.¹⁰ Akhand pāth is especially popular here, with families commissioning them to mark special occasions and seek blessings. The continuous chanting of the entire Guru Granth Sahib over forty-eight hours, with different chanters taking turns, configures an especially soothing, inspiring, and meaningful space for a weekend stay.

With the growing popularity of Gurdwara Makindu as a pilgrimage site, a much larger gurdwāra building and complex was constructed. During the construction, the extra-large copy of the scripture was moved to Kericho. On completion of the project in 2010, the scripture was returned to Gurdwara Makindu with great fanfare, and sacred song and chant was the key accompanying activity. The journey was taken in a chartered train, thus tracing the roots back to the first Sikhs who came to build the great train line, the lunatic line, dubbed so due to the wild terrain it traversed with the man-eating lions of Tsavo that devoured a number of workers.

The current gurdwāra complex houses, in addition to the worship halls where sacred song and chant are performed with the scripture as the presiding Guru, a dining hall and community kitchen that serves langar throughout the day to all visitors, ranging daily from a few hundred to a few thousand. There is free hotel-quality accommodation as well, in well-appointed and serviced rooms, and visitors can stay up to two nights at a time. The compound is well groomed with a playground for children, and roaming peacocks add a sense of enchantment.¹¹ According to the manager, at one time there was a peacock who was especially attuned to the sacred sounds and danced every time kīrtan was being sung in the worship hall.

History and Myth

Along with congregational musical worship and communal dining, the accumulation of myth and history has played its role too in carving out Gurdwara Makindu as a special place. Many relate to the tenth and last Sikh human Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708), who is remembered especially for his fight against social injustice, in particular religious oppression. The story goes that the African caretaker Gwalo had a vivid dream one night of a Kalasingha on a white horse telling him that the gurdwāra should be revived as an active place of worship. In the morning, he recognized the person to be Guru Gobind Singh, whose portrait was painted

on the gurdwāra wall. After this, several pilgrims reported hearing horse galloping sounds (sound here too!). In some recounting, it was the Muslim cleric at the nearby mosque who reported that on several occasions he had seen a white horse with a Sikh descending from the sky into the gurdwāra. Another devotee described that one night when she was reciting from the scripture a shadow fell on it that she recognized as Guru Gobind Singh standing behind as an attendant swaying the ceremonial whisk. In one story, a fire broke out at the gurdwāra, burning most of the things, but the scripture remained unharmed. Many say that their prayers made at the gurdwāra were all answered. Call it history or myth, these accounts have combined to position Gurdwara Makindu as a special sacred site.

My interlocutor, Avtar Singh Thethy, tells me of his own special experience in 1998. After what he described as a very serene time at the gurdwāra, where he was also able to read from the special copy of the scripture, he got a ride to Kericho:

But after 15 minutes, 10 miles, we had to return because he [his ride] had forgotten to return the room key. When we got back, Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh [spiritual guide] said, *tūsi ā gayé, bahut changā kitā, bīr lé jāni hai* [you came back, very good, the scripture has to be taken]. This was due to the construction activity. When we were going with the *bīr* [scripture], a big cobra came up to the road and spread its hood. We were going at very high speed, could not break. But the car just went over smoothly as if there was nothing there. *Ai kī hōya!* [What just happened!] . . . When you have faith, things happen.

AFFECTIVE ENTANGLEMENTS: CARVING OUT A “DIASPORA SPACE” THAT IS HOME

In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Avtar Brah introduces the concept of diaspora space to recognize the embedded nature of the diasporic experience. “Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (1985, 178). This space is inhabited not just by migrants and their descendants but also by the indigenous. “The concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’” (Brah 1985, 178). For South Asians living in Kenya, life is not without social and political tensions with the indigenous population. British East Africa was a land of opportunity for South Asians where their artisan and business skills enabled rapid and substantial socioeconomic progress. However, colonial policy played a role too. In particular, the stratified racial policy of the “colonial sandwich” placed Europeans at the top, Asians in the middle, and Africans at the bottom, relegating the indigenous people to low-paid service jobs and inferior social status. Back in India, British divisive politics and late colonial Hindu nationalist movements had contributed to unsettled feelings among Sikhs. Caste division was another factor of social dissatisfaction that was mitigated by the move to the middle status in

East Africa. The rapidly growing socioeconomic power of the Asian community understandably generated deep resentments among the indigenous population that peaked during the nationalist movements of independence.¹² While Kenya did not expel South Asians, as did Uganda, many families migrated out to western countries, chiefly the United Kingdom, for fear of retaliation in the newly independent nation-state. South Asians who continue to live there still hold an underlying fear of everyday crimes such as burglary and assault. According to Chebai, South Asians imbibed the British racist attitudes toward Africans, keeping their relationships and interactions with Africans functional and situational, though he considers Sikhs to be somewhat guided by the ideal of equality in the Guru Granth Sahib. Some of my Sikh interlocutors have expressed regret about the embeddedness of Sikhs in race hierarchies, while pointing to the change for the better in recent years and with the younger generations. According to Paul Younger (2010), social segregation between Asians and African tribes was initially supported by mutual need and expectation, but by the time of independence the African population largely felt that the racial divide was a means to Asian economic dominance. Some of my Sikh interlocutors have indicated that cultural and religious differences, rather than racist attitudes, have been the reasons for the limited nature of social integration. What all recognize is the certain mutual suspicion that exists across the racial divide, especially between sharply divergent economic classes. Thus, the intersectionality of race and class is an important factor in this tension.¹³

Sikhs have used the affective potential of their twin open-house sacred rituals of congregational musicking and communal dining to amplify a message of peace and inclusion, regularly organizing special events. “Kīrtan is always the base,” Satinder Singh Jabal tells me, as he describes the Ekta Samagam (lit. oneness gathering) that he was active in organizing in 2013. Lasting over three days, with akhand pāth, interfaith prayers, a candlelight vigil prayer for the disadvantaged, documentaries, and exhibitions, it culminated in a program of sabad kīrtan, *ardās* (chanted supplication), *hūkam* (lit. command; recitation of a verse from the Guru Granth Sahib, as guidance for the day), and langar. In 2008, during a violent period in Kenya with political tensions between rival leaders, Sikh gurdwāray around the country conducted a nationwide Prayer for Peace with recitations of sacred verses (Nairobi Star 2008).

While such events are organized regularly in the capital city of Nairobi, Gurdwara Makindu has carved out a special and permanent diasporic space of affective entanglements that I argue deepen the feeling of Kenya as home for Sikhs. The range of meaningful activities here are not only for Sikhs but also for the “locals” (as Africans are referred to by the Asians there), and these programs are ongoing and stable. The town of Makindu has no resident Sikh population within seventy miles. Beyond a few administrative staff and a granthī, the locals perform all the work of keeping the place running. Sikhs who come to the gurdwāra are all out-of-town visitors. For many it is a pilgrimage to a site that marks their

century-old presence in the land and an opportunity to see and perhaps read from the historic copy of the scripture. For some it is to celebrate a special occasion with akhand pāth. For others it is part of tourism. Since the gurdwāra is on the well-traveled main road from Nairobi to the coastal town Mombasa, it makes a convenient stop en route with free board and lodging, and a relaxing sacred soundscape. In fact, travelers of all stripes, including locals, stop for rest in an atmosphere of serenity. For the locals, the gurdwāra complex is a significant source of employment and ancillary economic opportunities, and very importantly, a range of social service programs.

Sounding Peace and Oneness

The central theme of oneness of humanity in the Guru Granth Sahib is sounded through the singing and chanting of the hundreds of sabad that elaborate on this ethical value. As an example of verses that speak to this theme:

ਦੁਜਾ ਕਉਣੁ ਕਹਾ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਈ ॥
Whom should I call the Other, there is none.

ਸਭ ਮਹਿ ਏਕੁ ਨਿਰੰਜਨੁ ਸੋਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
The flawless One permeates all. (Pause [Refrain])

...

ਧਰਣਿ ਗਗਨ ਨਹ ਦੇਖਉ ਦੋਇ ॥
The earth, the sky, see no Other.

ਨਾਰੀ ਪੁਰਖ ਸਬਾਈ ਲੋਇ ॥੩॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, 223)
In women, men, all, the Divine permeates. (Verse 3)

Among non-Sikhs, north Indians particularly find it easy to relate to the sacred verses due to some familiarity with the language. Additionally, the verses of Guru Granth Sahib include hundreds of songs from Hindu and Muslim saint-poets duly attributed to them. The approximately 6,000 scriptural songs repeatedly address the divine with names from the Hindu and Islamic tradition, such as Ram and Allah. These especially inspiring aspects of the scripture, along with the diverse musical styles of rendition,¹⁴ create an inclusive devotional sound world, inviting all to rise above feelings of difference and notions of the Other and join in to create a sacred space and time of the unity of humanity.

Sikh devotees and others affected by these sacred soundings become sonic bodies affectively transmitting sensations of comfort and peace. In a 2013 blog post, an anthropology doctoral student identified as Kelly writes:

On multiple occasions that weekend, I caught myself feeling filled to the brim with happiness and contentedness. I have visited many gurdwaras, and

participated in many different activities within them, and I have always received warmth and welcome. But this was the first time I'd actually felt the *simran* [sacred chanting] wash over me during a prayer service. This time, I wasn't just a "participant observer." I actually felt something beyond my research and friendship interests.

At the level of action, the ethical value of oneness in the sacred verses finds enactment in the inclusivity of congregational worship and communal dining in which all congregants and visitors are treated equally. Scriptural verses are relayed on speakers in the langar hall as well to maintain an ambience of ethical ideals. Staff and visitors on the premise thus find themselves in an immersive atmosphere of sacred soundings aimed at bringing peace and togetherness among diverse people. Many among the local staff have learned several sacred verses that they recite flawlessly with pride, increasing their sense of ownership of the place and affective relationship to it.

Social Service and Inclusion

To this affective sonic mix has been added a substantial community service element in the form of a free hospital, with regular dental and eye clinics to serve the local African community. An African TV reporter, Shukri Wachu (2017), presents the views of the locals:

Residents of Makindu, a town named after the palm tree, or the Makindu tree in the local dialect of the Akamba community, say that the Sikhs have done a lot to help the locals in this small town, including building a hospital and providing free medical services.

The gurdwāra employs around two hundred locals who work in the kitchen, and as gardeners, cleaners, builders, and maintenance staff. In interviews conducted in Swahili by an African TV reporter, Wangari Nugunu (2016), staff members appreciate the extra financial support and other benefits they have received:

I have children in the school and university. I work in the temple and my children's education has been fully sponsored by the temple. The temple has sponsored so many local children for education and some of them have become doctors, teachers.

—Elizabeth Lazaro

Worshippers and visitors bring flour, sugar, vegetables to be used in the kitchen, and some also bring shoes for the kitchen staff.

—Ben Muya

The locals also derive income from their kiosks outside the compound, selling souvenirs, household goods, and fresh fruits and vegetables to the visitors. As Savinder Kaur Bhogal fondly remembers, "Only these kiosks sell very long wooden stirring spoons and ladles that I have brought to the UK."

Nugunu reports that locals Mohammed Athman and Robert Mungai stop regularly at the gurdwāra for an overnight break from dangerous nighttime traffic conditions. Additionally, Nugunu states, “If you fall sick, there is nothing to worry about. The Sikh Temple Hospital in Makindu will treat patients for free.”

In his interview with Shukri Wachu, custodian Amarjit Singh states, “There is no discrimination, and even now in our gurdwāras we have four doors.” He is referring to an architectural feature of the gurdwāra hailing back to the preeminent Harmandir Sahib in Punjab (popularly known as the Golden Temple) of building the worship room with four doors, one facing each direction. This feature symbolizes the open and inclusive policy of welcoming visitors from all backgrounds regardless of religion, caste, gender, and other social markers of identity, with no restrictions on participation in any of the congregational rituals.

Hundreds of visitors from diverse social backgrounds stop at Gurdwāra Makindu daily, welcomed by this open house policy (which is standard in all gurdwāray) combined with the high quality free accommodation, including accessible, in a lovely setting. Indeed, traditionally gurdwāray served as rest houses where weary travelers could get free board and lodging in a devotional setting. This is still the case wherever the gurdwāra resources allow. *Sevā* (selfless service) is an important Sikh ethic that combines with the ethic of oneness to undergird the continuation of these traditions. Regarding Gurdwāra Makindu, Shukri Wachu reports: “Even as the town of Makindu continues to grow, the policy at this holy institution is that the door will remain open for anyone in need.”

The open and inclusive practices at the gurdwāra has also inspired pilgrimage by non-Sikhs. An African journalist, Dauti Kahura (2009), writes about thirty-six-year-old Tony Kosgey who has been visiting since he was five. On a visit with his nine-year-old son, he told Kahura, “It is a tradition that runs through my family and I want my son also to experience and keep it.” Kahura also quotes another non-Sikh pilgrim, fifty-two-year-old Amin Premji:

The philosophy of The Makindu Temple is that all races come together to experience the sanctity of humanity in a holy sanctuary. Over time, that is what I have learnt from my coming here.

What's in a Name: Kalasingha

When conversing with Sikhs from Kenya or reading their blogs and other online postings, what stood out for me was a certain feelingfulness that they had about their lives in Kenya. Kenyan Sikhs relate with pride and affection to the term *Kalasingha*, by which African Kenyans refer to them. The story goes that in the early years of Sikh arrival in Kenya there was one Kala Singh, a merchant who was courageous enough to venture into remote areas to sell his goods. Along with his merchandise, he also carried with him medicines for common ailments such

as malaria and distributed them free of charge. Even to this day, African Kenyans refer to Sikhs as Kalasingha, a term that carries significant affective weight. An example can be seen in the spirit wear, with the phrase Kenyan Kalasaingh: Feel the Kenyan in You, and a logo that is a combination of the colors of the Kenyan flag and the Sikh symbol, *khandā*, a double-edged sword signifying the importance of melding the sacred and secular in everyday life.

At Gurdwara Makindu, one of the much beloved senior staff, Boaz Oyoyo, who worked there since 1979 and learned to speak Punjabi fluently as well as recite Sikh sacred chants, gained the affectionate nickname of Black Kalasingha, thus completing the affective circle. As he told Dauti Kahura in 2009:

The Kalasingas have been good to me. In the many years I have worked with them, we have forged a lasting friendship and a deeper understanding of each other.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: A WAY IN

I hope that Kalasinghas carry on giving this wonderful service to the community forever.

Wangari Nugunu (emphasis mine)

Gurdwara Makindu wins hearts, of not only Sikh and other visitors, but also, and importantly, the locals, the indigenous African community in whose land Sikhs hailing from India have made a home. As a peaceful site of positive affective connections, pilgrimage here contributes to the making of Kenya as home for the approximately 20,000 Sikhs who currently live in Kenya (SikhiWiki 2014), and thousands of families who have migrated out.

This story of making home through affective entanglements is not one of proselytization and conversion, nor of musical hybridity or deep social integration, but one that sounds unity-in-difference, engendered by sacred sound and its ideals. Rather than a melting pot, Gurdwara Makindu is a site where diverse Kenyans can feel at home, with mutual acceptance and respect, and symbiotic co-flourishing. It is home in the sense of the lived experience of certain feelings.

With a history studded with oppression, exclusion, and displacement, Sikhs know the value of home and the pain from being Othered. Generational trauma is alive from the 1947 bloody partition of Punjab (and India), and the 1984 Indian state-sponsored pogroms with the genocide of thousands of Sikhs, rape of Sikh women, and vandalization of Sikh properties, followed by years of unquestioned police brutality and disappearing of Sikh male youth in Punjab. The tremendous rise and success of Hindu nationalism in India has left minorities including Sikhs living as the Other. Since the formation of the Indian state, the rate of migration of Sikhs to other countries has been rising steadily. Making a home in Western countries continues to be full of strife too, with hate crimes and speech against

turbaned Sikhs mistaken as Islamic terrorists in the post 9/11 world, and heightening of racism in the Trump era. For Sikhs in East Africa, late colonial and postcolonial nationalist sentiments continue to create a certain precarity.

At the same time, Sikhs are also resilient and enterprising people. Rhizomatic belonging, with scripture as center, and sacred sound as connective tissue, comes easily to them. As the custodian at Gurdwara Makindu says, “Wherever we settle, we build a gurdwāra.”

Gurdwara Makindu, however, is unique. It is a pilgrimage site in a diasporic land, in a town with no resident Sikhs, a historical testimonial to the century-old roots of Sikhs in the country, engendering a sense of belonging. Over and above, it is a place of value for the locals, a place of employment, free medical services, and educational grants, but also a place to visit for rest and inspiration. The site is thus a diaspora space of affective convergences, from activities that satisfy the needs of the Sikhs as well as the locals. Through such enduring practices that make the Kenyan soil home to them, and by overtly including the locals, even in myth-making, Sikhs foster feelings of Kenya as home. By creating an ecosystem of benefits that focuses equally on the needs of the local African Kenyan community, Sikhs gain affective inclusion in Kenya.

Sacred sound is central to this affective ecology and has been the very seed of its development. From devotional musicking under the shade of a tree to the sacred songs and chants in the worship and dining halls of a grand structure and compound, sacred soundings have been vital to Gurdwara Makindu. Their deep affective impact on Sikh devotees transforms them into transducers of positive affect for all visitors. The sounding of the principles of oneness, equality, and inclusivity in the sacred verses configures a space of inspired behavior. The peaceful sacred sounds engender an ambience of serenity for all.

Making such pilgrimage as part of the everyday actively produces home and belonging. The pleasing devotional soundings, the free delicious vegetarian food, and comfortable lodging invite visitors from diverse backgrounds to participate in an ecology of oneness. This pilgrimage, not to an original “homeland” but within a diasporic location, is a way in, to a space of belonging, to home.

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NOTES

1. Due to the COVID-19-related restrictions, I was unable to travel to Kenya to conduct in-person fieldwork as I had planned to do in the summer of 2020. Hence, I have relied on online resources and long distance communications including phone calls, email, and text messages. More recently, the website of the pilgrimage site I am discussing, Makindu Sikh Temple has developed nicely. <http://www.gurdwaramakindusahib.com>

2. See Kaur (2018) for an argument of individual and fluid “worldings” engendered by sacred song, and Kaur 2019 for an elucidation of the multisensorial affective ecology of Sikh musical worship.

3. In the late colonial period, there developed in Punjab an institution (SGPC, Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee) to manage the operations of the regional gurdwāray, but its purview is limited to the three states that were all part of Punjab at the time—Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh.

4. The scripture was first scribed in 1604 with almost 6,000 sabad, and in 1704, 115 sabad were added. It was installed as the Guru of the Sikhs in 1708.

5. These are my own interpretive translations. I use capitalizations to indicate reference to a divine concept.

6. *Akhand pāth* in the worship hall at Gurdwara Makindu can be heard in a documentary, *My Journey: Homeland Kenya*, by the Sikh Channel, UK, on www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=P4YF1Gt9DfE at 17:51, accessed May 1, 2022.

7. On the problem of Hindu nationalism in Hindustan, see, e.g., Narula (2003).

8. See, e.g., Younger (2010).

9. A video of Sikh devotees lining up to view this scripture at Gurdwara Makindu, while chanting the divine name, can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzQAGupNsMA at 3:00, with stills at 4:00, accessed May 1, 2022.

10. For an example of the kirtan style sung by hereditary singers going back to the nineteenth century at least, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldynNXZH8hE, accessed May 1, 2022. This style combines classical and folk instruments, such as the tãnpura, tabla, harmonium, dhōlak, and cymbals, as can be seen in the stills at 0:30 and 1:00. Singing begins at 0:53.

11. Views of the gurdwāra and its environs can be seen on www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNNGSEOhIxI, accessed May 1, 2022.

12. See, e.g., Ghai (1966).

13. In a study of Sikh pilgrimage making in a contrasting “diasporic space” for Sikhs within India, Kristina Myrvold analyzes the development of Sikh pilgrimage sites in Varanasi, a prime Hindu holy city and pilgrimage center, as one of legitimizing minority presence in the locality through the construction of historical counternarratives that resist Hindu hegemony.

14. The typical contemporary style sung by a professional ensemble can be heard starting at 1:38 at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZuSn3L9xU, accessed May 1, 2022.

A youth ensemble with guitar can be heard at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkkaMaoVES4, accessed May 1, 2022.

A professional ensemble singing a sacred song of *vīr-ras* (heroic affect) in a more spirited style can be heard at www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgtP49Tho64, accessed May 1, 2022.

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Tracing the Indian Ocean at the Cape

Locating Performance and Writing Practices of the Cape Muslim Community

Sylvia Bruinders and Valmont Layne

INTRODUCTION

In the history of southern Africa, Islam has been a consistent factor in its relationship with the Indian Ocean world. In this framework, the word *Malay* has become a synonym for Islamic influence in the region. This article outlines some contours of Indian Ocean influence in the region. We suggest that, by querying the word *Malay*, we might enable new inquiries into the relationships between the Cape and the Indian Ocean world. Much of that history predates the colonial period, hence, this article considers a genealogy of Islam's influences of thought and practice through a discussion of its sonic residues. Might one map its fortunes by considering the ebb and flow of the meanings of Islam in southern Africa? These fortunes have shifted over time, although they are traceable through archives.¹ In southern Africa, it is unavoidable that viewing race in and through a literary and musical lens is important.

The epistemic frames and archive of music research are bound up with those of the colonial world and the Global South. In this article, we propose to locate the concept *Malay* inside this shifting field of scholarship. One might triangulate these inquiries with examples from text and song and with a historiography of Muslim archives and of thinking about archives as a whole in the region.

The article investigates archival vestiges—erasures, creations, adaptations, and community mobilizations—as cultural practices of the Cape Muslim communities

in Cape Town. These communities include descendants of Southeast Asian and East African enslaved individuals brought to the Cape from India, Indonesia, Mozambique, and Madagascar. Although apartheid submerged the geographical and cultural origins of the Creole community of Cape Town for decades, the cultural practices remained strong. These practices appear in the form of a religion, remnants of a patois, a vocal technique within choral singing, instruments, and a ritual mutilation ceremony. While these practices are not equally celebrated—some are more clandestine, others submerged, and yet others enjoying a revival of interest—they all point toward the Indian Ocean migration through slavery under Dutch colonialism at the Cape from the mid-seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century.

In the first part of this article we consider how to negotiate the “Cape Malay” as object and subject in discussions of the southern African Indian Ocean world. Thereafter, we locate the Cape Muslim community’s cultural practices. Arjun Appadurai used the “pragmatic” past to challenge the static, ritualized past, arguing that there is a third, culture-specific past, which consists of norms whose sole purpose is to regulate the inherent debatability of the past in the present. Given the ephemeral nature of the culture-specific past, it is apt to ask about fragments rather than seek wholeness. In other words, to ask what is marked as incidental in the record. Stoler confirms that the past is also present in fragments that are often audible or visible (Stoler 2016, 5). These “imperial durabilities” are sometimes so ineffably threaded through the fabric of contemporary life forms they seem indiscernible as distinct effects, as if everywhere and nowhere at all. Such reading of musicking can help in tracing an arc of the postapartheid through the musical life of a community.

CAPE MALAY: GENEALOGIES OF A WORD

In Indian Ocean scholarship, the Cape was a node in the Dutch East Indies Company empire connected to Batavia and Colombo (Alpers 2014, 94). Different usages of the word “Malay” came into being in the course of southern Africa history. For example, the word came to designate black settlements—as “Malay” quarters—in towns as far apart as the inland town Kimberley and Cape Town at the southwestern coast.

In considering Muslim performance in South Africa, therefore, it would be hard to avoid the category of the “Cape Malay” given its pervasiveness in South African discourse. However, to take performance practices of Muslim communities at face value is to risk repeating a particular “commencement” of the colonial archive (Derrida 1996, 4).

Under apartheid South Africa, “Cape Malay” was a legislated category of people with a historical narrative favorably aligned with the official story of apartheid South Africa. In crude terms, this preferred narrative is explained in the fact that apartheid institutionalized race and its classification and social taxonomy as the central logic of the state—with its assumption of white European civilization as the broader social objective.

Several strands of meaning converge around the term “Malay” in South African discourse: it could refer to a linguistic group, a religion, or a geographical designation. As scholar Gabeba Baderoon confirms, by the end of the Dutch colonial period, the word “Malay” lost its direct link to forced migration from the Indian Ocean world and became tied to the fact of being Muslim (Baderoon 2014, 12). Now and then, the interests of various groups coincide in producing “Malayness.” For example, Malay traditions are in vogue in Cape Town’s contemporary tourism industry, where Malayness is reified as a commodity in tourism and becomes part of the social narrative for the “historical” city (Witz 2011).² In narrative terms, the presence of such a category of people marks the city’s profile as a place “inside” history and lends it a certain purchase on Western-styled narrative. This commodification applies to “Cape Malay” cuisine and to historic parts of the city. In other spheres, people render it archaic—for example, in its marginalized traditional carnival. That is to say, the attractions of identifying as Muslim Malay in South Africa have waxed and waned with different moments in history.

For context, it may help the reader to locate the Cape Malay as an artifact of Cape Town’s geography and location in the global tourism industry. The area called Bo-Kaap in the city of Cape Town is marked as the home of the Cape Malays. The Malay Quarter was built largely by and for the artisans of Cape Town between 1790 and 1825. Only about 1 percent of the 63,000 enslaved individuals who were brought to the Cape were from Malaysia; the bulk of them came from India, Africa, the island of Madagascar, and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, during the founding years of Cape Town, the population in the Cape was diversified, initially able to communicate by way of Melayu and Malayo-Portuguese, the trading languages of the Indian Ocean basin. However, after 1770, these languages were replaced by Dutch, which eventually evolved into Afrikaans (Kotze 2013, 128). People who settled in the Bo-Kaap included political exiles from Java and Ceylon, who moved into the area around 1820. Liberated enslaved individuals moved into the area after 1834 and with them people who had already been living in the town. Over the years the area has come to be identified as the heart of the cultural life of the Muslim community. The area is now considered to be the historic enclave of that group of people.

In the 1930s, Bo-Kaap came under scrutiny from the South African government in an era of rapid racialization of South African society. The area has survived the urban iconoclasm of apartheid only because of a discourse that presented it as the traditional environment of an ethnic identity that authorities should recognize and protect from a municipality intent on modernist urban renewal. Immigration pressures in the city occasioned a new Bo-Kaap spatial pattern (Al Sayyad, Todeschini, and Japtha 2004, 190).

We might think of the phenomenon of the “Cape Malay” as an effect of the waning Dutch colonial influence as the British took over the colony in the “long nineteenth century” (Alpers 2014, 98). Cape Town in the mid-nineteenth century still looked to the Indian Ocean world as its dominant “hinterland.” Over the previous hundred years, few blacks had made their way across the

Helderberg Mountains to the settlement at the foot of Table Mountain (Harries 2016, 34). For sailors, traders, and travelers, the time spent waiting for the monsoon winds in Indian Ocean ports and on board ships encouraged cultural exchange and Creolization. Over time these developing social networks nurtured both the evolution of hybrid cultures and international communities. These exchanges and the shifting factors that influenced them shaped central themes of Indian Ocean history (Alpers 2014, 7).

By the end of the century, new Muslim arrivals from the Province of Natal and India, so-called Passenger Indians, created a new dynamic between the old established Muslim inhabitants and the new Indian immigrants. Distinctions arose between this Muslim group and the older established communities around ritual practices and language. Moreover, Jeppie asserts, “moral panic” around Indian immigration made the Malay moniker more desirable in the early twentieth century (Jeppie 2001, 83–84). For instance, the fez worn by performers in the Cape Malay Choir competitions is an example of a global vector of identification (Tayob 1995, 61).³ Today we recognize it as part of the ‘traditional’ attire of the Cape Malay, at formal events and choral competitions.

For Gabeba Baderoon, South Africa’s racialization of Muslims as “Coloured” or Indian or Malay had the effect of transforming slavery into a minority concern and enslaved people as a minority rather than as the “first modern people” (Baderoon 2014, 16–19). For Baderoon, the coloured trope in apartheid was meant to stabilize the meaning of blackness and whiteness. Within this worldview, Malayness signaled a promise of purity within the mostly “impure” colored designation. In this sense, a key challenge for the South African colonial state was the native question—how to institutionalize the racial order to serve South Africa’s mineral-driven capitalist economy.

We propose that in tracing this codification of race in musical performance, we may glimpse how people and institutions produce racial identities in the social world. What are the remnants in performance, institutions, and social inscriptions? In framing this question, we suggest ways to understand how the concept of Malay character and identity circulates in performance in the region. Bahasa Melayu had been a lingua franca in the Indian Ocean region. The oceanic connection may be a still-underestimated aspect of “Malayness” as it circulates in cultural memory. Might we put this premise to work with archival traces of the Cape, recognizing that such traces have life in a variety of forms, including written and oral forms? This maritime aspect invites us to consider the archive in terms of “command” and “commencement” and of the genealogy of Malayness (Derrida 1998, 1). The great contest for power in the Indian Ocean world is an important context for the laws that came to govern the archive:

Each European pretender to Indian Ocean power also created its own network, none more effective than that established by the VOC linking its capital at Batavia with Colombo and Cape Town. Colombo, on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka,

represented the midway node between the two extremes of Indonesia and the Cape, while Cape Town acquired the moniker “tavern of the seas” for its role in provisioning VOC ships that made port there, restoring its crews, and being the Dutch link between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. (Alpers 2014, 94)

This vast sphere of influence potentially opens several lines of possible inquiry but also complicates the explanatory links between oceanic memory on the one hand and performance institutions on the other. In this regard, the emerging discipline of sound studies may help to think of the sonic as an archival fragment.

The notion of Malay is an elusive category, marginal within the Islamic community in Cape Town itself and within the larger cosmopolitan city. It may not be enough to describe traits common to this community. There is flux. Also, both Atlantic and Indian Ocean movements have influenced the performance practices in this community. Rosa Ribeiro pointed to a “conflation of territory, language, and ethnicity, not to mention religion, [which seems] to be a nineteenth-century creation that became almost paradigmatic in the twentieth century” (Rosa Ribeiro 2015, 7).⁴ Moreover, Ann Laura Stoler offered the Foucauldian notion of genealogy as a political method, not invoked as a substitute for history but attuned to unachieved visions and interrupted imaginaries, demanding alertness to “those haphazard moments when we revise narratives when dissension is demoted or displaced” (Stoler 2016, 23). The archive may reveal ways in which performance was rendered archaic. Given the area studies concerns, one also takes a cue from Appadurai’s critique of “trait” geographies in favor of what he calls “process” geographies (Appadurai 2000, 6). In this sense our observations in this essay should be considered a contribution to the trace of archival fragments pointing to processes of its commencement. In other words, this work unmoors the “traits” that have hardened around the legacies of Cape Malay histories to better attend to underlying processes in future work, to arrive at more nuanced, helpful understandings of how these work in this part of the Indian Oceanic world.

The term “Malay” therefore exemplifies the potential *pitfalls* of working with cultural memory in South Africa, and, we suggest, potential *rewards* of a critical approach to doing this scholarly work. To engage with Islam as cultural memory in South Africa is to trouble its representation. As a noted Afrikaans poet influenced by the European romantics, I. D. du Plessis⁵ was interested in the instrumental value of the Malays for the cause of the Afrikaans language (Jeppie 2001, 86). Gabeba Baderoon concurs that, “Far from purveying a harmless romanticism, Du Plessis’s work disrupted the furthering of a broader black identity and helped to fragment the development of independent political movements among the ‘Coloureds’” (Baderoon 2014, 15). In a much-cited extract, Du Plessis sympathetically described Cape Malay racial “temperament” as follows:

He is introspective, kind towards women, children and animals; inclined to speak slowly, to be passive and insolvent. When aroused he may lose all self-control and run amok. (Du Plessis 1944, 3)⁶

This extract points to the critical formative influences shaping Du Plessis as a young intellectual: his gravitation toward Afrikaner nationalism in a context of English imperial power and attitudes toward the local Afrikaans communities, and his immersion in nineteenth-century romanticism and its attendant orientalism. Raised and educated during rising Afrikaner nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, Du Plessis became an important figure in the Afrikaans nationalist poetry movement called the Dertigers (literally Thirtiers), a generation of white Afrikaans writers and poets heavily influenced by European romanticism and its emphasis on the rustic and the noble.

