A spectrogram background with a color palette of green, yellow, and orange, showing various frequency patterns. The top and bottom of the cover feature this spectrogram, while the middle section is a solid olive green.

SOUNDING ISLAM

VOICE, MEDIA, *and*
SONIC ATMOSPHERES
in an INDIAN OCEAN WORLD

PATRICK EISENLOHR

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Sounding Islam

Sounding Islam

*Voice, Media, and Sonic Atmospheres
in an Indian Ocean World*



Patrick Eisenlohr



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

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Sounding Islam

ECHO

In August 2011, I was sitting in Farhad's living room in a village in northeast Mauritius. Farhad is an Urdu teacher and a locally well-known reciter of *na't*, a popular genre of devotional Urdu poetry in honor of the Prophet Muhammad. We were talking about different ways of reciting this genre when Farhad reached for his mobile phone and played a recording by the well-known Pakistani reciter of *na't* (*na't khwan*) Owais Qadri. The short audio clip featured a very strong echo effect so that every word, every syllable was audibly repeated several times, the sound of the poetry blurring in this way, with only the beginning of the two lines of poetry "yā khudā" (O God) being clearly intelligible to us. With a critical look on his face Farhad remarked, "Do you hear this? This is Owais Qadri with echo. This is not good. What you just heard is from a *mahfil* [devotional gathering] with an audience. Now listen to this."

He switched to a different recording. "Now I make you listen to a *na't* by Qari Fasihuddin [Syed Fasihuddin Soharwardi, a well-known Pakistani *na't khwan*] in a studio, where all the facilities for echo, the microphone, all the apparatuses needed, are already there."

Āe ishq-e nabī mere	O love of the Prophet
Dil mein bhī samā jānā	Reside in my heart as well
Āe ishq-e nabī mere . . .	O love of the Prophet . . .

Farhad went on: "This is Qari Fasihuddin; you hear the simplicity of it, even with all the studio equipment." Indeed, there was a marked difference between the

two recordings, with Soharwardi's recitation being clearly intelligible. However, a discernable reverb effect underlying the studio recording was also evident in this second recording, which Farhad played for me as an example of a "simple" recitational style. Farhad continued:

Two years ago a Pakistani na't khwan came to Plaine des Papayes [a village in northern Mauritius], and he found the microphone and amplifier the hosts had ready not good enough—it had no echo. He just packed up and left without reciting! But Qari Fasihuddin Soharwardi is a *sayyid* [a descendant of the Prophet] and my favorite na't khwan. When he is reciting, he closes his eyes as if he were not even there, and he does not care about whether there is a microphone or not. Others demand digital microphones with echo, very loud. But if there is no microphone, a true lover of the Prophet will recite nevertheless.

For Farhad, exaggerated technical effects in the performance and circulation of this Muslim devotional genre stand in the way of piety. Even so, for him, technical renderings of the reciting voice of the na't khwan make it possible for the voice to exert its power—to stir love for the Prophet Muhammad in those listening. But as Farhad pointed out, "Some na't khwan even recite with a recorded 'background' *zikh* [a devotional rhythmic repetition of the names of God common in Sufism], 'Allah, Allah,' but using such a 'background' for a recital is forbidden. A lot of Pakistani na't khwan are doing that. Ulema [Islamic scholars and jurists] in Bareilly Sharif have issued a fatwa against it, and in Mauritius all na't khwan have stopped using it."¹

Even though Farhad rejected the kind of technological artifice in the reproduction of vocal sound he considered exaggerated, clearly the mode of recitation he favors also relies on sound reproduction and studio techniques, such as a reverb effect. The latter suggests to listeners sound extending into a wide space, giving the sound a somewhat ethereal quality. Farhad's reactions to the two audio clips he played for me thus evocatively speak to the problem of the technicity of religion and to the anxieties surrounding it. One basic insight that has propelled research on media and religion in recent years is the inseparability of religious practices from media, including their technical dimensions. Commenting on such inseparability, Hent de Vries has pointed out that "mediatization and the technology it entails form the condition of possibility for all revelation, for its revealability, so to speak. An element of technicity belongs to the realm of the 'transcendental,' and vice versa" (de Vries 2001: 28). But for Farhad, an excess of such technicity can undermine the seriousness of such religious mediations. After some na't khwan became very popular and started to experiment with new technical effects that transformed the sound of their voices, Farhad found that "this does not sound right; na't has become too much a kind of banter [*badinaz*], just entertainment to make money." For him, the technical reproduction of voice central to the recitation of na't and other Islamic practices of engaging with the divine was a normal, almost

banal feature of the tradition he cultivates. Its technicity and artifice were unproblematic as long as these did not interfere with what the reproduced vocal sound conveyed—namely, the presence of the divine. The presence of the divine, however, depends on technical forms of mediation. As Jacques Derrida has remarked about such presence produced through technical mediation in religious settings: “This effect of presence cannot be erased by any critique” (Derrida 2001: 85). But for Farhad, a perceived excess of artifice in the technical reproduction of voice could also detract from such presence, making the entire pious exercise useless.

Farhad’s concerns about the “right” vocal sounds in recorded performances of na’t raise the question of what the sonic effects of the voice consist of. For Farhad, as for my other interlocutors in Mauritius, this was a difficult question to answer. He found it hard to fully describe what the “right” kind of reciting actually was. But when he played the two audio clips for me, Farhad knew which sound was good and had the right effect on listeners. The exaggerated echo effect in the recording by Owais Qadri did not deliver it, but the recorded voice of Qari Fasihuddin Soharwardi touched Farhad. Farhad was pointing to a sonic presence that was difficult to render into language. What does such sonic presence involve, why does it appear to be ineffable, and how does it act on those perceiving it? In this book I engage with these questions by addressing the issue of atmosphere in the sonic dimensions of religion. Examining the intersection of voice and technical media in a Muslim devotional context, I argue that the analytics of transduction and atmospheres that I lay out in the following chapters can provide a better understanding of sound in religion.

SOUND AND ISLAM

Sounding Islam is a study of the sonic dimensions of religion, combining perspectives from the anthropology of media, the anthropology of semiotic mediation, and sound studies. Its setting is Mauritius, including a transnational world of Islamic networks in the Indian Ocean region linking Mauritius with India. Based on my long-term ethnographic research on devotional Islam in Mauritius conducted between 2003 and 2011, I investigate in this book how the voice as a site of divine manifestation becomes refracted in media practices that have become integral parts of religion. I account for the key role of the technical reproduction of voice in Islam in the regional context I describe, while rethinking the relationship of religion, voice, and media. Flows of sonic media undergird Islamic networks and authority in the Indian Ocean region, creating transnational religious publics. This part of the world has a long history of trans-oceanic links and is sometimes considered to be the “cradle of globalization” (Moorthy and Jamal 2010: 9).

Focusing on an Islamic setting, I approach the embodied voice as the crucial mediator that brings Mauritian Muslims to God while aligning them with a particular South Asian reformist Islamic tradition through performance. The notions of

transduction and sonic atmosphere are of key importance here. They allow one to investigate the sonic aspects of religion beyond previous approaches to the voice in religion, which have emphasized, above all, its metaphoric aspects. Transduction and atmosphere point to the role of energetic flows and movement in sonic events, which provoke perceptions and bodily sensations that can be described in semiotic terms but are not exhausted by them. This may recall previous discussions about the “autonomy of affect” from meaning (Massumi 2002). However, in contrast to most versions of affect theory, I stress the close entanglements between transduction, atmosphere, and signification. I show how the force of sonic atmospheres merges with discursively elaborated religious themes. Mauritian Muslims often engage in the type of mediated religious performances I analyze in order to gain what for them is a more direct connection to the divine, an experience they describe as literally being touched and seized by a reciting voice. Focusing on *na't*, I examine the emergence of such seemingly immediate experiences of the divine through transduction—that is, the effect on performing devotees of what scholars in the field of sound studies call the “auditory real” (Cox 2011: 153–155, cf. Kittler 1999 [1986]: 16). Taking this sonic dimension seriously, in *Sounding Islam* I trace the impact of voice and its circulation through technologies of sound reproduction on religious sensations.

In the humanities and social sciences, approaches to the study of sound have been split between the idea that sound itself has the power to affect bodies—an assumption associated with the concepts of affect and the “auditory real” current among a range of scholars in the field of sound studies—and the notion that cultural practices centered on the self and the body invest sound with power, a notion prevalent among anthropologists and historians, including some scholars in sound studies. Drawing on an analytic of atmospheres and the phenomenology of the felt-body (*Leib*) in distinction to the physical body (*Körper*), I propose overcoming this divide. *Sounding Islam* is centered on an account of how these two dimensions of the power of sound interact. The sonic is powerful in itself; but culturally attuned bodies and selves also ascribe power to sound. As I explain later on, sounds contain suggestions of movement that bodies perceive. However, in order for sonic suggestions of movement to seize someone in a religious setting like those I describe in this book, they also must pass through bodily attunement and interact with religious and cultural values and ideologies that mediate the power of sound.

My work builds on previous treatments of the voice in sociocultural and linguistic anthropology. Anthropologists have stressed the key role of the embodied voice to articulate subject positions and to perform alignments with forms of social and cultural value. But my book also departs from these approaches, as it assigns the sonic dimensions of the voice a more central position, without falling into psychoanalytic essentializations ascribing prehistorical or precultural roles and characteristics to the voice. I hereby intervene in larger debates about vocal

sound and media in the social sciences and humanities that so far have been characterized by the split mentioned above, between scholars emphasizing the historically variable significations of sound (Bull and Back 2003, Feld et al. 2004, Samuels et al. 2010), and those taking sound and its attendant media as prime occasions for an affective turn that accounts for the ways that sound affects, articulates, and touches human bodies (Evans 2002, Shouse 2005, Schrimshaw 2013). Aiming to overcome this rift, I emphasize in the following chapters the deep entanglement of these two approaches, showing how vocal sound in devotional Islamic contexts sonically enacts suggestions of movement that figure in more than metaphoric ways on the narratives, values, and imagery of a particular Islamic tradition.

Following this intellectual route, my analysis contributes to the current rethinking of the category of religion, which has seen a large-scale shift, from a focus on belief and philological research on doctrinal content, to performance, public embodied practice, and the sensual dimensions of religion (Asad 1993, 2003, de Vries 2008). It draws on the rapidly growing literature on media and religion (Meyer and Moors 2006, Engelke 2010, Hirschkind 2006, Eisenlohr 2009, 2011a, Schulz 2012, Stollow 2005; see also Eisenlohr 2012 for an overview), addressing how religious presence, or the felt proximity of the divine, comes about as a result of media practices (Blanton 2015). In investigating uses of sonic media, the book specifically takes forward the study of “religious sensations” (Meyer 2008), a theme that also speaks to a broader anthropology of the senses (Howes 2003, Porcello et al. 2010, Stoller 1989). Research in the latter field has shown how such sensations are rooted in the particularities of historical paradigms and contexts. Understanding the relationships between sound, bodily affection, and signification also necessitates an account of what I call the transductive elements of religion. Taking the example of the sonic dimensions of the reciting voice, I show how sonic events also revolve around the transduction of energy from one state to another, generating sonic atmospheres that enter into relation with historically specific religious traditions. In doing so, I contribute to the exploration of the key role that media, in this case technologies of sound reproduction, play in shaping religious practices and sensibilities.

Work on the sonic dimensions of religion has not quite generated the same amount of interest as studies on religion and visual culture, and this has prompted some to critically remark on the “deafness” of the study of religion (Weiner 2009: 897) that reflects a long-standing ocular centrality of North Atlantic intellectual traditions. Nevertheless, the recent sensorial and media turns in the study of religion have also led to a marked surge in interest in sonic religion (Hackett 2012, Wilke and Moebus 2011, Gerety 2017). In anthropology, a main pioneer of the study of culture through the medium of sound is Steven Feld (1982, 1996). Feld coined the concept of *acoustemology*, or ways of knowing and engaging with human and environmental worlds through sound, a notion that has inspired other scholars working on the sonic dimensions of religion (Eisenberg 2013, Macdonald 2013).

Building on this notion, I aim, in this book, to expand anthropological approaches to sound through the analytic of transduction and atmospheres.