We may tie the designation “Malay” to two relevant questions for our purposes. The *first* concerns archival fragments, marks of empire traceable in the archive, and how the archive is authorized and commenced. The *second* question concerns the dynamics of what historians call the “Native Question” in South Africa (Mamdani 1996, 1–8).⁷ These political considerations are important because any ethnographic description of cultural practice is challenged to reckon with the mediated nature of social reality. The positioning of the concept *Cape Malay* seems in keeping with Mamdani’s scheme, in which colonialism produces the Malay, not as an “African tribe” but as a “subject race,” which is to say, colonized, nontribal but still “Other” to whiteness. It emerges from “ways of knowing” or the production and commencement of knowledge (and the archive) in service of empire (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000, 16).⁸ “Malay” came against what Veit Erlmann described as Empire’s monopoly of the means of representation (Erlmann 1999, 24). Historians of Africa’s heritage collections refer to “an army of reformers, linguists, folklorists, chiefs, missionaries, elders who ‘invented tradition in Africa.’ These interlocutors were ‘preservationists,’ defending ‘endangered’ cultural practices” (Peterson, Gavua, and Rassool 2015, 9). These champions in most colonial conquests are objects of controversial debate, which we need not repeat here, save to emphasize their role—notwithstanding the ethical nuances of such production—in producing the epistemologies that produced the object of ethnomusicological inquiry.

In the next section, we discuss the actual cultural traits that are still prevalent or extant examples of a previous, vibrant cultural form. These considerations intersect and produce the key to understanding how the performance practices survive as traditional forms. The recent sensory turn enables us to engage “imperial visuality” with sound. This engagement conditions and reveals the qualities we discern in what we hear in imperial structures as regimes of knowledge. Scholars argue that Western tonality brought into distinct forms “naturalized, iconic civility,” which rendered that which sounded different as “many calamities of noise in need of discipline, muting, silence.” For these scholars, “the ‘command to silence’ grew from an effort to contain the din—the noise of the Negro, Chinaman, and lazy native portrayed in European travelogues over four centuries, together with those interior, domestic forms of irrationality and difference within emerging empires: the hysteria of women; the clatter of the rabble” (Radano and Olaniyan 2016, 8).

So far, we have considered the term “Malay” as an archival fragment and considered how these fragments are “authorized” and “commenced.” The phonograph has influenced the form that music takes. It is noteworthy that *goema* as a Cape folk music was not part of the groundswell of phonograph recordings of the first half of the twentieth century. This offers an index of the marginalization of Malay performance.

ARABIC SCRIPT

In signposting a possible genealogy of Arabic script and how it might help make sense of Malayness in the Cape, we are mindful that scholars need to consider the implications of script as archival commandment and commencement. Stoler considers how the archive produces common sense from textual evidence, and for this purpose she distinguishes between what was “unwritten” because it could go without saying and “everyone knew it,” what was unwritten because it could not yet be articulated, and “what was unwritten because it could not be said” (Stoler 2008, 3).⁹

Besides the many regional languages, the enslaved people brought aspects of their cultural practices such as religion, rituals, music, musical instruments, and written script to the Cape. They did not coalesce as a subaltern society due to the harsh patriarchal Dutch rule as well as there being a lack of leadership within the community of enslaved individuals until much later in the eighteenth century. As discussed previously, one of the more dominant languages was Melayu, tied to the written script called Jawi. Both were in use in the early colony as was the Arabic script. As the Creole Dutch form became the lingua franca among the enslaved individuals, Arabic-Afrikaans script replaced Jawi (Jappie 2011). The Arabic script was kept alive particularly from the mid-eighteenth century by a high-ranking political prisoner, who, when freed, opened the first Muslim school (*madrrasah*) in Cape Town in 1793 and a mosque in 1795. It was here that children and adults learned to read the Arabic-Afrikaans script and were educated about Islam, and thus the possibility of a Cape Muslim community/identity emerged. The written tradition persisted until the mid-twentieth century, by which time it had developed into a distinctive literary tradition in which several manuscripts and religious textbooks had been published in this Arabic-Afrikaans script (Davids 2011). Sarah Jappie suggests there were three main uses for textual production in the early Cape Muslim community: religious, talismanic (mystical/secret knowledge), and quotidian texts (letters, lists).

One of the most influential men to emerge out of the early Cape Muslim community was Sheikh ‘Abdullah ibn Qadi ‘Abdus Salam (1712–1807), commonly referred to as Tuan Guru (Esteemed Master). He was a prince and religious scholar from the island of Tidore in the Moluccas who was banished to the Cape, held captive on Robben Island, and was held as a political prisoner by the Dutch for

conspiring with the English against them. Robben Island is renowned for being the prison island on which Nelson Mandela spent eighteen years of his twenty-seven-year incarceration. The island's almost four-hundred-year history of banishment and imprisonment began with Dutch convicts from the East Indies; they were often political leaders and nobility who had opposed Dutch rule. In his recent book in which he gives a trenchant account of the maritime history of the Bay of Bengal and other parts of the Indian Ocean, Sunil Amrith points out:

The British system of punitive transportation spanned the Indian Ocean, depositing convicts from India in a network of island prisons stretching from Robben Island to Mauritius, from the Andaman Islands to Singapore. The movement of convict labor was a global phenomenon. (Amrith 2013, 77)

Tuan Guru, referred to as an “Eastern Free Black,” transcribed the *Ummul Barahin* (The Demonstrative Proofs), a classic text on Islamic belief written by the Algerian scholar Sheikh Mohammad bin Yusuf al Sannusi (1435/6–1490). Along with the transcriptions, Tuan Guru provided commentary as well as transcribed parts of the Qur’an into Arabic-Afrikaans (Rafudeen 2005, 77–78). According to Achmat Davids (1991, 37, in Rafudeen 2005, 79) the *Ummul Brahini* provided an essential text for the Cape Muslim scholars at the madrasa in Dorp Street, Cape Town. This text, along with several other *kietaabs* (from the Arabic word *kitab*, meaning book) revealed in the mid-twentieth century, has been recognized as an important literary body of works written in Arabic-Afrikaans. Dutch linguist Adrianus van Selms, who coined the term “Arabic-Afrikaans,” and German linguist Hans Kahler, uncovered these works and pioneered this research in the 1950s. Both men made inventories of the extant manuscripts, which eventually amounted to sixty-four texts (Jappie 2011). Many of these books were produced as school notebooks or *kopies boeke*, which was an integral part of the rote-learning education system in the madrasa (Jappie 2011, 376).

The recent interest and celebration of these texts has yet again cast the orientalist lens on the Cape Muslim community. This time the Malaysian and Indonesian governments endorsed the orientalist lens, as they were interested in the Malay and Indonesian diaspora. Interestingly, Jappie (2011, 389) comments that this archival collection was not celebrated within the larger archive of Arabic-African texts, such as the Timbuktu manuscripts, but was rather narrowly placed within an ethnic Malay identity.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

A few instruments that have possible links to the Indian Ocean world are the *goema* drum, *tamboer* (frame drum), the *ramkie* (lute), and the *ra'king* (spike lute). The *goema* drum, a single-headed barrel drum originally made from a small wine cask, is like many barrel drums from Asia (including India, Indonesia, and

may have copied it from the enslaved people. Several similar names associated with slightly different instruments emerged over the years (see Kirby 1939, 482, for the exhaustive list), and an extant version is held in the Kirby Collection of Musical Instruments (hereafter Kirby Collection) housed at the South African College of Music. A precursor to the ramkie is the *kabossy* from Madagascar, which suggests its Indian Ocean roots. Although likened to a ukulele, the body of the *ramkie* is perhaps only that in size, not shape. In the extant version of the instrument, the shape has been localized, and the boxlike resonator is made of metal (see www.digitalcollections.lib.uct.ac.za/collection/islandora-20238).

The ra'king is a spike lute with three full-length strings and one half-length string; its shape is reminiscent of the spike fiddles and lutes of the Middle East and Indian Ocean world. It is no longer used in performance and is not much known except for the extant version held in the Kirby Collection (see <https://digitalcollections.lib.uct.ac.za/collection/islandora-20257>). In the past it accompanied songs and dances (see Kirby 1939, 484–85).

MUSICAL STYLE

Another cultural vestige of the Indian Ocean world is the vocal style displayed in the song genre referred to as *Nederlandslied* (Dutch song). *Nederlandsliedere* (pl.) ostensibly began as old Dutch songs (reflected in the High Dutch and older forms of Creole Dutch) brought to the Cape by settlers, sailors, and soldiers (Martin 1999, 26–27). Enslaved individuals emulated this singing, localizing the songs and thereby forming a new musical genre. Historically, people sang *Nederlandsliedere* at family and community celebrations. The most widely known *Nederlandslied* is “Rosa,” a love song popularly sung at Cape Muslim weddings, extolling the moral virtues of fidelity. In the past, weddings were prolonged affairs of several days’ duration with the families of the bride and bridegroom taking turns singing various types of songs as entertainment (Martin 1999, 72–73). These days the *Nederlands* (as it is referred to in common parlance) is a prestigious, competitive genre of the Malay Choirs, which are all-male choral groups that host annual choral competitions during the summer months (January to March). Its prestige and historicity have bestowed much contention on the genre, so much so that only cultural insiders adjudicate this genre until recently, often older men, former winners of this category in bygone years. All the other song genres are adjudicated by music specialists who are not necessarily (most often not) cultural insiders. Musically, the genre is a responsorial song of moderate tempo between a soloist and chorus, in which the soloist often joins the chorus for part of the response. The *Nederlands* is a Creole song in which there is a fusion of some musical traits that landed in the Cape under conditions of slavery during Dutch rule. Both European musical characteristics and Arabic influences, which came through the Islamic religion of the enslaved people, are prevalent.

The most distinctive feature of the *Nederlandslied* is the nasal vocal quality of the soloist and the rather high-pitched vocal melismatic ornamentation called *karienkels* in Afrikaans. The practitioners and the culture-bearers hold these qualities to be innate or a gift, which cannot be taught. The *karienkels*, consisting of various ornamentations (such as glissandi, turns, and *acciaccaturas*) around certain melodic pitches of longer duration, confer a minor inflection to the piece reflecting the Islamic vocal traditions that influence the soloist's singing. For instance, the *adhan* (call to prayer) or Qur'anic recitation, which both have similar ornamentation, probably influenced this melodic style. The soloist's voice is quite independent of the choral texture of the music as he produces these melismatic ornaments and intonational fluctuations with a rather constricted throat; he is also rhythmically freer than the chorus and accompaniment. His singing provides a contrast to the choir, which sings in Western block harmonies with a steady slow tempo and a rather even and controlled sound production compared to the more emotional quality of the soloist. The accompaniment, consisting of string instruments, has an Iberian feel to it through the combination of the strummed string instruments and their rhythmic patterns, reflecting the earlier Portuguese influence in some of the locations from which the enslaved individuals originated (Martin 1999, 172–73). Earlier, the instrumentation consisted only of mandolins, guitars, and banjos, but these days it includes other string instruments such as violins and cellos. At the annual street celebrations on December 31, when Malay choirs usher in the New Year with song, parading through the city of Cape Town, they end their parade at the old sports clubhouse in Rose Street, Bo-Kaap, where performers stand in a semicircle, reverently singing a *Nederlandslied*, swaying gently to reflect the movement of being on the sea. This visual reference harks back to both the enslaved individuals brought by ships to the port city and the fact that many men worked as fishermen in the early colony.

People have institutionalized fragments in the competitive practices that sustain them. Most of the songs were, if not composed, at least collected and put in their present form at the beginning of the twentieth century: they wrote some of these songs down in the early years, but around 1892 a Malay choir leader named Rasdien Cornelius, helped by a retired Dutch sailor, Frans de Jongh, recorded what was being lost. When Rasdien began, a mere twenty songs were all the younger singers could recall. They imported other songs from Holland and persuaded the oldest Malays to recall snatches of ditties sung in their youth. Later, the collector Willem van Warmelo also contributed by reintroducing Dutch songs into the repertoire of the *Nederlandsliedjies* (Martin 2013, 115). There are about two hundred to three hundred songs in existence, the repertoire is considered closed, and no one composes these songs any longer. There are a series of assumptions here about the forms of memory, the taxonomies at work in these interventions.

RELIGIOUS RITUAL

The *ratiep* or *khalifa*, “the eastern sword ritual” (Davids 1987, 63), emerges from the Sufi-inspired Islam that was practiced in the Cape. The Muslim mystic Al Rifa’i founded the Rifai’iyyah Sufi Brotherhood in the twelfth century in Arabia. Sufism is characterized by certain doctrines and ritual practices involving music and musical instruments, which occupy a contested space within Islam. This form of mystic Islam is practiced in places around the Indian Ocean basin, particularly in Sri Lanka and Indonesia where similar mutilation ceremonies exist in which devotees in a state of trance cut and stab themselves without any flow of blood. The term “mutilation ceremony” is a problematic term as the practitioners see this rather as a trance state that demonstrates the power of their belief and the power of the spirit over the body. In the case of the Cape, it is speculated that this ritual came with Sheikh Yusuf, brother of the Sultan of Makassar in Sulawesi (formerly Celebes) who was a political exile to the Cape from Bantam, Java. He went to Bantam where he spread the Islamic faith, married the daughter of the Sultan of Bantam, and assisted his father-in-law in his strife against Dutch trade monopoly. Sheikh Yusuf was forced to surrender and was initially imprisoned in the Castle of Batavia, then banished to Ceylon in 1684 and ultimately exiled to the Cape Colony. He and his entourage of forty-nine, including his two wives, twelve children, and twelve imams, settled on a farm in Zandvleit near Cape Town (currently Macassar, a small town in the Western Cape, 34 kilometers from Cape Town) in 1694. Sheikh Yusuf became the leader of the Cape Muslims, and Macassar became a vibrant place for Islamic activity for fugitive enslaved individuals and other exiles, the place where the first cohesive Muslim community was established (see South African History Online, www.sahistory.org.za/). Bantam was the original capital of Java, situated in the extreme northwest of the island. There are two places in the Indian Ocean basin from which aspects of the *ratiep* as well as the Cape enslaved individuals can be traced. Bantam was the center for *gedeboes* (iron spikes or ceremony including these), and West Sumatra was known for *dabus* activity (Sufi-inspired Muslim ritual including singing, playing the frame drum, bodily movements, and self-mutilation. See Kartomi 2005, 25).

In the *ratiep* ritual, men hit swords across their bodies and pierce skewers into their cheeks without letting the blood flow or feeling any pain while being accompanied by drumming and Arabic chanting.¹³ Although this ritual is not part of Islam, it attracted many enslaved people to the religion and became ensconced in the Cape Muslim community. This charismatic aspect of the tradition of Islam in the Cape was not necessarily supported by the religious authorities, and by 1854 when the colonial authorities wanted to ban it as a nuisance; the imams did not object. However, the imams realized the power of the ritual and its usefulness for religious conversion. They agreed to a compromise: that it be performed only once a year, on the twelfth day of the month of Rabir Ahir, giving it the Melayu name of *Amantu Ablas* (Davids 1987, 64).¹⁴ Davids (63) asserts that *ratiep* “must

have given the slaves tremendous feelings of power over their body [*sic*], despite their bondage,” as did the promise of the afterlife. This hope in the afterlife was underscored by an imam: “We teach them (the slaves) to believe that their souls are free and that they must look up to God to make them free when they die” (see Davids 1987, 63).

Regarded as the founder of Islam in the Cape, Sheik Yusuf’s burial place, or *kramat*,¹⁵ near Macassar is considered a holy place, and devout Muslims regularly visit the shrine. This early settlement in Macassar was instrumental in founding a more cohesive Cape Muslim community. Again, Amrith (2013, 77) is instructive here:

Across the Indian Ocean, small groups of political prisoners turned their places of exile into new homes: transported rebels from the Dutch East Indies formed the core of the “Cape Malay” community, and their journeys continue to evoke powerful memories to this day.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has considered Indian Oceanic cultural traits in South Africa as having been produced in social and cultural processes that involve inscription, sonic, performative, and textual mediation. It has sought to point out ways in which the making of identities leaves archival residues. We set out to show that the concept “Malay” in South Africa is not a stable category of its own making. This, we argued, had special bearing on the inherited category of the Cape Malay, an artifact of southern Africa’s historical relationship to the Indian Ocean world. It has foregrounded the work of colonial-era interlocutors in enabling the production and the curating of identities, considering the mediations that this involves, and trying to keep a sense of it as process, as opposed to finished forms. If reality is socially constructed, then the living archive is necessarily constructed by that reality. In this case, the social reality of Cape Muslims was initially constructed under Dutch and British colonialism and later crystallized by apartheid policies of separation and forced removals. The role of I. D. du Plessis cannot be underestimated in this process of identity construction and formation of the Cape Muslims in the twentieth century. We, therefore, seek to supplant the use of “Cape Malay” as a category of racial, ethnic, or even religious identification or a trace of something authentic. In its place, it may be more helpful to think of “Cape Malay” as an apartheid term for a wide range of humans with indirect or direct connections to the cultural world of the Indian Ocean. We might, after Appadurai, think of this as a “process geography” with several social features rather than a “trait,” or ethnic geography. The social production of race and identity is emphasized here. Although the origins of Cape Malay individuals in the Indian Ocean world were downplayed to foment a local identity and acceptance of the local authority, the cultural remnants of the Indian Ocean world remained very present in the expressive practices of the Cape Muslims.

NOTES

1. We use the term “archive” to denote those discursive relations of meaning-making that include but are not restricted to institutional archives, and in which institutionalized forms of power enable a claim to authority. In his influential account, Jacques Derrida referred to “commandment” and “commencement.” In this, we draw on its broader usage in humanistic and historical studies. See Derrida (1996).

2. The South African tourism industry has affected people’s ways of identifying and how they respond to pressures relating to identity. In a related context, Leslie Witz (2011) considers how places, people, cultures, and histories are made and remade in an image economy. The visual apparatus of tourism, depictions of place through writers, and officials, gender relations, allocation of resources, claims to expertise, local and national politics, institutional arrangements, and previous histories of images, are potent mechanisms in the establishment, production, and circulation of visual tourist knowledge.

3. In the drive to assert a unity that would strengthen their collective position, Indian traders invoked global affiliations to the Ottoman Empire. Indian Muslim traders adopted symbols of Islamic communalism to distinguish themselves in South Africa. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Abu Bakr Effendi introduced the Turkish fez to Cape Muslims. Abu Bakr Effendi had been sent by the Ottoman sultan Abdülmecid I in 1862 at the request of the British Queen Victoria to the Cape of Good Hope, to teach and assist the Muslim community. In 1903, his son, Achmat Effendi, as Imam of the Pretoria Mosque, petitioned the Pretoria Court to allow Muslims to wear it during trials. Subsequently, Muslims in the Cape, Natal, and Transvaal adopted its use. Echoing the Khilafat movement in India, there was support for the Ottoman caliph.

4. Rosa Ribeiro rejects any trenchant separation of the Indian and Atlantic oceanic worlds, arguing that there were complex interactions between the two.

5. I. D. du Plessis played a decisive role in lobbying the South African government to recognize Cape Malay as a “population group” worthy of special consideration inside the apartheid vision.

6. The purported Malay propensity in orientalist discourse to “run amok” is itself the subject of scholarly scrutiny, connected to the social phenomenon of ritualized suicide in Malaysia. See Panikkar (2005).

7. Mahmoud Mamdani argued that the African colonial experience came to be crystallized in the state, forged through that encounter. The African state contained two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority, organized differently in rural areas than in urban ones. In this, public power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, and rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, while customary power pledged to enforce tradition. Critically, this also drove a distinction in which the native was considered an ethnic category and the colonizer a civic and “racial” one. All other human formations—including in different African contexts “Cape Malays” in South Africa, Tutsis in Rwanda—were held under the sign that Mamdani called “subject races.”

8. For Europe, mass culture is modernism’s “other” in music as in the other arts, while reference to “authentic” folk and ethnic musics, primitive and exotic constructions, have remained more enduring and acceptable as forms of appropriation and projection in music.

9. In this section, we sketch the process by which texts operated at an empirical level. The work of reading this commencement is something for the future.

10. Klopse are carnival troupes that have been in existence since the days of slavery (which ended in 1834) and formalized in 1907 as the Coon Carnival, now Cape Town Minstrel Carnival (see Martin 1999).

11. Christmas bands are Christian wind and string bands that emerged as caroling groups in the 1850s and are mostly operative from November through April (see Bruinders 2017).

12. Cape jazz is a particular jazz style and sound, connected to the city of Cape Town, which incorporates the rhythms, harmonies, and sounds of the minstrels and Christmas bands. Its most celebrated international proponent is Abdullah Ibrahim.
13. There are similar forms of self-mutilation ceremonies called *ratib* in India and Malaysia as well as Rifa'i Ratib in Iran and Sri Lanka.
14. These days the ritual is practiced more often than once a year.
15. Afrikaans spelling of the Malay word *keramat*.

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Music and Citizenship

Using Siddi and Sheedi Musical Practices to Expand On Concepts of Belonging

Brian Jackson

Notwithstanding their intentional exclusion by society from concepts of belonging and systemic neglect by their respective governments regarding resource allocation, Afro-Indians and Afro-Pakistanis use the very thing that sets them apart from the rest to come together in shared experiences: their ethnocultural histories. Experiences like that of Juje Jacki Harnodkar Siddi—a native Indian of African ancestral origin, in which he described being grabbed by the collar and told, “you are a guest in this country, so don’t overstep your boundaries”—while at first conjuring emotions such as fear, anger, and anxiety, can ultimately lead to the use of cultural characteristics to create one’s own community (101 India 2016, 2:00). Although being Siddi, an Indian of southeastern African ancestral origin, in India is often equated with being a foreigner or a tourist, this does not stop many Siddi communities from using their unique musical traditions to combat societal attempts to exclude them. This chapter discusses Siddis’ as well as Sheedis’, Pakistanis of southeastern African ancestral origin, experiences of racism and xenophobia, and how such experiences relate to the use of musical traditions to reconstruct concepts of belonging. Focusing on the African-descended populations of western India and southern Pakistan, though inclusive of African-descended populations throughout India, in this chapter I use historiographies, documentaries, oral interviews, and ethnographies to expand on understandings of Afro–South Asian musical practices. Such practices, being rooted in historical immigrations, serve as a challenge to existing citizen versus “other” social dichotomies and represent relationships between African-descended minority populations in the region and their respective nations. Through the study of musical

instruments like the *malunga* and the *dhol* as well as dances such as the *amba* and *laywa*, I will provide examples of how dance and musical traditions reflect histories of maritime movement and can be used to contribute to improved understandings of South Asian identities. Additionally, Sheedi and Siddi festivals such as the Sheedi Mela and festival for Bava Gor will be expanded on in their efforts to call for the increased government recognition of Siddi and Sheedi communities.

Despite a lesser amount of scholarship regarding Afro-descendant populations throughout the Indian subcontinent compared to such populations throughout the Atlantic, new scholarship regarding these marginalized groups and their contributions to national concepts of identity and belonging is quickly growing. Academics such as Purnima Bhatt and K. N. Chaudhuri have written books detailing the immigrations of East African populations to South Asia as enslaved peoples, soldiers, traders, and merchants as far back as the first century CE, touching on the vast and lasting effects such populations have had on South Asian demographics and history (see Bhatt 2017 and Chaudhuri 1985). As one investigates current musical traditions of the Sheedi communities of Pakistan and the Siddi communities of India, particularly Gujarat, it becomes apparent that while their ancestries are significantly rooted in migrations across the Indian Ocean from Africa to South Asia, current Siddi and Sheedi identities are largely influenced by centuries-long adaptations to new social, political, and economic environments. In a global society where race frequently overshadows national and regional forms of identification, scholars often use dated histories of long-distance migration, both involuntary and voluntary, as a means to locate specific populations in a particular time, place, and experience. While part of my goal is to use migration histories to connect particular Indian Ocean populations and their musical traditions with geographic histories that acknowledge African pasts—something important in understanding these cultural traditions and communal experiences—we as scholars must be careful not to impose these pasts on contemporary concepts of identity. Though I recognize that while African-descended peoples in South Asia fully assert that they are now South Asian, one of my challenges in this chapter is to use musicology to identify cultural connections with regions in Africa through historical Indian Ocean relationships and networks (Jayasuriya 2008, 136). Hence, through the current musical traditions of Siddis and Sheedis, I assert that musicological traditions not only tell us about African pasts but can also be used to lobby for the recognition of South Asian presents. Focusing on the annual Sheedi Mela Festival in Karachi, musical practices of the Siddis in Gujarat, and historical accounts of maritime migrations and their effects on Indian and Pakistani societies, I will construct a narrative that asserts Siddi and Sheedi populations as members of everyday Indian and Pakistani societies.

While this research spans a vast historical period focused on the nineteenth century to the present but recognizing previous historical phenomena, it is not meant to be an in-depth account but aims to elaborate on the various places that

historiographic knowledge can be obtained and used to better understand current societal interactions in the region of focus. Consequentially, and as Shihan de Silva Jayasuria states, the history of music in many cases “lies outside the boundaries of [traditional] archives,” and “invisibility is a considerable obstacle to recognizing” regional Indian Ocean influences in local populations. Therefore, the recent increase in scholarly focus on these populations can be used to cite contemporary musical traditions that have been facilitated through historical maritime networks as growing evidence that Siddis and Sheedis, while still recognizing their African ancestral origins, are, as Purnima Bhatt states, “first and foremost Indian, [Pakistani and/or Balochi] before African” (Bhatt 2017, 122). In understanding the inclusive and fluid nature of music and musical traditions in the region and before continuing to map out such regional traditions, it is first necessary for me to explain the historical background of these populations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The term *Siddi* is historically used to refer to Indians of central, southern, and southwestern African origin who immigrated—both voluntarily and involuntarily—to South Asia as far back as the first century CE (Ali 1996, 18–27). Additionally, another influence from the Arab world on Siddi populations is one of religion, with most (but not all) Siddis practicing Islam. While many Siddis did arrive at what is now the subcontinent of India as enslaved persons, this term, Siddi, also broadly refers to those who arrived as merchants and soldiers and quickly rose up the social ladder, ultimately conquering large territories throughout the subcontinent.¹ Having controlled territories including but not limited to Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Karnataka as early as the seventh century AD, they brought with them musical traditions maintained on the decks of dhows and throughout their immigrations, instilling such traditions in their newly created empires and communities, such as communities within Gujarat (Ulaby 2012, 43–62).

In previous scholarship, such as the book *The Swahili* by Thomas Spear and Derek Nurse, as well as the film *Wonders of the African World* by Henry Louis Gates, scholarly discussions and cinematic delivery portray particular Indian Ocean identities as rigid and exclusive. Through various forms of maritime trade, and particularly with increased nineteenth-century trade across the region, musical practices were developed that proved just how fluid these identities were and are (see Gates 1999 and Nurse and Spear 1985). Furthermore, music is becoming a large factor in how historiographic representations of Siddi and Sheedi populations can be modified to describe modern Indian and Pakistani cultural practices. Therefore, it proves helpful in understanding previous immigrations from East Africa to India to explain the fluidity of identity in the region and put current musical traditions into a historical context. It is important to mention this because although Gujarat has come to be known as the “quintessential land of the

immigrant,” according to Samira Sheikh (2012), often little to no recognition is given to African diasporas that contributed to such a characterization.

While Samira Sheikh provides a nuanced account of Gujarati history, challenging authors like Michael Pearson who detail the region through strictly economic and trade vantage points, she nonetheless fails to be fully inclusive of the racial and ethnic makeup of the region. Although Sheikh discusses the role religion, patriotic ballads, poems, and chronicles of genealogy played in the creation of modern Gujarat, nowhere in her representation does she note the presence of Siddis or general Afro-descendant populations. Though I should note that Sheikh’s accounts of Gujarat mostly lie in the seventeenth century, two centuries before the main focus of this paper, Siddi populations had long occupied the region at that point in time. While it is not the goal of this chapter to assert a Siddi presence into Sheikh’s accounts of Gujarat, it is important to assert their presence into larger understandings of the region, especially because such a presence brought with it a unique component of current Indian identities upon the state becoming a part of India. In this sense, I argue that notwithstanding histories that are not inclusive of Siddis, these populations throughout time have used music and dance as a way of re-asserting themselves into conversations and imaginaries of identity and belonging. It is unfortunately common for Siddis and their historical contributions to be continually excluded from working definitions of Gujarati cultural citizenship and regional identity—such as Sheikh’s historical account, which represents a pointed and intentional history Gujarat as an Indian state. However, while discussing re-assertions of Siddi presence in Gujarati history through music is important, also important is providing a bit of context in terms of Siddi groups and people who are still crucial to local histories today.

The Nawabs of Sachin, a city in southern Gujarat, were a major force behind the decree of succession of Sachin into India, signed August 16, 1947, by Haidar Khan, son of the Siddi ruler His Highness Ibrahim Khan III (Robbins and McLeod 2012, 69–228). The fact of the matter is that throughout Indian history Siddis and Habshis² played large roles in shaping the subcontinent’s histories and cultures in their favor. Hence, relating this to K. N. Chaudhuri and Michael Pearson’s understanding of the *longue durée*, instead of it being the relationship between humans and their maritime environments through historic immigrations, the *longue durée* in this case can be noted as the relationship between humans and the social environments in which they exploited sociopolitical environments to create nuanced and diverse histories, cultures, and social interactions. Similarly, Savita Nair in her doctoral dissertation recognizes the connections between western India and East Africa as “circular and dynamic” and acknowledges “identities [that are] actively constituted” to underscore the porous nature of borders (Nair 2001, 277).

At present, Siddis largely speak the common language of the region they inhabit, such as Gujarati for Siddis of Gujarat, Kannada for Siddis of Karnataka, and so

on. The name Siddi is used overarchingly to refer to “all sections of the Indian population who, though considered native to India by virtue of their long history in the subcontinent, ultimately have their origins in Africa” (Cardoso 2010, 102). This term should not be confused with the related term *Habshi*, which in many parts of India denotes an Indian of Ethiopian or general Red Sea origin, and when used as *Habshi-Kafir* often possesses a derogatory and racist connotation historically used to refer to African-descended peoples in India. Discrimination against Siddis and Habshis continues today in many popular sayings, such as the Gujarati phrase “*siddi bhaiyo saw man sabuey nhay, to pan kala ne kala*”—“that even if they bathe with hundreds of soaps, they can never wash off their black color” (Bhatt 2017, 113–22). Siddis and Habshis are politically and socially disenfranchised, with many living in poverty as well as social and geographic isolation. While there is no map to illustrate areas largely populated by Siddis, in the states of Gujarat and Karnataka, this corresponds to western regions separated from the rest of the state by dense forests and unpaved roads (See 101 India 2016 and Poindexter 2013). Despite etymological distinctions, it is not uncommon for Siddis to refer to themselves as Habshi, often in attempts to distance themselves from the negative connotation that many non-Afro-Indians give the term Siddi (Poindexter 2013, 6:10).

Relatedly, the term *Sheedi* refers to Pakistanis of African descent, though unlike in India, Pakistan does not seem to have terms that differentiate geographic ancestral origins in the continent of Africa. While Sheedis in Pakistan, like Siddis in Gujarat, continue to commemorate their African ancestry through festivals such as the Sheedi Mela—a commemoration of the Sheedi ancestor Hoshi Sheedi as a brave patriot and a fighter against the British—even now in recent integrations into Pakistani society the term is beginning to lose its hold to broader and more inclusive terms such as *Balochi*, *Qambrani*, and *Bilali*, the last term denoting the Prophet Mohammed’s formerly enslaved companion Bilal (Feroz 1989, 25). It should be noted that the terms Sheedi and Afro-Balochi, while at times mixed up by Pakistanis, do not always refer to the same people. While Sheedi can often refer to any Pakistani of African ancestry, the term Afro-Balochi particularly refers to ethnic Balochis of African ancestry. Furthermore, the lack of social integration of Siddi and Sheedi populations in India and Pakistan, as well the strong maritime connections facilitated through trade between South Asia and East Africa, have contributed to the intentional and strategic use of musical traditions throughout these populations to both keep African traditions alive and strong and to unite Siddi and Sheedi communities in their South Asian identities. As Sabir Badalkhan notes in his chapter “On the Presence of African Musical Culture in Baluchistan,” “to dissolve the burden of discrimination, these people retained their musical traditions,” and nowadays this can be seen through their festivals and celebrations (Basu 2008, 278).