One major cross-disciplinary focus of research on sound and religion is the relationship between sounds, religious spaces, and political belonging. Analyzing the “acoustic territories” (Labelle 2010) and geographies of urban sound (Wissmann 2014) religion, scholars in anthropology, religious studies, geography, and other disciplines have investigated how religious sounds produce urban spaces, both sacralizing and dividing lived environments in religiously diverse settings. As these sounds permeate urban space, they frequently imply claims by religiously defined communities of belonging to a locality, which are sometimes contested (Oosterbaan 2009, Sykes 2015, de Witte 2016). These studies have shown how religious sounds that are performed in public directly impinge on questions of citizenship (David 2012, de Witte 2016). This is a dynamic especially evident for Islamic sounds in diverse urban settings (Moors and Jouili 2014, McMurray 2012). In particular, the Islamic call for prayer (*azan*) has become the focus of controversies and has triggered local debates about Muslims’ right to the city and overall political belonging (Lee 1999, Tamimi Arab 2015, 2017, Weiner 2014). In addition to the *azan*, other Islamic sounds, such as public sermons and genres of praise poetry, add to the contests over sonic space (Schulz 2012, Larkin 2014, Eisenberg 2013). This line of study has illustrated the interlocking of the spatiality of religious sounds and the problem of cultural citizenship (Rosaldo 1994).

Another strand of research has focused on the role of religious sounds in ethical listening, particularly in Islamic settings. Against the background of a powerful Qur’anic paradigm of vocal recitation as the site of divine presence (Graham and Kermani 2006, Gade 2006), scholars have investigated the act of listening to Islamic vocal sounds as part of a larger complex of pious dispositions, bodily habits, and carefully cultivated orientations that many Muslims consider a foundation for ethical life (Hirschkind 2006, Frishkopf 2009, Harris 2014). In some contexts, new forms of consumption and entertainment have shaped the listening to Islamic sermons on audiocassettes, pointing to the intertwining of Islamic moral renewal and aspirations to middle-class lifestyles (Schulz 2012). In other settings the ethical dimensions of the voice intersect with the tactics of sectarian struggle (Menon 2015: 135–168). There are also other forms of engagement with Islamic sounds beyond the vocal, mainly in the form of Sufi music, whose adherents supplement the primacy of vocal genres of Islamic self-fashioning with other instrumental sounds in the quest for an encounter with the divine (Kapchan 2008, 2009, Qureshi 1986, Wolf 2014).²

Nevertheless, as inspired as many of these studies are by the sensory and material turn in the study of religion, they have stopped short of accounting for what the specifically sonic contributions to religious sensations and embodied dispositions actually consist of. The workings of sound in religion, including vocal sound, comprise far more than the role of a sonic representation of discursive themes

important to religious traditions, such as specific forms of Islam. What is needed is an account of how the perception of sound can actually bring about the religious marking of contested urban territory, make a case for the belonging of a specific religious group, or create pious dispositions for an ethical life in individuals in more than a metaphorical way. In short, for a proper understanding of religion, it is necessary to take sound seriously and not to reduce it to something else, such as a stand-in for ultimately discursive meanings or social values (Feld and Brenneis 2004). Religious sounds have a capacity to act on those perceiving them, in a manner going beyond such well-established domains of analysis. That is, we need to get at the proprium of sound in order to understand its specific ways of creating knowledge and sensations if we are to explain its entanglement with discursive meaning and social values. This entails a closer analysis of the specificities of acoustics and sonic parameters than has been customarily undertaken in the study of sonic cultures, especially the sonic dimensions of religion.

One of the premises of the book is that sound is a separate modality for creating meaning and knowledge that also requires other forms of access besides discursive description. For the study of sound in Islamic contexts, where previous ethnographic work has mainly focused on verbal descriptions of sound and its effects (Hirschkind 2006, Kapchan 2008, 2009), this is particularly relevant. Taking sound seriously necessitates paying close attention to its qualities and features, and this cannot be done by verbal description alone. For this, a formal analysis of sound, such as the one I undertake in chapters 5 and 6, is indispensable. Such analysis is necessary in order to avoid the immediate reduction of sonic events to language. I emphasize that such formal analysis does not downplay the ethnographic record; on the contrary, all such analysis is closely connected to and builds on my ethnography. While my interlocutors found it difficult to put the qualities and effects of vocal sound in words, they metaphorically described vocal sound, and what such sound did to them, in ways that strongly resembled the terminology of neophenomenological approaches to atmospheres. Also, as will become clear later on, even though the sonic is, in principle, independent from language, the sonic and discursive aspects of *na't* recitation turned out to be closely intertwined. As a next step, in order to attend to the particular affordances and effects of sonic events as they become enmeshed with discursive dimensions of religion, it is necessary to engage with the analytics of transduction and atmospheres.

AN ANALYTIC OF TRANSDUCTION: RELIGION, VOICE, AND MEDIA

The notion of transduction plays a central role in my exploration of voice, media, and religion. Transduction refers to the transformation of energy from one material modality into another. In anthropology, transduction has recently been deployed to analyze the transformation of discourse between different material

states in “spirit writing” (Keane 2013), to account for nonreferential aspects of translation (Silverstein 2003, Handman 2014); the notion has also been taken up in anthropological work on religion and media (Engelke 2011). Regarding sound, Stefan Helmreich has analyzed sonic immersion as transduction (Helmreich 2007, 2010). My approach differs from such previous uses of the notion of transduction, as I expand my analysis beyond the transformation of one type of energy into another, focusing more on transduction’s potentialities and generative capacities. In doing so, I draw on a formulation of transduction by Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989), first formulated in his 1964 thesis (Simondon 1964). Simondon is now widely acknowledged to have provided crucial inspiration for Gilles Deleuze’s materialist philosophy of becoming. In my analysis of the sonic dimensions of religion, transduction features in at least a double sense. First, in a more mundane manner, transduction describes the processes of converting energy from one mode into another that are at the heart of sonic events, including those in which media play a central role. These are foremost the energetic interactions between the body and air. When the hearing apparatus converts the variations in air pressure we call sound waves into analogous nerve impulses, we speak of transduction of one form of energy into another. This is also the case in vocal performance, when muscles and body cavities, in conjunction with the vocal tract, produce variations in air pressure that then travel as sound waves. Transduction in this sense is also crucial to all sound reproduction technology: “Modern technologies of sound reproduction use devices called *transducers*, which turn sound into something else and that something else back into sound. All sound reproduction technologies work through the use of transducers” (Sterne 2003: 22, emphasis in original). A microphone may convert sound waves into analogous variations of electrical current and voltage, while conversely such variations in electricity can be transduced into variations of air pressure by a loudspeaker. Different forms of media storage, from the gramophone, to the CD and the MP3 file add additional layers of transduction to the process. Such forms of energetic transduction are the condition of possibility for sonic events, including their mediatised versions.

But there is a second, perhaps more important, way in which transduction is central to my analysis. Following Gilbert Simondon, transduction can be understood as a process of “individuation,” in which new entities, such as objects, organisms, or psychic phenomena, emerge from an inchoate, “pre-individual” milieu (Simondon 1992 [1964]). For this to occur, two or more dimensions of this milieu have to interact, entering an energetic exchange that in turn produces new entities and phenomena, often more complex in structure. According to Simondon, a “pre-individual” milieu is also “metastable,” containing unresolved tensions and therefore energy (Simondon 1992 [1964]): 302). Cutting across older distinctions between “nature” and “culture,” as well as between the human and the nonhuman, transduction is the process that engenders the new, by mediating between disparate energies in a domain.

This term [transduction] denotes a process—be it physical, biological, mental, or social—in which an activity gradually sets itself in motion, propagating within a given area, through a structuration of the different zones of the area over which it operates. Each region of the structure that is constituted in this way then serves to constitute the next one to such an extent that at the very time this structuration is effected there is a progressive modification taking place in tandem with it. The simplest image of the transductive process is furnished if one thinks of a crystal, beginning as a tiny seed, which grows and extends oneself in all directions in its mother-water. Each layer of molecules that has already been constituted serves as the structuring basis for the layer that is being formed next, and the result is an amplifying reticular structure. (Simondon 1992 [1964]: 313)

Simondon extends this model of the genesis of new entities from “pre-individual” milieus across physical, biological, and ultimately, human domains, including the creation of mental phenomena and social groups (Simondon 2005, Scott 2014: 126–149), which all rely on the transfer of energy through material media. In this book, I approach sonic processes of transduction as individuations in Simondon’s sense. This means that the energetic mediations between air and body result in the generation of something else, here chiefly bodily sensations and attendant psychic phenomena that stand in relationships of analogy with the forces of transduction that produce and structure them in the act of sonic immersion. My Mauritian Muslim interlocutors described such effects as the sensation of being profoundly seized and moved by a voice.

As I discuss in chapters 5 and 6, sonic atmospheres comprise the mechanism through which transduction creates new phenomena in a Simondonian sense. Drawing on approaches to atmospheres in recent strands of phenomenology, I describe sonic events as resulting in the emission of energetic forces—chiefly differences in air pressure—that fill spaces between their sources and those perceiving sound while intermingling with the bodies of those receptive to them. As I will explain, such sonic atmospheres act on the felt bodies of those perceiving them through suggestions of movement. Studying religious sounds and their mediatic circulation in an Islamic setting requires paying attention to sonic transduction as atmospheres, if the analysis is to progress beyond the discursive dimensions of such sounds. The analytic of atmospheres illustrates in concrete terms the creative processes of sonic transduction. In the ethnographic settings I describe, we understand how transduction operates, in a Simondonian sense, through analyzing sonic atmospheres.

Transduction as sonic atmospheres is an approach that does justice to the effects of the embodied voice against the backdrop of the cultural and historical specificities of Islamic traditions in their Mauritian and transnational settings. Chapters 2 and 3 of this book introduce the historical and ethnographic contexts of Mauritian Muslims as people who are part of dense networks of migratory, religious, and economic exchanges across the Indian Ocean world. I focus on the practice of *naʿt*,

which is very popular among the followers of the *Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at* tradition (the term is frequently abbreviated to “*Ahl-e Sunnat* tradition”; Sanyal 1996) in Mauritius. Sound reproduction has come to play a key role for this genre. I detail how recordings of presentations by acclaimed reciters of *na't* are widely listened to beyond the boundaries of ritual contexts. They have also been turned into models to be emulated in local live performances on important days of the ritual calendar, as well as during auspicious events in peoples' lives, such as weddings and moving into a new home. Furthermore, I analyze how media-enhanced performances of this devotional genre work to bring about the spiritual presence of the Prophet and other Islamic authorities, such as prominent Sufi saints. These performances enact the alignment of ritual participants with the *Ahl-e Sunnat* tradition, known for its emphasis on venerating the Prophet. Analyzing a range of performances in detail, I particularly focus on the shifting participant roles in a deictic field. In this field, performers assume responsibility for the poetic utterances in honor of the Prophet while, at the same time, seeking to cast their performance as a faithful reenactment of poetic words assumed to have been authored by revered saint-poets who experienced a close spiritual relationship with the Prophet.

Not just the poetic texts, but also sonic dimensions, are of crucial importance to the success of the performance as a means of rapprochement with the Prophet. Of particular significance are the qualities of the reciting voice. My Mauritian Muslim interlocutors regarded such qualities as essential for bringing about a state of love, longing, and affection for the Prophet that helps bridge the gap between the Prophet and Muslim devotees in the context at hand. Mauritian Muslims deploy sound reproduction technologies to access and safeguard exemplary qualities of the voice. For them, the perceived authenticity of vocal qualities and performance is important in a double sense. On one hand, media-supported circulation and safeguarding of what is felt to be the “right” performative and vocal style address concerns about the authenticity and correctness of a key Islamic practice. This is an important concern in the diasporic context of Mauritius. There, Muslims, who have an Indian background, constitute a minority and consider themselves far removed from centers of religious authority. On the other hand, the qualities of vocal recitation of *na't* are deemed essential for the performative success of the devotional practice. Successful performances enable ritual participants to spiritually apprehend the Prophet and to experience him as close by. Therefore, the voice, and technical means for its reproduction, are pivotal in bringing about the perceptible presence of the divine.

Vocal recitation in the performance of *na't* is embedded in a particular South Asian Islamic tradition in the Mauritian diasporic context. Ritual listeners engage with the “moving” effects of the reciting voice through the discursive and other semiotic categories of this tradition. Moreover, *na't* performances provide social occasions for shared attention to particular ritual texts and their stylistic dimensions. They are therefore constitutive of social relationships between participants as Mauritian Muslims jointly seek to align themselves with the *Ahl-e Sunnat*

tradition through performing and listening to na't poetry. But the work of sonic transduction involves more, providing an additional mode of religious engagement. Here, the reciting voice features as an agent that transports Mauritian Muslims listening to na't closer to the divine, acting on their bodies in a powerful way. The discursive and the transductive are different yet closely entangled dimensions of religious mediation, providing solutions for the problem of presence (Keane 1997: 51, de Vries 2001, Engelke 2007). Pace Hirschkind (2011), the problem of religious presence is not just an artifact of Protestant ontologies that center on a dichotomy of inner spirit and outward material forms but can also be found in many other contexts. In a broad range of other religious traditions, though not all (Robbins 2017), human actors do not take the relative presence of the divine, or of other non- or semihuman actors inhabiting a usually imperceptible otherworld, as self-evident. Since whatever is considered the divine can be perceived as relatively closer or more removed depending on context, religious practitioners have devised a great diversity of practices to enhance their connection with the divine, involving spoken and written language, material objects, images, and sounds, in connection with technical media such as print, photography, sound reproduction, and the latest audiovisual media. For example, when Hindus engage in the intense visual and quasi-tactile interaction with their deities known as *darshan* (Eck 1998), many of them draw on technical media such as chromolithography, photography, and digital audiovisual media in order to increase the deities' presence for them (Jain 2007, Pinney 2004). Most Hindus who engage in these media practices are not guided by Protestant oppositions between inner spirit and outer materiality. Instead, for them the material and the divine are powerfully intertwined, indeed indistinguishable, as *darshan* revolves around a "physical relationship of visual intermingling" (Pinney 2001: 168), in which the gaze is "a vehicle of transmission for powerful essences" (Jain 2007: 262). Neither can scholarly interpretations of such practices drawing on the notions of presence and mediation be simply understood as the effect of Protestant genealogies of religion in academia.

A desire to enhance their connection to the divine also underlie my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors' uses of the technical media that I analyze in this book. Here, sound reproduction is in turn central to the search for technical solutions for accessing the divine. However, media, as long as they function in expected, habitual ways, have a propensity to erase themselves in the act of mediation (Bolter and Grusin 1999). Whether we are using audiovisual media, making a phone call, being absorbed by a book, watching a movie, or working in front of a computer screen, as long as media operate successfully they phenomenologically disappear from awareness, withdrawing in the face of what is being mediated. The latter appears to be fully present, while the technical apparatus and the social and institutional relationships it is part of recede into the background. Media's capacity for "aesthetic self-neutralization" (Krämer 2008: 28) appears to be a necessary condition for media to perform the work of mediation. Closely related to this propensity for

self-erasure is a paradox of mediation: in order to get more immediate and direct access to whatever is being mediated, and to gain a sense of immediacy, people in the contemporary world deploy ever more complex apparatuses of mediation (Mazzarella 2006). Media practices thus involve a constant alternation between states where media are highly perceptible and obviously present, and moments where their propensity to disappear in the act of mediation gets activated. Several authors have argued that the sense of immediacy depends on mediation (Bolter and Grusin 1999, Krämer 2008, Eisenlohr 2009), and that it must ultimately be understood as an effect of the latter's technicity. The performance of *na't* is a summoning of divine presence that can result in a sense of intimacy with the Prophet, enabled by a technical apparatus that in moments of such closeness with the divine tends to experientially disappear. This form of mediation is based on the webs of discursive meaning that constitute this Islamic practice, as well as on the power of sonic atmospheres. In the interactive process between sonic transduction as atmospheres and discursive meaning, the former accounts for the especially powerful and seemingly immediate sensations of the divine.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SOUND AND VOICE: TRANSDUCTION, SIGNS, AND ATMOSPHERES

Sounding Islam suggests a new direction for the anthropological study of sound. To this end, I propose sonic atmospheres as an analytic for the ethnographic engagements with sound in socioculturally diverse contexts. The anthropology of sound has, among other theoretical developments, worked above all through two principal concepts, soundscape and acoustemology. *Soundscape* is a term coined by the Canadian composer Murray Schafer (1994 [1977]). Drawing on an analogy with the term *landscape*, *soundscape* is intended to describe the totality of sounds perceived by an individual in a given spatial setting and environment. My work is inspired by the holistic approach connoted by the soundscape concept and by its emphasis on the relationality of listeners and their environments. Also, the parallel with *landscape* suggests the deep cultural shaping of the environment in which listeners are embedded (Samuels et al. 2010). Schafer's romantic critique of urban, mechanical, and industrial sounds as presumably polluting pristine soundscapes also led him to denounce "schizophonia," the separation of sounds from their sources through modern technologies of sound reproduction, as negative and abnormal. Schafer's organic holism is thus ill equipped to engage with contemporary worlds (see also Kelman 2010), including religious worlds where sound reproduction is ubiquitous and has profoundly shaped listening habits and expectations for more than a century. My analysis also departs from the concept of soundscape in that the latter's analogy with landscape ties it to the notion of a three-dimensional space that is limiting for the study of religious moods and atmospheres produced by sonic events and listening experiences. Also, the "-scape" component of soundscapes

seems to suggest a relatively stable setting and downplays the temporality inherent in any sonic event and listening experience (Helmreich 2010, Ingold 2007).

In contrast, another analytic used by anthropologists in the ethnographic analysis of sonic events, *acoustemology*, does not suffer from the implicit privileging of a static three-dimensional space or from a bias toward temporal stasis. Steven Feld developed the notion in order to describe acoustic knowing—opening up ethnographic investigation into sound and listening practices through which people come to know and orient themselves in their cultural environments. To illustrate this notion, he described a rainforest environment in which listening skills acquire special importance. In contrast to *soundscape*, listening is understood as a place-making practice rather than an activity unfolding in a three-dimensional space. Also, *acoustemology* is attentive to temporality as it approaches a “sensual time-space,” while one of its principal modalities of knowing is the change of sounds over time: “sounds are heard moving, locating, placing points in time” (Feld 1996: 98).

My investigation of the experience of religious presence mediated by sound, in particular the voice, and by technologies of sound reproduction, draws on *acoustemology*’s “exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth” (Feld 1996: 97). An analytic of transduction specifically points to the immersive character of sound and to the ways in which listeners *comingle* with sonic phenomena. Transduction as sonic atmospheres emphasizes the passing of sound from body into air and vice versa, as sound waves are registered not only by the hearing apparatus but also by the entire body, including its bones. Against the notion of a three-dimensional *soundscape* experienced by a subject separated from it, transduction directly addresses the sonic ways in which the boundaries between humans and their environments blur (cf. Ingold 2007). But vocal sound as transduction is more than the mere passing of energy between air and the body undergoing transformation into different modalities. Inspired by Gilbert Simondon’s rendering of the concept that takes transduction to be the mechanism of individuation of new entities across a broad ontological spectrum, I highlight in particular the generative capacities of sound. Sound’s passing through the body creates emotions and other phenomena at the interface of the psychological and the physiological—in my ethnographic account specifically the experience of the divine. In contrast to *soundscape*, transduction as sonic atmospheres thus highlights somatic intermingling with sound. Furthermore, unlike *soundscape*, transduction is fully equipped to do justice to the temporality of sound in several ways. It is attentive to the durational character of sound, attending to the precise morphology of unfolding sonic events as constantly and rapidly changing bundles of characteristics, such as loudness, pitch, and timbre. In addition, it brings to light that which sound creates in the process of embodied vocal performance and listening—in my analysis, events and phenomena commonly described as religious.

An analytic of transduction as sonic atmospheres also affords new insights for the anthropological exploration of voice. For a long time, anthropological engagement with the voice has centered on the broad use of the notion of voice as a trope for agency and subject positions. A particularly fruitful aspect of this strand of research is the attention given to “voicing,” the fact that speakers often have a repertoire of different relationships to their utterances. Here, *voice* refers to “the linguistic construction of social personae” (Keane 1999: 171). Single speakers often rapidly shift between such typified “voices” indicating distinct interactional stances as they relate to their utterances, as either reported speech, parody, or discourse for which they take personal responsibility (Bakhtin 1981, Hill 1995, Irvine 1996). More recently, a smaller number of scholars have also ventured into the ethnographic analysis of the embodied voice. Current research in anthropology pertaining to the voice is engaged in demonstrating and strengthening the links between formerly split approaches to the voice, combining the analysis of interactional stance and the investigation of voice as an embodied, sonic phenomenon (Bakker Kellogg 2015, Harkness 2014, Kunreuther 2014, Weidman 2006, 2014; see also Faudree 2012: 525–526). Scholars such as Nicholas Harkness and Amanda Weidman (2006), who attend to the embodied voice and what Harkness has called the “phonosonic nexus” (Harkness 2014) have all shown how ideas about the voice have been outcomes of historical formations such as gender, nationhood, religion, or neoliberal accounts of agency. They have thus sought to elucidate culturally and historically variable ideologies of the voice. The latter often rely on characteristics frequently ascribed to the voice, such as deepness, inscrutability, and a profoundly bodily and emotive character, in order to naturalize historically contingent links between certain forms of vocal performance and particular subject positions or sociopolitical formations (Srivastava 2006). In concert with other semiotic and media ideologies (Keane 2003, Gershon 2010), they make it possible for vocally performing subjects to align themselves with semiotic formations of value: “The voice as phonosonic nexus is a medium through which we orient to another, not directly, but through phonic engagements with sonically differentiated frameworks of value that shape our social interactions” (Harkness 2014: 17). This line of analysis shows parallels to analyses of “voice registers” in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. In such analyses, scholars have traced the indexical and iconic links between particular qualities of the voice and the performance of particular subject positions in given ethnographic contexts, such as associations of falsetto voice and interactional stances of respect among Zapotec speakers in Mexico (Sicoli 2014), or “creaky voice” and the persona of a “hardcore Chicano gangster” among Latina gang members in California (Mendoza-Denton 2011).

This productive strand of research implies a critical stance toward psychoanalytic approaches to the voice, where the voice sometimes features as a subversive element, owing to its “spectral autonomy,” which decouples the voice from the speaker’s body and subjectivity (Žižek 2001: 58). The voice disrupts the flow of

signification while, at the same time, being the focus of intense and unspeakable desires, constituting a trace of the forever lost “real” in a Lacanian sense. Mladen Dolar’s theory of the “object voice” is the most elaborate example of this, taking “the voice, the object voice, as one of the paramount ‘embodiments’ of what Lacan called *objet petit a*” (Dolar 2006: 11). Such psychoanalytic scholarship takes the embodied character of the voice seriously and realizes that it cannot be easily be subsumed under processes of signification. However, as Dolar’s account of the “object voice” shows, it has also furthered a tendency to essentialize the voice as a structure of universal deep-seated drives or desires, ascribing to it prehistorical and precultural qualities.

My analysis shares the anthropological impetus to deconstruct such essentializations of the voice and to provincialize psychoanalytic theorizing of the voice that combines writing from a North Atlantic perspective with universalist pretenses. My account of the voice in Muslim devotional practices in Mauritius in the context of the Indian Ocean world shows the historical and sociocultural variability of what the voice is held to be and what it accomplishes. Also, I demonstrate how performing certain qualities of the voice makes it possible for actors to align themselves with valued subject positions in interactions with others.

Sounding Islam attends to a key dimension of the embodied voice that is largely missing in previous engagements with the voice, which I aim to capture through the analytic of transduction. With this I do not just mean the complex interplay of muscles, bodily cavities, and the vocal tract that transduces bodily motions into movements of air, converting them into waves of differences in air pressure. I also point to the generative role of such transduction, as it creates new phenomena in the bodies through which movement of energy passes, remaking what it encounters in ways analogous to its own structures and qualities, not unlike the growth of a crystal. Previous ethnographic investigations of the voice have largely employed frameworks of historical and cultural meaning, understanding them as “material embodiments of social ideology and experience” (Feld et al. 2004: 332), or have accounted for the workings and effects of the voice in Peircean semiotic terms (Faudree 2012: 525–526, Weidman 2014), with particular attention to aspects of Peircean firstness (Harkness 2014).

Peircean semiotics has the great advantage of allowing one to approach social life as a meaning-generating process in a highly differentiated way. To this end, Peirce not only distinguished between different kinds of signs, such as the well-known triad of icon, index, and symbol, thereby differentiating likeness, copresence, and convention as different modalities of meaning-creation, but he also cast the sign as always standing in a triadic relationship with an object (what a sign stands for in the modes described above), and an interpretant, the latter being “whatever a sign creates insofar as it stands for an object” (Kockelman 2005: 234). Interpretants can take various forms, such a cognitive or emotional state or reaction such as an insight, a feeling, or a social action. Crucially, interpretants can

themselves become objects of other signs, so semiosis has an inbuilt tendency to propel chains of social action, as signs always beget new signs and actions. Semiosis thus understood appears to be not only irreducibly social but also generative and processual, insofar as the flow of signification is coterminous with the turns and emergent qualities of social life (Peirce 1992, Parmentier 1994, Agha 2007). Seen from such a Peircean perspective, the sound of a voice in the Muslim devotional settings I investigate is thus always a complex sign, standing for an object—such as the quality a voice is perceived to be like—while indicating the copresence of other objects, such as social stances and values, or standing for an object it signifies by convention. Simultaneously, not only is it a sign of something, but also it can be a sign *for* somebody, who will react to the apprehension of the sign-object relation through the production of an interpretant—for example, by taking a religious stance or being seized by religious affect, which would be an “affective interpretant” in Peircean terms (Kockelman 2013: 121).