MUSIC AND FESTIVALS AS FORMS OF SURVIVAL

Annual musical processions among Siddi and Sheedi populations over time have not only served to preserve African ancestry but to also reinforce religious, socio-cultural, and even musical traditions. For example, the weeklong Sheedi Mela festival, which takes place ten miles from Karachi at the shrine of the saint Manghopir, once meant to reinforce Sheedi history for future generations as well as predict whether the coming year would be auspicious or not, now has an additional purpose in uniting the Sheedis of Pakistan and calling for increased government support of Sheedi cultural practices. Similar to the practice of commemorating past ancestors, Siddis of Gujarat also partake in an annual procession for the ancestor Bava Gor, believed to be the first Siddi to arrive in the region (Poindexter 2013, 4:10). What makes these festivities, and particularly the musical traditions that are practiced during the festivals, unique is not only the intentional connections made to African pasts but also the assertion of South Asian identity and lobbying for government support.

As mentioned, one of the purposes of the annual Sheedi Mela festival is to reinforce Sheedi traditions for future generations. Throughout the festival, what Pakistani freelance journalist Fahad Desmukh details as “African beats” are played and musical chants are sung in a language “believed to be a mixture of Swahili” and additional indigenous languages (Desmukh 2009, 1:32). The particular use not only of those beats not readily recognized as South Asian, but also a language more so connected with the African continent than South Asia (at least in popular beliefs), is intentional as a way to preserve African pasts for future generations of Sheedis. Using parts of the original African languages of the various types of music can be understood as a way to honor its origin and influence on current populations (Al-Harthy 2012, 114). Additionally, Afro-Balochi dances such as the *dammāl*, *lewa*, and *amba* are performed, indicating the African-influenced cultural heritage unique to Sheedis.³ As Sabir Badalkhan puts it in his discussions of Yemeni Habshis in Hyderabad, these Afro-descended populations’ history and presence in the region “has become embodied in their music [and dance] (Basu 2008, 303).⁴ For example, delving deeper into the dance of *amba*, similar to music where the *malunga* (a bowed instrument) is used (which will be further discussed below) is at times accompanied by the playing of a *dhol*. While the term *dhol* can often generically refer to any large drum, it more frequently refers to a big, double-headed drum. This particular instrument serves as a common manifestation of Afro-Balochi culture and history in their current musical practices. I specifically note that it is a manifestation of Afro-Balochi history because, as Badalkhan notes from his interviews with former sailors regarding Afro-Balochi music, stories of “drums beating” on the decks of dhows and particularly along the coastal areas of Makran⁵ causing Balochi sailors such as Mazar to dance along with them, throughout the history of the Afro-Balochi presence in the region are quite

numerous (Basu 2008, 303). Similarly, the dance of the *lewa*, while not as celebratory as the *Amba*, is also common among Afro-Balochi populations throughout Makran. Additionally, what makes this dance even more interesting is that it is also practiced in Oman, though possessing a slightly different cultural meaning than when practiced among Afro-Balochi populations. As such, these dance traditions and the instruments used in these ways all serve a purpose not only for creating community among Afro-Balochi populations but also retaining African-descended cultures.

However, this should not be misinterpreted as a form of self-exclusion and refusal of Sheedis to integrate into the larger Pakistani society. While journalist Fahad Desmukh suggests that it is normal for Sheedis to come to Karachi from all over Sindh and Balochistan to commemorate this festival (the most important event on the group's calendar), increasingly more Sheedis and Afro-Balochis are making longer trips to the festival in a "deep sense of brotherhood" and a "devotion to their forefathers" to maintain their cultural practices as Pakistanis of African origin. In an interview with Fahad Desmukh, Sheedi community chief Ghulam Akbar stated that Sheedis are Pakistani and "have rights of Pakistan, but [they] have no strong leader," hinting not only to a desire to be incorporated into social definitions of being Pakistani, but also the need for community representation (Desmukh 2009, 4:27). Hence, the Sheedi Mela festival for Akbar and other Sheedis has become a way to use musical rhythms, chants, songs, and dances to call for increased national support for the Sheedi community. Though, while increased government support is also a goal for Siddis in India and more specifically Gujarat, their festivals, unlike their Pakistani counterparts, do not outwardly include a specific intent of gathering such support.

Despite compromising the eighth generation since arriving in South Asia, consequentially adopting regional sociocultural practices as their own, Siddis of Gujarat maintain a sense of pride as "Habshis," as they refer to themselves using this specific term (Poindexter 2013, 6:10). As a way to maintain such pride, the Gujarati Siddis of Dhrangadhra carry out an annual procession to commemorate their ancestor, Bava Gor, as the first Siddi to arrive in the region (Shroff 2013, 18–25).⁶ This festival, similar to the Sheedi Mela, consists of playing music and chanting in a mixture of local languages and dialects, while proceeding through the town toward the burial site and shrine of Bava Gor. Most Siddis and Habshis are Muslim, and they practice a form of Sufism that includes the worshiping of the burial site of local saints, such as that of Bava Gor. Additionally, during this procession, specific musical instruments with African origin such as the *malunga* are used, simultaneously demonstrating an African past and a South Asian present. The *malunga* instrument is particularly interesting not only because it complements Siddi narratives of Congolese ancestry but also because of its striking resemblance to Afro-Brazilian instruments such as the berimbau, denoting what some scholars see as a similar African origin (Jayasuria 2008, 145).

While some scholars have noted that both the *malunga* and berimbau have their African origin in the Congo region, a known origin of many enslaved peoples both in Brazil and India, I find it necessary to briefly discuss the sociocultural role of the berimbau to provide context for what seems to be a similar phenomenon growing in Gujarat with the use of the *dhol* and *malunga*. Previously, as a researcher of Afro-Latinidad⁷ and Afro-Brazilian cultures, I conducted research on the Afro-Brazilian presence in national celebratory representations of Brazil, such as the Rio de Janeiro carnival. As such, capoeira, both the dance and martial art, proved to be a great avenue for understanding how Brazil as a country celebrates its cultures on a national level and portrays such cultures to the world. At the center of such portrayals during my research, in addition to samba and soccer, was capoeira. Generally, capoeira as a whole was and is popularly portrayed as a martial art that during the times of slavery was disguised as a dance by enslaved Africans in Brazil and used to revolt against slave masters. In Brazilian attempts to depict capoeira as a national martial art, this description is often connected to national pasts of racial injustice, perceived as not connected to present social phenomena. Though, what Afro-Brazilians frequently assert through the use of capoeira (the songs, and martial art) is that these histories of injustice are still connected to current social experiences of Afro-descendants in the country. Furthermore, because capoeira is so nationally (and internationally) recognized, by default the berimbau instrument is part of the symbolism connected with such recognition. The berimbau instrument not only provides the musical base for capoeira, but it also has a role in the organization of relationships within the Afro-Brazilian community such as *mestre* (master or teacher) and student (Jackson 2015, 12). The teacher uses the berimbau to teach culture to the student of the Afro-Brazilian music and to guide the martial art performance. These relationships in turn contribute to the continued value placed on Afro-Brazilian culture by the youth, having learned of such culture from their elders and also of the role of the berimbau in such culture. Resultingly, a continual relationship between elder and youth is maintained, much like one of the goals of the Jairazbhoy-Catlin Siddi-Malunga project, a documentary on Siddi musical practices and the particular use of the *malunga* instrument in Gujarat.⁸

The *malunga* instrument has special cultural meaning not only because it is quite literally an instrumental reminder of the effect that transoceanic immigrations had on musicological practices—demonstrating how particular musical traditions with African origin have been integrated into South Asian sociocultural traditions—but also because recently it has been losing its cultural value among younger generations. In their documentary, Nazir and Amy Catlin Jairazbhoy emphasize not only how the *malunga* is played in group songs and dances but also how particular costumes are used, all in an attempt to reinforce African ancestry (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 2003, 5:30). The Siddis of Gujarat, through the use of the *malunga*, strive to keep their African ancestral practices alive and well. Hence, why as Jairazbhoy and Catlin state in the documentary, their project goals were

twofold: “locate and record the music of African Indians known as Sidis” and assist in the maintaining of ethnomusicological practices, particularly the use of the *malunga* among the younger generation (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 2003, 25:50). Throughout the documentary, various elders are interviewed regarding their views on the importance of the *malunga* not only in keeping African traditions alive but also in keeping Siddi culture alive. This is particularly important in larger attempts to establish Siddi and Afro-descendant cultures as equally deserving of being considered Indian. In striving to keep Siddi cultural practices alive, further gains can be made to lobby the government to consider Siddis as one of the many uniquely Indian ethnic groups.⁹ To that end, workshops were set up in which mainly young Siddi men were taught to play the *malunga* by Siddi elders as an effort to keep the instrument in use and also to encourage intergenerational bonding and the sharing of cultural knowledge.¹⁰ In this sense, the musicological purpose of the *malunga* becomes more than a means to keep culture alive: it reinforces cross-generational relationships among the Siddi community of Gujarat. The documentary ends with young Siddi men expressing that they appreciate having learned to play the *malunga*, stating, “Our ancestors knew how to play it—so we should learn. . . . Now we’ve learned a few things so we’ll go home to rehearse it and then learn a bit more. We’ll go home to our friends and brothers and teach them all” (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 2003, 0:20). Not only this, but also the success of Siddis in popular Sufi folk music also shows a promising future for Siddi music in South Asian culture. With the published recordings such as *Sidi Sufis: African Indian Mystics of Gujarat* by Jairazbhoy and Catlin, the musical practices of Gujarati Siddis seem to be gaining increasing prominence even outside of local cultural contexts. This is important because it not only creates sociocultural exposure for the Siddi communities of Gujarat but also reinforces historical narratives of Siddis as Indians who possess African ancestry. This in turn facilitates the continued understanding of Indian Ocean historical connections as being relevant even today, so long after such connections are not as easily visible.

FURTHER METHODS FOR GAINING INCREASED NATIONAL SUPPORT

Before ending this chapter, I find it useful to provide further suggestions for how Siddis and Sheedis, in nationally recognized musical contexts, have and might continue to raise awareness of their existence and the diversity of South Asian identities. Jairazbhoy and Catlin published a CD as a result of their ethnographic work and in support of the increased visibility of Siddi musical practices on a national level. However, this should not take away from the fact that Afro-South Asians have been contributing to national cultures of music on their own, and with wide success. As Ahmed Feroz briefly mentions, Bilawal Belgium, a popular and well-known Afro-Balochi musician, has become regionally renowned for being

a skilled benjo player (Feroz 1989, 27). Bilawal Belgium has become popular for playing Sheedi music such as the *dammāl* as well as making it onto international music platforms such as Spotify, Tidal, Pandora, and more. He has popularly come to be known both by M. A. Sheikh as well as his former music label for his 1975 album as “Pakistan’s Most Gifted Instrumentalist,” catapulting not only Sheedi music into a national spotlight, but also exerting the existence of Sheedi culture, music, and dance into Pakistani musical discourses. Although he died in 1977, he has since made it into Pakistan’s larger music history, having been detailed in M. A. Sheikh’s book *Who’s Who: Music in Pakistan*. Sheikh details Belgium as having “infused new life” into the benjo in a Pakistani context and produced “lilting and emotive” music (Sheikh 2012, 79). Hailing from the Makrani community, Belgium and his musical contributions were indeed a factor in the (though still limited) national exposure of Sheedi music and culture. Similarly, Abid Brohi, a now active popular Afro-Balochi rapper, is “changing the face of Sindhi music” as Ushah Kazi puts it (Kazi 2018, 1). Brohi, who mixes soulful notes of the Sindhi music *yore* into his songs, has created a unique style of Pakistani rap that is innovative yet at the same time contains influences from Sufism with musical traditions practiced by many Afro-Balochis across Sindh and Pakistan. Interestingly enough, as Kazi notes, although Brohi cannot read or write, his music and particularly his song *Ama Chahay Thi* (translated as “My Mother Wants”), tackles issues common in the Sheedi, and even the larger Pakistani community, such as lack of education, or even possessing education yet finding it difficult to obtain a job in Pakistan’s current economic climate. While Brohi, much like Bilawal Belgium, does not appear to be outwardly attempting to bring light to Sheedi culture and musical practices, I argue that his mere musical presence as a famous Afro-Balochi musician, and even more so as a Pakistani musical artist who infuses Sheedi musical and dance practices, is actively contributing to the recognition of Sheedis through popular music and dance; much like Tanzeela Qambrani as the first Sheedi lawmaker to be elected to Pakistani office, contributes to the political presence of Sheedis in Pakistan. Furthermore, in the Indian context, Siddi dance practices and performances throughout history have been a part of non-Siddi wedding celebrations and continue to be an integral part of Siddi weddings, showcasing the larger cultural importance of dance to Siddi communities and Indian identities.

While the Siddis of focus in this chapter are largely those of Gujarat, nonetheless important are the Siddis of Hyderabad, and particularly in the context of the nineteenth century. In detailing the importance of Africans in Hyderabad at the time, Sadiq Ali details how Siddis were commonly called on to dance at weddings and unofficial ceremonies, many times performing dances such as *zubu* (Ali 1996, 199). While Ali does not provide much further information on this topic, it is curious that Siddis’ musical and dance practices in this time and context were to some extent valued in celebratory settings among non-African-descended Indians. Although the performance of Siddi dances at non-Siddi weddings and

ceremonies seemingly (yet not confirmed by Ali or other scholars) is no longer a common practice, possibly contributing to their increased social ostracization across India—and also likely a factor in Siddis largely marrying within their own communities and looking down on interethnic marriages—Siddi dance practices at weddings remain important to Siddi identities on a larger cultural level. These dance practices can further be used to gain government support for Siddis through the incorporation of such practices into larger Indian celebratory culture. While I am not suggesting the cultural appropriation of Siddi dance practices, I reference the procession of Bava Gor as a celebration that in this case I relate to the maintenance of Siddi cultural practices as a form of resistance. In a similar way that supports the survival of Siddi cultures in a larger Indian context, Siddi dance practices at weddings can be focused on by the national government to represent cultural practices important to Siddi marriage culture as characteristic of the diversity in general Indian marriage cultures. Through the outlining of Siddi wedding dance practices particularly in celebratory and wedding settings as part of regional (Gujarat or Telangana) Indian wedding culture, much like how the Bindi in northern India and the Mangala Sutra in southern India signify a woman having completed her marriage ceremony, Siddi dance practices have the potential to be recognized as integral to the diversity of Indian marriage and/or larger celebratory cultures.

Therefore, both the use of Sheedi and Siddi musical practices and the innovative ways that these populations have and continue to incorporate such practices into modern contexts serve not only as a form of resistance but can also lead to the increased visibility of Afro-descendant populations in India and Pakistan. Yet, although Siddis have been socially and politically organizing themselves more so recently in order to gain increased government support, the Pakistani and Indian governments are ultimately tasked with recognizing such efforts and supporting Siddis and Sheedis through their musical as well as larger cultural practices.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter has been to use music and dance practices to locate collective identities in historical maritime connections. In other words, while the larger historiography of the Indian Ocean has tended to focus on political and economic facets, largely overlooking music as a point of focus, this chapter is meant to shed light on an alternative viewpoint through the use of immigration history, cultural, and musicological practices. Using music as a way to map out histories, neglected populations, subcultures and their varied significances to larger concepts of the nation and belonging, can be brought to light. In doing so, not only can musical practices throughout the South Asian region continue to survive, but they can ideally be further recognized not just because of their enticing beats and rhythms but

also for their cultural and historical significance. Under this guise, I have shown how Afro-descended populations in South Asia—specifically Pakistan and western India—are connected through their well-established oceanic relations and the effect such relations have had in creating many equally important subidentities.

African influences in local musical traditions of South Asia serve as an indicator of historical maritime relations and the continued influence such relations have on cultural customs and traditions. While I emphasize that we must acknowledge Siddi, Sheedi, Kaffir, and Afro-Balochi populations as native South Asians, it is also important to let them, and their music, speak for themselves in acknowledging historical African connections. The effort of Jairazbhoy and Catlin has been very helpful in attempts to maintain the continued practice of Afro-South Asian musical customs, particularly in Gujarat. Additionally, the Sheedi calls for further government recognition, which I hope will be successful, could serve a similar purpose as that of the Siddi-Malunga documentary in preserving Sheedi and larger Afro-Balochi traditions for future generations. Not to mention the positive role that musicians such as Bilawal Belgium and Abid Brohi continue to play in bringing to light Sheedi musical influences on a national level. Hence, Siddis and Sheedis are already involved in social and political efforts to achieve increased social visibility, and this can be seen through the historical presence of Siddi dance performances at weddings as well as more contemporary Sheedi musical artists and their lasting contributions to the Pakistani music industries.

It is my hope that this chapter has broadened insights into Indian Ocean historiography and provided evidence for different ways of accessing knowledge and understanding historical immigrations between Africa and South Asia, along with their effects on the populations of the region. Indian Ocean history remains a relatively new field that continues to be expanded on, with new scholars periodically taking up interest in the region. While this is extremely important to understanding the field, we must not let innovative studies be an excuse for the lack of inclusive research. To that end, I found it rather interesting, as noted by Shihan de Silva Jayasuria, that some scholars consider Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion, The Maldives, and other Indian Ocean islands as the “Caribbean of the Indian Ocean.” As a scholar of Indian Ocean history, I hope that the Indian Ocean region would not fall into the same category as the Caribbean in terms of studies of the African diaspora in the region, often neglected in favor of US-centric African American studies. Nonetheless, it proves a great start for continued research on the topic and further understanding not only of how African and South Asian identities are present in and throughout the region, but even how oceanic influences are indicative of centuries-long contact between various populations. In closing, it is my hope that this chapter supports continued discussions of Indian Ocean history and encourages the recognition of the vast diversity within the region, and the identities of the people who occupy it.

NOTES

1. Examples of Siddis who conquered large territories of India include Malik Ambar of Janjira and Abdul Karim Mohammad Yakut Khan I of Sachin, Surat.
2. Habshi, a term often confused with Siddi, denotes Indians of African ancestral origin who can be traced to Ethiopia; from the related term Habesha. Throughout history, most Habshis, like Siddis, are Muslims.
3. *Dammāl* and *lewa* are dances typical of various countries throughout the Indian Ocean region, such as Oman, the UAE, and, of course, Pakistan among others. *Dammāl*, widely typical in the Indian state of Gujarat and southern Pakistan, is characterized by energetic jumps, turns, and head movements, while *Lewa*, characterized by rhythmic arms and feet movement, is more common in Arab Gulf countries such as Oman, the UAE, and even parts of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Through the dispersal of African-descended populations in these regions, the dances were incorporated into the local and regional customs. While historically Afro-Balochis performed *dammāl* to commemorate the return of a king or even of warriors from successful hunting expeditions, more recently it is performed as a cultural representation of the Afro-descended peoples of the region.
4. In Basu's section on Daff Music of Yemeni-Habshis in Hyderabad, this topic makes me question whether there exists any work on Afro-Baluchi populations in Oman (Basu 2008). Furthermore, if there are Yemeni-Habshis in India, and Swahili-Omanis in East Africa, could there be a Afro-Baluchis in Oman?
5. Makran refers to a coastal strip of Balochistan, modern-day Pakistan and Iran, that runs along the Gulf, now Sea of Oman, and possesses a sizeable Afro-Balochi population.
6. Bava Gor, as one of the first ancestors of Siddis to arrive in the region, is described through Siddi folklore as a founder of the Siddi peoples who is revered as a saint along with his sister Mai Mishra, worshiped as assisting those with fertility issues.
7. Afro-Latinidad refers to the state of being Latino/a and of African descent. It is also referred to as Afro-Latineity.
8. In a documentary as part of an ethnomusicological project conducted by Dr. Nazir Jairazbhoy and Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy titled *The Sidi-Malunga Project: Rejuvenating the African Musical Bow in India*, Dr. Jairazbhoy and Dr. Catlin travel to Gujarat to study the use of the *malunga* instrument as important in Siddi musicological practices. Through the increased use of the instrument for the purposes of the documentary, elder-youth relationships were able to improve in elders' teaching youth how to play the *malunga*.
9. While it is not directly related to music, there have been other efforts to establish Siddi ethnic and cultural practice in popular Indian culture. Recently, the Indian government attempted to contract Siddis to participate in national track races in order to compete with East Africans and possibly improve India's international reputation in the sport. However, the program has since been halted for reasons not entirely made clear.
10. In the documentary, Siddi elders discuss the idea that women are allowed to play musical instruments, but it is discouraged. Women were not depicted playing the *malunga* in the documentary.

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SECTION FIVE

Connections

Squinting at Greater India

Julia Byl

What is a Theravada Buddhist stupa doing in the highlands of North Sumatra? Since 2012, a replica of Myanmar's Shwedagon pagoda has shone out from the Karo Batak highlands in the interior of Indonesia's most westerly island. Karo communities are religiously heterogeneous: bound by strong clan affiliations, indigenous cosmologies coexist with Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Hindu beliefs (Ginting 2003, 232). Vajrayana and Mahayana Buddhist traditions have long histories in Sumatra, practiced by ninth-century Tantric monks (Acri 2019) and twenty-first-century Indonesians of Chinese descent (Chia 2020), respectively. Yet unlike mainland Southeast Asia, Indonesia lacks the institutional Theravada lineages that moved from Sri Lanka to Myanmar from the third century BCE—and so hundreds of saffron-clad Buddhist monks walking along a highland road for a dedication ceremony is an unusual sight.

I did not witness this procession myself—I rely on newspaper accounts and on historian Mairii Aung-Thwin, who documented the event from Indonesian and Burmese viewpoints (Aung-Thwin 2012). My niece lives nearby and remembers the event, though, so I suspect that its audience included many individuals from the neighboring Batak communities (Karo, Dairi, Simalungun, and Toba, who collectively make North Sumatra one of the most Christian areas in Indonesia). The dedication ceremony began with a speech by Suryadharmas Ali, the Indonesian Minister of Religion at the time—and despite his name (revealing Sanskrit, Buddhist inheritances) the leader of the hardline Muslim political party PPP. Perhaps he commenced with the Arabic greeting *as-salam alaikum*, so common in public life in the world's most populous Muslim country. The replica was made possible by Tongariodjo Angkasa, an entrepreneur in the nearby city of Medan and attendee of a *vihara* (temple) featuring a characteristic blend of Chinese Buddhist and Taoist elements. Angkasa donated the land for the replica; currently, he leads

Medan's Indonesian-Chinese cultural society and bears the Burmese honorific, Maha Sadhammajotika.

The description of the ceremony is still available on the website of an Indonesian Buddhist weekly, *Berita Bhagavant*, where it details the names of the monks who visited from Burma and beyond: from Korea, the United States, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, India, and Sri Lanka.¹ In July 2022—the date of writing, and of the Theravada festival Asalha Puja, commemorating the Buddha's first sermon—the story was framed by extracts from sutras and a link to a sound file of chanting, the contours of the voice shadowed by a meditative flute. Likewise, the monks who visited Sumatra twelve years earlier had chanted prayers for two days, using Pali, the language of the doctrinal Theravada Buddhist texts (the *Tipitaka*), known from Sri Lanka to Burma to Cambodia.

The history of Indic religions in Sumatra involves the transmission of texts and doctrine, but it also moved in more flexible ways. A Tamil inscription from the port of Barus on the island's western coast dates the settlement of the merchant guild Ainnurruvar (or “The Five Hundred of the Thousand Directions”) to 1088 CE. This guild, based in Aihole, Karnataka, moved between India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and Sumatra. Tellingly, it left multilingual inscriptions in Tamil, Sanskrit, and Old Malay throughout its trading grounds (Christie 1998). Sanjay Subrahmanyam suggests that it represented not “vertical” institutional state or religious power but “strong bonds of horizontal, or corporate solidarity both in rural and urban areas” (Subrahmanyam 2011, 145). Leonard Andaya asserts that the guild grew to “include several ethnolinguistic groups among its ranks” (Andaya 2002, 378).

Such local groups likely included the Karo Batak, the preeminent traders of the Sumatran interior—in whose domain the Shwedagon was built. Karo families need no inscriptions to claim an Indic lineage; it is encoded within their *marga* (“clan”) names, particularly sub-*marga* of Sembiring (“the black one”): Brahmana, Pelawi, Colia, and Pandia (Ginting 2003, 238). By the twentieth century, many Karo families had converted to Christianity or Islam, and few now know the Indic roots of the old deities or can decipher the Brahmi script of their inherited *pustaka* (“literature”). However, during the brutal Suharto period (1965–1998), in response to anti-Communist policy requiring citizens to specify an organized religion,² some Karos turned to a reimagined Hinduism with room for hair-washing ceremonies, ancestor possession, and music to summon gods (Ginting 2003, 238). In recent years, some in the community (Parisada Hindu Dharma Karo) have sought clarification from orthodox Hinduism, moving, like Balinese *pandita*, towards a more rigid reform (Acri 2013).

So, in effect, the Sumatran Shwedagon Pagoda was a case of one Buddhist lineage borrowing the prestige of another, endowed with power by the chants of an international group of monks and the speech of a national Muslim official, built on Karo hereditary land that has seen Christian missions and a Hinduism reaching far into the past and forward into the future. No wonder we look to Indonesia

for flexible articulations of world religions, whether a moderate version of Islam (Harnish 2021) or an engagement with Indic religious concepts so connected to local articulations of power as to be indistinguishable from them.³

This chapter outlines the dynamics of such religious interplay by considering how much attention, and in how much detail, ethnomusicologists should expend on the heritage of Indic religions in Southeast Asia—and at what expense to the interpretive agency of its inheritors. I use “Indic” as a geographical referent but also as a metaphor for more general religious integration, as India provided much of Southeast Asia with its first experience of making sense of foreign religious ideas on native soil. I refer often to Sumatra, the locus of my own research, but hope to convene a broader audience of scholars of Indonesia, Southeast Asia, and even the area called, in the past, “Greater India.” This phrase is a polemic—invoking the fraught terminology of hegemony and diffusion—as we shall see in a brief historiographical study. Yet a discussion of Indic religious circulations gets at the heart of a persistent concern of this volume: how to acknowledge over a millennium of historical sources of the connected beliefs, rituals, and cosmologies that crossed the Indian Ocean, while leaving room for the modern inhabitants of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to interpret, discard, meld, and otherwise transform this legacy through their own intellectual framings and expressive culture.

SQUINT OR FOCUS?

When scholars describe the flexible ethos of the Sumatran Shwedagon, we often use the term “Hindu-Buddhism,” which Judith Becker describes as “imprecise and obfuscating” but also “vague but convenient” (Becker 1993, 11). Craig Reynolds cuts a bit deeper, memorably stating that this “sloppy language . . . makes a complex historical process sound like a fisherman’s catch” (1995, 433).⁴ Archaeologists and art historians tend to be more specific—referring, say, to a statue with both Buddhist and Hindu attributes (Reichle 2007, 45). Although Barbara Watson and Leonard Andaya occasionally recruit the phrase for broad descriptions of the Malay world (e.g., “the Hindu-Buddhist Influence from India”), they are as likely as British historian D. G. E. Hall to reserve it to describe eras that actually saw the influence of Buddhism and Śaivism within one period, such as the thirteenth-century Singhasari dynasty in east Java (Andaya and Andaya 2015, 154; Hall 1981 [1955], 31). Clifford Geertz uses the term occasionally in *The Religion of Java* (1960), and Benedict Anderson in his study of power in Indonesia (1990), but the last quarter of the twentieth century saw the term taken on as a metaphorical, almost evocative shorthand⁵ for a cultural foundation rendered less and less visible with the accrual of subsequent “strata.”

It is this “Hindu-Buddhism” as gesture that has conditioned my own reading of the expressive culture of Sumatra (Byl 2014). However, once I moved outside my area studies cone, I discovered that this descriptive tic drives scholars of South Asia crazy. The phrase “Indic,” or even the old-fashioned “Greater India,” is a little

easier to comprehend—think of how the Ramayana epic populated traditions from Bagan in central Burma to Mindanao in the Philippines, and you understand. “Hindu-Buddhism,” though, is something different, both more specific (two heterogeneous religions, not the generic “Indic”) and infuriatingly vague: these linked adjectives elide diverging histories, theologies, lived practices, and hegemonies over which physical and intellectual wars have been fought. And yet here they are, stuck together with an unassuming hyphen.

Many of the early sources for our knowledge of Southeast Asia are reliant on Indic languages and religious terms, however—gleaned from philological knowledge. In recent decades, the authority of this scholarship has been eroded by its colonial genesis and tendency to “master” local knowledge—yet the libraries at SOAS University of London and Leiden University provide access to the earliest written histories from Cambodia to Kalimantan (Borneo), often inscribed in Sanskrit. One of the most exciting thinkers working at the nexus of historical research, religious doctrine, and modern interpretation is the preeminent Javanese scholar Sumarsam, whose deep research into Tantric and Sufi texts is matched by his attention to contemporary Islamic sermons and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) masters.⁶ Sumarsam uses philological scholarship freely—contemporary and colonial—but cross-checks it with his own lived experience and extensive knowledge of Javanese music and social life. Crucially, a balanced engagement with philological scholarship can document the richness of religious and cultural beliefs that predate European expansion and record-keeping.

For instance, within my own research on the knowledge of Toba Batak *datu* (ritual practitioners)—all but stamped out by colonial and missionary strictures—scholarly catalogs taught me that a word that begins prayers is actually a variant of “om” (Putten and Zollo 2020, 79) and that diagrams danced into village squares illustrate the “churning of the cosmic ocean,” a story found in the Puranas and carved into the walls of Angkor Wat (Schuster 1975, 66). My initial curiosity about the Sanskrit words used for the cardinal directions ended up contradicting a common assumption that interior North Sumatra was isolated before the advent of Christianity. Yet this knowledge is also fraught: the beliefs of the Christian individuals I work with make such a revelation anathema. These musicians find more worth in understanding Toba ritual as a cultural, not a religious, inheritance, thus allowing the musical ensembles that once accompanied Śaivite beliefs to sound in worship services run by the autonomous Toba church.

And so the related question that I pose here is: when does it make sense to recruit specialist knowledge to understand the cultural legacy of the region, and when is this knowledge merely academic, distracting from the agency of complicated, contemporary Southeast Asian actors? Is our lack of Indic knowledge a lazy neglect of a scholarly duty or a defensible ethical attention to the play of the local? For indeed, the abandonment of sites like Borobodur in central Java (leading to its “discovery” by Europeans in the eighteenth century) was not due to the amorphous “advent of Islam” but to the accumulation of new beliefs and priorities of

Southeast Asians in the intervening years. When does it make sense to doggedly focus on occluded histories, and when does it make sense to accept our lack of clarity and squint from afar, subbing out defined details for a blur that might tell us something as well?

PARSING HINDU-BUDDHISM

Once the dust is blown off, early twentieth-century scholarship on Southeast Asia reveals stunning findings and historiographical insight. Consider French historian and archaeologist George Coedès's writings that, in 1918, proved beyond doubt the location of Srivijaya, the Mahayana Buddhist thalassocracy that controlled the Strait of Malacca from 900 to 1300 CE and through it, large swaths of the south-east Indian Ocean. From Chinese sources, we know that Srivijaya sent monks to Nalanda, the world's first residential university, in Bihar, India. Srivijaya in turn fostered Tantric Buddhism through its most famous student, Atiśa, the Bengali sage who brought dharma to Tibet in the eleventh century CE (Coedès 1918).

Yet the kingdom was not located, as was argued, in Thailand, a place known for Buddhist lineages, or on the shores of the Strait of Malacca itself. Rather, its capital stood eighty kilometers inland on a Sumatran riverine network (Coedès 1918), near the modern city of Palembang (now a primarily Muslim city with a significant Chinese Buddhist minority). By the twentieth century, the site was a bit of a cul-de-sac. One thousand years earlier, however, the interior location was the whole point: this kingdom—with its Sanskrit inscriptions and doctrine—was not a coastal fortress, oriented out, but a meeting place that integrated the Indian Ocean with indigenous land and commerce practices of the interior.⁷ Srivijayan temples were built inland and sounded their prayers at transport junctures that provided access to forests containing trade commodities (Andaya 2002, 87). The reconciliation of these disparate elements—the Sanskrit cosmopolis, positioned downstream of indigenous commerce, with Muslim religious conversion soon to come—is instructive enough for us to dwell on in detail for a paragraph or two, and return to from time to time.

Coedès showed the importance of understanding Sanskrit and Buddhist religious terminology in his discussion of the Talang Tuwo inscription—a stone tablet from 684 CE found, face down, northwest of the Palembang site (Coedès 1992 [1930]). The tablet describes the intent of the ruler Sri Jayanasa to create “gardens with dams, ponds, and all the good works . . . may be for the good of all beings, mobile or immobile, and may be for them the best means of obtaining joy. . . .” For the denizens of the garden, the king wished for

continuous generosity, observance of precepts, patience; may energy, diligence, knowledge of all the arts be born in them . . . may they be firm in their opinions, and have the diamond body [vajrasharira] of the Mahasattwas, an unequalled power, victory, and memory of their former lives, all their senses, a full form, happiness, smiles, calmness, a pleasant voice, the voice of Brahma. (Coedès 1992 [1930], 50)

In his discussion, Coedès, a trained Indologist, takes a few erudite jabs at rival scholarly centers, particularly the Dutch scholars van Ronkel and Bosch, who had first translated the inscription. He refines van Ronkel's characterization of the inscription as a "prayer to the faithful," stating that instead it is *pranidhana*, "the initial pledge of a candidate for the Bodhi, representing the beginning of his career as a *Boddhisatva*" (Coedès 1992 [1930], 51). He continues, "I apologize for reminding the reader of these notions, which are obvious to anyone at all familiar with the doctrines of Mahayana Buddhism." To a modern ethnomusicologist, this statement reinforces the role of specific knowledge of Sanskrit religious vocabulary and suggests that the act of inscription was not simply a communicative act but an efficacious act—and one that likely used the "knowledge of all the arts."

But Coedès's snarky correction can also be read historiographically. Within the scholarly world of the early twentieth century, French academics (many associated with the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris) were experts on India's vast corpus of Sanskrit India and applied this knowledge eastward; Dutch insight on Southeast Asia (from Leiden and Utrecht) was conditioned by experiences in the colonies and by some knowledge of the indigenous social, political, and cultural life. Andrea Acri describes the work of French scholars like Sylvain Lévi, Paul Mus, and Coedès himself as "transregional," and Dutch scholars like W. Stutterheim, J. De Casparis, and C. C. Berg, as "autonomous" or "indigenistic." (Acri 2017, 14–16). The argument would be transformed in subsequent years: the Greater India Society, formed in Kolkata in the 1920s by Indian nationalist scholars (Bayly 2004) sharpened the French perspective into a biased vision of India as a benign center of civilization (Acri 2017, 15); scholars at Cornell University in the 1960s focused on Southeast Asia's indigenization of foreign concepts (Wolters 1982); and Sheldon Pollock's watershed writing on the "Sanskrit cosmopolis" inspired a balance of the precise knowledge of the language so valued by elites from Java, Bali, and Cambodia, with a recognition of the inherent flux of the time before "India" (let alone "Greater India") existed (Pollock 2009).

RELIGIOUS INTERSECTIONS

This last insight positions "Hindu-Buddhism" as a reasonably accurate term, rather than a hedge. To begin with, Tantric Buddhism and Śaivism shared many elements, "to the extent that the two religions participated in an interdependence of discourse in such disparate domains as philosophy, soteriology, ritual, and iconography" (Acri 2019, 4). Secondly, the exchanges of "the Tantric turn" (in the eighth century CE), between religious lineages and across Indian Ocean networks, were not fixed in India and diffused outward. Rather, they developed simultaneously, in a "pan-Asian expansion . . . [of] roughly coeval Asian dynasties," across Odisha, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and into Sumatra, Java, and East Asia (Acri 2019, 7). Considering this reach, it is fitting that the evidence with which Coedès "signed

the birth certificate” of Srivijaya includes Chinese texts (seventh to fourteenth centuries CE), Tamil charters (eleventh century), and Arabic texts about “the rich sovereign of Sribuza” (Manguin and Sheppard 1992, viii).

Here we move to musicology, and to Judith Becker, the ethnomusicologist who has most thoroughly theorized this subject (and the mentor who has formed my own interest in it). Becker’s 1993 *Gamelan Stories*—on the medieval musical history of Java and the intersection of Tantrism and Sufis within it—is remarkable for its “periodization” of a non-Western music most often studied in the present and its insistence on the relevance of earlier systems of meaning, preserved in “esoteric” manuals by twentieth-century *kraton* (palace) theorists like Sastrapustaka (Becker 1993, 59). Becker discusses Tantric initiation rites and the Śailendra dynasty, Javanese texts and Leiden philologists, and the connections between the organs of the body, the keys of the gamelan instruments, and the royal *Bedhaya* dancers.

As well as taking Indic teachings seriously, Becker argues that these philosophies and practices were transformed by the advent of Islam, first transmitted through Sufi lineages beginning in the fourteenth century. If Srivijaya or Borobodur appear to have been buried—in time and in mud—as a result of this sea change, Becker argues that the process was more gradual, and that many of the esoteric doctrines connecting humans and the divine became intertwined in practice (particularly *wahdat al-wujud*, the metaphysics of Allah’s relationship with his creation, and the Tantric doctrine of “becoming the deity”: Becker 1993, 95). That such insights are novel, despite strong evidence, is a “scholarly blindness” resulting from inadequate knowledge of Sufism and Tantrism, and insufficient recognition of their common aesthetic and doctrinal terrain.

To be fair, without collaboration, few modern Indologists or scholars of Sufism have the training to register such a transfer; and even the Dutch Orientalist “localists” persistently underestimated or misconstrued Islam’s significance: in Jacob van Leur’s famous words, applicable to both Hinduism and Islam, “the sheen of the world religions and cultural forms is a thin and flaking glaze” (Leur 1955, 95; see also Laffan’s historiographical characterization of “past Islam as safe Islam” 2011, 103). But more recently, scholars have gloried in these connections between religions and possess the linguistic skills to understand them. In *Islam Translated*, for instance, literary scholar Ronit Ricci explores the movement of Islamic literature across the Indian Ocean, through Arabic, Javanese, Tamil, and Malay texts (2012). She explicitly models her “Arabic cosmopolis” on Pollock’s “Sanskrit cosmopolis,” and her larger work studies the overlap of these systems at the point of conversion, working against seeing each ecumene as separate, bounded complexes.⁸

Taking our lead from Becker and Ricci, then, let’s consider a description of the movement of Islam into the Sumatran kingdom of Pasai on the northeast coast of Aceh—an early foothold of Islam in the region, and the site of first Malay epic text, *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai* (ca. 1390 CE). This epic describes the successive dockings of a ship that sailed the monsoon between India and Sumatra, bringing with it

significant religious cargo: a collection of wind instruments called the *nobat* (spelled *nawba*, *nowbat*, and *naubat* in Arabic, Persian, and Hindustani, respectively). This ensemble of “kingly power” was used from at least the eighth century CE to initiate rulers and mark the call to prayer in Islamicate states throughout Western and South Asia (Byl 2014, 105–6). In Pasai, the music was followed by a dream of the Prophet Muhammad—which instantly converted to Islam an indigenous “raja,” and later, a Hindu yogi, overawed by the Islamic power that the Sumatran sovereign commanded in his new name, Sultan Ahmed:

Overcome by the sanctity of the Sultan’s presence, the yogi fell to the ground in a faint. The Sultan was amazed to see what had happened to him in spite of his deep knowledge of the magic arts. Afterwards the yogi embraced the faith of Islam. (Hill 1960, 74)

The yogi-convert was said to have come from Kalinga, a historical region of South Asia on the Indian Ocean. In light of this, it might be wise to expand what we understand by “Hindu-Buddhism” and “Greater India”: the formulation could also include Islam, which arrived in island Southeast Asia from Mecca and Cairo, but also via Gujarat or Kerala (Laffan 2011), and then intertwined with local and localized religious practices. Indeed, when I write about Hindu-Buddhism, often I am not referring to foreign religions at all, but to indigenous modes of understanding new teachings and assessing their ability to access an extant spiritual power. Note that the Sultan recognized both the yogi’s Indic “magic arts” and his own *Muslim* “sanctity,” which surprised him even as he channeled it. Conversion can be an emotional or intellectual process, but sometimes it is a pragmatic decision of self-interest, or the result of powers suddenly unleashed. This last description is actually a feature of Tantric, or “lightning bolt” (*Vajra*) Buddhism—enlightenment taking hold in an instant.

ENERGETIC SOIL

In Malay, the individuals who wield such power are called *datuk* and linked to Islam; the Batak equivalent, *datu*, also harness power, but through mostly Indic religious concepts. Regardless of affiliation, the work of both practitioners is regularly glossed as syncretic. Consider, for example, a magical formula from colonial Malaya (ca. 1900) used by *datuk* to harness jinn, “spirits” answerable to Solomon, whose mastery over them is mentioned in the Qur’an (13:12–14); in the incantation, one particular jinn is alternatively named “the land demon” and “the destructive side of Śiva, i.e., Kala” (Skeat 1900, 93–94). Alternatively, look at figure 11.1, a shrine to “Datuk Kong,” a power worshipped by Malaysians of Chinese descent. “Tuk” is also from *datuk* (which can mean “grandfather”), and devotees ensure that offerings to him are halal;⁹ “kong” connotes Taoist nature practices from East Asia (DeBernardi 2009, 152). And the place where I took this picture? The beachside Sri Singamuga Kaliamma temple on Penang island, a compound opening onto the Indian Ocean. These religious practices at play seem clear evidence of syncretism and hybridity.



FIGURE 11.1. Datuk Kong, Pulau Pinang. (Photo Julia Byl)

Yet despite the links of shrine (Taoist, Muslim, Hindu) and jinn (Muslim, Śaivite) to specific religious traditions, we can sometimes better understand what is happening by ignoring doctrinal elements altogether and instead considering what compelled their amalgamation in the first place—a fusing impulse powerful enough to draw in elements from all religions. The object in the brightly painted shrine is not a statue, nor a text—but a heavy rock, dug out of local soil. And the impulse that melds these mixed religious elements is not syncretism (a term of after-the-fact description, not of generation), but an investment in what anthropologist John Clifford Holt calls “the power of place.” In this refraction, the deity—Śiva, Tuk Kong, Solomon¹⁰—is not a religious representation, but an avatar of local power requiring the offerings and worship of anyone in that place desirous of channeling it, regardless of religious affiliation. In his book *Spirits of the Place* (2009), Holt grapples with this terrain using the work of an Indologist/philologist: Paul Mus’s *India as Seen from the East* (first published in French in 1933), which asserts the importance of local powers vis-à-vis imported Indic deities. Originally

suspicious of Mus's¹¹ "master narrative," through his studies of Laotian *phi* (nature or village spirits), Holt comes around to agree with passages like this one: "It is important to stress that this [place/soil/stone] is not the lodging, the 'seat' of the god, but the god himself, consubstantially. Not the stone of the genie, but the stone-genie" (Mus 1975 in Holt 2009, 25). Or as Holt puts it, drawing on his studies of Sri Lanka, "there *always* seems to be a deity who is referred to as 'the god who is in charge of this place'" (24). For the Durkheimian Mus (and by extension, Holt), the social act is key:

The "energy of the soil" was experienced within the social context of *events*. Its value was then valorized within ritual. In that sense, then, the subsequent constructions of hierarchy, in both supernatural and social forms, are not simply understood as calculated political machinations designed to legitimate the establishment of hierarchically imposed power, but rather as indices to those values that have been deemed worthy of consecration by the community. (Holt 2009, 28)

During my research into Tamil communities in North Sumatra, I found a description of a ritual that illustrates Holt's point precisely—featuring diverse individuals united by an efficacious event and a sacred site. In 1976, Singaporean sociologist A. Mani traveled outside of Medan to the Bekala Rubber Estate to attend a Theemithi (firewalking) ceremony at the unassuming wooden Mariamman temple complex built for the plantation's laborers. The first group of Tamils arrived from Penang in 1873; after the Dutch "Coolie Ordinance" of 1880, tobacco and rubber plantations drew laborers directly from the Coromandel coast (Mani 2006 [1993], 53). In 1976, Mani could still count forty-eight temples spread throughout the plantation lands (n43); many were abandoned after sovereignty in 1949.¹²

During the ceremony, Mani observed the faithful moving around the complex with oblations to Śiva, Viśnu, Murugan, and Kali. On the temple's right side, they passed by a shrine dedicated to "Nagoor Aardavan" (the Lord Nagoor), though without offering devotional hymns or camphor incense. A Tamil Muslim family stayed behind to offer flowers, though, confirming Nagoor's identity as the Sufi saint Shahul Hamid Nagore (who anchored this volume's introduction). Tamil Muslims were clearly a part of the "consecration by the community," then, even when expressing their beliefs differently. Nor was the ethnicity or piety of the participants constrained: "numerous couples participated . . . in the hope of overcoming infertility . . . an elderly Mandeling [*sic*] Batak man played the *parai* (or *thappu*, a type of Tamil drum) in appreciation of a boon Bekela Mariamman was said to have granted his family" (Mani 2006, 77).

This is a pregnant detail for us: in India, the *parai* is emblematic of Dalits and non-Brahminical religious traditions (Sherinian 2014, xix); by now, we recognize a "Batak" as an interior Sumatran, but Mandailings are mostly Muslim. Hybridity,¹³ perhaps, in some form: the gratitude was routed through the practice of Tamil religious music, and although the man could have been playing Batak *gordang*

rhythms, at minimum, the loan of the *parai* shows fellow feeling. But the boon granted was fertility, among the most universally human desires, and one quite elemental at that. Indeed, natural power and common practice is right there in the temple's name—*Sunggu Sappi*, a Tamil approximation of *sungai sempit* (Malay: “small river”), a reference to a local water source important for ritual purification within Indic, Muslim, and indigenous practices alike.

It is more than this, though. A hand-drawn map of the complex shows a shrine, in the central temple space and adjacent to that of Śiva, dedicated to a “village deity” (Mani 2006, 71). No more information is given, let alone musical description, but Mani's explanatory footnote is perhaps relevant here, stating that unlike in South India, with its strict agamic rules, “the ranking of deities within a temple, from those housed in the central sanctum sanctorum to those considered as minor or guardian deities and housed in outlying shrines, reflects local social conditions rather than a formal hierarchy. Ultimately, for its devotees, each deity is of equal importance as an aspect of God.” (Mani 2006, n. 29). Or perhaps as an aspect of local potency, made manifest in a shrine or in the camphor incense that suffuses it—the very forest commodity that propelled Indian Ocean trade, the rise of Srivijaya, and the proximity of diverse Indian Ocean populations. For the “spirit of the place” is also present in the ways communities form around it: communities made of people drawn to the efficacy of spiritual power, resonating through Hindu Tamil hymn singer or Muslim Batak *parai* drummer alike.

CONCLUSION: SOCIETY IN THE ROUND

In her recent article on “Greater India” in the Dutch East Indies, cultural historian Marieke Bloembergen invokes the name of Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore, though she withholds the customary reverence given him:

Writing about the Balinese [in the 1920s], without ever having met them, he inferred, “These people, who had their seclusion that saved their simplicity from all hurts of the present day . . . have, I am sure, kept pure some beauty of truth that belonged to India.” (Bloembergen 2020, 193)

Bloembergen is unconvinced, and sees such “purity” as an exhibit of an “exclusive Greater India mindset,” with Southeast Asian traditions as “ornaments to a shining center” rather than worthy studies in their own right (Bloembergen 2020, 193, 177). For me, Tagore's quotation jars most in its shunting aside of human experience, conclusions reached without ever having met a Balinese person. (The quote was gathered in Amsterdam, at a colonial museum.) Indeed, when I write on arcane topics like this one, the ethnographer in me worries about scholaring in the absence of interviewing, discussing, and playing. Completing ethics for fieldwork, I must stipulate the grade of language that I will use

to write informed consent forms: if “high school” level is deemed too restrictive, what would be said of esoteric communications with strange diacritics?

Bloembergen slices through to the ugly side of academic discourse: “why do we construct ideas about space in moral and civilizational terms?” (2020, 174). This question might resonate with scholars of nonelite Indian religions, who decry the focus on elite knowledge at the expense of all other traditions. After all,

The boundary between great and little traditions is impossible to draw: possession is both a Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit idea; *yoga* is a mixture of great and little traditions, as are ghosts and spirits; *acara*, local usage, is given the sanction of legal authority in the Sanskrit lawbooks; literary Sanskrit culture itself consists of a number of regional schools with their own local twists.¹⁴ (Mabbett 1975, 159)

Southeast Asian scholars are conflicted, too, about whether Sanskritic traditions can really document the beliefs of nonelite segments of society: Alexis Sanderson, an Indologist and scholar of early Cambodia, admits that “if our sources allowed us to see Khmer religion and society *in the round* we would no doubt recognize that Indian forms clothed Khmer beliefs and practices” [my emphasis] (2003, 379). Not everybody chisels their thoughts into stone; others may pour ideas into a dance gesture or a drum pattern.

Yet there are always those rare individuals who attend to both texts and performance. Ida Wayang Granoka Gong is a contemporary Balinese master: a Brahmin scholar named after Bali’s most spiritually powerful instrument, the *gong agung*,¹⁵ who inspires followers by “bringing together the works of the Old Javanese court poets with Vedic hymns and ancient Greek philosophy [and] the writings of modern-day anthropologists, philologist, theologian, and authors of pop science” (Fox 2018, 141). Rather than policing the “purity” of any of these traditions, Granoka moves through them all with improvisatory abandon, as recounted by his interlocutor, anthropologist Richard Fox (2008, 141, translation by Fox):

ding . . . gending . . . das ding . . .

Ding [the musical note] . . . musical phrase¹⁶ . . . the thing . . .

das ding an sich . . . dalam arti kuasa yang mahakuasa

the thing in itself . . . meaning the power that is all powerful [i.e. Tuhan, or “God”]

Had Tagore heard Granoka’s “unruly assemblage” (Fox 2008, 141) he could have parsed *mahakuasa* as the Sanskritic *mahāvaśa* (“all powerful,” from वश) and been reassured about Balinese Indic knowledge—but the invocation of Immanuel Kant’s “the thing in itself” as gamelan-inflected sound might just have scrambled his idea of “Balinese simplicity.”

The ideas of Mamu Mahmood, a Tamil Muslim librarian, are equally virtuosic, and also end with a musical coda. Literary scholar David Lunn and I met Mamu Mahmood in 2014 in a library in Penang, Malaysia, where, for over an hour, he

led us through a dizzying discourse on religion in Southeast Asia, from the vantage point of his own experience as a Tamil Muslim. We spoke about the *wali songo* (“nine saints”) who spread Islam to Java (“I like Sunan Kalijaga the best, he focused on Indonesian rather than Arab culture”), and the founder of Malacca, the Srivijayan prince Paramasvara/Iskandar Shah, whose name, in Sanskrit, refers to supreme lordship, and in Persian, to Alexander the Great. We discussed the Andalusian theologian Ibn ‘Arabi and the tendency for Tamil Muslims to be marginalized vis-à-vis the larger Tamil Hindu and Muslim Malay communities (Nasution 2014), a grievance that probably explained Mahmood’s insistence that Tamil was the original language spoken by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The session ended with a song: Mamu Mahmood was learning Urdu, the scholarly specialty of David—and when he discovered this, he immediately launched into a stanza of qawwali music (“*Mashallah!*: Glory Be to God”).

So far, I have presented you—bewildered you, surely—with the multiplicity of religious interpretations in Sumatra and beyond. With more than a millennium of multidimensional religious history, it could not be otherwise. And yet, although I lack a consistent approach to such issues across all times and communities, my study has left me with two theoretical stances that I have found steadfastly helpful. The first is to learn as much as possible about the trajectories of the past without an expectation of relevance to or fidelity by those in the present. The unexpected interpretation is often agency at play. In the centuries before an appeal to Hindu or Muslim orthodoxy became possible, island Southeast Asians were cut off from “true doctrine” and created meanings in the gap. Elements of a new religion—whether a sacred word in a prayer or a novel musical instrument—were integrated into local knowledge systems, powerful not in spite of but *because* of the lack of lexical or doctrinal content. Secondly, although seeking out specific knowledge allows the tracking of meaning across time—an activity that Granoka Gong and Mamu Mahmood both took pleasure in—there is much to be learned from individuals in proximity: the connection of different religious paths through social, affective means. Individuals can stand in for the traditions that have formed them—a Tamil Muslim, a Batak Christian—but they can also create a mutually transformative interface by the act of listening to another—even playing each other’s instruments—and being heard in return. I’d like to end this chapter, then, by recalling its opening: the interface between individuals and ideas from India and interior North Sumatra, told from the present.

Although I carried out fieldwork in Medan for years, I had never engaged with its Tamil population before the Indian Ocean project. The city’s Tamil community is profoundly marginalized, living in a small enclave next to a filthy river. In 1972, a Tamil Jesuit priest named Father James Bharataputra came to Sumatra from Tamil Nadu and later purchased a parcel outside the city as a refuge. This area became the site of the Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni shrine mentioned in the introductory chapter of this volume: a structure resembling a South Indian Hindu temple



FIGURE 11.2. The
Graha Maria Annai
Velangkanni.
(Photo by Julia Byl)

that hosts mass for congregants on Sunday, and on other weekdays, aids those who seek the Virgin Mary's help, from any religion whatsoever. Father James insists that the "graha" ("house") is simply a sacred place, open to any seeker in need of healing power (figure 11.2).

It turns out that one of these seekers is my sister-in-law, Akkang—a Batak woman and practiced healer born in the Sumatran highlands, and living in Medan. I only realized that Akkang considered the Graha as her home church when she accompanied me on my initial "research" visit—and was greeted warmly by Father James, the pastor of her flock. As I passed through the front gates, topped by the architectural designs of Batak houses, a nun called out my name: she recognized me from my doctoral fieldwork twenty years before, when I would collect my younger (adoptive) sister from the Catholic school where the nun taught. Any hope of a formal interview with Father James was gone—my sister-in-law is far too social to sit quietly—but all was not lost. As the head of a church in North Sumatra, the priest knew something about Karo and Toba Batak music: more than fifty years

after Vatican II, the phrases of the Catholic liturgy were infused with local melodies (Rook 2020; Prier 2015).¹⁷ Now, it was time for Akkang to hear something of the Tamil liturgy of Father Bharataputra's childhood. He searched out a small book and sang, his voice forming foreign words that moved in unexpected ways—yet were animated by shared belief.

This was a particularly satisfying exchange. Father James's name, "Bharataputra," means "son of India";¹⁸ indigenous Indonesians or Malaysians are called *bumiputera* or *pribumi* (bumi = earth), terms that paradoxically use Sanskrit terminology for a toxic discourse that divides "native" Southeast Asians from the overseas people they have lived and learned with for millennia (Balasubramaniam 2007). The alliance of Father James and Akkang refutes this logic. So does the shrine to the Virgin Mary, open to Muslims, Hindus, Catholics, and Protestants alike. Its holy waters (accessed by a spigot in the back of the chapel) are drawn up from the soil of Sumatra, and filtered through different beliefs systems. This too is the intent of the Sumatran Shwedagon pagoda, located an hour's drive away: the path of Buddhist merit is not summarily closed to anyone. As I took a parting glance around the compound, I spotted an interior chapel with a large mural dedicated to Pope John Paul II, the pope of ecumenicism who had visited the area in 1989. Surrounding the pontiff were rows of Karo Batak women in their distinctive peaked headpieces, their fingers arcing back in a graceful bend: a kinship gesture, a benediction, a *mudra*, or perhaps all of these at once.

NOTES

1. <https://berita.bhagavant.com/2010/11/03/peresmian-replika-stupa-shwedagon-di-medan.html>.
2. Citizens could choose from six options: Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, or Confucian. The choice was written on all official documents, including identity cards; since 2018, a supreme court ruling has mandated a more vague description of "*penghayat kepercayaan*," or "believers of the faith."
3. A cursory search of international newspapers after September 2001 shows a rush to describe Indonesian "tolerance" (www.economist.com/special-report/2004/12/11/a-model-of-tolerance), and more recently, anxieties that this tolerance will soon cease to exist.
4. See Andrea Acri (2017, 8, fn1) for the quote, as well as a discussion of the metaphor of "strata."
5. Consider, for instance, that Margaret Kartomi's sweeping book on Sumatra (2012) refers to "Hindu-Buddhist concepts" (28); "Hindu-Buddhist philosophy" (123); the "Hindu-Buddhist idea of 'the inner being'" (102); "Hindu/Buddhist practices" (101); and a "Hindu-Buddhist' look" (149), alongside the more specific reference to a "king" (177) and "deities" (344). In contrast, Jaap Kunst's work on music in Java uses "Hindu-Javanese," but not the broader amalgamation.
6. See Sumarsam's forthcoming book, newly announced at the time of press, *History and Myth, Interculturalism and Interreligiosity: The In-Between in Javanese Performing Arts* (Wesleyan University Press).
7. In addition, the mangroves on the eastern coast of this area of Sumatra made the building of a residential site difficult.
8. Ricci pays attention to sound and silence (Ricci and Becker 2008), inspired by her coauthor, linguist and area-studies scholar Alton Becker. Becker is best known to ethnomusicologists as the spouse of Judith Becker and coauthor with her of an important article on Javanese gamelan.

9. Personal communication, Tan Sooi Beng.
10. Given, we may be in danger of conflating theologies: Solomon is a prophet, not a deity; the Datuk Kong has a place in a temple governed by a polytheistic religion but you wouldn't find it at a mosque. But for many people, it might not have mattered if Solomon was *dewa* or *nabi*, if he harnessed local power. By this logic, then, the Islamic reform of hybrid laxity is not simply a change in intellectual framing but an orientation away from the local and a denial of its power.
11. Holt's work ranges through Laotian and Sri Lankan practices, while the works by Mus he refers to are about Borobudur and the kingdom of Champa (a historical kingdom in southern mainland Southeast Asia). As such, this discussion allows me to at least *gesture* at expanding my focus to South-east Asia as a whole.
12. See Stoler (1985) for a longer discussion of the effect of the plantation system on Batak and Malay communities.
13. An uncritical invocation of hybridity differs from an intentional use of the term: see Weiss (2008) for this in engagement with the precolonial cosmological *Sureq Galigo*.
14. The descriptors "great" and "little" are a case in point.
15. See McGraw (2019) for a discussion of Granoka's philosophy and musical training.
16. The term "gending" is, of course, more of a musical totality than a specific phrase.
17. For examples of the liturgy, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9D_ZruA6tc (*Angus Dei*, Toba Batak style); www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUvNjm99MoA (*Gloria*, Karo Batak style); and www.youtube.com/watch?v=smOr4VW8MJw (a Tamil mass).
18. Father James was born Irudayam Singarayar Sebastian James in 1938, but changed his name to James Bharataputra upon receiving Indonesian citizenship in 1989.

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Transplanted Musics in a Plantation Society

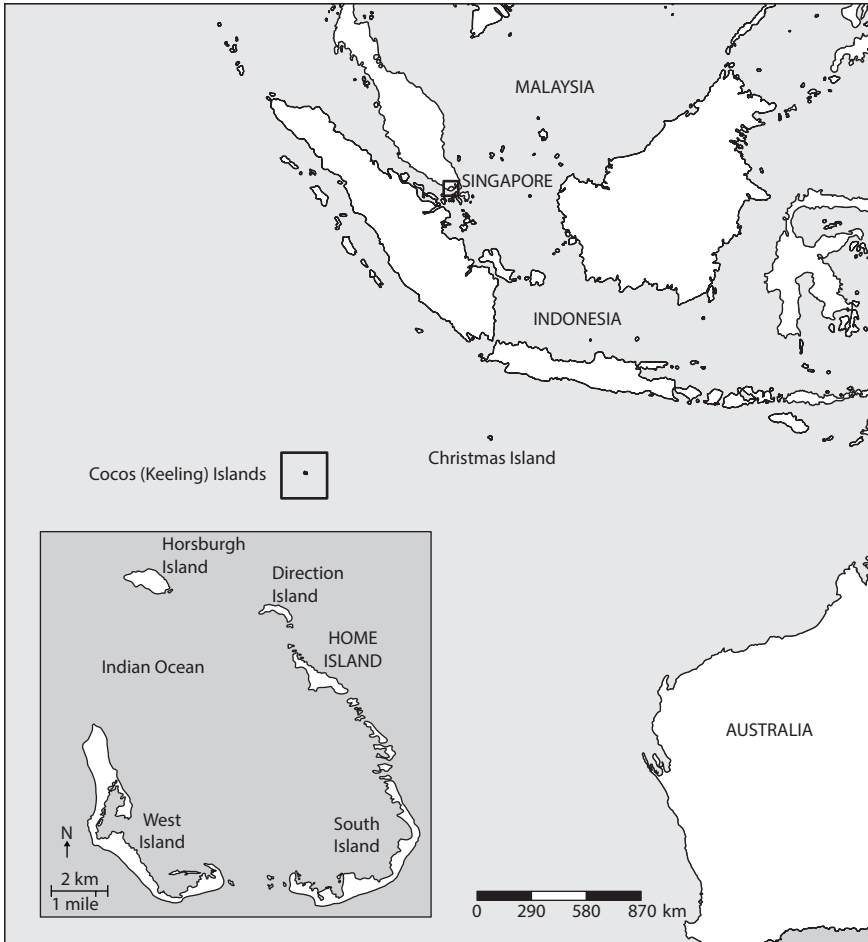
*Performing Arts on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands,
1826–1955*

David R. M. Irving

In 1954, Queen Elizabeth II (1926–2022; reigned from 1952) made her first tour of Australia and other parts of the British Commonwealth. Wherever she went, she was greeted with pageantry on a grand scale that was filmed and documented extensively, and transformed into full-length movies or news stories with luscious orchestral soundtracks. On her way from Western Australia to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), she stopped for one day, April 5, at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (map 12.1). This tiny coral atoll (hereafter Cocos), consisting of no more than 14 km² of land, was home to under 400 Cocos Malay people and a small number of residents from Britain and Australia.

The queen's visit to Cocos was broadcast throughout the British Commonwealth by Movietone news and British Paramount News. These newsreels preserve what appears to be the earliest known video recording of Cocos Malay performing

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MAP 12.1. Map showing location of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean. Inset map: The Cocos (Keeling) Island atoll. Map by Joanne Byrne. Used by permission.

arts, although with dubbed audio. In the Movietone reel a voice-over provides the official narrative:

After *The Gothic* had anchored two miles out the Queen and the Duke came ashore by launch. With them were their host and hostess Mr and Mrs Clunies-Ross. A perpetual lease of the islands was granted to the family by Queen Victoria. Malays, and they provide the majority of the population, now performed a special dance of welcome. (British Movietone 1954, 00'19"–00'36")

This “special dance,” shown in figure 12.1, was a *silat*—a martial arts dance genre believed to deter evil spirits—performed by two Cocos men, Badrie bin Jamihan



FIGURE 12.1. *Silat* performed by Badrie bin Jamihan and Lloyd bin Zanlay before Queen Elizabeth II, 1954. Still no. 383 from <https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/96595/>. Reproduced by permission of British Pathé.

and Lloyd bin Zanlay (Clunies-Ross 2009, 160; Ramnie bin Mokta and Ayesha [Jan Young], personal comm., April 13, 2023). They were accompanied by a *gendang* (double-headed drum) and two *biola* (violins) (see Irving 2019, 308–9), although only one *biola* is visible here, on the far left.