In *Sounding Islam* I bring this tradition of semiotic analysis to bear on the performance of Muslim devotional poetry. However, I also contend that this framework does not exhaust certain somatic modes of religious engagement that I aim to elucidate through the notions of transduction and sonic atmospheres. This is not to argue that semiotic signification and sonic movement are opposed modalities, and that my analysis attempts to get at some sonic “real” outside language or metaphor. In fact, sonic movement is shot through with signification. Signification is not arbitrarily imposed on sonic movement from the outside but is inherent to its processual forms. Instead of contrasting sonic movement with signification as such, my argument is that sonic movement and the discursive dimensions of vocal recitation are two different modalities of the devotional practices I analyze in this book. In the examples I discuss in the following chapters, they are closely intertwined but can, in principle, operate independently from one another. This is why I insist on taking sound seriously in its own right. However, both dimensions are suffused with signification from a semiotic point of view. The semiotic is not confined to the discursive alone: it also extends to sonic dynamics.

In addressing the religious sensations provoked by audition, my book also builds on Hirschkind’s analysis of “somaesthetics” (Shusterman 2002) in another Islamic setting (Hirschkind 2006: 85). Deploying a Simondonian understanding of transduction, I seek to pinpoint the mechanisms responsible for the frequently remarked upon power of sound and vocal recitation to bring about religious sensibilities. One of the hallmarks of such sonic power is that its effects are often experienced as deeply encompassing yet exceedingly difficult to describe in concrete terms. This is because one of the key possible impacts of sound and the reciting voice is the creation of atmospheres. A focus on sound and atmospheres is helpful in order to re-center the discussion of ethical sensibilities away from the inner states of subjects.

Perhaps the most compelling way to apply a logic of transduction to the analysis of sonic events and their effects lies in drawing a connection to phenomenological

work on atmospheres. According to neophenomenological philosophers Gernot Böhme and Hermann Schmitz, atmosphere is not an interior mood but an objective phenomenon in the world, something “that proceeds from and is created by things, persons, or their constellations” (Böhme 1993: 122). Atmospheres are distinct entities that exist independently from human subjectivity and can be felt and encountered by bodies: they are “the occupying of a dimension-less space or area within the sphere of experienced presence” (Schmitz 2014: 30). As they flow forth from objects and other things in the world, atmospheres can be understood as “ecstasies of the thing” (Böhme 1993: 110). These tangible ecstasies of things and persons not only can be sensed by the felt-body but also are themselves feelings. Arguing against subjectivist and interiorist accounts of the sensate dimensions of atmospheres, Hermann Schmitz has pointed out: “Feelings are atmospheres poured into space and powers that seize the felt-body [*Leib*]” (Schmitz 2014: 30). According to Schmitz, the phenomenological felt-body can intermingle with atmospheres, making the latter’s perception possible.

Sound and sonic events provide concrete possibilities for empirically investigating the workings of atmospheres understood in neophenomenological terms. Taking a lead from such work on the objective qualities of atmospheres, I draw inspiration from recent work in cultural musicology proposing that sonic phenomena and events can also be understood as atmospheres (Abels 2013, 2017a, 2017b). Sonic phenomena have an objective existence, they unfold in time and are measurable. Sound “flows forth” from objects and persons, constituting the latter’s “ecstasies” in tangible ways, and acts on perceiving bodies through suggestions of movement. Human bodies register sound by intermingling with sonic phenomena through transduction. Sound encounters and passes through bodies, being transformed into other types of energy in the act of immersion. The intermingling of felt-bodies with sound as atmospheres is at the heart of the often-described peculiar power of sound and music to move people, generating moods and feelings that often resist discursive rendering (Eisenlohr 2018). The objective power of transduction notwithstanding, the registering of sonically generated atmospheres is not the same for everyone. Not only is it “always the body social that is enunciated in and through the voice” (Feld et al. 2004: 341), but also the perception of vocally created atmospheres depends on learned, cultivated forms of attunement that make Mauritian Muslims receptive to particular sonically produced atmospheres, having acquired the appropriate modes of religious listening to the reciting voice. Even though they found it difficult to put their sonic perceptions in words, my interlocutors in the field did offer descriptions of their culturally embedded perceptions of vocal sound. They thereby drew attention to the significance of auditory cultures, learned techniques of attending to sonic events that are part of larger cultural frames, such as the auditory cultures in my ethnography of a particular tradition of Islam (Bull and Back 2003, Erlmann 2004, Feld 1996, Feld et al. 2004, Schmidt 2000, Sterne 2003). As I discuss in chapter 5, there are

deep resonances between the ways my interlocutors described their affection for vocal sound within the framework of such auditory sensibilities and an analytic of atmospheres.

Sounding Islam provides an account of the particularly commanding characteristics of sound and voice in the field of religion, doing justice to both transduction as sonic immersion (the intermingling of sound with bodies) and the generative powers of sonic events. The book thus sheds light on a key dimension of religion, the sonic incitement of sensations that are often difficult to translate into language. At the same time, I investigate the performance of Muslim devotional poetry in a manner showing the embeddedness of the sensations and affects that sound provokes in particular historical traditions and dynamics.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

I first became interested in the Muslim devotional practices that are the subject of this book during my dissertation research in 1996–1998 on the cultivation of “ancestral languages” among Mauritians of Indian background, who comprise nearly 70 percent of the population (Eisenlohr 2006a, 2007). In Mauritius such languages, among them Urdu, were hardly ever known by ancestors migrating from India to Mauritius. But these languages came to play important roles in the constitution of diasporic and national forms of belonging in the twentieth century, decades after migration from India to Mauritius had ended. They are never used as vernaculars; they primarily function as ethno-religious markers and are used in, above all, religious contexts. The Mauritian state heavily supports the cultivation of these ancestral languages, especially by teaching these languages in the school system and by training teachers and producing schoolbooks and other teaching materials in these languages. This markedly contrasts with what was, until recently, a near absence of state support for Mauritian Creole, the vernacular language of the great majority of Mauritians. Transnational religious networks that link Mauritius with India and Pakistan are another context where ancestral languages, among them Urdu, are important. In Mauritius, unlike in South Asia, Urdu is not a vernacular language used in everyday life but is mainly restricted to Islamic ritual contexts. The exception is the work of a very few Mauritian writers who have created fiction in Urdu; their works are published in South Asia and also largely read there (Edun 2006). Mauritian Muslims who are of Indian origin, and who are officially recognized in the constitution as a separate community, are unique in the country for laying claim to two ancestral languages, Urdu and Arabic. Both languages are taught in state and state-supported schools to students of Muslim background. The official recognition of Arabic as an ancestral language further reinforces the point that the “ancestral” quality of such languages is rather disconnected from the actual linguistic practices and knowledge of Muslim ancestors who migrated from India to Mauritius in the nineteenth century.

In my earlier research, between 1998 and 2003, on Muslim identities, religious mobilizations, and notions of the secular in Mauritius, I found that the study of Urdu and Arabic was strongly related to sectarianism, as adherents of different traditions of Islam from South Asia compete with each other in Mauritius, as is also the case throughout South Asia (Eisenlohr 2006b). Muslim students, like other Mauritian students in the school system, can study only one ancestral language. I often noticed that families following the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at tradition chose Urdu over Arabic, while those who were adherents of the Deobandi tradition, including those active in the Tabliqi Jama'at, and Salafists would favor the study of Arabic over Urdu. In Mauritius, as in South Asia, devotional practices in Urdu that involve eulogizing the Prophet Muhammad and other Islamic authorities, such as Sufi saints, are prominent points in sectarian difference and contestation. The recitation of na't poetry in honor of the Prophet in devotional gatherings known as *mahfil-e mawlud* is among the most significant of the occasions that provoke critiques among followers of purist traditions, who see in the poetry's exuberant praise of the figure of the Prophet a danger to the unicity of God. I found that media practices were completely intertwined with the recitation of na't poetry. In the late 1990s, I still encountered the use of cassettes, while in the early years of the twenty-first century there was a rapid shift to CDs, which have since been supplanted by digital audio files played on mobile devices such as cell phones.

Having been trained as a linguistic anthropologist, I set out to analyze how na't recitation operated as a mode of interaction between Mauritian Muslims and the divine. Investigating the use of linguistic registers, deictic markers, and shifts in participant roles during performances, I paid attention to how my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors deployed sound reproduction as a means to enhance their connection with the divine. Much of this initial focus of my research is evident in chapters 2 and 4 of this book. The qualities of the voice of a good na't khwan was the subject to which my conversations with my Mauritian Muslim friends frequently returned, as they described the safeguarding of these voice qualities as one of the primary motivators for making and listening to sound recordings of the genre. How, then, can one capture what makes up the desired qualities of the voice? As I will show, my interlocutors spoke about such qualities in a variety of ways but also acknowledged that, ultimately, the qualities and effects of vocal sound were difficult to put in words. This in turn raised the question of how to account for what happened in those moments that my Mauritian Muslim respondents described as the feeling of literally being touched or even carried away by the sound of vocal recitation.

In the years between 2003 and 2011, I attended numerous mahfils throughout northern and eastern Mauritius, where I interviewed and had many semistructured conversations with Mauritian na't khwan and na't aficionados, who frequently also listened to na't recordings outside the established ritual times and events associated with the genre. In addition to recording these interviews and semistructured

and open-ended conversations, many of which took place in several sessions, I audio-recorded the performances I attended and video-recorded some of them. I also collected a corpus of cassette and CD na't recordings that were sold or otherwise distributed in Mauritius. And I participated in the regular social life of several of my interlocutors and made visits to the homes of many others far beyond the context of na't performances and other events connected to the genre.

Since my work on this devotional genre, media, and voice grew directly out of my earlier research on ancestral languages among Mauritians of Indian origin, Urdu teachers initially played a major role in facilitating my fieldwork on na't. Through the help of an Urdu teacher and members of his family in a village near where I had lived during my initial fieldwork in northeastern Mauritius, I first learned about and witnessed the devotional practice among Mauritian Muslims that is the focus of this book. Other Urdu teachers I knew in northern and eastern Mauritius did the same, introducing me to their neighbors, acquaintances, and family members, most of whom had very different educational and professional backgrounds. Over time, my field of respondents snowballed as they kept on referring me to new interlocutors. As in any other ethnographic undertaking, what I learned through these interactions about the intersections of media, voice, and Muslim devotional practices in Mauritius was not exhaustive, and I cannot claim to have covered all possible perspectives current among Mauritian Muslims. Apart from interlocutors whose public roles were self-evident in the conversations I had with them, and those who had no objections to being named, I have changed names in order to protect the identities of my respondents as is the convention in my discipline.

Unsurprisingly, transnational Islamic networks turned out to be of great importance for understanding the devotional practices that are the focus of this book, as will become evident in chapter 3. In 2009, I complemented my research by following the links of a particular network from Mauritius to Mumbai, where I was already engaged in a different research project on religion and media among Twelver Shi'i Muslims (Eisenlohr 2015a, 2015b, 2017). I visited and had conversations with a Sufi sheikh residing in Mumbai who made yearly trips to Mauritius at the invitation of his spiritual followers there. I also conducted a number of interviews and open-ended conversations among Sunni Muslims in Mumbai who were following the same tradition as my friends and interlocutors in Mauritius, some of whom were also involved in the distribution of devotional media such as mp3 disks and video CDs of na't recitals. The significance of these Islamic networks spanning the Indian Ocean were in turn a prominent topic in the conversations I had with my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors, who displayed a great variety of stances toward such transnational religious links, ranging from enthusiastic engagement to downright skepticism about the motives of those involved.

Devotional Islam and Sound Reproduction

One evening in 2011, I was sitting in the living room of Raouf, a retired school inspector in a town in northern Mauritius. Raouf's twenty-one-year-old nephew Naushad was also there. Naushad worked in his family's retail business in a major tourist center on the northern coast while also studying at the University of Mauritius. I had wanted to talk to him for a while because I had heard that he used to organize mahfil-e mawlud, the ritual event that features recitation of na't poetry. Although not a well-known na't khwan himself, he had learned to recite na't and told me about how he began doing so.