In this scene the soundtrack music changes from a symphony orchestra to what is clearly a South Asian instrumental ensemble, featuring sitar, violin, and *bansuri* (British Movietone 1954, 00'36"–00'43"); the producers probably used “stock” recorded music. In another reel by British Paramount News, which uses the same footage, the music does sound Malay (British Paramount News 1954, 00'33"–00'50"), with a melodic instrument (which sounds like the double-reed instrument *serunai* rather than *biola*) accompanied by drums. However, it is not apparent whether the recording comes from this occasion; it is most likely “stock” audio (and no evidence of the *serunai* on Cocos has yet emerged). After the procession arrived at the Clunies-Ross family’s residence, known as Oceania House, there were entertainments on the lawn outside, under a pavilion. Two men performed *melenggok*—a dance with scarves, usually given for weddings—again accompanied by *gendang* and *biola*, followed by many dancers performing *selong*, a dance by male-female couples, stepping backward and forward (see Irving and McCallum 2020, 10, and video 8'34").

Newsreels such as these were typically distributed internationally after the visits took place, but newspapers preempted the occasions. Two days previously, *The Mail Digest* in Adelaide, South Australia, had announced that a remarkable mix

of Malay and Scottish cultural traditions were to be found on the islands: “When the local orchestra goes into action, Malay dirges are lightened with snatches from ‘Cock o’ the North’ or ‘A Hundred Pipers.’ During wild island dances Malay kronchongs often give way to foursome reels which go on for hours” (“Queen to Meet a Brown Mr. McTavish” 1954, 51). This story included highly specific references to Scottish melodies; it is also a rare instance of the *kroncong* genre being mentioned in connection to Cocos. Australian newspapers also gave space to the distinctive history and current political status of Cocos, the islands being owned by a twenty-five-year-old “king,” John Cecil Clunies-Ross, the fifth hereditary patriarch of his family to “rule” them. His young English wife, Daphne, was billed as a “queen” (“Queen Elizabeth to Meet Another Queen” 1954, 4).

Few stories of island “kingdoms” in English-language news reports have captured the imaginations of twentieth-century readers like those of Cocos, and the five patriarchal heads of the Clunies-Ross family, originally from Scotland, who ruled from 1827 to 1978.¹ The romanticized image of the “Kings of the Cocos” became a trope in descriptions of the islands, a moniker undoubtedly popularized by John Scott Hughes, who wrote a book with that exact title (1950). In some respects, Cocos was similar to the “kingdom” of Sarawak, the polity on Borneo ruled from 1841 to 1946 by three successive “white rajahs” of the Brooke family, who had originally been granted the royal title by the Sultan of Brunei (Runciman 1960). While Cocos was occasionally considered a Sarawak-in-miniature, it also was significantly different. Its oceanic location was significantly remote and it had no preexisting society before its colonization.

The twentieth-century media typically represented life on the islands as simple, idyllic, and carefree: a tiny and remote “kingdom” where there was reportedly no currency—although in fact it produced its own, which became a matter of debate in the late twentieth century—and no crime, with the main export product being coconuts. Information was evidently sourced from encyclopedia articles, histories, and travel accounts of the islands. Reporters commented on the presence of Scottish names among the Malay inhabitants and mentioned that the population of the islands was quite small. English references to Scottish culture as England’s original “other” may have heightened for Anglophone readers the sense of simultaneous alterity and familiarity. The overall image presented was of a remote utopia, with a timeless unchanging lifestyle regulated only by the winds, the waves, and the sunset. Indeed, only four years earlier Hughes had concluded his popular book *Kings of the Cocos* with an evocative comment about the soundscape of the islands: “For far the longer part of the year . . . the trade wind rolls up the white breakers on the barrier-reef, ripples the water of the lagoon, singing night and day its sibilant song in the froned palms, the music of coral-island life” (Hughes 1950, 162).² However, in the decade prior to Hughes’s publication, Cocos had undergone drastic social, cultural, and economic change, and the community had endured great trauma.

During World War II, the population of the islands—then consisting of around 2,000 Cocos Malays, and a small number of other people—was suddenly expanded by the presence of approximately 5,000 servicemen, and daily life affected by increased military activity. The tiny community was transformed suddenly into a lively node within a complex web of military maneuvers and global politics. The British military also engaged, for the first time, in a sustained way with this remote part of the empire that had until then been so often overshadowed by its larger colonial neighbors. A secret military report of 1944 contains many fascinating glimpses into what they described as the “feudal system” on Cocos, and the comment that “it is by force of personality rather than threats of punishment that the Clunies-Ross family administer their islands” (National Archives of the United Kingdom, WO 203/134, “Cocos Islands: Topographical Report on the South Keeling Islands Issued by Intelligence,” 10). The same year, John Sidney Clunies-Ross (1868–1944)—the fourth “king”—died of a heart attack (on August 14), following an aerial attack, and the military assumed control of Home Island.

On May 10, 1945, celebrations for the Allied victory in Europe were marked in Cocos by a day off work, and a football (soccer) match played on West Island. Some 80 jukongs (local sailing boats) conveyed around 400 islanders across the lagoon to watch the match, after which Malays took soldiers for sailing trips in the lagoon. The report records that on this day bagpipes were heard, played by soldiers from Punjab then stationed on West Island: “The Islanders had rides in lorries and jeeps and were particularly impressed by the playing of the pipe band of the 26/14 Punjabis” (National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 273/673/9, “Cocos Islands: Emergency Organisation,” document headed “The Office of the Military Administrator, ‘BROWN’ / 6th June, 1945,” “Report for the month of May 1945,” 1). The comment that the Cocos Malay listeners were “impressed” makes one wonder whether it was the first time that they had heard the instrument. Despite the bagpipes’ symbolism as an iconic musical emblem of Scotland and the connections of Cocos to Scottish culture, it is striking to note that this is the earliest documentary evidence known so far of bagpipes in the islands, and that the players came not from Scotland but the Indian subcontinent, where pipe bands had been introduced by the British to military music traditions.

This interregnum continued until the arrival of Ross’s widow, Rose Alexandra Nash (1903–1991), and her son John Cecil Clunies-Ross (1928–2021) in 1946, by which time most of the military personnel had departed. Rose decided with their managers that the Cocos Malay population was too large for their estate to support and began an emigration scheme between 1948 and 1951 in which approximately two-thirds of the community (around 1,600 people) were moved to Christmas Island, Singapore, and especially Sabah, Malaysia, which meant that fewer than 400 Cocos Malays lived on Cocos by the time of the Queen’s visit (Hunt 1989, 98–104; United Nations Department of Political Affairs 1978, 2; T. E. Smith 1960, 97).³ The largest group of emigrating Cocos Islanders, numbering 1,486, settled

near Lahad Datu in Sabah, Malaysia, by 1952 (Baker 1965, 14). Following this emigration, diasporic connections with the Malay world were subsequently maintained through the former British colonies in what is now Malaysia—mediated by the Clunies-Ross Estate—even though the ethnic and ancestral origins of most of the Cocos Malay community come from what is now Indonesia.

The United Kingdom transferred sovereignty of Cocos to Australia in 1955, but the operations of the Clunies-Ross Estate remained relatively undisturbed until the 1970s, when the Australian government and the United Nations made interventions amid allegations of “Slavery on Cocos” (Hunt 1989, 152): these focused specifically on the style of the estate’s administration by John Cecil Clunies-Ross, and especially the payment of Cocos Malay workers’ wages by use of locally minted plastic tokens that could be used to redeem goods from the company’s own store (see Hunt 1989, 150–64). Federal intervention and migration programs managed by the government resulted in numerous Cocos Malays settling in mainland Australia during this decade, although the process was ad hoc until the government established a formal resettlement scheme in December 1976.⁴ Following increased political pressure on the family, and under close scrutiny of the United Nations, the Australian government bought the freehold of the islands from the Clunies-Ross family in 1978; six years later, the islanders voted in an Act of Self-Determination for integration with Australia (Mowbray 1997, 391).

Today the Cocos Malay diaspora is spread throughout Borneo, Singapore, and numerous parts of Western Australia (for a map of the diaspora, see Winarnita and Herriman 2012, 377). Nevertheless, Cocos has remained the symbolic homeland of the Cocos Malays. Only three islands in the main atoll were usually inhabited (see inset of map 12.1): the Cocos Malay community and the Clunies-Rosses lived on Home Island; government and military officials lived on West Island (where the airstrip is located); and the employees of the Cable & Wireless Company lived on Direction Island from the turn of the twentieth century until the closure of the station in 1966. Today the Cocos Malay kampong remains on Home Island, and most visitors stay on West Island.

Until the 1990s, studies of performing arts on Cocos were typically made within broader studies of Cocos Malay history and culture, especially those by Pauline Bunce (1988) and John Hunt (1989), who were able to interview many elderly residents of the islands. Since the 2010s, there have been research projects in the fields of ethnomusicology and anthropology.⁵ These have combined ethnographic work with archival research to explore the histories of Cocos Malay performance arts, among other topics. Many have focused on cultural practices in recent generations, and particularly during the period since 1978. This chapter looks earlier to explore documentary evidence of the transplantation of music and dance to Cocos, from the point of the islands’ permanent settlement until the United Kingdom transferred sovereignty to Australia in 1955. (The scope of this chapter does not allow for discussion of the enormous topic of vocalization for Islamic worship and devotion—these types of religious sound are usually considered in

Islamic thought to be distinct from “music”—nor the extensive use of drums such as rebana, kompong, and beduk; however, see Bunce [1988], McCallum [2020], and Irving and McCallum [2020] for further context.)

Archival details about music and dance from those times are relatively sparse, and some have previously been discussed by C. A. Gibson-Hill (1952), John Hunt (1989), and Nicholas Herriman (2022). Here I aim to revisit the well-known sources about performing arts on Cocos but also to combine the discussion of them with analysis of textual and iconographic traces newly gleaned from archives. This approach can offer a keyhole view into a rich microhistory of a tiny and isolated community at the crossroads of trade. Overall, it is hoped that new findings about the transplantation of performing arts to Cocos have broader implications for understanding the complexity of British-Malay cultural exchanges in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and may feed in to further work in the field. Before we start, however, it is necessary to outline some earlier historical contexts.

THE BEGINNINGS OF COLONIALISM ON COCOS

First recorded on maps in the seventeenth century (Bunce 1988, 38), Cocos remained uninhabited until 1826.⁶ That year Scottish trader Alexander Hare (1775–1834), who has been described as the first “white raja” on Borneo (F. A. Smith 2013), arrived there to establish a settlement with a retinue of ninety-nine enslaved people (Bunce 1988, 133). They originated from many parts of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, including Bali, Bima, Sulawesi, Madura, Sumbawa, Timor, Sumatra, Pasir-Kutai, Melaka, Penang, Jakarta, Cirebon, Banjarmasin, Pontianak, Tasikmalaya, and Kota Waringan (Bunce 1988, 43; Gibson-Hill 1952, 228; Lapien 1979, 153–54; Ackrill 1984, 229–44; Brockman 1978, 1981; Linford 2009, 29–57; Hunt 1989, 4; Herriman 2022, 35–36). Some of these enslaved people had apparently been presented to Hare by Sultan Soleiman of Banjarmasin (r. 1801–1825), in whose court Hare was appointed British resident in 1811 (Gibson-Hill 1952, 235–36; Ackrill 1984, 231; Hunt 1989, 4; Herriman 2022, 36). Among their number were musicians adept at performing music in a “European” style, fulfilling the typical roles expected of them in colonial societies in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago (F. A. Smith 2013, 110; Herriman 2022, 36–37).

Relatively few details are known about these musicians: there is no information on their names or number, the precise kinds of instruments they used, or the kind of music they performed. However, it is likely that their practice reflected that of other ensembles of enslaved musicians in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. As an example, Gibson-Hill transcribed the advertisement of an auction in Batavia in 1833 of enslaved people (fifty-one adults and sixteen children) who included twenty-two musicians—players of violin, flute, clarinet, trumpet, French horn, bassoon, sackbut, bass violin, Turkish instruments—to be offered for sale along with clothes and “music of the latest editions, imported from Europe” (Gibson-Hill 1952, 168–69; F. A. Smith 2013, 110n38). Since no such details exist for the musicians

under Hare's control, it is important not to draw conclusions about the nature of their practice. Rather, it is worth revisiting the few early textual descriptions of his household before the settlement on Cocos. As Hare's rival John Clunies-Ross wrote in the mid-nineteenth century:

At Malacca the very few of them [i.e., enslaved people] which Mr Hare had whilst there—were employed as domestics in his house. On Borneo—it is not needful to say how the women were employed, farther than that there was no out of doors work to be performed by them—*the men were set to learn music so as to perform the part of a band at his (Mr H's) dwelling place.*⁷ [emphasis added] (John Clunies-Ross, "PAPERS of Capt. John Clunies Ross, first real settler on the Cocos or Keeling Islands in the Indian Ocean," British Library, Add MS 37631, f. 174v [p. 56]; Clunies Ross 2020)

Here the gendered role of musicians (only men) is emphasized, although this serves also to reinforce Clunies-Ross's implication about the kind of work that was expected of women. Allegations of Hare maintaining a harem or a group of concubines within this community are repeated in a number of sources, and Clunies-Ross leaves the charge of "indoors labor" unspecified.

In 1819 Hare was forced out of the Dutch colonies in the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago and traveled with this entire community of "112 retainers" to the Cape, South Africa (Hunt 1989, 4). It was here, as observed by Clunies-Ross in a letter to Rear Admiral Sir T. Bladen Capel, that Hare's "habitual mode of domestic life with the women began . . . to be taken notice of in the British society wherein no fellow feelings existed in its favour" (Gibson-Hill 1952, 241). Clunies-Ross also wrote that the enslaved people taken by Hare to South Africa were unhabituated to the hard outdoors labor assigned to them on Hare's farm (around twelve miles from Cape Town), since "in Java, etc., [they are] generally or rather universally are employed, not in fieldwork, but in domestic services, such as in the kitchen, *at the table and performing music—all rather amusing exercises than laborious toils*" (emphasis added) (Gibson-Hill 1952, 241). It is striking that Clunies-Ross considered music—alongside the work of the kitchen and home—a form of amusement or entertainment rather than labor. According to Clunies-Ross in a document of 1835–1836, members of this group complained of their treatment to local authorities and insisted that they were free people (Gibson-Hill 1952, 241).

Following his move to Cocos in 1826 Hare constructed a residence on Pulu Beras, which included enclosed accommodation for women and girls. (The Malay name Pulu Beras means "Raw Rice Island," but its English name is more appropriately "Prison Island"; today it has eroded to an extremely small size, and it may eventually disappear as a recognizable island altogether.) On Cocos, Hare's regime scandalously involved the incarceration and exploitation of young women, as attested by a number of witnesses.⁸ His scheme was disrupted, however, when his former colleague and rival Clunies-Ross arrived in 1827. According to an undated account by British naturalist Henry Nicholas Ridley (1855–1956) of his visit to the islands in 1890, an elderly Cocos Malay man "who was living on the island in Hare's time (i.e., for two generations)" told him that Hare gave "a fiddle and two sheep" to

men from Clunies-Ross's camp in an attempt to stop them from coming to his island (Henry Nicholas Ridley, "Visits to Cocos and Christmas Islands," Ms., n.d., Royal Botanic Gardens Library and Archives, HNR/5/15, 11).⁹ Clunies-Ross gradually took control of the islands, and people in Hare's camp moved to his rival settlement. By 1831 Hare left Cocos, never to return.

The scholar Frederic Wood-Jones (1879–1954)—who was present on the islands for fifteen months in 1905–6 and who made a second visit in 1907, eventually marrying one of George Clunies-Ross's daughters, Gertrude, in 1910—wrote in lofty tones of Alexander Hare:

His attempt to realise his ideal—to be the monarch of a slavish Eastern court amidst the luxurious setting of a tropical coral island—had proved a failure. His band of musicians, his slaves, his courtiers, his harem, and his splendid sovereignty had slowly but surely slipped from his grasp, and the more stubborn, more practical rule of Ross Primus [John Clunies-Ross] had ruined his Utopia. (Wood-Jones 1912, 20; also quoted and discussed in F. A. Smith 2013, 117)

It is interesting to note that the first element of monarchical status mentioned here by Wood-Jones is a "band of musicians," a symbol of prestige preceding even mention of "his slaves, his courtiers, [and] his harem." Whether Hare wanted to emulate the grandeur of Dutch or British colonialists, or of Malay sultans, is unknown. Unless further documentation emerges, the size and nature of this musical ensemble remains a mystery, although it is clear that a violin was present.

Some years after Hare's departure, Clunies-Ross established a "social contract" with the Cocos Malays in a document of December 21, 1837, and initiated a quasi-feudal regime—which "bore a number of likenesses to a traditional nineteenth-century Malay state" (Hunt 1989, 1)—under his rule.¹⁰ The agreement was signed by twenty heads of family, who represented around 100 people. It promised housing and payment in return for the harvesting of 250 coconuts per worker, per day; any member of the community who chose to do so could leave the islands, with three months' notice, but they could never return (Hunt 1989, 5–6; Birch 1885, 16–17). The settlement on Cocos remained a private project until the islands were annexed by Captain Stephen Grenville Fremantle for the British Empire in 1857; he had in fact made a mistake, as he had originally been directed to another set of Cocos Islands (part of the Andaman Islands) in the Bay of Bengal.¹¹ In 1886 an indenture from Queen Victoria formalized the Clunies-Ross family's ownership of the islands (*United Nations Involvement with Australia's Territories* 1975, 163–65; Hunt 1989, 7).

While the settlement and political structure of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands appear to be relatively unique in the colonial history of the eastern Indian Ocean, the history of music on Cocos reflects the situation of a few other islands—such as Bermuda, where the earliest settlers in the early sixteenth century encountered a natural environment and soundscape as yet unmarked by any permanent or settled human intervention (Tomlinson 2007, 1–3). From the 1820s to the early 1950s, the culture changed rapidly as a result of external influences, immigration

and emigration, the introduction of new technologies, and the resourcefulness of the local community in finding new ways to adapt to the environment. However, the ruling family controlled many aspects of this process. Rosemary Ann Brockman, drawing on a model devised by George L. Beckford (1972), has described Cocos as a plantation community that “was both a total economic system and a total social system” (Brockman 1981, 29). The history of transplanted music and dance on Cocos is in many ways intertwined with the forms of control exerted by the dominant ruling family.

It seems that some aspects of Scottish culture—such as dancing and celebrations for New Year—were grafted onto the practices of the Cocos Malay community, and that Cocos Malays were integrated into multiple generations of the Clunies-Ross family through marriage and children. Yet a circumstance that distinguishes Cocos from many other British colonial outposts, at least until the early twentieth century, is that two out of five heads of the Clunies-Ross family married a non-European wife and had children with them. John George Clunies-Ross married Supia Dupong (or Dayapong, 1823–1863) in 1841; she was from Sumbawa, near Bali, and her gravestone on Cocos “says she was born in Cape Town in 1823” (Clunies-Ross 2009, 51).¹² Their son, George Clunies-Ross, married Inin (1850–1889), a Cocos Malay woman, in 1868. In her role as the community’s matriarch, George’s wife Inin (figure 12.2) appears to have played a significant role in influencing domestic life through the institution of a top-down model of household management. Henry O. Forbes observed in 1885: “Every Cocos girl has had her term of apprenticeship to spend in Mrs. Ross’s house in learning under her direction sewing, cooking, and every house-wifely duty as practised in European homes” (Forbes 1885, 18). Following Inin’s death in 1889, George married again in 1896 (Clunies-Ross 2009, 79); his second wife Ayesha—who was also Cocos Malay—appears to have held a position of authority and influence in the community.

Like George, other men of the Clunies-Ross family married Malay women, as a report of 1885 stated: “The Ross family consists of seven brothers and two sisters. The men are hardy, intelligent, and well-informed. They have all received a Scotch education, and have made up their minds to settle down in the Islands and intermarry (as five of them have done) with the natives” (Adams 1885, 3). The core and extended family were thus becoming closely integrated with the Cocos Malay community and adapted aspects of their culture to fit with prevailing local norms, while maintaining cultural differences (such as site of residence, and freedom to travel) that symbolized their political position. However, this acculturation came to the notice of British authorities, who were suspicious of it. In 1891, British colonial inspector Walter Egerton explicitly criticized George Clunies-Ross’s lack of provision for English-language training on the islands, writing: “It is lamentable to see the way in which even his own nephews and nieces grow up, unable to speak anything but Malay” (*Papers Relating to the Cocos-Keeling and Christmas Islands*



FIGURE 12.2. Inin Clunies-Ross (left) with a cousin of her husband George Clunies Ross (right). Photograph by Capt. Adams R.N. (1885), no. 2 of 20 appended to Ernest Woodford Birch, *The Report of Mr. E.W. Birch, Deputed by the Officer Administering the Government of the Straits Settlements (Mr. Cecil C. Smith, C.M.G.) to Visit the Cocos-Keeling Islands* ([Singapore]: n.pub., 1885). King's College London, Foyle Special Collections Library. The handwritten caption reads: "M.^{rs} George Ross. Miss Ross—a cousin of the present proprietor."

1897, 48). It appears that none but the patriarch's direct heirs were taught a sufficient degree of English to impress any colonial officials visiting from Singapore. In response to this observation, Lord Knutsford (Secretary of State for the Colonies) wrote from Downing Street, London, to Sir Cecil Clementi Smith (1840–1916), then governor of Singapore: "Unless the Ross family as a whole maintains its status as that of a race boasting a higher civilization than that of the natives, it will be difficult hereafter to allow the leaders of the family to continue in that unique position of authority over the population which they have hitherto enjoyed" (*Papers Relating to the Cocos-Keeling and Christmas Islands* 1897, 50; Brockman 1981, 45).

Thus, within the space of three generations, the family had become strongly interconnected with the Cocos Malay community and saw themselves as part of it, although they did not convert to Islam. They maintained a sense of distinction as rulers of the islands and emphasized a Scottish identity. In the late 1930s G. W. Webb, the District Officer on Christmas Island, stated that "John Sydney [*sic*] Clunies Ross . . . regards himself as the head of the community and his word is final in all matters, 'after the fashion of the old Scottish head of the clan[,] as he himself put it'" (National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 273/632/2,

“Administration of Cocos Islands: Mr J S Clunies-Ross,” G. W. Webb, “Report on Cocos Islands” [8 December 1937], 35). It is significant to note that John Sidney was also described in a secret British military document of 1941 as “Seven eighths Malay and one eighth Scot, whose Malay mother and grandmother possessed royal blood” (National Archives of the United Kingdom, CAB 106/100, “Reconnaissance report on the Cocos-Keeling Islands 1941 Mar. by Colonel R. H. F. Duckworth, Royal Engineers,” 5). Of this ruler’s four grandparents, only one was European, which in fact made his ancestry three-quarters Malay. Unlike his father and grandfather, however, he would marry an Englishwoman, as would his son John Cecil (Hunt 1989, 123).

OUTSIDERS’ VIEWS OF TRANSPLANTED MUSIC AND DANCE ON COCOS

A traditional narrative of the Cocos Malay community is that of isolation and separation from the outside world, with contact mediated by the Clunies-Ross family, who maintained total control over economy, education, and cultural life. Nevertheless, a diachronic examination of archival material complicates this picture, demonstrating that there was significantly more interaction with people beyond the islands, at least during the rule of the first four family heads, and even in the time of the last ruler. Cable and wireless communication, the bartering of goods, the sending of letters (and, in the later twentieth century, sound recordings of messages; see Hunt 1989, 151, 160), and interactions with visitors to the islands were all ways in which external contact took place. These circumstances resulted in the circulation, transplantation, and local cultivation of specific kinds of performing arts. In particular, many Malay and Javanese forms of music, dance, and drama were transplanted to Cocos, where they were cultivated assiduously.

The interwoven histories of the Clunies-Rosses and the Cocos Malay community, whose lives were collectively affected by maritime enterprises and trade (although not equally, with a social hierarchy on the islands), sets the backdrop for a remarkable set of performing arts practices transplanted to Cocos. Many genres of music and dance were brought to the islands, where they were cultivated by numerous generations. The earliest historical description of music and dance on the islands comes from the pen of the young Charles Darwin (1809–1882), who arrived at Cocos on the HMS *Beagle* in April 1836. Although Darwin sojourned there only twelve days (April 1–12), he wrote evocatively of Cocos and its inhabitants, and his brief remarks in his published *Journal and Remarks* of 1839 were surely one of the first accounts of the islands and their people to reach a broad international readership. His report came at a significant time, just ten years after the establishment of the community on Cocos.

Darwin gave an outsider’s account of the first generation of settlers, from the perspective of an educated naturalist. While much of his short narrative focuses

on the natural history of the islands—geology, fauna, and flora—he took a special interest in the people, their voices, their dwellings, reporting on the unusual circumstances of the people’s arrival in the islands, their manner of subsistence, their cultural origins, and even music and dance. On April 3, 1836, Darwin recorded in his diary:

After dinner we staid to see a half superstitious scene acted by the Malay women. They dress a large wooden spoon in garments, carry it to the grave of a dead man, and then at the full of the moon they pretend it becomes inspired, and will dance and jump about. After the proper preparations, the spoon held by two women became convulsed, and danced in good time to the song of the surrounding children and women. It was a most foolish spectacle, but Mr. Liesk [the English resident in charge during the absence of John Clunies-Ross] maintained that many of the Malays believed in its spiritual movement. The dance did not commence till the moon had risen, and it was well worth remaining to behold her bright globe so quietly shining through the long arms of the cocoa-nuts, as they waved in the evening breeze. These scenes of the tropics are in themselves so delicious, that they almost equal those dearer ones to which we are bound by each best feeling of the mind. (Darwin 1839, 546)

This is the earliest known description of performing arts on Cocos and gives a fascinating glimpse of the kinds of animist practices that originally existed in this Muslim community. (The islanders already identified as Muslims and were perceived as such; a letter of 1836 from Port Jackson, Australia, describing Cocos, states that “pigs . . . the Malays would not touch, or attend to, being Mohametans” (National Archives of the United Kingdom, ADM 125/131, “The Cocos or Keeling Islands and Seychelles,” f. 31r).)

The “wooden spoon” was probably a wooden grave marker (Hunt 1989, 3, citing Bunce; Clunies-Ross 2009, 39) that appears to have become spiritually animated in the course of the ritual. From the words “acted” and “spectacle,” however, it is unclear whether this was a performance that was specially staged for the visitors. It is significant to note Darwin’s comment that the spoon “danced in good time to the song of the surrounding children and women.” Although he makes no further comment about this vocal music, or about how many men were present, he mentions earlier in his entry for the same day that he “liked both their general expression and the sound of their voices” (Darwin 1839, 545). The location of the event is not made clear; Darwin refers to being at “the Settlement” (on Home Island), where “Captain Ross and Mr. Liesk live in a large barn-like house open at both ends, and lined with mats made of the woven bark. The houses of the Malays are arranged along the shore of the lagoon” (1839, 545). Darwin’s account is unique among archival records of performing arts in this early phase of settlement. It seems possible that Darwin was accompanied by his servant Syms Covington, who was a musician (fiddler). Nevertheless, Covington makes no mention of this event in his journal, but he does sketch a house and a *jukong* (Covington 1995).

Other nineteenth-century voyagers to the islands left brief remarks about what they encountered there, and colonial reports of the 1880s onward give more detailed descriptions of cultural practices, although they are based on relatively short visits (see discussion of some in Irving 2019, 305–8). A more detailed account of Cocos Malay customs and practices was made by Wood-Jones (1912, 45–56), who as mentioned above became a son-in-law of George Clunies-Ross in 1910. John Hunt notes that while his writings give a valuable perspective of Home Island during a period of cultural transition, “rather too often he reflects the prejudices and historical perspectives of his host (and later father-in-law)” (Hunt 1989, 182). Another was made by Carl Alexander Gibson-Hill (1911–1963), a British medical doctor who in 1941 lived on the islands for ten and a half months (Gibson-Hill 1947, 170–74). According to John Hunt (1989, 25), the observations of these two authors had varying degrees of reliability. Like other accounts of the time, we must read them with caution.

MINSTRELSY, DRAMA, DANCING, AND GRAMOPHONES

A range of evidence left by visitors to Cocos attests to the diverse range of performing arts transplanted to the islands. When ships visited the islands, their own crews and passengers contributed to musical life on the islands, and fleeting archival references offer glimpses of these events. Some were one-off performances, and there is no proof of transplanted practices taking root. For example, a handwritten caption to a photograph from 1885 (figure 12.3), at the time of the visit of the ship *Espoir*, states: “A group of villagers—both Cocos born & Bantamese taken after the ‘Espoir’ Christy Minstrel [*sic*] performance. Some marines & Blue jackets may be seen in the group” (Photograph no. 12, Appendix XIV, in the copy of Birch 1885 held by King’s College London, Foyle Special Collections Library, FOL. DS486.5 K4 STR). “Christy’s Minstrels” was a kind of blackface minstrelsy originating in New York that since the mid-nineteenth century had had a relatively standardized style of performance (Henderson 2001). It was probably fairly common on board British and American ships calling at Indian Ocean ports; it became popular in southern Africa, and minstrel songs entered Cape Malay repertory (Laffan, personal comm., March 14, 2020; Desai 2010, 715). Minstrel performances by ships’ ensembles before local audiences in various ports of call clearly contributed to the dissemination and knowledge of the genre, but whether minstrelsy entered into lasting practice on Cocos is unknown. The annotation to this photograph is so far the only archival evidence of this practice on Cocos; it is nevertheless possible that more stories may emerge.

A number of genres of music-drama were performed for events such as circumcisions (*sunat*) and weddings (*kawin*). The *wayang kulit* theater was transplanted to Cocos in the 1860s, by Nek Sebina, an immigrant laborer from Banten (see Hunt 1989, 38, 46; Lindsay 1997). It became a popular genre and in the 1930s performances



FIGURE 12.3. Photograph by Capt. Adams R.N. (1885), no. 12 of 20 appended to Ernest Woodford Birch, *The Report of Mr. E. W. Birch*. King's College London, Foyle Special Collections Library. Part of the handwritten caption reads: "A group of villagers—both Cocos born & Bantamese taken after the 'Espoir' Christy Minstrel performance. Some marines & Blue jackets may be seen in the group. In the background the old man with white whiskers & beard is Neh Basir, the oldest inhabitant. The old man under the porch on the right is Pa Adim the senior Penghulu or headman."

given by the *dalang* (*wayang* master) Nek Itjang (1867–1949) were reportedly accompanied by an instrumental ensemble of *kendong* (i.e., *gendang*; two-headed drum), *kenong* (a gong in a wooden frame), *gambang* (Javanese xylophone), and *suling* (end-blown flute); members of the Cocos Malay community commissioned these for celebrations surrounding a circumcision ritual, at the cost of around three weeks' wages (Hunt 1989, 46). Two rare photographs taken by Charles W. Andrews (1866–1924) in 1898 (one reproduced in figure 12.4), held in London's Natural History Museum, show some of the puppets; they appear to have attracted the attention of this visitor to Cocos.¹³ A full set of seventy-five puppets has survived on Cocos to the present day, and since 1987 has been on display in the Home Island Museum (Hunt 1989, 46; Lindsay 1997). According to Hunt, who cites interviews of Cocos Malay informants Nek Dittie, Nek Bika, and Nek Renja, "all the major characters of the Pandawa Cycle (the Javanese version of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata) are represented, including Arjuna the ideal hero, his wife Dewi Sumbadra, Hanuman the monkey warrior, the gods Batara Guru and the beloved Semar, and a host of monsters, villains, servants and heroes" (Hunt 1989, 46). Following the death of Nek Itjang, "the gamelan instruments were thrown into the sea and the puppets locked in a chest for almost 40 years" (Hunt, quoted in Lindsay 1997).