It started more than ten years ago with the large video camera of a cousin of my father. He used to make recordings of weddings with it. Then I wanted to try out the camera myself and started filming. It was not easy, as the camera was very heavy. I began filming an Urdu drama, and we made videotapes of it. Together with a cousin of my mother, I went toward religion [*kote din*], and we filmed mahfils in different mosques in the north [of Mauritius]. I got a new camera, from which you could make DVDs, so I filmed *majlis* and mahfils in our madrassa, or in other mosques, and distributed the DVDs among my friends and, after Friday prayers, at mosques for fifty rupees. I bought a digital projector for our mosque and also recorded a conference of the Ahl-e Sunnat. Then I realized I need an amplifier for the sound. I became very interested in sound systems and listened a lot to sound recordings of mahfil-e mawlud. I started getting into na't through listening to recordings. "Madina, Madina" was the first na't I was able to recite. A group of friends and I met regularly, listening to recordings, writing down the poetry from cassettes and CDs, and making programs for mahfils we organized.

Naushad's account of how he became fond of na't to the point of learning to recite the poetry and organizing mahfils himself highlights how the cultivation of this

poetic genre and contemporary media practices have become inseparably linked. For him, listening to na't has become a regular routine that he has built into the rhythms of his daily life. "Most of my friends listen to Western and Indian music. Maybe 20 percent listen to na't. For many there is a balance: they listen to na't and also to different kinds of music. I listen to na't for inspiration, in the early morning, alone in the bus on the way to the university. I get into the na't . . . I also listen to na't in the car together with friends."

Naushad pointed out how newer media practices have loosened the link between immersing oneself in the recitation of na't and the established ritual contexts and times of mahfils. For him and his friends it is possible to saturate routine daily situations with na't, to enjoy inspiration from it, as he put it. I had many conversations with my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors about what Naushad called the inspiration of na't, and they repeatedly told me how they felt captivated and deeply moved when listening to recitations of the poetry.

Shareef had a particular way of describing what Naushad had called the inspiration gained by listening to na't. I had first met Shareef in 2003, at the suggestion of several of my interlocutors. He was known as one of the pioneers among the circle of Mauritian na't khwan who had started to make recordings of na't recitations and distributed them on cassettes and, later, also on CDs. In a conversation when I again visited his home in a village in the central part of the island in 2010, he stressed that the best na't recitations are the ones that are "touching," evoking the synesthetic effect of listening as the bodily sensation of touch. When I asked him when makes a na't touching, he replied,

A na't evokes feelings for the Prophet. For example, we are here, he is there, and there is no way to get where he is. So there is a feeling of separation, of being cut off. We long for him and wonder how to get to the place where he is. This is why a na't is touching. Also, when we recite a na't, we sometimes evoke his [the Prophet's] difficult moments. When he prayed at the *ka'ba*, people threw stones at him. Nobody believed him. He had no food, because he gave everything to the poor. We also recall the miracles the Prophet brought about. Also the na't is in Urdu and not in Creole. Urdu is simply the language of the poet. It has more intense words. Also, the voice of the na't khwan needs to be melodious, like that of a Qari [Qur'an reciter]; it needs to be well formed, with fluctuation. A na't in Urdu recited with a good voice touches you directly.

In this quote Shareef pointed to several dimensions of how a na't recitation can be touching. A narrative of separation and longing can move listeners deeply, as do accounts of the Prophet's initial difficulties in creating the first community of Muslims or of his generosity to the poor. The choice of linguistic code is also very important. For Shareef as for many others, Urdu is associated with ideas of poetic beauty and power. According to him, the main vernacular language, Mauritian Creole, lacks these qualities in comparison. Further, the voice of the reciter needs to be properly trained so that the recitation is performed with the right vocal

qualities. As I will show, my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors directly connected qualities of the voice to the power and effects of a recitation of na't, especially the effect that Shareef described as the sensation of being "touched."

Trying to trace such peculiar powers of the voice, I investigated uses of CD recordings of the Islamic devotional genre na't in Mauritius and its role in shaping performances of this genre at religious speech events known as mahfil-e mawlud, which took place on occasions such as ritual commemorations and weddings. Na't (from the Arabic *na't*, meaning "description, qualification, characterization") are devotional poems recited in praise of the Prophet Muhammad and of what is often considered his favorite city, Madina. They are also performed alongside poetry in praise of other Muslim authorities, such as the prominent Sufi teachers Mu'inuddin Chishti (d. 1235, popularly known as Khwaja Gharib Nawaz) and 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani (d. 1166), and even members of the *ahl-e bayt* (the family of the Prophet and their descendants), such as the Prophet's son-in-law 'Ali and his grandson Husayn, a practice recalling Shi'ite traditions. This genre—which in Mauritius is associated with the Sunni South Asian Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at (people of the Prophet's way, and the majority community), and whose practice is vigorously opposed by followers of the Deobandi and Salafi traditions—is usually performed in Urdu. Its performance is, above all, considered an act of piety that has a transforming effect on subjects; but it is also understood as helping to link a diasporic Mauritian Muslim community to sources of religious authenticity from a location on the periphery of the Muslim world.

Electronic reproduction of this genre is significant because of the authority associated with recordings of na't by accomplished performers from India and Pakistan, as well as by Mauritians who have received training from such performers. In addition, the performance of na't is a practice of intercession that can be understood as mediating between subjects and an otherworld. Against this background of religious practice as a particular form of interaction, sound reproduction also intervenes in a fundamental way in the process of mediation between what are experienced as different ontological spheres. The use of first cassette and later CD recordings of na't reveals a particular relationship between this form of electronic mediation of discourse and recital, questions of religious and diasporic authenticity, and the performance of na't understood as a practice of mediation between subjects and an otherworld. In particular, I suggest that a close articulation exists between critiques of mediation in Islamic traditions, such as those expounded in debates between Deobandi- and Ahl-e Sunnat-affiliated Muslims, and certain uses of electronic voice mediation, such as the circulation of cassette and CD recordings of na't. Specifically, a key formal property of electronic mediation, the minimizing of spatial and temporal distances in interaction, intersects with a particular authority of voice in religious tradition. The significance of electronically reproduced na't emerges in the ways in which sound reproduction becomes part of a preexisting genealogical logic of Islamic authority, in which

the faithful transmission of religious discourse through long chains of reliable interlocutors traceable to the Prophet Muhammad and his companions plays a central role.¹

MUSLIMS IN MAURITIUS: CONTESTS OVER RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN THE DIASPORA

Mauritius is a former plantation colony in which nearly 70 percent of the population of approximately 1.3 million is of South Asian origin. Muslims of Indian origin make up 17 percent of the population. Like other Mauritians, they primarily use French-lexifier Mauritian Creole in everyday conversation, use English in education and state administration, are embedded in a strongly francophone mediascape—French also being the dominant language of the private-sector economy—but also cultivate Urdu and, to a lesser extent, Arabic as ancestral languages. These ancestral languages are never used in everyday interaction but are taught on an ethnic basis in state schools and are important emblems of ethno-religious belonging. Mauritian state institutions, in general, strongly encourage the cultivation of “ancestral cultures” and ancestral languages of different ethnicities. Under the leadership of the middle class among Hindus (52 percent of the population), who dominate state institutions, a hegemonic notion of cultural citizenship has been established, according to which Mauritians are subjects with origins in other parts of the world and continuing commitments to diasporic ancestral cultures. Accordingly, full membership in the Mauritian nation is performed by cultivating ancestral traditions, whose perceived authenticity provides crucial support for claims to a legitimate place within the nation (Eisenlohr 2006a, 2007). For Mauritian Muslims, Islamic traditions represent the official ancestral culture through which their membership in a Mauritian nation is defined. Thus, contests over the authenticity and purity of Islamic traditions are not just theological arguments or power struggles between representatives of different schools of thought but are also about claiming a legitimate place for Muslims in Mauritius, which is ensured by the projection of a Muslim ancestral culture deemed to be authentic.²

Although some Muslims from India lived in Mauritius under French colonial rule (1715–1810), the vast majority of Mauritian Muslims today are the descendants of North Indian indentured laborers of mostly humble agricultural background who arrived in British colonial Mauritius between 1834 and the First World War to work on the island’s sugar plantations. Small groups of Indian Muslim traders of Gujarati background also established themselves as free immigrants in Mauritius, in the second half of the nineteenth century (Kalla 1987). These trader immigrants, aided by their capital and their intense and ongoing links with India, played the role of mosque builders and founders of Islamic institutions on the island. The Kutchi Memons, a trader caste originally from the western part of Gujarat, soon emerged as the dominant force in spreading forms of Islam more institutionalized

than those practiced by most of the poor rural indentured laborers and their descendants. They gained control over the island's principal mosque in the colonial capital of Port Louis in 1908 after a long and bitter lawsuit against their chief competitors, the Sunni Surtees (Vorahs), another Gujarati Muslim trader caste.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Kutchi Memons increasingly cultivated links to scholars and institutions of the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition in India. The scholar of Islamic law (*alim*) and Ahl-e Sunnat missionary Abdul 'Alim Siddiqi visited Mauritius at the invitation of the Memons for the first time on a return journey to India from South Africa in 1928, and he repeatedly returned in the following years, once for a nine-month mission in 1932–1933, attracting large crowds at his public discourses (*va'z*).³ Because of the influential position of the Memons as an elite among Mauritian Muslims, and because of their connections to the Ahl-e Sunnat network, this tradition became the predominant current of Islam in the first half of the twentieth century throughout Mauritius.⁴

The Ahl-e Sunnat is one of the movements of Islamic reformism that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in colonial India (Metcalf 1982, Sanyal 1996, Reetz 2006). It was founded by the 'alim Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi (1856–1921) and is also known as the Barelwi tradition after the North Indian town of Bareilly, a seat of Islamic learning and the residence and ancestral home of the movement's founder. In contrast to other contemporary Sunni reform movements, such as the school of Deoband, the Ahl-e Sunnat's vision of Sunni Islam distinguishes itself by its great emphasis on the veneration of saints, its openness to Sufism, and the importance it places on spiritual intercession by saintly figures.

The Ahl-e Sunnat is often mistaken as representative of a “popular” or “traditional” South Asian Islam largely untouched by the wave of reformism in Indian Islam since the nineteenth century. The movement emerged in a context in which many of the devotional practices of its followers came under attack as backward and inauthentic by other, better-known reform movements, such as the school of Deoband and the Ahl-e Hadith (Metcalf 1982). Responding to such attacks, Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi systematically sought to give the mediatory practices common in South Asian Islam a new legitimacy and scriptural foundation. At the same time, he made use of the emerging print media and modern transport systems in his endeavor to propagate a new synthesis between 'ulama-based Islam and Sufi traditions, which he claimed best emulated the original society of the Prophet. The Ahl-e Sunnat should, thus, be understood as a reformist movement on a par with the other representatives of renewal (*tajdid*) in late nineteenth-century Indian Islam (Sanyal 1996). For his followers, of course, Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi was the foremost renewer (*mujaddid*) of Islam of his age. *Barelwi* is a label ascribed by others to the movement and is usually rejected by followers of the Ahl-e Sunnat in South Asia, who refer to themselves by the latter label. In Mauritius, the label *Barelwi* is rarely used, and Mauritian Muslims who are affiliated with the Ahl-e Sunnat say they are affiliated with the “Sunnat Jama'at” or more commonly state that they are simply “Sunnis.”

The Ahl-e Sunnat tradition entertains a close relationship with the Sufi order (*tariqa*) of the Qadriyya and highly venerates its spiritual founder, ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani, who is also addressed and eulogized in numerous devotional poems. In particular, scholars of the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition are known for their teachings on the Prophet Muhammad, often summed up as the doctrine of present and observant (*hazir-o nazir*). Whereas God is beyond space and time, according to this controversial interpretation, the Prophet Muhammad is no ordinary human being but is manifest as pure light (*nur-e muhammadi*) while he is spiritually present and perceptive, when pious Muslims invoke him and ask for blessings on him. Even long after his death, the Prophet thus continues to be a powerful spiritual presence, capable of mediating between Muslims and God. The reading of na‘t and the recitation of blessings directly bring about his presence to the benefit of the believer (*mu‘min*).⁵ The deep personal devotion to the Prophet that is so characteristic of the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition resonates with the broader theme in Sufi traditions of attaining an intimacy with God through emulating the Prophet (Buehler 1998, Schimmel 1975). In Sufi traditions a preferred method for attaining this goal is to perform spiritual exercises under the guidance of a Sufi sheikh in order to establish a “heart-to-heart connection, leading to a vividly intense experience of Muhammad” (Buehler 1998: 17). As it aims to bring about the spiritual presence of the Prophet, the recitation of na‘t is in direct continuity with such Sufi traditions.

A main competitor of the Ahl-e Sunnat, as noted, is the school of Deoband, another reformist tradition placing emphasis on a purist “return” to what it considers the authentic sources of Islam. Deobandis also tend to be greatly suspicious of illicit innovation (*bid‘a*), especially in the South Asian setting, in which Islam is not the overall dominant religious tradition. In particular, the Ahl-e Sunnat’s emphasis on practices of intercession has been attacked by Deobandis as an illegitimate innovation that negates the oneness of God (*tawhid*) by elevating other transcendent mediators to a position next to God. They charge that followers of the Ahl-e Sunnat thus commit the unforgivable sin of *shirk*, or the setting up of partners or associates in the worship of God.

The 1950s saw a broad establishment of Deobandi-affiliated missionizing and institution-building in Mauritius. First, in 1954, the Sunni Surtees completed the building of their Markazi Mosque in Port Louis, intended not only as a social counterweight to the Memon-run Jummah Mosque but also as the local center of an intensifying relationship between the Surtees and Deobandi scholars and institutions of learning in India. Thus, the conflict between Barelwis and Deobandis in Mauritius was, at the beginning, also related to the antagonism between the Kutchi Memons and the Sunni Surtees. Then, in 1959, a disciple of Maulana Abul Ala Maududi in Pakistan, the founder of the Jama‘at-e Islami, a pioneering movement of modern Islamism that also traces its origins to the tradition of Deoband, cofounded the Islamic Circle of Mauritius.⁶ Finally, and most importantly, the Deobandi missionary movement Tabliqi Jama‘at arrived in Mauritius, cultivating

a close relationship with the Surtees. Initially using the Markazi Mosque as an unofficial headquarters, it quickly gained a steadily growing number of followers among Muslims of all classes and ethnic backgrounds. The Tabliqi Jama'at established its own center in Port Louis in the early 1990s.

Thus, in present-day Mauritius, the Deobandi tradition is, above all, represented by the Tabliqi Jama'at, today often considered the world's most powerful transnational Islamic missionary movement and sometimes described as similar in scope to global evangelism (Sikand 2002, van der Veer 2002). When the Tabliqis started to establish themselves in Mauritius in the 1950s, the local Islamic environment was still heavily dominated by the Ahl-e Sunnat. Since the 1970s, however, the Tabliqi Jama'at has made serious inroads into the Ahl-e Sunnat constituency in Mauritius, to the extent that most Muslims now hold that the Tabliqis are close to dominating the cities and urban areas, whereas the hegemony of the Sunnis (the Ahl-e Sunnat followers) has shrunk to the small towns and villages of the countryside.

As a result of this conflict, practices of worship have come under increasing scrutiny and debate by an increasingly well-informed and educated Muslim public in Mauritius. Tabliqis often portray the Ahl-e Sunnat as representatives of a popular Islam favored by superstitious and innocent country folk blindly following spiritual mediators. More particularly, they claim that the practices of intercession favored by the Ahl-e Sunnat are illegitimate additions to Islamic practice attributable to the Indian (and, by implication, Hindu-dominated) environment in which they arose. Although Tabliqis often claim to follow no particular tradition or school of thought, the Tabliqi Jama'at is closely linked to the tradition of Deoband, in which its chief ideologue, Muhammad Zakariyya (1898–1982), was trained. Zakariyya subsequently also taught at a branch seminary of Deoband. The Tabliqi Jama'at promotes a “return” to the society of the Prophet as a model to be practically emulated (Gaborieau 1997, Metcalf 1993, Sikand 2002). Thus, the struggle over religious authority also involves attributions of authenticity, in which not only is the diasporic status of Mauritian Muslims problematized but also their origins in India are subject to a skeptical assessment on the basis of perceived Islamic authenticity.⁷

Ahl-e Sunnat-affiliated Muslims often find themselves on the defensive in these struggles, in which conflicts over religious authority and diasporic authenticity are frequently intertwined. In the last five decades, the Ahl-e Sunnat camp has steadily lost followers to the proselytizing efforts of the Tabliqi Jama'at. One of the key points of contestation between followers of these two traditions is the performance of certain devotional genres—above all, *na't*. These conflicts touch on long-standing differences regarding the role of spiritual mediation in Islamic traditions, as well as on disputes with respect to the cultivation of affective stances and dispositions in leading a pious life. Thus, among Muslims in Mauritius, the legitimacy of practices of intercession such as performing and listening to *na't* has increasingly come under pressure.

SOUND REPRODUCTION AND DEVOTIONAL GENRES

Although na't has for a long time formed part of Mauritian Muslims' religious practices, its prominence, ways of dissemination, and uses have recently changed. Apart from a small number of devotional poems and songs known as part of an oral tradition by many Mauritian Muslims, na't were known, until the last few decades, solely from "old books" from India written in Urdu. Just a few copies were available in Mauritius, and they were accessible only to the relatively few individuals with sufficient competence to read Urdu. Since the 1980s, however, na't cassette tapes and, subsequently, CDs from India and Pakistan have become widely available. At the same time, talented performers in Mauritius began recording and disseminating their own collections of na't, supported by Indian and Pakistani imams affiliated with the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition. Also, regular Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation radio broadcasts of na't performances began in the mid-1990s, and some listeners record them and then transcribe them by hand. Although na't are not locally composed in Mauritius, a task that is often described as exceedingly difficult because of the perceived danger that praising the Prophet and saint-teachers can slip into idolatry, local performers have closely collaborated with Indian imams residing in Mauritius who are affiliated with Barelwi institutions in India to study na't and to learn how to perform na't "correctly" and authoritatively.

An important aspect of the practice of na't in Mauritius is that audio recordings and their circulation and dissemination are firmly integrated with literacy practices. Mauritian Muslims interact with these recordings in the following ways: They typically listen to them on the radio in the morning at home or in the car and use them to prepare for mahfil-e mawlud on particular occasions, such as the anniversary of the demise of a saint (*urs*) or the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (*milad-un nabi*), as well as weddings and other key events in life. Often, persons preparing a mahfil-e mawlud carefully transcribe the text of na't in roman letters from a recording and then make photocopies of these handwritten notes to distribute to those taking part in the event. Given this continuity with practices of literacy, local performers have released printed booklets of texts of na't simultaneously with their cassette and CD recordings of collections of na't. The Urdu text of a na't is usually presented in *nasta'liq* writing (the variant of the Arabic script used for Urdu) on one page and, on the opposite page, a transliteration in Roman letters with a French translation running underneath. Often, the transliterated pages in these booklets, and copies of handwritten transliterations made individually from audio recordings, either purchased or recorded from radio programs, are used simultaneously in mahfil-e mawlud. Nevertheless, the printed booklets of na't texts and translations are clearly used as supplements to audio recordings of the genre, which, in their aesthetic and spiritual qualities, are considered the actual models to be emulated.

Local, accomplished na't performers have recently come to play an important role in the legitimatization and popularization of na't as a devotional practice



FIGURE 1. Mauritian CD cover of a collection of na't recordings. Photograph by the author.

through circulation of electronically mediated na't. As I mentioned, Shareef is a well-known local performer and producer of na't cassettes and CDs in Mauritius. He is a schoolteacher, now the head of a primary school, and previously directed a local mosque association (*jammāt* in Mauritian Creole) in his village in the central region of the island. Shareef started to develop his talent in the performance of na't with the assistance of the Indian maulana Bashir Ahmad Na'imi. Na'imi lived in Mauritius as the imam of the Ashrafi Mosque in the central village of Providence, later became head of the Aleemia College, an Islamic secondary school in the town of Phoenix, and now, after his return to India, heads an Islamic academy (*dar-al 'ulum*) in Uttar Pradesh. For Shareef, Maulana Na'imi was a main source of na't, enabling Shareef to build up his repertoire while Maulana Na'imi also assisted him in training his voice and interpreting the spiritual significance of na't. The teaching and recitation of na't is frequently part of curricula of Ahl-e Sunnat-affiliated madrassas and dar-al 'ulum in India and Pakistan. After Maulana Na'imi's return to India, Imam Shamim al-Azhari of Allahabad, India, a graduate of al-Azhar in Cairo and a former imam of the Jumma Mosque in Port Louis, took over the role

12. *Bafaaré madeena*

A'jab rang par hé bahaaré madeenaa

La cité sacrée brille d'un éclat extraordinaire

Ké sab jannatein hein nixsaaré madeenaa

Même le paradis veut chercher les faveurs de la cité sacrée.

1 *Rahé ounké habwé hassé ounké jalwé*

Que mon cœur devienne la demeure d'où jaillit la splendeur de Huzoor (ﷺ)

Méré dil bané yaadgaaré madeenaa

Que mon cœur soit le foyer de l'amour de Huzoor (ﷺ)

2. *Mataaék lagatwé hein ankhon sé apné*

Les anges descendent continuellement du ciel pour contempler sa demeure

1 *Shabo roaz aaké muzaaré madeenaa*

et ce mouvement sans relâche durera jusqu'au jour dernier

3. *Banaa aasmaan manzilé Ibné Mariam (as)*

La station de Hazrat Issa (as) fut le quatrième ciel

Gayé laa makan taaj daaré madeenaa

Tandis que la station de Huzoor (ﷺ) se trouve devant l'audience d'Allah

4. *Méri khaak yaa rab na barbaad jazé*

Que mes poussières ne soient pas éparpillées vainement

Passé marg girde ghoubaaré madeenaa

Qu'on me les mélange avec celles de Médina après ma mort

5. *Do a'alam mein hat-taa hé sadqaa yathan ka*

L'aumône émanant de sa demeure sacrée est distribuée à travers l'univers

Hamein ik nahin rétzaa khwaaré madeena

Ne serait-ce que moi qui suis toujours dans l'attente d'en recevoir, ne serait-ce que des miettes

6. *Sharaf him sé haasil houwaa ambiyaa (as) ko*

Les prophètes (as) qui ont atteint un statut aussi prestigieux l'ont hérité

Wohi hé Hassan ijtekhareé madeena

grâce à celui qui est la fierté de Médina, O Hassan

بہارِ مدینہ (۱۲)

عجب رنگ ہے بہارِ مدینہ

کہ سب جہنم ہیں نارِ مدینہ

۱۔ رہے ان کے جلوے بسے ان کے جلوے

میرے دل بنے یادگارِ مدینہ

۲۔ ملائک لگاتے ہیں آنکھوں سے اپنے

شب وروز آکے مزارِ مدینہ

۳۔ بنا آسمان منزلِ ان مریمؑ

گئے لامکاں تاجدارِ مدینہ

۴۔ میری خاک یا رب نہ برباد جائے

پس مرگ کرو غبارِ مدینہ

۵۔ دو عالم میں بٹاتا ہے صدقہ بہاں کا

ہمیں اک نہیں ریزہ خوارِ مدینہ

۶۔ شرفِ جنم سے حاصل ہوا انبیاء کو

وہی ہے حسنِ افتخارِ مدینہ

FIGURE 2. Two pages of a booklet accompanying a Mauritian CD of nat poetry. The original Urdu is on the right; on the left is a roman transliteration of the Urdu, with a French translation underneath. Photograph by the author.

of Shareef's mentor. Candidates for the position of imam of the Jummah Mosque were traditionally recommended to the mosque association by Maulana Shah Ahmad Nurani in Pakistan.⁸ This close collaboration with Indian Ahl-e Sunnat-affiliated imams has enabled Shareef to release nine cassettes and CDs with accompanying booklets, which are widely circulated among Muslims in Mauritius and are among those most frequently consulted and listened to by Muslims preparing for a mahfil-e mawlud to be held in a home or a mosque.