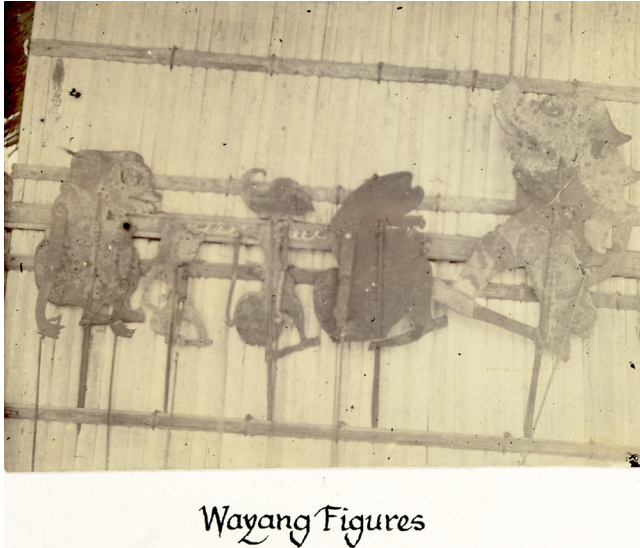


FIGURE 12.4. “Wayang Figures.” From “Photographs of Cocos Keeling Island. taken 1898. by Chas. W. Andrews,” DF 152/2/9. Library and Archives, Natural History Museum, London.

Bangsawan (Malay folk theater, deriving from the Parsi-derived theater genre prevalent in colonial Malaya) was also present on Cocos. Also introduced by Nek Itjang, it featured a large number of stories, and some performances were opened with “a prayer for Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands,” which Hunt states contributes to indications that it originated from Java (1989, 47). The genre—combining drama with vocal and instrumental music, and dancing—is still practiced on Home Island, although only occasionally; a performance was recorded in 2016 (Irving and McCallum 2020). Yet one of the most prominent forms of performing arts on Cocos, and one in which the entire community came together, was dancing. Dances took place outdoors and in communal structures, but also in the home of the Clunies-Ross family. Like the plantation estates of parts of the Americas, the house of the patron was the locus of assemblies involving the whole community and the site of considerable interaction (Brockman 1981, 95). The Clunies-Ross family’s desire to maintain a position of prestige within the community involved the building of a large mansion in 1893 (Hughes 1950, 99; Hunt 1989, 17). Surviving today, it is known in English as Oceania House and in Malay as *rumah besar* (the big house). These dances were performed for New Year’s Eve but also ad hoc for visiting officials, and Queen Elizabeth II in 1954.

In the late 1890s, several official British colonial reports on the islands mentioned performances of music and dance, noting the hybrid mix of traditions. One such report was made by Arthur Keyser in 1896 at a dinner hosted by George

Clunies-Ross (see Irving 2019, 306). Musical exchanges took place on visiting ships too; in the same report of Keyser, he relates that eighteen members of the Ross family came aboard the HMS *Æolus* for dinner, after which “some of the ship’s company gave a most enjoyable concert, and the evening closed with an impromptu dance” (*Papers Relating to the Cocos-Keeling and Christmas Islands* 1897, 88). Such events were part of the regular traffic of sailors coming and going. In a report of a visit in 1897, Justice Andrew J. Leach described the dances as “malengo,” a dance involving men and women, and a dance similar to Sir Roger de Coverley (*Cocos-Keeling and Christmas Islands: Report on the Annual Visit for 1897* 1897, 21). These performances have been identified as the practices known today as *melenggok*, *selong*, and *dangsa* (Hunt 1989, 18; see also Anthony 2003; and Irving and McCallum 2020).

When the Clunies-Ross patriarch was absent, his wife or another relative would host visitors. In September 1901, W. Langham-Carter (Acting-Collector of Land Revenue, Singapore) visited Cocos in the official capacity of conducting a colonial inspection for the Straits Settlement government. George Clunies-Ross was absent from the islands, having gone to London for an eye operation, but Langham-Carter was received by George’s son, John Sidney Clunies-Ross, and George’s wife Ayesha. Langham-Carter wrote at the conclusion of his official report:

Information was freely given, boats provided, and their usual generous hospitality displayed by the Ross family. On my last night, Mrs. Ross kindly afforded such of the officers of the “Rosario” [his ship] as could be present and myself the pleasure of witnessing a Cocos’ ball [*sic*]. This consisted mainly of reels and country dances, taken part in by the Islanders, but omitted the more violent efforts, such as the “Hunting of the Fowl,” etc., described by Mr. Leach and Mr. Farrer [in their previous reports]. (*Cocos Islands. Report for 1901 1902*, 13)

From such descriptions, it appears that a significant degree of blending of Scottish and Malay cultural practices was occurring in the formal dances at the Clunies-Ross house, but that Scottish identity was being both cultivated and privileged.

Few accounts of dances have emerged from the decades that follow, but in reporting a performance given at a dinner on April 17, 1948, British naval captain M. J. Ross gave an intriguing description of styles. He described how the dances began with a *ronggeng* performed by children, after with the adults performed Malay and Scottish dances (accompanied by four biola players and a number of drummers) with an increasing number of Scottish dances being performed, and the music accompanying them being “easily recognisable Scottish Airs” (National Archives of the United Kingdom, ADM 1/21152, “Cruise of HMS HART to Cocos and Christmas Islands: Report of Proceedings” [1948], 8; see further discussion of this quotation in Irving [2019, 307–8]). From the 1950s, new dance music was introduced by John Cecil Clunies-Ross and his wife Daphne (née Parkinson). While older forms were still practiced, they gradually attained the status of “tradi-

tional” *dangsa cocos*; new forms were called “Scottish dancing,” and the two styles coexisted (McCallum forthcoming).

During the first half of the twentieth century, the types of accompaniment used expanded from fiddles and drums to include gramophone records, accordions, and various other instruments. It is unknown exactly when the first gramophone came to Cocos—or, indeed, when the first sound recording was made there, and with what equipment—but shipping records of the Clunies-Ross Estate indicate some of the musical materials brought to the islands.¹⁴ In the 1920s and 1930s, there appear regular orders for numerous sets of “Malay Dance Records,” “Malay gramophone records,” and peripherals such as gramophone needles (on one occasion in 1923, some 1,000 needles were ordered) (National Archives of Australia, A9752/119, “Caldbeck MacGregor—Accounts and indents and correspondence”; National Archives of Australia, A9752/118, “Invoices from Messrs MacGregor and Company, Singapore” [1933–37]). Although most of the records are unidentified, a 1936 order included recordings of European art music by Weber, Wagner, Chopin, Gounod, and Rachmaninoff (National Archives of Australia A9752/118, “Invoices from Messrs MacGregor and Company, Singapore” [1933–37], March 19, 1936). An order in 1935 included popular music such as “Who Is Sylvia,” “My Bonnie,” “Shenandoah,” and “4 Columbia latest Dance records” (National Archives of Australia A9752/118, “Invoices from Messrs MacGregor and Company, Singapore” [1933–37], November 1, 1935). The recorded repertory imported to the islands from Singapore likely reflected the general trends in public taste and commercial production in the burgeoning gramophone industry in British colonial Malaya (on this industry, see Beng 1996 and 2013). Imported discs were likely destined for Cocos Malays as well as the Clunies-Ross family; gramophone records and at least one gramophone player were present within the kampong, as a document of 1944 attests (see Irving 2019, 301–2).

CONCLUSION

Cultural transplantation is a common phenomenon resulting from the circulation of performing arts around the Indian Ocean and in Southeast Asia. Not all genres or practices take root in a host culture, but only those that are meaningful to a local community or which are compatible with prevailing ways of life and religious structures—or those that are imposed by an influential ruling family. The relatively rare evidence and examples of performing arts on Cocos from its settlement in 1826 until the middle of the twentieth century, teased out from traces in the archives and comments in colonial reports and travelogues, demonstrate that there was a diverse repertory of genres and practices, some reflecting patterns in other plantation societies around the world.

Although there were policies of isolation and the ruling family exerted strong control in mediating contact with the outside world, it would be misleading to see these islands merely as a cultural zone that was the end recipient of imported cultural practices and objects. Rather, Cocos was the fertile ground of hybrid

responses to multiple cultural influences and a place where unique local practices emerged. Glimpses into the community's life afforded by archival data, some newly gleaned, contribute to the broader picture of transplanted cultures in the maritime Malay world, and further details are likely to continue to emerge.

NOTES

1. John Clunies Ross (1786–1854) was present on the islands from February 1827, and consolidated his rule following the exit of Alexander Hare in 1831, ruling until his death. He was succeeded by John George Clunies Ross (1823–1871; ruled from 1854); George Clunies Ross (1842–1910; ruled from 1871); and John Sidney Clunies-Ross (1868–1944; ruled from 1910). The family's surname became hyphenated from the fourth generation, but for consistency is hyphenated throughout the main text. The fifth hereditary owner of the islands, John Cecil Clunies-Ross (1928–2021), came into his inheritance on the death of his father on August 14, 1944. He arrived on Cocos on July 6, 1946, with his mother, Mrs. Rose Clunies-Ross (née Nash), who controlled the estate until her son reached the age of majority. His ownership ended on September 1, 1978, when the Australian government purchased the property of the Clunies-Ross Estate (except his house and another building). Data from Bunce (1988, 63, 133) and Linford (2009, 127, 206–8).

2. For a critique of Hughes's book, see Hunt (1989, 184).

3. Official documents from the time acknowledged that it was "admittedly cruel to send away the surplus population." See National Archives of the United Kingdom, CO 537/4738, "Cocos Islands," "Notes of Conference at the Colonial Office on the 7th March, 1949," 125–32.

4. Thanks to John Hunt for this insight.

5. For studies on music and dance since the transfer to Australia, see Irving and McCallum (2020); Irving (2019, 288–99); McCallum (2020); and McCallum (forthcoming). For recent anthropological studies see Winarnita and Herriman (2012), Herriman and Winarnita (2021), and Herriman (2022).

6. There may, however, have been previous brief encampments by shipwrecked or marooned sailors (Holman 1835, vol. 4, 374; Guppy 1890, 2).

7. Thanks to Michael Laffan for pointing out this quotation and to Katharine Anderson for providing a transcription of the manuscript (now published as Clunies-Ross [2020]). On this source see also Anderson (2018).

8. See a letter of March 19, 1830, by surgeon William Simpson of HM Sloop *Comet* (National Archives of the United Kingdom, ADM 125/131, "The Cocos or Keeling Islands and Seychelles," f. 5v); it is also mentioned by John Clunies Ross ca. 1830 (as reproduced in Gibson-Hill 1952, 235–47, esp. 244).

9. This source is cited and the text reproduced with the kind permission of the Board of Trustees, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

10. This document was transcribed by Birch (1885, 16–17), and a manuscript copy is in the National Archives of the United Kingdom, ADM 125/131, "The Cocos or Keeling Islands and Seychelles," 79r–81r; a more recent transcription is in Gibson-Hill (1952, 279–81).

11. An account of the Fremantle's act of taking possession of Cocos is in "Taking Possession of the Cocos Islands," Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies D-FR/213/12, "Papers Relating to the Cocos Islands, Including a Long Report on Taking Possession of the Islands by H.M.S. *Juno* (under Captain Stephen Grenville Fremantle), 1857–1858."

12. Thanks to Michael Laffan (personal comm., July 17, 2020) for information about Dayapong.

13. His papers also include examples of *pantun* (quatrains in Malay). These must be among the earliest written examples of the genre, at least in romanized form, from Cocos. Library and Archives, Natural History Museum, London, C. W. Andrews, untitled notebook DF 152/2/2, n.pag.

14. Thanks to John "Johnny" George Clunies-Ross for permission to cite these shipping records held in the National Archives of Australia, within A9752, "Collection of correspondence, photographs, press clippings and accounts relating to the Clunies Ross administration of Cocos (Keeling) Islands."

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Káfriinha, Kaffringha, and the Bailasphere—Sri Lanka and Beyond

Mahesh White-Radhakrishnan

PROLOGUE—A PORTUGUESE BURGHER *KÁFRIINHA*— BATTICALOA, OCTOBER 2017¹

The music begins with the violins of Newton and the youngsters, Angelo and Rushman, as the dancers in each couple turn to each other. Hayed soon beats three beats on the *rabáána*² (frame drum) in a hemiola before launching into the “*jungudu-jukkung*” 6/8 or 3/2 hemiola rhythm. I am very familiar with this beat.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars of Portuguese creoles in the Indian Ocean have argued that linguistic and cultural material circulated within the Portuguese Indian Ocean world, leading to what Dalgado (1917) referred to as “reciprocal transfusion” of linguistic influence in the development of Asian Portuguese creoles (see also Tomás 2009; Cardoso 2014; Cardoso, Hagemeyer, and Alexandre 2015). Meanwhile, there has also been an increase in scholarly interest in Indian Ocean and trans-oceanic cultural history, including a focus on syncretic music and dance forms (Kabir 2020; 2021; Sardo 2017; Kartomi 2012; Castelo-Branco 1997; Sarkissian 2000; Ganap 2006).

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The island of Sri Lanka constitutes a significant geographical and cultural hub at the center of the Indian Ocean. Situated between the western and eastern Indian Ocean regions, it has been an important stop on trade routes that stretched back to ancient times, reconsolidated during the waves of European colonial expansion. The musical history of the island itself is characterized by “rampant cultural interaction” (Sykes 2011, 482) and reflects the shared history between its diverse communities. While Sinhala people are the ethnic majority of Sri Lanka, constituting roughly 75 percent of the population, the island is home to significant Tamil and Muslim minorities and smaller groups such as Burghers who trace their ancestry to Portugal, Holland, and other parts of Europe (Kumari Campbell 2005) and Afro–Sri Lankans, also known as Kaffirs,³ whose presence on the island stems largely—though not exclusively—from the slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries (Jayasuriya 2005). The highly iconic and catchy style of music, Sri Lankan *baila*, developed mainly from the interaction between these ethnic groups particularly with Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha* (Ariyaratne 2001; White-Radhakrishnan 2021; Sheeran 1998, 2004).⁴ *Baila* is the most popular music genre on the island in terms of record sales and is recognized in India⁵ and other parts of South Asia. This deep connection rightly cements the strong historic contribution of Asian Portuguese communities such as the Portuguese Burghers to Sri Lanka and the broader region. Portuguese Burgher communities are present around the island, but those with significant populations, greater visibility, representation, and maintenance of culture and their language—Sri Lanka Portuguese—are concentrated in and around the east coast towns of Batticaloa and Trincomalee.⁶ It is in these places that *káfriinha* is still performed as a social dance during Portuguese Burgher weddings and other significant occasions including First Communions and puberty ceremonies.

Scholarship on Sri Lankan *baila* has increasingly focused on these historic intercultural processes (Sheeran 1998, 2004) and more rigorously explored links between the genre and its related forms. These include Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha* and Afro–Sri Lankan music (Ariyaratne 2001), which has become quite a popular form of cultural performance in recent times.⁷ Links with broader oceanic cultural circulations have also begun to be explored (Jayasuriya 2017, 22–23). Out of these scholarly perspectives I propose that there exists a broad category of related genres with common musical and kinetic reference that I call the *bailasphere*, drawing on Sri Lankan *baila* and the identically named and related genre from the west coast of India, derived from the Portuguese *baile* “dance” or *bailar* “to dance.”

In a discussion of the geographic spread of the song “Jinkly Nona,” a very clear example of shared repertoire in the *bailasphere* (see Jingali Nóna below), Sarkissian (1995, 42) points to a lack of attention to musical form in the comparative analysis of the song. In this chapter I argue for the importance of looking at musical form in addition to social context and textual comparison to illuminate histories of cultural circulation such as within the Indian Ocean network.

THE BAILASPHERE

The idea of a music and dance circulating in the Indian Ocean is not new (see Cardoso 2010, 96; Dalgado 1919, 474; Jayasuriya 2017; Kabir 2014; Sarkissian 1995; Sardo 2017). Kabir describes it as a *kinetoscape* that foregrounds the centrality of dance movements but also includes music within its scope. Sardo's term *lusosonic*, which she proposes in contrast to *lusophonic*, a term with colonial connotations (Sardo 2017), is another useful way to conceptualize this network. The use of the prefix *luso-* still arguably places an emphasis on Portugal both culturally and territorially, which could potentially perpetuate its centrality and diminish or erase other cultural layers.

Despite also having a Portuguese association, the term *bailasphere*, being associated by etymology rather than identity and place, foregrounds the diverse cultural convergences, be they African, Asian, Portuguese, or from elsewhere in Europe, and cross-cultural processes without being defined by one or more of them.⁸ Descriptions of Sri Lankan *baila* as variously Portuguese, Afro-Portuguese (Jayasuriya 2014) or Afro-Iberian (Sheeran 2004) are examples of this kind of definitional straitjacketing. While such descriptors are not inaccurate in their identification of the major cultural influences, they are somewhat limiting in that they erase the other layers of influence and the processes. Focusing more on style and repertoire allows scope to explore layers of influence (wherever they come from) in a historical perspective and also look at the circulations past and present, including in recent popular culture.

Central to the *bailasphere* are a range of genres characterized by a 6/8 asymmetric or hemiola rhythm and typically based on primary chord structures and diatonic melodies, in other words, the major scale in western music. Goan *mando*, Mangalorean *baila*,⁹ Sri Lankan *baila* (with subgenres of Sinhala *baila*, Tamil *baila*, and such), Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha*, Afro-Sri Lankan *manja*, and Portuguese creole music from Diu and Daman, constitute core genres from the South Asian subcontinent, as well as *joget and branyo*, both of which originated in the Portuguese Eurasian community in Melaka, Malaysia.¹⁰ All of these *bailasphere* styles overlap in turn with other local and translocal genres such as Bollywood, and Sinhala, Tamil, and Malay film and pop music¹¹ and rhythmically similar subgenres such as Tamil *kootthu* and other South Asian folk and classical genres based on *khemto* rhythms, which are largely outside the *bailasphere*.¹² While the focus of this chapter is on delineating the core elements of the *bailasphere*, these genres and stylistic overlaps provide an important check against jumping to uninformed conclusions.¹³

Another set of genres in the eastern Indian Ocean can be regarded as stylistically peripheral *bailasphere* genres and includes *kerongcong* and *sikambang kapri* from Indonesia, *Maquista music* from Macau, and other related eastern Indian Ocean styles. These could be regarded as part of the *bailasphere* by virtue of the shared melodic and thematic material and, in the case of *kerongchong* and Macanese music, the shared grounding in Portuguese creole speaking cultures.

However, these genres are all typically in 4/4 or duple-based rhythms, demonstrating that rhythm on its own is not an essential aspect of the *bailasphere*.¹⁴

On the western side there is another set of even more stylistically peripheral genres including *Sega*, *t'sega*, *t'shega* (Wergin 2009), *maloya* (Medeiros 2003), and other related western Indian Ocean styles performed in countries such as the Mauritius, the Réunion Islands, and Seychelles and traced back to the music of African enslaved individuals in those islands. These could be considered as a separate sphere (perhaps the *segasphere*?) linked to the *bailasphere* by their grounding in European harmony set to 6/8 asymmetrical (hemiola) rhythms—though with a slightly different emphasis as compared with *baila*. European colonization, slavery, cultural contact, and the emergence of creolized quadrille dances to similar rhythms shaped the cultural contexts from which these forms emerged, hence reflecting parallel processes of syncretism in social dance. Ascertaining whether or not these western Indian Ocean styles can be regarded as part of the *bailasphere* necessitates asking important questions about whether stylistic similarities between *sega* and *baila* can indeed be traced to specific trajectories of material or are simply the result of coincidence. Comparative work on this should look at the development of syncretic quadrilles in each place and could also expand the comparison to include other western Indian Ocean music and dance forms such as *bodu beru*, a vocal and drum genre from the Maldives, as well as Malgache and Mozambican music forms.

CAFRINHO TO KÁFRIINHA AND KAFFRINGHA

An important historical backdrop to the *bailasphere* is the curious phenomenon of music and dance genres known by similar sounding names such as *káfriinha*, *cafferina*, *kapriñña*, *kaffringha*, and other variant spellings (Dalgado 1919, 474; Cardoso 2010, 97; Tan 2016; see also Ganap 2006; Kartomi 2012, 406) and the likely precursor of these, *cafrinho*, a form of dance music variants of which are attested in a range of musical cultures by the turn of the twentieth century. Dalgado's (1919, 474) *Glossário luso-asiático* defines the word *cafrinho* as “apparently the same as the *mando*, practiced originally by Africans (*cafres*),” adding that “the dance would have been widespread in the east during the sixteenth century, since it is known in the Moluccas with the name of *kafrinu* and in Timor as *kafrinia*.”¹⁵

The etymology of the name *cafrinho* is a compound of the Portuguese *cafre*, “African”—now largely considered a derogatory term in Portuguese—and *-inho*, a diminutive, or term of endearment, referencing an African origin, influence, appropriation and/or imitation (see Hornback 2008) linked to slave transportation and other forms of migration within the African diaspora (Kartomi 1997, 313; 2012, 241; Jayasuriya 2008; Cardoso 2010). While scholars have often emphasized this African association, all of the genres that are known by variants of the name developed out of the combination of different musical elements. For example, they

bring together influences associated with African music, including syncopation and hemiola, largely Asian vocal styles, melodic influences and performance contexts, and largely European-derived diatonic melodies based on primary chord structures or dance formations (Kartomi 1997, 2012; Sarkissian 1995; Kabir 2021). Yet the interculturality of these forms often contrasts with past and contemporary understandings and attitudes shaped by the racial legacies of colonialism (Sheeran 2004; cf. Radano and Bohlman 2000).

The earliest probable reference to *cafrinho* is in the form of a Portuguese decree given in Goa in 1606 ordering that “sarabanda, nor songs called mundã¹⁶ or cafrinho,” are allowed to be “danced or sung” (Arquivo Portuguez Oriental, fasc. 4, p. 264 cited and translated in Beltes Manso 2007, 41).¹⁷ In the decree both *cafrinho* and the *mando* (here called mundã), are placed side by side in addition to *sarabanda*, a dance originating in Latin America and arriving in Spain during the sixteenth century and popular from that time until the eighteenth century. According to Bellingham (2011) the original *sarabanda* was “accompanied by song, castanets, and guitars” and was “a fast, lively dance alternating between 3/4 and 6/8 metre and with a reputation for lasciviousness.”¹⁸ The fact that *sarabanda* produced an ambiguity between 6/8 and 3/4 warrants further inquiry to ascertain if hemiolas are a rhythmic characteristic that may have been shared among these prohibited forms and perhaps at the core of their perceived impropriety and sense of otherness.

The lack of details about *cafrinho* in the above passages and its scarce appearance in the historic record to date mean that it is difficult to say with certainty whether it was simply used as a catch-all term for a range of dances performed by African people at that time or whether it indicated a specific dance performed either by Africans or by others as an appropriated form or imitation of one or more of their forms. The history of *Moresco* dancing, another dance with a similarly long history and with many variants, may provide some relevant insights and parallels in this regard (see Grove 1907 [1895], 136 and Hornback 2008, 201). Further investigation of documents relating to the links between Goa, Portugal, and the Southeast Asian archipelago including forced and free migration (Ganap 2006, 14) would also shed some light on this and the links between the aforementioned seventeenth-century *cafrinho*, more recent *káfriinha*, and broader *bailasphere* styles including peripheral styles such as *sega* from Mauritius, *maloya* from the Réunion Islands, and *bodu beru* from the Maldives.

Jumping ahead a couple of centuries and to the Sri Lankan context, Dutch travel writer Jacob Haafner’s (1995) *Reize te voot door Ceilon*, originally published in 1826, presents some evocative passages of music involving a man who, based on the account, was probably a Dutch Burgher and his enslaved attendants (their ethnicity is not given). While there is no specific reference to the music being of a particular genre, the passages suggest that it may possibly be an early form of *káfriinha* because of the combination of instruments and the mention of contradance and, elsewhere in the book, a quadrille (both of which would suitably describe *káfriinha*). The inclusion of *chicoties*¹⁹ within the repertoire, the presence of

the violin and *rabana*, and the energetic and peculiar style of dancing, which was strange to the European dance sensibilities of the writer, and indeed the dancer, give further weight to this possibility:

When supper was over, one of the company again took up the *rabanna* [sic] but M. D'Allemand, who was little entertained with its music had privately ordered his slave to surprise them with his **violin**. The sound of the instrument no sooner reached their ears, than they all seemed as if **struck by an electrical shock**. They all stood up, and the young girls, encouraged by the example of their parents, eagerly called for a **country dance** (*Contredanse*), and taking us by the hand, notwithstanding our objections and protestations of being fatigued, they drew us **into the circle**. . . . After dancing some time, we found ourselves incapable, from fatigue, to hold out any longer ; and we sat down before the hut. The rest of the company having also finished came and placed themselves by us, and began to sing a sort of **Malabar love songs, called chicoties and chacras**. (1995, 38; emphasis added)

Haafner's book later mentions of "fandangos, quadrilles, and Cingalese dances" (1995, 68–69), which, if the labels are accurate, suggests that all of these diverse dance repertoires would have already been coalescing in early Sri Lanka by the early nineteenth century. It is also interesting that the *chicoti* is described as a genre of "Malabar love songs," suggesting, again if accurate, either a regional or linguistic association.²⁰ The other genre mentioned by Haafner is *chacra*, which quite possibly refers to a variant of the genre known as *jácara*, *chácara*, *xácara*, a Spanish genre with notable variants in Latin America closely connected to the *villancico* tradition as well as the *sarabanda*, and also using hemiola time (Shalom 2022, 360).²¹ The absence of any reference to Portuguese language or cultural identity in the passage is interesting as is the description "into the circle," possibly suggesting something about its formation and indicating that it may not have been a quadrille.

A fascinating account by British colonial journalist and coffee planter John Capper (1878) details Dutch Burgher revels that took place following the twice-a-year arrival of a ship and demonstrates the establishment of *káfriinha* as a ballroom dance and popular institution across colonial society on the island. Capper arrived in the island in 1837, so the description is likely to reflect life around the 1840s:

The evening meal being over, the tables were moved aside and to the sound of mirth-provoking music the whole party joined in the frantic movements of the Ceylon "Caffeina," a kind of tropical "Cancon," in vogue to the present time. (Capper 1878, 49–50)

While expressed in colonial exoticizing language, Capper's assessment provides a richer and more broad-minded account of the *káfriinha*, providing clues as to its peculiarity to European sensibilities and highlighting the "considerable latitude" of movement.

C. M. Fernando's "The music of Ceylon" is yet another colonialist source but also an invaluable scholarly perspective on *káfriinha*. Presented for the Royal Asiatic

Society branch of Ceylon in 1894 and published in its proceedings in 1895, Fernando's work includes pictures of instruments, some details about the music and movement, and, notably, musical notation of several pieces including both *káfriinha* and *chikóóti* plus a couple of song texts. Of particular note, Fernando describes *káfriinha*'s rhythm as "peculiar," "jerky," "6/8 time . . . the last note being a crotchet" (1895, 186) and attests to its being a sung, improvised form of song dueling.

These passages highlight the social and scholarly commentary and awareness about *káfriinha* including attention to its unusual rhythm and movement from a European perspective within the broader framework of familiar European social dance structures, major melodies, and European-derived musical macrostructures (primary chord patterns, diatonic melodies). An important area for further work is the role of African musicians during the European colonial periods, both within the slave economy and the military sphere,²² such as the Colombo Volunteer's Band,²³ Further evidence from the Portuguese and Dutch colonial periods in Sri Lanka would greatly deepen research in this area.²⁴

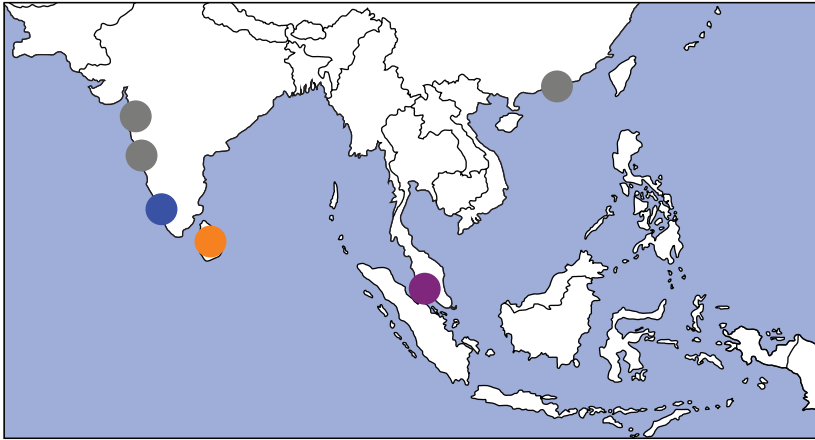
Portuguese Burgher discourse rarely reflects on the origins of *káfriinha* or the word itself. Typically, it is described as the dance "brought" by the Portuguese, as in the reflections of Newton Sellar in a podcast interview (White-Radhakrishnan and Curran 2022, 53, 09–53:42), an idea that has currency in broader Sri Lankan discourse about it, including in *baila* song lyrics.²⁵ In a rare instance in which the actual name *káfriinha* was brought up, a senior Portuguese Burgher musician and community leader responded that the word was related to *kafal* (i.e., the borrowed English word "couple"), reflecting a time when everyone in the community was dancing together as couples and in harmony with one another. In both these instances any Afro-Sri Lankan connections are overlooked by community members, but in some rare instances they are acknowledged or even emphasized, another aspect that warrants deep and sensitive examination.

CASE STUDY—JINGALI NÓÓNA

Probably the most well-known illustration of the *bailasphere* is the song known as "Jingali Nóóna," which scholars, notably Jackson (1990; 2007) and Sarkissian (1995) have treated in some detail (see also Byl and Sykes 2020, 406). The following image shows three versions of Jingly Nona with significant melodic matches (in red horizontal parentheses) and attested locations of the song mapped out (music example 13.1).

Jackson (1990; 2007) correctly demonstrates the presence of "Jingali Nóóna" (a.k.a. "Singele Nona") in the Portuguese Burgher repertoire in 1895, the presence in its text and tune across various parts of the Indian Ocean and in Trincomalee, eastern Sri Lanka, in 1974. However, in Jackson's recording in Trincomalee, the song text (which corresponds closely with that in Fernando [1895]) is sung to a variant of another song format, straight *báyla*, as opposed to the song's associated tune (as in music example 14.1). Meanwhile, this tune is performed as an

- Shingly Nona, Kerala, India, 1987 ●
- Singalee Nona, Sri Lanka, 1895 ●
- Jinkly Nona, Melaka, Malaysia, 1991 ●
- Other mentioned locations ●



MUSIC EXAMPLE 13.1. Three versions of Jingly Nona with significant melodic matches highlighted (*top*) and the locations of the matches marked (*bottom*). These include Shingly Nona in Kerala (Desta Barra Fora, Track 4), Singalee Nona in Sri Lanka (Fernando 1895) and Jinkly Nona in Melaka (Sarkissian 1995, 43).

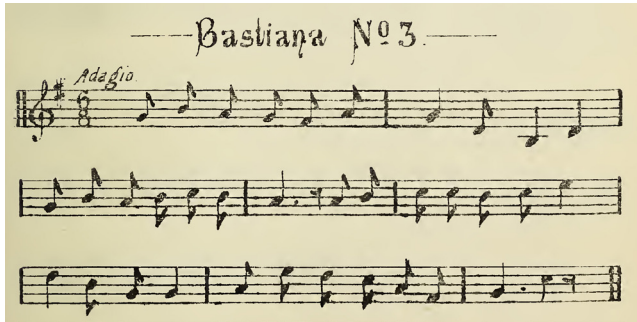


FIGURE 13.1. Bastiana from Fernando (1895).

instrumental *káfriinha* with no words sung. This separation of tune and text is confirmed by the fact that the older generations in the Portuguese Burgher communities in both Batticaloa and Trincomalee remember the tune but do not remember it being a song in their youth (even those familiar with the verse beginning “Single Nona” did not associate those words with the tune).

An added twist to this complex trajectory is that the song is, in fact, performed today, notably by the group Burgher Folks, which is mostly made up of younger musicians (Cardoso 2017, slp039_5). Significantly, the words used for the song are based on the Melaka version²⁶ rather than the similar but different Sri Lankan version as transcribed in Fernando (1895) and recorded and transcribed by Jackson (1990). This “return” of *Jingali Nóóna* to the Portuguese Burgher repertoire highlights the way that scholarship and recent initiatives appear to have reinvigorated the nodes within the *bailosphere* leading to present-day exchanges and influence. The appeal of the Melaka version of the song is further supplemented by its indexing of Portuguese diasporic culture. The already iconic place it has in Malaysian culture has given this a great deal of visibility. The stylistic intelligibility of *káfriinha* and *branyo*, and parallel to these, the more broadly popular genres of Sri Lankan *baila* and Malaysian *joget*, and the continued presence of the tune allowed for a seamless (re)incorporation of a different version of an obsolete song (in terms of the whole music and text coming together) into the contemporary Portuguese Burgher repertoire.

CASE STUDY—BASTIANA

Another early circulation within the *bailosphere* is a song known as “Bastiana,” no longer sung within the Portuguese Burgher repertoire or present as a tune (figure 13.1). Meanwhile, this song is prominent in Macau today and is highly iconic of Maquista creole tradition. A search through the network of folkloric texts shows that around the turn of the twentieth century this particular song-text is present in Diu (Quadros 1907 cited in Cardoso 2018), Sri Lanka (Fernando 1895; Jackson 1990), and as a parody version from Macau (Marques Pereira 1901, 239–43), suggesting the song was

Cancioneiro musical crioulo

Cantilenas macaistas

I

Parodia á Bastiana

Parodia á Bastiana

P. Pereira

FIGURE 13.2. Parodia á Bastiana from Marques Pereira (1901).

likely well established there by that time. Musical notation is presented in Fernando (1895) and the parody version in Marques Pereira (1901), which, based on its correspondences with the melody and rhythm of *Bastiana* as sung in Macau today, we can assume resembled the original Macau version. And while the Macau version of the tune is 4/4 both today and in 1901, the Sri Lankan versions from 1895 and 1929 are in 6/8 (figure 13.2).

The salience of the song in Sri Lanka at the time is evident in its presence as melody and text (being one of the songs included in the Nevill Manuscript compiled

in the 1880s and 1890s). The tune is also one of those “quoted” in bars 146–161 of Norbert Rodrigo’s 1929 arrangement, *Ceylonese Dances* (reproduced in Ariyaratne 2001, 80–87), where it is presented along with other *káfriinha* tunes. Here it is also in 6/8. The coexistence, melodic resemblance, and contrast in the rhythm between the versions from Macau and Sri Lanka are an interesting possible indication of continuities and changes in the music across the *bailasphere*. The 4/4 pattern used in *keroncong tugu cafrinho* may reflect a similar pattern of change. In fact, it is very interesting that in the *keroncong* context, dancing does not appear to play the same role as it does with the *káfriinha* and the *branyo*, for example. Meanwhile, the absence of Bastiana from the contemporary *káfriinha* and *kaffringha* repertoires highlights the vagaries of musical continuity.

RHYTHMS OF THE BAILASPHERE

Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha*, Sri Lankan *baila*, and, to an extent, Afro–Sri Lankan *manja* share common rhythms, typically underpinned by the *rabana*.²⁷ The idea of rhythm being integral to these styles is emphasized in the lyrics of Sri Lankan *baila* songs, which typically present *baila* and *káfriinha* as “rhythm” or “beat.” This rhythm is best described as a three-over-two hemiola but alternatively as 6/8, the latter of which is the way in which I have always heard of it in discourse among those with Western music training from Sri Lanka including Portuguese Burghers.²⁸

The interplay of the *rabáána* with accents on the first and fifth beats (if counting in 6/8) and other—often higher frequency—percussion (e.g., the *salaari* in Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha*) sounding on the first and fourth beats produces the three-over-two hemiola effect. The melodic rhythm of the violin and voice is often in a crotchet-quaver-quaver-crotchet pattern, which I would argue is the prototypical *kafrinha* rhythm. Wally Bastianz’s *Irene Josephine*²⁹ provides a clear example of this in Sri Lankan *baila*. Following a lyrical free time violin intro, the song starts with four bars emphasizing this rhythm played by the guitar (music example 13.2). Following the passage in this transcription, the rhythm is maintained with the bass instrument (likely contrabass) emphasizing the first and third crotchet beats (again the hemiola) and the guitar playing the *káfriinha* rhythm in a more arpeggiated style. A hi-hat plays on every quaver with an open hi-hat on the fifth quaver of the second bar (i.e., the third crotchet). Meanwhile, a second percussion instrument (likely *rabana*) joins the rhythmic fray, playing on every quaver with open beats on the first and third crotchet and relatively muted beats on the rest as in Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha*.

It is also worth juxtaposing the *rabana* and *salaari* rhythm in *káfriinha* with the *dólak* and coconut shells and spoons rhythm in Afro–Sri Lankan *manja*. Both genres are characterized by hemiola rhythms, with an emphasis on the fifth beat—in *káfriinha* this is evidence in the fifth *rabáána* beat being a lower and more open beat compared with the others, while in *manja* this is evident in the fifth beat



MUSIC EXAMPLE 13.2. Guitar for opening bars of Wally Bastianz's *Irene Josephine* after intro.



MUSIC EXAMPLE 13.3. Opening bars capturing *rebana* rhythm used in a recording of *branyo* made by Alan Baxter.

being a crotchet. In addition, these beats are not isochronous. In both *káfriinha* and *manja* it appears that the first and fourth beats are of slightly longer duration than the others, which has the effect of creating ambiguity between a duple and triple rhythm.

The rhythmic emphasis in *káfriinha* and *manja* echoes the rhythms found in a range of other *bailasphere* styles. While a comprehensive comparison is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth providing some more cursory examples as a prompt for further inquiry.

- In both *mando* and *dulpod* from Goa and other parts of the west coast of India, the fifth beat of the 6/8 (or 6/4) bar is a crotchet, which corresponds with the *káfriinha* rhythm. This can be explained by the strong cultural connections and continuities among various South Asian Portuguese cultures, in particular between Goa and Sri Lanka.
- Meanwhile, the percussion rhythm used by the *rebana*³⁰ in a song recorded in Melaka, Malaysia, in 1981 by Alan Baxter in the *branyo* music of the Melaka Portuguese community shows a slightly different emphasis (music example 13.3). In this example, while the fifth beat is always played and is always a crotchet, the overall rhythmic cycle goes over two bars with the second beat of the first bar being a crotchet rest (bars 4 and 6) while the remaining bar presents a dotted quaver-crotchet-quaver-crotchet rhythm. The overall result is a different sounding rhythm, more sparse compared to the other *bailasphere* rhythm but sharing an emphasis on the crotchet at the fifth beat.³¹
- In *kerongcong*, another *bailasphere* style performed in Jakarta, Indonesia, it appears that some of the same tunes may have undergone rhythmic transformation into 4/4 (or possibly 2/4) in parts of Southeast Asia including Indonesia as well as Macau (see discussion of Bastiana above). For example, the song *kerongcong tugu cafrinho* has, in my view, a strong melodic overlap with the Portuguese Burgher song *kuráánjaniita* from Sri Lanka and the song *Canto*

de marilha from Daman, but unlike *kuráánjaniita* and *Canto de marilha*, the *kerongcong* song is in 4/4.

- One can also catch a hint of the rhythmic resonances in the opening rhythm used in a recorded performance of *sega tipique* on the *ravanne*³² and triangle. It is the first, third, fourth, and fifth beats that are emphasized by the *ravanne*, with the fifth beat the most open and the second and fifth beats emphasized by open beats on the triangle creating a sense of syncopation, asymmetry, and hemiola. This seems to have echoes with *káfriinha* with its typical crotchet-quaver-quaver-crotchet rhythm and Fernando's (1895) observation about the last note being a crotchet. While the overall rhythmic effect is distinct, there appears to be sufficient overlap to warrant further comparative work.

CONCLUSION

The above examples highlight the musical continuities and contiguities between the Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha* repertoire past and present and the *bailasphere* of Sri Lanka and the wider Indian Ocean. The comparative analyses presented here, building on studies that have tended to foreground social context or text over musical form, demonstrate the validity of a domain of cultural sphere that I call the *bailasphere*. This chapter begins the process of trying to map out the *bailasphere* and its trajectories of musical and kinetic flow, which mirror the cultural, economic, and linguistic flows between various parts of the Indian Ocean during the occupation of Portuguese, Dutch, British, and other European powers. In the Southeast Asian context it will also be significant to consider the Arab, North Indian, and local Asian influences, which have shaped musical styles there such as Sikambang Kapri (Kartomi 2012).

The mapping process requires much further work. There are a number of tunes, tune fragments, dance movements, and song lyrics yet to be analyzed in juxtaposition (White-Radhakrishnan 2021; Jayasuriya 2017, 22), work that requires a careful balance of “scope and zoom” and close attention to the perspectives of community members (Byl and Sykes 2020, 408). Historical research on attestations of *cafrinho* (and variants of the word) in discourse about music and dance in Portuguese, Dutch, British, Spanish, and other language sources will provide an important insight into the establishment and development of *kaffringha*, *káfriinha*, *mando*, *kerongcong tugu cafrinho*, and other *bailasphere* styles including western Indian Ocean styles, which warrant careful consideration. There is far more comparative work to be done to ascertain whether there was some kind of relationship in the development of these western Indian Ocean genres with other *bailasphere* genres, including analysis of melodies past and present, the content and structures of song texts and movement including comparative work on the quadrille, building on the work of Kabir (2021). Another related significant project concerns interrogating the supposed interconnection between African performance forms within

the Indian Ocean space and *cafrinho* especially given the readiness with which Dalgado (1919), Fernando (1895), and other scholars have arguably emphasized its African provenance. Related to this aspect is the erasure of African-ness within the Indian Ocean space, a significant issue of history, identity, and justice; for much of the evidence points to the *bailasphere*, drawing significantly from African cultures and peoples whose voices are missing from the historic record. Another important aspect of *bailasphere* research will be to compare if (and if so, how) trajectories and developments in creolized music and dance map onto Dalgado's (1917) reciprocal transfusion hypothesis with regard to the development of Asian Portuguese-lexified creoles. Finally, and significantly, *bailasphere* research must focus on contemporary practices, including the maintenance and revitalization of vulnerable music traditions such as *káfriinha* including examination of innovations, the renewal and recalibration of past networks of circulations, and the formation of new ones. From the perspective of cultural diversity and global history, the *bailasphere*, and the other domains of performative styles with which it comes into contact, reveal important stories of connection that await urgent and careful scholarly attention and (re)telling.

NOTES

1. An audio version of this reflection can be heard on *Sakudii bayláá* a Music!Dance!Culture! podcast episode about Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha*. www.buzzsprout.com/1886223/10690584, segment from 2:03–3:53. The performance itself was recorded as part of the Documentation of Sri Lanka Portuguese project (Cardoso 2017, slp035_2).

2. *Rabáána* is commonly spelled *rabana*. When discussed within the Portuguese Burgher context I use the Documentation of Sri Lanka Portuguese orthography developed by Hugo Cardoso (see Cardoso et al. 2019).

3. This term comes from the Portuguese word for African, “Cafre,” which in turn derived from the Arabic “Kaffār” (infidel). While recognized as derogatory in much of the world, “Kaffir” was commonly used in Sri Lanka as an ethnonym, including by the community. Recently, community members have increasingly started to use and prefer the term Afro–Sri Lankan. While I also prefer the term Afro–Sri Lankan to refer to the community, the formerly used term is important to be aware of because of its historical salience and because the term is widely accepted by scholars as linked with *káfriinha*.

4. Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha*, an oral dance and music tradition with repertoire in Sri Lanka Portuguese, is distinct from Sri Lankan *baila*, a highly produced popular music genre that is mostly in Sinhala (with variants in Tamil and other languages). The two forms have a shared history with the *káfriinha* playing a significant role in the historical development of Sri Lankan *baila* in its early stages when it was also known as *kaffringha* and more closely resembled *káfriinha* music. Sri Lankan *baila* likewise has had influence and cultural salience on Portuguese Burgher *káfriinha*, especially in modern times where modern *káfriinha* songs in Sri Lanka Portuguese have been based on Sinhala *baila* songs.

5. While Goa and the west coast of India has its own related tradition of “*baila*” music, the association between *baila* and Sri Lanka is still strong in the South Asian popular imagination. For example, the 1993 Tamil film song *Pattu Nila*, with lyrics by Vaali and music by famed Tamil film music composer Ilayaraja, had the chorus “Sinhala *baila* has come (to) India! Start a party! Make a jumpy dance!” (my translation). This song can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=VowLdf2JeY.

6. There is a small community in Jaffna too, but their numbers are very few and only a handful speak the language. The extent of cultural maintenance and identification in other areas (e.g., Galle) remains to be studied.

7. Scholarly and popular interest in Afro-Sri Lankan culture, including their music tradition, *manja*, is, for example, reflected in the documentary *Kaffir Culture* produced by Kannan Arunasalam. www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXvLYV9MZLI.

8. I acknowledge that the Portuguese language roots of the word *baila* might suggest the foregrounding of its Portuguese elements (much like the prefix *lusó*). However, I would argue that it is a word that, at least within the Sri Lankan context, has deep (and varying) significance among the diverse communities connected to the associated styles including African communities in Sri Lanka and across the Indian Ocean network who mostly spoke a variety of Portuguese creole, giving the term arguably wider prominence, certainly more than other terms that directly foreground Portuguese cultural primacy. The term is also much less othering than any term indexing *káfriinha*, *kaffringha*, or *cafrinho*.

9. *Baila* in the west coast of India can be regarded as a different genre with its own history. At the same time, both Sri Lankan *baila* and Indian *baila* are closely related, and their development would likely have significant overlaps. Songs in one genre/country have been popular in the other. Examples are the Sinhala (Sri Lankan) *baila* song “*Surangani*” widely known across India, and the Konkani (Indian) *baila* song “*Catherina*” widely known across Sri Lanka. These overlapping histories call for deeper exploration.

10. *Joget* is a common Indonesian and Malay word for “dance” and is used for a range of genres in both countries. Here we refer to the popular genre in Malaysia, which is derived from *branyo*.

11. The blurriness of these boundaries is particularly evident in 6/8 Sinhala pop music, which is often regarded by its performers as separate from *baila* despite sharing more commonalities than differences. As Gabriel Mininberg, in his unpublished thesis, states, “The distinction between *baila* and Sinhala Pop may be . . . more a matter of labeling than a fundamental difference in content.”

12. The stylistic intelligibility of *koothu* and *khemto* music, as well as Arabic rhythms, which would have been circulating especially in the Indonesian-Malaysian archipelago, would have also led to interesting convergences.

13. Jim Sykes hypothesizes that the well-established presence of these three-over-two rhythms in South Asia could represent a much earlier convergence of rhythms across the Indian Ocean linking Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

14. The reason these genres are in 4/4 could be due to the influences of dominant rhythmic patterns, including potentially from traditional Malay and Indonesian forms. This is another area requiring further inquiry.

15. This passage is also cited and discussed in Kabir (2021) and Almeida (2013).

16. Dalgado (1919) states that this is the same word (or variant spelling) of *mando*.

17. “Since there is no such thing that incites more sensuality than songs and lascivious and dishonest dances, this sacred Synod determines that under the penalty of excommunication no person from here on shall dance or sing the saraband, nor the songs that are called *mundā* or *cafrinho*, nor order someone to dance, or sing . . . and wishing to prevent the evils that follow in the republic of the multitudes of singing girls, and dancing girls that are in this State, strictly prohibits schools where they teach girls how to dance, sing or play musical instruments. (Arquivo Portuguez Oriental, fasc. 4, p. 264 cited and translated in Beltes Manso 2007, 41). I learned of this decree in a paper presented by Dr. Inês Guarda on January 3, 2018, at Lisbon for the Goa Research Cell, a working group within the Modern Moves project led by Professor Ananya Kabir.

18. The *sarabanda* was, for example, suppressed by Philip II of Spain in 1583 and also condemned by Jesuit priest Father Mariana in 1609 for its vulgarity (Bellingham 2011), reflecting the sentiments expressed in the English work, *Dialogue against Light, Lewd, and Lascivious Dauncing* (1582) by Christopher Fetherston, which included a diatribe against Morris dancing (Hornback 2008). Despite its

suppression, the *sarabanda* continued to flourish, spreading to Italy and France where it evolved into a “much slower and more stately version” in the seventeenth century. This taming of the *sarabanda* is comparable to processes and discourses around the *mando*, *kaffringha*, and *sega*, where “crazy” variants were transformed into, and/or coexisted with more controlled and dignified versions (Kabir 2021; Capper 1878; Sheeran 1998).

19. De Vos (1950) discusses “chicoti,” mentioning Haafner’s definition, but also suggests that the word “is perhaps a corruption of ‘chacota.’” another genre of music that was circulating in the Portuguese world around the seventeenth century.

20. Malabar is the name of the southern west coast of India, but the term was also often used by the Portuguese to denote Tamil or other southern Indian languages, a term that survives in Sri Lanka Portuguese as the word *Malváár* for Tamil language and people.

21. Other important Latin American styles to consider for comparative work are Mexican mariachi and Paraguayan harp music, both of which are frequently based on hemiola rhythms. In fact, Sri Lankan baila artists have often tapped into the resemblance between their music and these styles, including a wave of baila bands in Colombo in the 1960s with names beginning with the Spanish articles “Los” and “La” and an indexing of Latin America (e.g., La Bambas, La Ceylonians, Los Muchachos). There were even forays into these styles, most notably Joe Perera, who sang a baila fusion version of the song “Chiquita Linda” from the Paraguayan harp tradition www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUq9jqbSCMc. From the other side there appears to be a category of Mexican *villancico* dance that drew on the dance of Africans and other ethnicities (Baker 2016, 399–408), which brings the connection full circle but also highlights why careful work is needed in understanding the relationships between these genres.

22. African migration to Sri Lanka significantly comprised but also outlasted slavery. The military was a type of slave labor but also became an important source of employment into the start of twentieth century (Jayasuriya 2008, 137).

23. For example, an Australian traveler to then Ceylon in 1892 reports, “The CoLombo Volunteer Band played in the verandah of the Grand Oriental one evening, and the big dining room was cleared out for a dance. The musicians were all black men, and I was told three of them were Kaffirs. They played polkas, schottishes, and quadrilles indifferently, the barn dance badly, but I never heard such lovely time as their waltzes. A waltz seemed somehow to fetch them, and they seemed to put all their soul into it. The floor was lovely, and I had one waltz, hot as it was, with a real good dancer—never had I a better. The spring this black band put into waltz music was wonderful.” (Letters to Boys.—No. V, South Australian Chronicle, July 23, 1892). Given the three-over-two timing it is possible that the lively “waltz” the writer observed may have been influenced by, or a version of, *kaffringha*.

24. Another significant early nineteenth-century account is in De Butts (1841), referring to a “Cafre dance.” Though written in a deeply racist and condescending tone, it provides an interesting insight into a dance form that may have been an early version or antecedent of *káfriinha*. See Jayasuriya (2018) for a discussion of this account.

25. One example of this is Corrine Almeida’s Kapirignna (www.youtube.com/watch?v=lniu8YJsVS4).

26. Community leader Earl Barthelot related the story of how he shared the Melaka version with the community, and this was taken up.

27. Though Sri Lankan baila frequently utilizes tabla, drums, or synth pads, the *rabana* is considered typical. Meanwhile, Afro-Sri Lankan *manja* uses a *dholak*, a double-headed Indic drum, demonstrating another interesting instance of syncretism.

28. In fact, one prominent family of Portuguese Burgher musicians refer to “straight *báyla*,” one of the most prototypical *káfriinha* song formats as “six-eight,” highlighting the rhythm used for the overall genre. Nevertheless, the characterization of baila as 6/8 is not universally accepted by scholars. I am grateful to Jim Sykes and Julia Byl for drawing my attention to this contention.

29. A copy of this song is accessible at www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWYL6SO2JAo.

30. The *rebana* is a drum used across the Malaysian archipelago. It has the same etymology as the Sri Lankan *rabana*, with its origins in the Malay language and indicating a drum with ties to Islamic cultures. The Mauritian *ravanne* may also share the same etymology. Any etymological connection does not necessarily indicate a relationship between these drums or definitively point to shared origins, but they are all frame drums.

31. A commonly used rhythm for the percussion in modern *branyo* is the crotchet-quaver-quaver-crotchet *káfriinha* rhythm, which is also used in Malaysian *joget* music. Chopyak (1986, 125) highlights that for *joget*, “the single most important feature is a constant rhythmic feeling of two against three,” while Sarkissian (1995, 42, 47–48) equates *joget* and *branyo*, applying the transcription conventions for *joget* notation and Chopyak’s description of *joget* rhythm to *branyo*. What is most significant here is that both music forms are characterized by the same hemiola rhythm. It is worth noting that Sarkissian’s (1995, 43) notation of the violin melody of “Jinkly Nona” is in 6/8, possibly demonstrating that *branyo* rhythm is perceived and described by its performers as 6/8 rather than purely as three over two.

32. See note 30 in this chapter regarding the connection between *ravanne*, *rabana*, and *rebana*. This recording is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfKn33CUik8.

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Conclusions

Bandung 2.0

Audible Dakwah and the Performance of Indian Ocean Islam

Anne K. Rasmussen

AUDIBLE DAKWAH

Clad in a flannel shirt, jeans, a woolen beanie, and with an Arab kaffiyeh around his neck, Muzammil Hasballah recites *Surah al-Rahman*, a chapter from the Qur'an. His soft, gentle *tilawah* (recitation) reverberates within a mosque, his back to a congregation of young men in rows, arms folded, heads bowed. The event is preserved on his YouTube channel.¹ In another clip, this one on Ammar TV's channel, we see and hear Muzammil Hasballah against a plain white wall, dressed in a collared shirt and sweater, reciting the same tuneful rendition of *Surah Al-Rahman* into a round, mesh pop filter that protects a side address microphone, suspended in a shockmount. We can find clips of him in a trio (again in flannel) or wearing a Western suit jacket over his collared shirt and sweater, at his desk, his open laptop poised to one side. Appearing in attire that intentionally extends traditional *baju koko*, men's Muslim dress, and with a voice that is sweet, cool, gentle, clean, diatonic, and modern, Muzammil's Hasballah's persona resonates with a cadre of male millennials whose performance of Islam and presentation of self across a variety of social media platforms constitute a multidimensional, cosmopolitan, Muslim masculinity. Visitors to his Instagram account may discover his line of perfume and men's clothing, including a practical prayer vest. The names of each individual product recall places in the Islamicate world, Gaza, Istanbul, and Medina, as well as the names of Arab musical scales: *Kurdi* (the prayer vest), and *Hijaz*. His perfume is named for his company, *Habba*, which derives from the Arabic word for love (*hubb*).



FIGURE 14.1. The official stamp of “Bandung 2.0,” *Konferensi Islam Asia-Africa*, March 6–14, 1965. Note the iconography of maps and mosques on the stamps, top right as well as the orientation of the globe on the left. Image credit: James Phillips.

In this “sounding” of the Indian Ocean, I begin with Muzammil Hasballah to explore musical circulations around an Afro-Asiatic zone looking backward from this example to ponder the shared Islamic soundscape of the *Konferensi Asia-Africa*, known as the Bandung Conference of 1955, and the *Konferensi Islam Asia-Africa* ten years later, Bandung 2.0.² As we chart the topography of Indian Ocean history, we must consider the Asia Africa Conference of 1955 (KAA) and the Islamic Asia Africa Conference of 1965 (KIAA) as two of its highest peaks.

Like any number of influencers of his generation, Muzammil Hasballah’s persona refracts *dakwah*. Sometimes translated as proselytization, *dakwah* is the Indonesianized version of the Arabic term *da‘wa* (the letter *ayn* converts to a *k*), which connotes strengthening the faith and encouraging others to do the same. In Indonesia it is important to display piety by participating in and generating religious culture, for example, *seni musik Islam*, or Islamic musical arts, the focus of my research.³ Carla Jones (2021), emphasizes the importance of style in the expression of Islamic piety, drawing our attention to the transnational character of public and publicized acts and the “domestication of foreignness,” particularly among young women. Such phenomena, like fashion, she writes, are “particularly well suited to the celebration of cosmopolitan lifestyle that social media celebrity affords” (173). I want to place Jones among many others (Husein, Slama, Beta), whose concern is with the visible, the material, and the lexical, among acts of piety in what R. W. Liddle (1996) calls “the Islamic turn” in Indonesian politics: the post–New Order era of reform (*Reformasi*) that saw a proliferation of mostly right-leaning Muslim political parties and social trends. My work draws attention to the audible, namely, the soundscape of Muslim Indonesia and the ways that “Islam in the Atmosphere” (Rasmussen 2010, 38–73) references the traditional and local, the Inter-Asian (Ho 2017) and international, the political, the aspirational, and the personal.⁴

Muzammil Hasballah was on the margins of my research in Indonesia in 2017 when all eyes and ears were fixed on a heated debate about Muhammad Yasir Arafat, a reciter who performed at the presidential palace two years earlier (in May 2015). This *qari'* (reciter) surprised everyone by reciting the Qur'an in *langgam Jawa*, or Javanese melodies. In an act of aesthetic disobedience, he strayed from the conventional melodic framework of the Arab (or more correctly, Egyptian) system of *maqamat*, a melodic modal network described in Indonesia with the shorthand expression, or *singkat*, *Bi Hosrin Jasat*, an aide mémoire for the eight principle Arabic musical modes: *Bayyati*, *Hija*, *Saba*, *Rast*, *Nahawand*, *Jiharkah*, *Sikah*, and *Ajam*.⁵ Subsequently exploding on social media, this performance of Javanese melody, ironically by a reciter not from Java but from Sumatra, stirred an anxious and recurring refrain, *Islam yang mana? Or, which Islam?*⁶

To recite in *langgam Jawa* resonates with any number of examples across the time and space of *Islam Nusantara*—the tolerant, open-minded, and flexible Islam of the Indonesian archipelago. Burning incense, visiting graves, performing ceremonies such as the seven-month blessing for a pregnant woman (*tujuh bulanan*) are other examples of practices that might come under scrutiny by modernist hard-liners who referee diverse communities and practices, including local traditions and the bodies, voices, and activities of girls and women. While the Islamization of Indonesia obviously involves a certain degree of Arabization, a new intensity of Salafi/Wahabi originalism among conservative modernists and right-wing hard-liners has involved not only a remarkable degree of neo-Arabization but also of cosmopolitan, middle-class consumerism (Rasmussen 2022; 2010a).

I submit that with his audible *dakwah*, Muzammil Hasballah offers one response to the question *Islam yang mana?* (Which Islam?). It is not only his soft gentle voice, but also the melodic phrases, grouped into paragraphs, and then repeated as if they were verses in a song that together are as striking as the recitation in *langgam Jawa* already described. Taking his cue from the reciters of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf who deploy a simpler, faster chanting style called *murattal*, and who have become extraordinarily influential in Indonesia due to the omnipresence of Saudi Arabian soft power, Muzammil's recitation abjures the model of Egyptian and Arab-world artists whose sonic imprint and concomitant habitus of *tarab* (ecstasy, rapture, enchantment) have shaped the nationalized culture of the Qur'an in Indonesia since the midcentury Bandung era. His style resonates with *nasyid* or *akapella*, the musical boy bands who, beginning in the 1990s, brought innovative ideas and images along with a stripe of conservatism to Islamic musical arts, including hip and cool urban lifestyles, functional western harmony, and objection to women's voices and musical instruments (Rasmussen 2010a; Barendregt 2017).

Rather than to exhibit the virtuosity prized among Indonesian reciters who can exhibit the path or (*seyer*) of a *maqam* and who are expected to navigate among the eight primary *maqamat*, Muzammil delivers his *Al-Rahman* in the diatonic Phrygian mode, akin to *maqam kurd* with its flattened 2nd, 3rd, 6th, and

7th degrees. A Western ear might hear this as the melodic world of flamenco (D-E \flat -F-G-A-B \flat -C-D). His sequence of descending thirds beginning on the 6th degree of the scale—6-5-4; 5-4-3; 4-3-2; 3-2-1—constitutes a four-phrase sentence that is repeated over and over. The repetition and the predetermined melodic movement render the recitation as a kind of easy-listening song, that, while friendly to the ears of Muzammil Hashballah's millennial *sahabat* (companions), do not adhere to the rules of recitation as they have been taught, learned, practiced, and enforced through the institutions of Quranic education, including a scaffolded competition system, a hallmark of Muslim Indonesia.⁷

Master reciter and educator Kiayi Hajji Rif'at Abi Syahid explained to me that a reciter such as Muzammil Hasballah positions himself among young millennials who aspire toward pious lifestyles. However, K. H. Rif'at commented further that his recitation exits (*keluar*) from the Arabic modes (*Bi Husrin Jasat*), is outside of the Arabian style or *lahja* (accent), and that the notes (*notasi*) he uses are not from Arab nations (*dari negara Arab*) (pers. comm. October 27, 2021). Anthropologist Dadi Darmadi pointed me toward a number of other “modern” reciters, many of them from the Arabian Gulf, who prescribe their YouTube recordings, labeled *tilawah*, *takbiran*, or *zikr* (recitation, praise, and remembrance) to help calm anxieties, put babies to sleep, unwind after a long day, or even accompany your workout. Given the extraordinary protocol surrounding Quranic recitation we must ask: Does the popularity of this new style and the transactional purpose of recitation present a tipping point in a stable system or is it an example of the kinds of Indian Ocean circulations that have been ongoing for centuries?

How does Quranic Arabic and by extension Arabic and Islamic song and music crisscross the Indian Ocean? To study the Indonesian category, *seni musik Islam*, from sacred text to saccharine song, is to penetrate the enduring routes and roots of shared culture across the region for the *longue durée*, to echo Eric Tagliacozzo and colleagues (2009) who adopt the term coined by Fernan Braudel (see also Lavin this volume). Although mimesis of and homage to the authentic homelands of Islam, namely Mecca, Medina, the Hadramaut, and the Arab *Mashriq* are to be expected, circulation of praxis originating from the lands below the Monsoon winds upward to South Asia, East Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula through commerce, pilgrimage, and pleasure are not to be overlooked. I join Byl and Sykes's challenge to “methodological nationalism” with an ear toward what Ronit Ricci (2011) calls “the Arab cosmopolis,” where those capable of performing authoritative texts, particularly the language of Islam, possess a “special kind of authority.” Complementing such authoritative texts are processes of linguistic domestication and vernacularization. In Indonesia, Arabic terms have mutated to suit the alphabet and pronunciation preferences of the national language Bahasa Indonesia: *da'wa* becomes *dakwah*; *ta'lim* becomes *taklim* (learning); *faham* becomes *paham* (understand), to cite just a few examples. In religious parlance, Indonesian and Arabic go hand in glove with expressions such as *pelantun Al-Qur'an bil-ghina* (singer/

chanter [I.] of the Qur'an with song [Ar]). While rules for sustaining the aesthetics and techniques of melody or *irama* (I.) abound, processes of vernacularization apply to melody as well (Rasmussen 2010). Let us turn back from the contemporary example of a millennial *qari'* and the Inter-Asian circulation of modern recitation styles to the *Konferensi Asia Africa* in Bandung and the conference that followed ten years later, the *Konferensi Islam Asia-Afrika* 1965, or Bandung 2.0.

PERFORMANCE AT THE BANDUNG ASIA AFRICA CONFERENCE OF 1955.

The *Konferensi Asia Africa*, held in the cool mountain town of Bandung, West Java, from April 18 to 24, 1955, marked the beginning of postcolonialism for twenty-nine nations and delegations of Asia and Africa. The participants were united by the experience of imperial subjugation; some of them had yet to achieve independence. Held at the height of the Cold War (*peran dingin*), one aim of the conference was to establish a position of nonalignment with either the Soviet bloc or with Western Europe and the United States. Another was to acknowledge siblinghood through a collective and shared performance of emerging national selves. Jennifer Lindsay (2012), asserts: "As the first Asian nation to declare its independence at the end of World War II, Indonesia was seen in the region as the leader in the fight against imperialism. Between 1950 and 1965, five Asian and 35 new African nations emerged from previous colonies" (9).

In his *New York Herald Tribune* article "Watch Bandung!," published on the eve of the conference, April 17, 1955, General Carlos P. Romulo, head of the Philippine delegation to Bandung, cautioned the United States to pay attention to the "ominous meeting" for two reasons. As "Special and Personal Envoy of the President of the Philippines to the U.S.," Romulo cautioned that the alignment of Asian nations could challenge "the free world's struggle to stay the advance of Communism" and stressed the Asia-Africa coalition as a racial alliance: "the first important manifestation of a conscious, deliberate, banding-together of the non-white world against the white." Romulo's unapologetic entreaty condemns Americans for not having grasped "the real nature of anti-colonial emotionalism."