RELIGION AS MEDIATION, AND THE POWER OF REPRODUCED NA'T

The recitation of na't is a form of religious practice designed to produce a range of performative effects. First, the practice of na't is expected to transform the soul of the subject, imbuing one with love for and emotions of attachment to the Prophet. *Na't khwani* is a tradition of verbal art in which performers are judged according to how intensely they move emotions and how their voices stir attachment to and love for the Prophet Muhammad in listeners. Thus, na't is a key practice in a theory of intercession. In it, performers praise, declare their love for, and ask for blessings for intermediaries between themselves and God, such as the Prophet Muhammad, and through other poetic genres also for 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Ghareeb Nawaz, and members of the ahl-e bayt. Performing na't is a way to accumulate spiritual merit (*sawab*) and, thus, constitutes a means to turn performers and other participants in a mahfil-e mawlud into morally improved persons. In the eyes of its advocates, na't is a performative technique to "rouse in the soul an overwhelming desire to invoke blessings and salutations upon him [the Prophet]" (Kabbani 2002: 69). Na't is, therefore, a performative practice also in the sense of creating pious dispositions in the participating subjects (Hirschkind 2006). The practice is a component of a larger complex of pious behavior, *adab*, promoted as a model for an ideal Muslim subject by Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi, who, apart from being a prolific theologian and jurist, was also known as an accomplished composer of na't (Sanyal 1996: 13). Na't and other practices of intercession are often labeled *traditional* components of a popular South Asian Islam. Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi, however, saw himself as a reformer and understood the practice of na't as part of a wider renewal of Islam (*tajdid*) in colonial India, a concern he, of course, shared with members of other Islamic movements of his day. The performance of na't moves the mediator to intercede on behalf of the performing subject, and, at the same time, it attracts to the performer-participant the spiritual merit necessary for the balancing of one's sins.

The use of sound reproduction in the practice of the long-established genre of na't has become common, with recordings from Pakistan and India and local productions circulating widely among Muslims in Mauritius. At the same time, "live" recordings of visiting master na't khwan from India and Pakistan were first

distributed on tapes and then CDs.⁹ Technologies of sound reproduction are used for preparing a mahfil-e mawlud, or making a “program,” as my interlocutors say. At the same time, na‘t recorded on cassettes and CDs have also enabled new contexts for audition, such as listening to na‘t in the car or at home with family members and friends or alone. Na‘t sound files can be downloaded from several Islamic websites based in Pakistan, India, and the United States (Alahazrat.net n.d., Naatsharif.com n.d., islamicacademy.org n.d.) and are an additional way of listening to na‘t in Mauritius outside of established contexts of performance.

Before the use of na‘t recorded on cassettes and CDs, local imams were the main source of na‘t, and they kept collections of na‘t, transcribed in Urdu, in mosques. The popular Urdu language manual *Milad-e akbar* (cf. Hermansen 1995, Qureshi 1996: 55) was also well known in Mauritius as a compilation of na‘t, and it included instructions on how to recite them, explanations of the benefits derived from this act, and practical instructions on how to hold a mahfil-e mawlud. Even though Urdu has been taught as an ancestral language to students of Muslim background in Mauritian schools since the 1930s, most Mauritian Muslims do not possess sufficient Urdu literacy skills to read the na‘t, although, clearly, most Muslims I know in the towns and villages I worked in understand the texts when they are recited. In this context, cassettes and CDs have newly popularized na‘t, making the poetic genre accessible to people who lack reading knowledge of Urdu.

At the same time, recorded performances by accomplished na‘t khwan are now understood as authoritative models to emulate. Mauritian Muslims following the Indian Ahl-e Sunnat tradition stress the importance of performing na‘t in the right way, which, in particular, should not remind listeners of Hindi film songs, should incorporate the correct pronunciation of the Urdu, and should feature the “right” version of na‘t. The latter concern is especially important because, in expressing profuse praise of the Prophet, na‘t is a delicate, controversial genre that, in the eyes of most Muslims, must never suggest equivalence between the Prophet and God. As one imam in a village in northern Mauritius put it, composing na‘t is like walking on the blade of a sword, and thus, it pushes the limits of what is considered proper Islamic practice on several counts. The recordings reassure many Mauritian Muslims that reciting and appreciating na‘t is not a matter of ignorance about proper Islamic conduct in the diaspora or an unwarranted perpetuation of the ways of ancestors who may not have been knowledgeable about scriptural Islamic traditions when they arrived as indentured laborers in Mauritius. Scholars working in the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition have, for a long time, cited hadith supporting the claim that performing na‘t was a common practice among the companions of the Prophet and was also highly appreciated by him. The circulation of first tapes, and then CDs, from India and Pakistan, and their production in Mauritius under the guidance of imams from South Asia, have convinced many Muslims that na‘t is, indeed, an authentic and authoritative practice in the Muslim world beyond Mauritius.

In this sense, the great concern about the correctness and faithful reproduction of na't that partly motivates the use of sound reproduction evokes a "recitational logocentrism" attested for other Islamic traditions (Messick 1993: 21–25; see also Lambek 1990). At the same time, this recitational logocentrism has a key performative dimension because the authentic presence of the "correct" text, enabled through long chains of dialogues, is the precondition for its performative efficacy—here, its transformative effects on pious subjects and its successful enactment of spiritual intercession. Attributions of authorship are of key significance, because the recitation of na't is interpreted as a merging of the performer's voice with an authorial voice ensuring the authenticity of the poetry. Even if performing na't does not directly summon a divine presence, as the recitation of scripture does, it at least evokes the presence and authorship of learned personalities and religious authorities like Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi as creators of na't, ensuring the appropriateness and efficacy of the recited poetry. At the same time, the faithful reproduction of na't, which many see as enhanced by the use of techniques of voice mediation, exceeds the "correct" transmission of spiritual knowledge because it also involves the mediation of a visceral experience of piety and personal closeness to Islamic authorities, which, in the performance of na't, are interdependent dimensions of the event. This continuity, crucial for both the authenticity and performative efficacy of na't, is, in turn, something many see more faithfully realized through mediation by voice rather than writing. This is an important aspect of my interlocutors' stress on the necessity to preserve the "proper meaning" of na't and on the potential dangers arising from a failure to do so in a chain of performative entextualizations (using the term coined by Briggs and Bauman [1992]) and recontextualizations.

Technologies of sound reproduction are important in the faithful transmission of a particular performative style, which is as significant for the efficaciousness of na't as for the authoritative transmission of texts. When I asked my interlocutors how one could tell whether na't was recited well, many of them negatively defined what a "good" na't is by contrasting it with Hindi film songs, since in Mauritius the consumption of "Bollywood" entertainment is ubiquitous.¹⁰ Shareef, for example, described the struggle against what he sees as the influence of the music of popular Hindi films on the performance of na't as one of his main motivations to become a widely known na't khwan and disseminate his own recordings: "Earlier Muslims in Mauritius did know the words of na't from imams and old people, but many did not know how to read na't correctly. They would simply recite the lines they remembered to the melodies of film songs they heard during the day, and would not keep the proper restraint and respect and would spoil everything. I did not want film songs to be used for na't, and this is why I wanted to give guidance."

The performative style of na't that Shareef aspires to is demarcated from film songs in numerous ways. It includes no use of musical instruments and no female voices, unless the occasion is a mahfil for women only. Also, in contrast to

performances of Hindi film songs, the speed of the delivery should always be moderate and not overtly rhythmic, and the performer should guard its recitational qualities. In other words, the recitation of na't should be performed in iconic correspondence to the decorum, the restrained and respectful conduct and absence of agitation, that many conceive as a distinctive characteristic of a pious Muslim. For Shareef, the faithful transmission of this particular performative mode is best ensured through sound reproduction, because this dimension cannot be mediated through mere knowledge of the printed texts. There are not enough accomplished na't khwan in Mauritius to provide effective guidance without mass mediation to counteract the influence of Hindi film songs on the performance of na't in an environment saturated by Bollywood.

An enthusiastic adoption of na't audio recordings in local religious practice has also been informed by the sense that the spiritual benefit, or sawab, bestowed on the person practicing na't increases with the number of times na't is recited and listened to, granted the appropriate disposition of the listener. The observation that recorded na't enables Muslims to listen to na't, and experience its transformative effects, much more frequently than previously—by opening up new contexts of use for the genre, such as individually listening to it at home or in the car, has led to the perception that the increased electronic circulation of the genre has resulted in a multiplication of its spiritual benefits. At the same time, some fear the dangers that come with the diminished control over its use and the expansion of contexts of performance and audition. These are, above all, the blurring and crossover of na't into musical entertainment genres, such as film songs, with their associations of romantic love, and the sensual dance performances central to Hindi film productions. In fact, the soundtrack of a famous Hindi classic, *Mughal-e Azam* (Asif 2005 [1960]), features na't (cf. Asani 1995: 182). Any benefits of listening to and appreciating na't in these entertainment contexts, many Mauritian Muslims fear, would be corrupted and turned into their opposite, and many are concerned that the tunes of film songs have a powerful influence on the way na't is recited and performed in Mauritius. In addition, the leaking boundary between na't and popular musical genres provides support, at least in Mauritius, for the numerous detractors of the practice of na't.

SAFEGUARDING THE AUTHORITY OF DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES THROUGH SOUND REPRODUCTION

Even many Muslims affiliated with the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition in Mauritius are ready to concede that performing and listening to na't are supplementary to what are seen as essentials of Islamic practice and, thus, constituting an additional layer of piety. Their argument with Deobandi-affiliated Muslims is whether the performing of na't in a mahfil-e mawlud is an illicit innovation (bid'a), as the

Deobandis argue, or a laudable practice bestowing additional benefits.¹¹ An imam in the northeastern village of Plaine des Roches illustrated the latter perspective in the following way, speaking to me in his usual Mauritian Creole with heavy use of Urdu loanwords:

Why not do a little extra? Why just the bare necessities? Why go without the benefit of doing something which is not minimal obligation but otherwise recommended? One day a great ‘alim said, “When the Day of Judgment [*qayamat ka din*] comes, God will not do justice [Allah pa pu fer insaf].” A group of *maulanas* [respected Muslim leaders who are graduates of Islamic institutions of learning] got together, outraged, and staged a protest, confronting their teacher. “How is it possible,” they said, “that you declare God will not be just on the day of judgment?” The teacher replied, “If God would do justice on the Day of Judgment, no one would be allowed to enter paradise, everyone would be left in a hopeless position [Si zur qayamat pu fer insaf person pa pu kapav al jannat, tu pu tasse]. Think of all he has given us. He has given us so much, we would never be able to repay him. God’s mercy is much greater than your worship [Allah so rahmat li boku pli gran ki u ibadat]. Therefore, why should we only do the minimum while worshipping? The more good you do, the better for you, you will receive benefits. For every minute you do this [extra] worship, you gain sawab. So we say, do all of it!”

Nevertheless, many Ahl-e Sunnat–affiliated Muslims I worked with agree that practicing na’t is not a minimal obligation (*farz*), such as *salat* (the five daily prayers), and that it, therefore, constitutes an additional exercise of piety, standing in relative exteriority to those ways of interacting with God considered minimal obligations for all Muslims. Thus understood, the performance of na’t adds a new dimension of mediation, a new intermediate dimension between Muslims and God. It does so by transforming the subjects’ affective stances to an intercessor, who consequently facilitates their approach to God and his revealed word. But at the same time, intercessional practices, such as na’t, raise the issue of straying too far from the words in which the immediate presence of God can be experienced, such as in Qur’anic recitation. This, of course, points to long-standing debates on issues of intercession (*shafa’a*) in Islamic traditions. Mauritian Muslims who side with the Deobandi-affiliated Tabliqis reject performing and listening to na’t precisely because of its perceived supplementary character, which raises the specter of corruption of commended forms of worship through song, illicit innovation, and even idolatry.

The use of sound-reproduction technology can be seen as a new intervention in these old debates, which continue to divide Muslims in Mauritius, as well as in other parts of the Muslim world. For many Mauritian Muslims, religious authority and concerns about diasporic authenticity, in the sense of dealing with the temporal and spatial remove from a homeland, are closely interrelated questions. When I asked Anwar, who at the time was in his twenties and worked in a relative’s construction-steel business, about the differences between listening to na’t

on cassettes and CDs and the ways na't was previously known and practiced in Mauritius, he answered,

We Muslims are a minority here, and far away from the Islamic world. We are often worried about whether what we follow is correct, with so many things: how to celebrate weddings, doing mawlud, and distributing sweets afterward. Some say yes, some no. Especially na't—many are against it and say that na't often exaggerate and describe our Prophet like God, and say that reciting in group is forbidden. We know this is wrong, but we have to be certain. Listening to great na't khwan on tapes or the radio gives us an example to follow. We could always obtain the opinion of great scholars in India or Pakistan. But with the tapes, there is better guidance and assurance. It is easier to follow the teachings of great authorities this way, even if they are far away.