I have argued that the basic reason some Asians were so cold to the propaganda of democracy and so vulnerable to Communist blandishments was that the so-called democracies, in times past, had brought them, for the most part, not democracy but colonialism . . . five-cents-a-day wages and racial barriers. (Romulo 1955)

If absent and overlooked in the American press, critical documentation of the 1955 Bandung conference appeared immediately in two small but important volumes, both published in 1956. The first is a chronicle of the meetings and speeches of the KAA by George McT. Kahin (1918–2000) a historian and political scientist after whom the Cornell Center for Advanced Research on Southeast Asia is named; the

second is *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* by acclaimed African American author Richard Wright. In his autobiographical account of the conference, Wright reveals: “I found that many Asians hated the West with an absolute-ness that no American Negro could ever muster” (1956, 25). He cites “terse phrases” of the *Christian Science Monitor’s* notice of the conference on January 23, 1955.

The West is excluded. Emphasis is on the colored nations of the world. And for Asia it means that at last the destiny of Asia is being determined in Asia, and not in Geneva, or Paris, or London or Washington. Colonialism is out. Hands off is the word. Asia is free. This is perhaps the great historic event of our century. (Wright 1956, 88)

Naoko Shimazu writes that the 1955 conference “came to represent the mythical moment when the combined dynamism of the newly decolonized, independent states of Asia and Africa monopolized the centre stage in international relations” (2014, 226). Noting the tensions between various parties who naturally, due to their colonial histories, were aligned with either the West or the Soviet bloc, Shimazu describes the resulting Ten Bandung Principles as “a miraculous feat of collective determination” that established “Afro-Asia as a new collective force in international politics” (227–28). Shimazu goes on to emphasize not the political but rather the cultural significance of the event as conferring “symbolic meaning” through the “performance of pageantry,” for example, the fashion show of national dress in Bandung, a city that had been recently reclaimed from the Dutch and “prepared as the stage for a diplomatic theatre” (231–34; see also Spiller [2023] and Mackie [2005]).

TILAWAH AS DIPLOMACY: BANDUNG 2.0.

Of my research in the 1990s and 2000s, I recall more than one of Jakarta’s senior reciters telling me that an international competition in Quranic recitation (*Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur’an*) was staged as a part of the Bandung Conference (Rasmussen 2001, 2010b). Quranic recitation was likely to have been used as a frame for various ceremonial events at the conference, after all, Indonesian president Sukarno’s NASAKOM, a *singkatan* or abbreviation denoting the three ideological streams of NAS-nationalism, A-religion, (*agama*), and KOM-communism (or Marxism), recognized Islam as a pillar of Indonesian society (Chisaan 2011). Furthermore, the Muslim participants among the twenty-nine delegations would have worshipped together and shared interests in religious ritual and recreation. They were, to use Ricci’s term, part of the “Arab cosmopolis” (2011). While it is plausible that festivalized presentations by reciters were a part of the cultural entertainments that played on in the marginalia of the seven-day conference, I have not been able to corroborate my consultants’ assertions of either a scheduled competition, *musabaqah*, or of a *haflah*, literally a Qur’an listening party, among the reciters at the Bandung conference. What is certain, however, is that Quranic arts and Islamic culture were central to the second iteration of the Bandung

conference, the *Konferensi Islam Asia Afrika* (KIAA) held ten years later, from March 6 to 14, 1965: Bandung 2.0.

Choerotun Chisaan (2011) characterizes the 1965 *Konferensi Islam Asia Afrika* (Bandung 2.0) as the culmination of fifteen years “in search of an Islamic cultural identity.” The conference, attended by 107 delegates from thirty-three countries, four observers, and forty delegates and twenty-one advisors from Indonesia “representing the full spectrum of the Islamic community in Indonesia at the time,” confirmed “Indonesia’s place as a centre of Islamic revival and renaissance equal to the existing examples of Turkey, Egypt, Palestine and India” (Chisaan 2011, 288). The conflation of pan-Asianism and pan-Islamism was an idea that was underscored by the writings and initiatives of President Sukarno, among them the KIAA of 1965. What is significant for our purposes is the emphasis at this moment in history on Islamic praxis as both cultural and artistic, on religion as a wellspring for creativity, and on art as an act of *dakwah*. Among the numerous Islamic arts and culture organizations that emerged in Indonesia in the mid-twentieth century, Chisaan draws our attention to the *Himpunan Seni Budaja Islam* (HSBI, Association for Islamic Arts and Culture), formed in 1956, and *Lembaga Seniman Budayawan Muslim Indonesia* (LESBUMI, Institute of Indonesian Muslim Artists and Cultural Figures), formed in 1962.⁸

One year prior to the conference, in June 1964, a planning committee consisting of delegates of thirteen countries set out an agenda that would follow the political and social principles of the first Bandung conference in 1955. Chisaan (2011) summarizes that in addition to its goals of strengthening solidarity and cooperation among the *umma*, “Additionally, the conference would aim to discuss ‘matters concerned with Islamic Proselytizing (*Dakwah*), Education (*Tarbijah*) and culture (*tsaqofah*)” (289),

Specifically, the conference aimed to discuss: 1) developing an Africa-Asia people’s culture that did not conflict with Islamic teachings; 2) establishing cultural exchange programs between the Islamic peoples of the Africa-Asia region with a view to strengthening cooperation and Islamic brotherhood; 3) intensifying the application of Islamic teachings and developing a good quality Qur’anic recitation (*qiraah*) among the peoples of Africa-Asia; 4) encouraging the development of Islamic libraries; 5) promoting the use of spoken Arabic as a language of unity among the *umma*, alongside the national language of each country; and 6) working towards the establishment of Islamic cultural centres, at both the national and international levels. (Chisaan 2011, 294–95)

This is an exciting moment in Indonesia’s leadership of the Afro-Asiatic *umma*. Rather than to be only on the receiving end of Arab Muslim-ness, Indonesia defined and disseminated Islamic culture, offering models of cultural practice and aesthetic standards. This stance—that arts, culture, and aesthetics are part and parcel of an Islamic life—is one that is repeated, reinforced, and indeed debated through the actions of individuals and organizations to the present day.⁹

The *Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an* at the second Bandung conference originates with the extraordinary acts of ordinary individuals.¹⁰ Their history, as far as I can piece it together, is worth recounting here. We center on the figure of Basori Alwi (1927–2020), renowned Quranic, educator, competition judge, recording artist, and author known for developing and popularizing the melodic recitation of the Qur'an, usually referred to in Arabic as the *mujawwad* style. Like many reciters he learned the Arab melodies for reciting from other Indonesian reciters and from the records (*piringan hitam*) and cassettes of Egyptian reciters that circulated among students and audiences and on the radio.

It is recounted that beginning in the 1950s before the *subuh*, morning prayers, Alwi and four of his friends performed *tarhim* (A.) or *sholawat* (I.), songs in praise of the prophet Muhammad, and verses of the Qur'an at the ancient Ampel Mosque in Surabaya, East Java. The mosque is still a site of worship and pilgrimage to the grave of Sunan Ampel, 1401–1481, one of the nine saints or Wali Songo who introduced Islam to Java.¹¹ The singing and recitation by Alwi and his friends caught the attention of the locals, and his group subsequently launched a regular Friday evening *Laylatil Qur'an*, or evening of the Qur'an. The coalition of interested reciters spawned an organization of male and female reciters and memorizers, from across Java and beyond. Finally, the *Jam'iyyatul Qurra' wal Huffadh* (Association of Reciters and Memorizers) was formally established in 1951 by K. H. Wahid Hasyim, Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs. The organization exists to the present day. Founding member Basori Alwi was invited to recite for President Sukarno at the palace, then to appear at the inaugural KAA in 1955, and then to assist in the planning of the first international competition in Quranic recitation, *musabaqah tilawatil quran*, or MTQ, held at the KIAA in 1965. Immediately following Bandung 2.0, Alwi and two colleagues embarked on a government-sponsored mission to nine Arab nations, along with Pakistan and India, using recitation or *tilawa* as their *alat* (tool) or *cara* (method/style) of *diplomasi* (diplomacy).

TILAWAH AS SPECTACLE

I momentarily pause this historical reconstruction to convey something of the spectacle of Quranic recitation as public performance.¹² A reciter (male or female) typically approaches the stage or place of performance, dressed appropriately in Busana Muslim, and with a posture of modesty. Reciters, *qari'* (m.) or *qari'a* (f.) often sit on the floor as is common practice for many social occasions. The reciter prepares, breathing in deeply, and then begins their recitation (*maqra'*) in the very lowest grumble at the bottom of their vocal range. As their recitation progresses, she or he interprets the Arabic words (*kalimat*) of the verses (*ayat*) of the Qur'an's 114 chapters (*surat*), matching text to tune, progressing through the expected paths (*seyer*) of the *maqamat* (pl.), climbing up and up in their vocal range, embroidering

phrases with ornamentation and variations. It is commonly recounted that the Qur'an in Indonesia was likely chanted first with local melodies and *lagu Makkawi* or Meccan *maqamat* transmitted through the experience of the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca and the tutorials of early traders and teachers. The Meccan melodies were dramatically superseded by the musical language of Egypt around the 1950s. An official publication of the Indonesian government's Division for the Development of the Qur'an (*Lembaga Pengembangan Tiwatil Qur'an*) within the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*Departamen Agama*) notes that the Quranic arts, were "enlivened" (*diramaikan*) by the beloved Egyptian reciters who, beginning in 1955, systematically visited Indonesia during the month of Ramadan. Their visits and the institutionalization of Quranic learning, reinforced by the developing competition system, were bolstered by the recordings (*piringan hitam*) of these Egyptian masters that circulated among the public and on the radio (Rasmussen 2010b, chapter 3). And there is no question that the Egyptian reciters took back with them as souvenirs the stories of young, enthusiastic, Indonesian men and women. As the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Division for the Development of Quranic Recitation extolls:

By 1955 there had developed a revolution of Quranic melodies that heretofore had been in the Makkawi style (in the style of Mecca). The melodies became Mishry (from Egypt, Ar. Misr) because of the influence of the Egyptian reciters, especially Syeikh Abdul Basith Abdus-Shamad and Syeikh Shiddiq al-Minsyawy. (LPTQ 1994, 18–19)

To recall Ricci's *Islam Translated* (2011), the *experience* of the language, especially Quranic Arabic with its qualities of sacrality, power, prestige, and untranslatability, may eclipse the *understanding* of the language. Although recitation is a solo act, its context is communal and meant to reach the ears of the masses. In Indonesia as elsewhere in the Islamic world, it is common for audiences, sometimes numbering in the hundreds or thousands, to participate in a reciter's performance by humming the landing note of a vocalized phrase during the pregnant pauses between lines and by exclaiming Arabic expressions of exhilaration and acknowledgment aloud, a process that A. J. Racy (2003) describes as "creative listening." Furthermore, recitation is not only cast as functional ritual, it is also athletic and showy, demanding a great degree of physical effort and expertise on the part of male and female reciters, something that is palpable, perceived, and appreciated by audiences, the majority of whom have also at least practiced at recitation themselves, at some point in their lives (Rasmussen 2011). I submit that with its best reciters in the show, Bandung 2.0 cultivated a sense of shared aesthetics within what Ho (2017) has promoted as "Inter-Asia . . . an old world crisscrossed by interactions between parts that have known and recognized one another for centuries." Thus, cultural capital among the Bandung participants was shared not only through discourse but also through practices that participants could experience and bring home.¹³

AUDIBLE *DAKWAH* AND KIAI HAJI RIF'AT'S HAFLAH
AL-QUR'AN VIRTUAL¹⁴

Muzammil Hasballah, the millennial, hipster, skateboarder, influencer, reciter described at the outset of this piece taps into the contemporary modernist *cosmopolis* of Inter-Asia. His cool style references physical and material techniques that are outside of the framework of the recitation world as it developed (*berkembang*) and was broadcast (*menyebarkan*) beginning in Sukarno's Bandung era and throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Muzammil's *Al-Rahman* resonates on the one hand with the Saudi Arabian soft power soundscape (Jones 2021, 173; Rasmussen 2022), while also calling out to half a century of Islamic popular music groups from Bimbo, to Snada, to Sabyan. Let's listen to the flip side.

During the spring of 2021, a research team comprising Dadi Darmadi, Muhammad As'ad, and myself invited Kiai Haji Rif'at Abi Syahid (quoted earlier) to join our online Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with professional Quranic reciters and educators. This was the time when people worldwide were reeling from the pandemic and adapting to recommendations to quarantine, social distance, and wait for the COVID vaccine to be developed. K. H. Rif'at, director of two large boarding schools (*pesantren*) and secretary of the West Java committee of Nahdlatul Ulema (NU, the largest Muslim social organization in the country), a member of the brotherhood of mosque *imams* (callers to prayer), and a *mutawwif*, or guide for the *Hajj* and *Umrah*, told our group about the experience of hosting a *Haflah-t-al-Qur'an* on zoom. While not ideal, the format allowed for several international participants to join, particularly the sensation, Sheikh Rajai Ayoub from Tanzania.¹⁵

So, I think it turns out that this pandemic also provides a kind of avenue for us to be creative, yes, including making international *haflah-s* through zoom meetings. It is true that what we love, [we can experience] through zoom, it is not as beautiful as in live, because we can't set the sound system and so on. But in my opinion, there (through zoom) we can see and hear the authenticity of the reciter's sound without amplification or effects. It's amazing, we can listen to Sheikh Ayoub's authentic voice without the echo effect and the delay effect and it's amazing. Even though the participants are far away; the view is very close. That's how that emotional connection works, in the zoom room we feel very, very close. (pers. comm. K. H. Rif'at, April 22, 2021)

We see with this last example that the reciters in the “*umma* below the winds” (Laffan 2003) are part of a communal sound world within an Indian-Ocean-Asia-Africa. It is an ancient predisposition that has proved resilient to political and scholarly categorization by nation, race, class, gender, and religion, and that has been boosted by the capacities of today's internet and social media. This final example of audible, mobile *dakwah* joins with the numerous examples cited in this volume and beyond that compose the Indian Ocean soundscape throughout history and in the contemporary moment.

It is stunning to realize that the *Konferensi Islam Asia Afrika* occurred in March 1965 and that just a few months later, on September 30, 1965, six generals were murdered, setting into motion (1) the genocide of nearly a million more citizens thought to have associations with the communist party, (2) the fall of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, and (3) the rise to power of Indonesia's second president, Suharto, who, backed by the United States and its allies, ruled from 1966 to 1998. As the second-largest independent nation after India, Indonesia had been poised to guide a postcolonial Asia-Africa toward the path of political, social, and cultural Indian Ocean interconnectivity of the *longue durée* (see Tagliacozzo 2009; Lavin this volume; Alpers 2014; Boulos, Danielson, and Rasmussen 2021; Bose 2006; Al-Harthy and Rasmussen 2012). While the nonaligned movement as envisioned was never realized as a political outcome, the cultural materials of its travelers and the soundings of its recreation and ritual continue to resonate in the atmosphere and in the spirit of Bandung 2.0. To give the last word to Carlos Romulo, the Philippine delegate from a Christian and Catholic Asia and who, according to Richard Wright, "made the most race-conscious and stinging speech of all" (1956, 150): "The handwriting of history is spread on the wall; but not everybody reads there."

NOTES

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOdi8cxR9xY MH, *Surat al-Rahman* with congregation. www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_47v5-7l9s MH, *Surat al-Rahman* in the studio. www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mYgb1tF7c4 MH, seated at a desk, tutorial of 8 *maqamat*.

2. Note that *konferensi* often appears as *konperensi*. The *f* in English and Arabic often converts to a *p* in Bahasa Indonesia.

3. Piety as demonstrated by folkways, to include dress, cuisine, and consumption, has been noted by numerous if not the majority of scholars of Indian Ocean Islam. On recent trends of the fine line between demonstrating piety and showing off (*riya'*), see Hussein and Slama (2018); Husein (2017); and Jones (2021). See also Harnish and Rasmussen (2011) for fourteen case studies of musically oriented *dakwah*.

4. Such expressions, whether material or audible, are conveyed both digitally and live, or in Indonesian pandemic parlance: *daring* and *luring* or online and offline—from *dalam* (inside) *jaringan* (the network) and *luar* (outside) the network (*jaringan*). "Hearing Islam in the Atmosphere" is a chapter in my 2010 book.

5. See Rasmussen (2022). I borrow "aesthetic disobedience" from philosopher Jonathan Neufeld. For more on the technicalities of recitation, see Rasmussen (2010b), chapter 3.

6. In her 2022 article, Marie-Claire Hefner describes a play, *Islam Yang Mana*, the title of which summarizes the angst among Indonesians to measure up to Islam as it is practiced in the Arab world and Middle East. See also Harnish and Rasmussen (2011).

7. The Qur'an is not made by a human and the melody of the recitation should be improvised, based on a spontaneous compilation of already internalized and appropriate materials. Like instrumental improvisation, recitation should not be rehearsed and re-sounded over and over in the same way. That would render it a human and individual creation. What reciters are trying to do is to model an archetype in the moment of performance (Nelson 1985; Racy 2003; Rasmussen 2010b, chapter 3).

8. Chisaan's work on LESBUMI (The Institute of Indonesian Muslim Artists and Cultural Figures) Political Strategy of Culture that is under the wing of Indonesia's largest Islamic social organization,

Nahdlatul Ulama, is extensive (see Chisaan 2008). LESBUMI leaders have also figured consistently in my own research.

9. Chisaan mentions at least six other organizations, in addition to LESBUMI and HSBI, in Indonesia whose mission it was to identify, define, and promote various aspects of Islamic art and culture. The insistence among people “in the business of religion” that religious praxis is artistic and aesthetic is the scaffolding of much of my own work. That religion and art, and by extension the involvement of women in both, are compatible are positions that must constantly be safeguarded from accusations by a conservative, hard-line, ill-informed patriarchy from within and outside of the country. Much of this defense is accomplished through both discursive and nondiscursive modes, such as material and audible *dakwah*.

10. This reconstruction is enabled through a number of sources, listed in the references as: Basori Alwi Obituary; LPTQ Nasional; Pesantren Ilmu al-Qur’an, Sejarah Asal . . . ; Shalihah; Sjafari; and recent discussions with Maria Ulfah and Mukhtar Ikhsan.

11. See, for example, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ug69omzRUZw. While Sunan Ampel’s father was Javanese, his mother was a princess from Champa, present-day Vietnam, where he was born. Sunan Ampel does not migrate to Java until 1443, marries the daughter of a Chinese captain, and is likely descended through his father’s lineage from an Arab family from the Hadramout, true embodiment of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism.

12. Examples abound on YouTube of both the public recitation of the Qur’an and/or Quranic competitions and of Indonesian and international competitions (*Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur’an*). A *Haflah* (party) or *Layla* (night) of Quranic recitation can occur at a private home or as part of a larger celebration or competition.

13. In the case of the Bandung conferences, Inter-Asia extended to much of the African world as well.

14. I attribute the privilege of continuous communication with the family of Pondok Pesantren Al Qur’an Al-Falah and Al-Falah II in Cicalengka to my longtime research partner Dadi Darmadi of the Universitas Islam Negeri. The patriarch of these schools, K. H. Ahmad Syahid (1945–2017) figures importantly in my 2010 book.

15. K. H. Rifat respects Qari’ Rajai Ayoub not only because of his breath control (*nafas panjang*) but also for the originality of his ornaments and phrasing and his *thouq*, an Arabic term having to do with feeling and soul. He has invited the Tanzanian reciter, both live and virtually, to Indonesia. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtCVLfdZ4sg, Qari Rajai Ayoub reciting at a haflah in Pakistan—note the tips showered upon him. Tipping is a Pakistani tradition that you would not see in Indonesia. See also www.youtube.com/watch?v=FF-q2sOjrV8, Qari Rajai Ayoub reciting at a haflah in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Check the beginning of the clip and then again from 8’30” to 10’ to appreciate the dramatic shift in range, extraordinary breath control, and the way the crowd interacts with the soloist. The other guest reciter at this event is from Egypt.

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Epilogue

Global Indian Ocean(s) and the Promise of a Decolonial World

Julia Byl and Jim Sykes

In 2019, Jim traded in his “professor” hat for one labeled “concert booker and tour manager”: a musical group he’d worked with in Singapore asked him to book a US tour of a few East Coast universities. The group, Siva Sakthi Muniandy Urumi Melam (hereafter SSMUM), is composed of an ever-shifting roster of young Tamil males belonging to Singapore’s Indian minority (9 percent of the population).¹ The genre SSMUM plays, *urumi melam*, centers on the uniquely sonorous urumi drum, which is thought to generate and sustain trance in ritual contexts. Today, urumi groups are ubiquitous at Hindu festivals in Singapore and Malaysia (most notably Thaipusam, the largest Hindu festival in the region), where they accompany devotees undergoing penance.² Live performances of the top urumi ensembles garner many YouTube views, particularly in Malaysia, where the genre emerged in its modern configuration.³ The group’s most well-known video, “Karuppu,” had 595,000 views at the time of writing—no small feat considering Singapore’s small size.⁴ Before visiting the States, SSMUM had already toured Australia and Tamil Nadu.

Throughout their US trip, the group members wore matching red hoodies at all times with the group’s logo emblazoned on the front. Upon arrival in New York, they headed promptly to Times Square, where Jim found himself sheepish at the city’s infamous grubbiness—though the musicians seemed to enjoy themselves (figure 15.1). SSMUM’s first performance was at the City University of New York, where they shared a bill with New York-based Tamil Hindu musicians of Surinamese descent.⁵ Both parties seemed excited to witness their Tamil diasporic identities reflected back on one another, and they approached each other with curiosity and camaraderie. In contrast to the Singapore group’s use of the urumi



FIGURE 15.1. Siva Shakthi Muniandy Urumi Melam in Times Square, New York City. Photo by Jim Sykes.

and *thavil* drums, the Suriname performance shifted from songs using harmonium to frame drumming (*thappu*).

After the performance, a lively discussion with the audience ensued and moved in a direction that Jim had not anticipated. Some in the crowd were local Hindus (non-Tamils), including many African American converts. One audience member asked why there were no women in the group, and the answer (women's impurity in ritual contexts) created a small uproar. SSMUM turned diplomatic and apologetic. Emerging in a rather confrontational, stereotypically American way, the gender criticism forced the group to question their beliefs about the exclusion of women from their practices. The packed auditorium was the site of multidirectional learning, with comparisons emerging between Caribbean and Southeast Asian diasporic experiences, and North American and Tamil Hindu religious perspectives.

This small example—SSMUM in NYC—provides a fresh perspective on the well-worn theme of Indian Ocean mobilities. Moving beyond ethnomusicology's land-centric area studies paradigm does not mean bounding the Indian Ocean between its coasts. On the contrary, Indian Ocean musics and musicians are global—and they have been for a long time. Writing about “waves” is a bit cliché, but the metaphor describes the differences that emerge through the (re)circulation of Indian Ocean cultures. Thus we conclude this epilogue by turning from Jim's anecdote, situated in the Indian Ocean's globally emergent twenty-first century, to an earlier time in which Indian Ocean musics washed up in New York City during the heady days of postcolonial independence movements.

In NYC in 1960, Miriam Makeba recorded an “Indonesian lullaby” called “Suliram” for her eponymous album on RCA Victor (Makeba 1960). Julia first heard it in college in the mid-1990s, but when she enrolled in Indonesian classes as a graduate student at the University of Michigan, she was surprised to find that she could understand Makeba's words.⁶ This intelligibility remained a bit of serendipity, though, forgotten when the music was turned off. But just recently, as Julia was reading the chapter in this volume by Sylvia Bruinders and Valmont Layne on

Cape Malay music, she wondered: could “Suliram” have been inspired by Makeba’s own listening practices in her home country of South Africa?

The song itself is a folk tradition that is known across the Malay world. “Suliram” is popular among Western choral arrangers, and Cape Town is referenced in *Rise Again*, a songbook printed by the storied Sing Out! organization: “Miriam Makeba recorded ‘Suliram’ after hearing it from Malay/Indonesian descendants of slaves brought to Africa by the Dutch several hundred years ago” (Blood and Patterson 2015, 162). Here, reader, your age may be revealed as surely as Julia’s was above, for if you are of a certain generation, you might associate “Suliram” not with Miriam Makeba but with the folk-music group The Weavers, whose most famous member, Pete Seeger, recorded it in 1953 and performed it in concerts for decades.⁷ Indeed, the Sing Out! songbook asserts, “Pete Seeger learned the same song in 1949 from a young Indonesian who was passing through New York,” whose name (we find out from the liner notes of a Pete Seeger concert at Bowdoin College) was Mas Daroesman (Place 2011, 16). (Who was Mas Daroesman, and what was he was doing in New York City in the very year of Indonesian independence? This remains a mystery—at least, to us.)⁸ Taken together, these NYC “Suliram” stories demonstrate the mobility and global relevance of a song from an Indian Ocean island, infused with the hope of the postwar period—one whose waves stretch beyond these incidents, both chronologically and geographically.

This story, too, has a Caribbean connection. Miriam Makeba transformed from South African musician to activist (Mama Africa) under the mentorship of Harry Belafonte, who himself had helped ignite pan-African activism with the music of his parents’ native Jamaica and the political discourse of Trinidadian Calypsonians. Belafonte recorded “Suliram” in 1959, and the vocal harmonization and tempo of the song (but most especially its second verse, sung *a cappella* with awkward syllabic accents that could only come from a non-Indonesian speaker) are consistent from Seeger to Belafonte to Makeba.

Now, contrast this with a Malaysian film clip of the song from 1962, “Suliram,” featuring singers playing with Malay literary conventions.⁹ The song also alternates between solo and chorus, but the words of the soloist are infused with literary tropes taken from the courtly tradition. The lyrics also contain *pantun* phrasing—a genre, folk and elite, in which a singer or poet pairs a formulaic couplet (of no connection to song) with corresponding rhymes that provide the true meaning of the quatrain. This element was missed by the liner note writers, who translated the lyrics to “Suliram” literally, leading to incongruous words about water buffalo sacrifice in a “lullaby.”¹⁰

Although the 1962 “Suliram” is set within Malay village life—with its bucolic images of women weaving bamboo—it also references multiple Indian Ocean histories. The namesake of the film it is part of, *Tun Fatimah* (Ghani 1962), was the powerful consort of the Sultan of Malacca who was instrumental in defending the kingdom from Portuguese attacks in the early 1500s. The prophet Muhammad’s

daughter is referenced in her very name; her father, Tun Mutahir, was of Tamil Muslim descent (Windstedt 1938, 12); and their ancestors figure in the Malay epic *Sejarah Melayu/Sulalatus Salatin* (circa AH 1021; 1612 CE). By spinning this history into a musical number, featuring cosmopolitan violins and vocal harmonies along with village handicrafts, “Suriram” participates in what Adil Johan [2018, 20] calls “the intertextual articulation of nation-making that reflected the contestations, aspirations, and paradoxes of the independence era in the Malay peninsula.” It is worth noting that the Malay film industry, too, is a broader Indian Ocean story: consider that *Tun Fatimah*’s director, Salleh Ghani, was discovered and mentored by the formidable film producer B. S. (Balbir Singh) Rajhans, a man from a Punjabi Sikh family, raised in Calcutta, who grew up in Singapore, and claims as his first film the Islamicate classic *Laila Majnun* (Noh and Mohammad 2021, 28).

In 1965, the same year as the Asia-Africa Conference discussed by Anne Rasmussen (whose chapter begins this volume’s concluding section), Makeba and Belafonte collaborated on “Malaika” (RCA Victor LSP-3420), a Swahili-language song whose composition is contested within Kenya and Tanzania—but whose words are nonetheless known throughout the Swahili coast and beyond. Regardless of Makeba’s incorrect pronunciation of Swahili poetry, the song is received with pride for the respect its recording conveyed. Ethnomusicologist Jean Kidula has remarked to us that Makeba’s association of the song with Tanzania is itself a function of that country’s role in providing political refuge from South Africa during the long apartheid period,¹¹ creating a new political, social, and musical network along the east African coast. Makeba’s Indian Ocean connections thus move in multiple directions.

In performing “Suliram,” we suggest, Makeba was not reflecting her own experience of Cape Malay choral singing (though she may certainly have heard the tradition). Rather, she was participating in a decolonial musical project that promised to place Africa and the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, and the United States on equal footing. This utopian project of an egalitarian world of recordings is, of course, as vexed and unrealized in 2023 as it was in 1965. Recall that the apartheid regime’s “homelands policy” used the first linguistic and ethnic association of African citizens “to police and restrict the circulation of acoustic assemblages between listening entities” (Titus 2022, 19). For musicians like Makeba, being heard in English and other international languages was a freedom indeed. Yet the global status of English in pop music comes with imperial overtones. The assumption that Makeba was transmitting the Malay song “authentically” and directly from Malay sources was a constraint never applied to Seeger. In contrast, we—Jim and Julia, two white, Anglophone scholars working in an academy structured to support us—see ourselves all too well in Pete Seeger’s recording: speaking languages not our own, received as experts for transmitting the songs of others, and likely mispronouncing their words at that.¹²

The current decolonial shift in music studies—a vastly unrealized project that nevertheless proceeds apace—is matched, perhaps, by the promise of the Indian Ocean as a decolonial space—constituted by performances across the region, from hip-hop and punk to traditional music genres, performed on stages, Zoom, YouTube, and countless elsewhere. Networks of songs in Swahili, Malay, Tamil, Arabic, and beyond are not only connecting their native speakers across vast distances but also reaching audiences in one or more of these other Indian Ocean networks.

In this volume, we have facilitated a shared discourse between the authors of the essays, but our broader goal is for dialogue among an emerging readership as broad and diverse as the Indian Ocean itself (assisted by the egalitarian mechanism of open access). And we look forward to future work by scholars living and working in the Indian Ocean region. Makeba’s “Suliram” made it back to the Cape Malay community in Bo-Kaap and on to Ann Arbor and Indonesia, where it was transformed in new ways; “Malaika” continues to resound throughout Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa, Canada, and beyond. So too, we hope this book—and the insights of its authors and the communities that formed their knowledge—will circulate throughout the Indian Ocean, engendering further documentation of the region’s musics and their resonant waves.

NOTES

1. Many Singapore Indians descend from laborers who worked in the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Malacca, Dinding, and Penang) or on plantations or in cities (like Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh) that belonged to the Federated and Unfederated Malay States, all part of British colonial Malaya. Today, Singapore Indians are diverse, numbering about 360,000 of the resident population and 700,000 total; Tamils still constitute the majority (Sinha 2007). The number of Malaysian Indians is higher, roughly two million (7 percent of Malaysia’s population).

2. They also play in some secular contexts, such as state-sponsored cultural events, school gatherings, and weddings.

3. One of the most famous Malaysian groups is called Masana Kali.

4. www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tXpv4iJ4mE.

5. The latter were the interlocutors of a CUNY doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology, Stephanie George, who organized the joint concert.

6. At the time of writing, a wonderful live performance of the song by Makeba was available on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=knt4XZ9Gb9w.

7. See, e.g., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGDzhK6Z_6E.

8. Curiously, a Dutch colonial almanac lists Mas Daroesman, “doctor Djawa,” as a weather observer in Riau, a likely place for learning a Malay lullaby (Koninklijke Magentisch en Meteorologisch Observatorium te Batavia: 213).

9. At the time of writing, this version of the song was found on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=subtnez9viM.

10. We leave you to make your own comparisons with “Mbube”—first recorded by South African singer Solomon Linda but made famous decades later when a version by The Tokens, whose lyrics were added through a similar chain of transfiguration, was made famous by *The Lion King*.

11. Jean Kidula, personal communication, July 23, 2023.

12. We are reminded of the comment by General Carlos P. Romulo of the Philippines made at the 1955 Bandung Conference that the gathering represented “[an] important manifestation of a conscious, deliberate, banding-together of the non-white world against the white” (cited in Rasmussen, this volume).

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