A local epistemology of sound reproduction, informed by a logocentric authority of voice in religious discourse, evokes the problematic known in the literature on the political economy of globalization as “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989) or “deterritorialization” (Appadurai 1996, Tomlinson 1999; see also Castells 1996: 462–463). According to this literature, electronic mediation of discourse and images is invested with a special significance, because enabling the shrinking of spatiotemporal distances is one of the key formal properties of such forms of mediation. These concerns are relevant to my discussion because the diasporic dimension of Islamic traditions in Mauritius is important for the circulation and uses of na't through cassettes and CDs. Here, a sense that electronic circulation of na't is evidence of its genuine and authoritative status in Islamic traditions in South Asia, and even in the Arab world, is also understood in terms of diasporic authenticity. Mauritian Muslims are often concerned that living as a minority on the periphery of the Muslim world might result in their deviation from what is understood to be correct Islamic practice (cf. Lambek 1990). In other words, the spatial and temporal remove from the homeland of the immigrating Indian ancestors gives rise to concerns that authentic religious practice may gradually be lost, a worry Muslims share with many Mauritian Hindus (Eisenlohr 2006a).

There is no direct equivalence, however, between uses of sound reproduction in the circulation of na't, with its authenticating powers, and the media-facilitated experiences of time-space compression described by theorists of globalization. Instead, I suggest, the potential for a minimization of temporal and spatial distances enabled by the material frame of technologies of sound reproduction is appropriated and reworked through established logocentric epistemologies of an authority of voice. Thus, media practices recast what is often described as a hallmark formal characteristic of contemporary media: facilitating experiences of multiple spatial and time frames simultaneously in terms of a particular tradition of discourse circulation. Here, Mauritian Muslims reshape technology according to a genealogical form of Islamic authority centered on a “safeguarding” of textual and performative transmission through long successions of reliable interlocutors.

This genealogical form of authority in the transmission of texts privileges vocal recitation over writing, because the former has a stronger link to a personal chain of transmission. Such authority has deep roots in Islamic scholarship, where in the study of hadith a text (*matn*) needs to be authorized by a supporting chain of reliable and morally trustworthy interlocutors (*isnad*), ideally reaching back to the Prophet and his companions. “Documents alone, without a line of *persons* possessed of *both* knowledge and righteousness to teach and convey them across the years, are useless as instruments of authoritative transmission. It is the ‘golden chain of sincere Muslims’ that guarantees faithful copying, memorizing, reciting and understanding of texts—not only those of the Hadith but those of the Qur’an and all subsequent works of Muslim piety and learning” (Graham 1993: 507, emphasis in the original; see also Brown 2009).

According to my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors, this paradigm of *isnad* also extends to vocally recited *na’t* and shapes the domestication of sound reproduction into this devotional practice. In other words, what theorists of globalization describe as the shrinking of time and space afforded by technologies of electronic mediation—here, sound reproduction—is interpreted in terms of a reliable transmission of authoritative voice. As a consequence, the reproduction of vocal sound ensures the authenticity and performative force of devotional discourse and recital through long chains of transmission and circulation. This reading of what sound reproduction accomplishes also shapes the experience of listening to recorded *na’t* as aesthetically appealing, recitationally correct, and thus, effective as a technique of intercession and accumulation of *sawab*. That is, *na’t* recorded on cassettes and CDs in the particular diasporic context of Mauritius, where the contest over religious authority is also reflected in concerns about diasporic authenticity, in some measure mitigates apprehensions about too many layers of mediation between God and Muslims, because of the qualitative characteristics attributed to it as a means of voice mediation. A recitational logocentrism informing the use of *na’t* recorded on cassettes and CDs also refutes concerns about the corruption of sacred utterances as a result of the multiple layers of mediation between pious subjects and God presupposed by practices of intercession such as *na’t*. It counteracts the doubts about the legitimacy of performing *na’t* as compared, for example, with the recitation of scripture. This particular articulation between mediation of voice through sound reproduction and religion understood as a practice of mediation between subjects and an otherworld, therefore, supports the claims of the followers of the *Ahl-e Sunnat* tradition in Mauritius in their struggle with *Tabliqis* and *Salafis*, as they make a situated use of this articulation to mitigate what are widely seen as the dangers of their practices of intercession.

Aspirations in Transnational Religious Networks

On a cool August night in 2003, I walked with Raouf through his hometown in northern Mauritius. We were going to the house of his relatives, the parents of Naseem, whose wedding was going to be held the next day. That night before the wedding, a mahfil-e mawlud was to take place at Naseem's parents' house. Arriving at the house before the performance, we met Anwar, who was to be one of two main reciters of na't this evening. Anwar was a student in a dar-al 'ulum recently constructed in a small town in the east of the island, and he was a spiritual follower (*murid*) of Maulana Shah Ahmad Nurani, who until his death in 2003 was also a prominent figure in Pakistani politics. A great emphasis on saint veneration and practices of intercession formed part of Anwar's education at the seminary. It also constituted an important part of the background for the na't recitation that would take place that evening. Islamic institutions in Mauritius tend to maintain close links with centers of religious authority in South Asia, and this was also the case with the newly established dar-al 'ulum in the east of the island that Anwar attended.

The dar-al 'ulum in Mumbai that supervised the new academy had recently sent what is believed to be a hair of the Prophet and a hair of the famous twelfth-century saint-teacher 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani, to be kept as sacred objects in the new institution. In 2002, a maulana who headed a Barelwi institution in Mumbai brought the sacred hairs to Mauritius. Both hairs reportedly continue to grow. Before the performance, Anwar showed me a photograph of the still only half-finished dar-al 'ulum, in which what appear to be rays of light emanate from the part of the building that houses the blessed hairs (*bal mubarak*), a phenomenon that Anwar and several others present attributed to a miracle. Several of those attending the

mahfil-e mawlud surrounded Anwar as he held the photograph, discussing precisely which part of the then unimpressive and unfinished building the light was emanating from. Six years later I heard from an Urdu teacher, who is also a locally known na't khwan, that the maulana had in the meantime given *ghuzl* (full ritual washing) to the hairs when he last came to Mauritius. Reportedly, the water that had come in contact with the hair had cured a cancer patient who subsequently drank it.

Not only in Mauritius, but also in the wider South Asian world and its diasporas, the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at tradition is known for propagating devotional practices such as the recitation of devotional genres in honor of the Prophet and other Islamic authorities. It also encourages the veneration of prominent Sufi saints. The new dar-al 'ulum Anwar attended is also under its control. For students of Sufism, not only the telling of miracles but also the reference to light in the vignette above is hardly surprising, given the influence of the Sufi conception of the nur-e muhammadi, the continuing presence of the Prophet manifest as pure light (Schimmel 1975: 224). The opportunity to perceive it is often a highly desired goal for those engaged in Sufi practices in devotion, an ultimate spiritual reward that suddenly suspends the multilayered steps of spiritual progress and processes of mediation separating the devotee from the divine through the relative immediacy of light.

Mauritian Muslims affiliated with the Ahl-e Sunnat maintain dense transnational ties to religious organizations and centers linked to the same tradition in other countries of the Indian Ocean region, most importantly, India, Pakistan, and South Africa. To give only a few examples, in Pakistan, Maulana Shah Muhammad Anas Nurani Siddiqui Qadri Madani, the grandson of the Barelwi 'alim and missionary Abdul 'Alim Siddiqui, a follower of Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and the founder of the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition in Mauritius, headed the Jama'at-e Ulama-e Pakistan, the political party representing the Barelwi 'ulama and affiliated institutions until 2008. Like his father, the late Maulana Shah Ahmad Nurani, and his grandfather, he regularly visits Mauritius, where he is hosted by the Jummah Mosque in the capital, Port Louis. He is also the president of the World Islamic Mission, an international network originally founded by Shah Ahmad Nurani in 1972 and closely connected to the Jama'at-e Ulama-e Pakistan. The World Islamic Mission plays an important role in recommending candidates for the position of imam of the Jummah Mosque in Port Louis, whom Mauritian Muslims following the Ahl-e Sunnat also recognize as the mufti of their country. The Jummah Mosque is controlled by the Kutchi Memon Society of Mauritius, and ever since independence in 1968 the Mauritian government has treated the mosque as the official representative of the Muslim community of the country.¹ Since the turn of the century the Da'wat-e Islami, a transnational Islamic missionary movement that propagates the Barelwi tradition, and which is consciously modeled on the



FIGURE 3. Center of the Da'wat-e Islami in Port Louis, Mauritius. Photograph by the author.

Tabliqi Jama'at (Gugler 2011), has also come to Mauritius. In 2009 its members held weekly meetings in five locations and went on weekly missionary tours throughout the island. The movement is locally headed by two Pakistani brothers married to Mauritian women and is closely linked to its center in Karachi. The recent security-related restrictions on foreign students who wish to enroll in dar al 'ulum in India and Pakistan have made the religious ties to Barelwi institutions in South Africa, particularly in Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Pretoria, much more important for Mauritians, and these three cities are now among the main destinations for those seeking an Islamic education abroad.

As can be expected, the Ahl-e Sunnat-related ties between Mauritius and India are manifold. For a long time, savvy use of modern media had not been seen as typical of Barelwis and their leaders, since the movement, founded by Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi, is often regarded as the exponent of Sufi-linked popular Islam associated with the rural and small-town milieus of northern India. But this has changed. In Mumbai, the Raza Academy, a Barelwi publishing house and activist platform founded in 1978, maintains a web portal that includes directories of associated institutions and ulema. However, it is, above all, the sheer mass of "small" media, especially audio and video CDs of devotional poetry performances and religious speeches and sermons, that make up the Barelwi media universe in Mumbai.

The web portal also provides links to other locations where the same media circulate. When I met the founder and head of the Raza Academy in Mumbai in 2009, he told me that he was attending the *arba'in* (commemorative gathering on the fortieth day after a person's death) of Sarfaraz Naimi, a Barelwi 'alim in Lahore who had been assassinated by a Taliban-linked suicide bomber in his seminary the previous month. But another purpose of his trip to Pakistan the following day was to collect the latest audio and video CDs of na't, *manqabat* (Sufi poetry in praise of saints), and sermons from there so that upon his return he could give them to local entrepreneurs to copy and redistribute in India.

In Mauritius local media companies such as Etoile Brilliant Sound specialize in quickly producing and distributing audio recordings of recitals of na't and manqabat by Mauritian performers. Even when audio CDs of na't performances are locally recorded and produced in Mauritius, there is often an effort to link such recordings to a source in South Asia deemed to be authentic. For example, an Urdu teacher in a village in northeast Mauritius who is known as an accomplished na't khwan, having won a prize at one of the yearly televised na't competitions by the state-run Mauritius Broadcasting Cooperation, has produced a CD with accompanying booklet under the sponsorship of the dar-al 'ulum linked to a maulana in Mumbai. Even though this CD is his own production, he has taken care to stress that the na't performed were all composed by Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi and taken from his collection of poetry titled *Hada'iq-i bakhshish* (Khan Barelwi n.d.). In matters of style (*taraz*) and mode of musical recitation (*taran-num*; Qureshi 1969), he claims Fasihuiddin Soharwardi as his example to emulate, and to me he described the moment when the visiting Soharwardi embraced him after having listened to his na't recital at the Mauritius Broadcasting Cooperation competition a few years earlier as the greatest honor he ever received in his life.

Both in Mauritius and Mumbai, I found that religious personalities and others involved in the running of mosques or dar-al 'ulum, such as the *mutawalli* (president) of the Jumma Mosque of Port Louis, were eager to establish transnational links, to exchange visits by imams and religious students, and to share media such as books, CDs, and DVDs. Mauritian institutions invite and host religious authorities and other specialists and cover their costs of travel, while those invited give sermons, recite the Qur'an, provide instruction to students, bring books and electronic media, and, sometimes, as I described above, even bring sacred objects with them. Until recently, Mauritian students would also be sent to dar-al 'ulum in India. But the reasons why Ahl-e Sunnat-affiliated Muslims sought to take part in the transnational network between Mauritius and Mumbai differed.

In Mauritius, some hoped that such links would enhance the credibility and status of the institutions they were running and to which their livelihoods were also connected. For example, the then-half-finished dar-al 'ulum that received the maulana from Mumbai who, as mentioned earlier, had donated the sacred hairs to the institution on his visits to Mauritius, was the project of the local imam and one

of his local allies who unsuccessfully ran for the office of president in the mosque council. The imam's partner and cosponsor also owned a hardware and building materials store and a small construction business, which had carried out the work realized so far. But at the time of my research, substantial work still needed to be done to complete the construction of the dar-al 'ulum, and for this the imam and his partner depended on local donations by those who were convinced of the enterprise's worthiness and its religious credentials. Despite the presence of the bal mubarak, with their miraculous emanation of light, and the visits by the maulana from Mumbai, some doubted the legitimacy of this undertaking and its associated fund-raising. Similarly, in another town in the east of Mauritius a few kilometers away, another religious specialist, whom I call Imam Parvez, had a plan to build and extend a dar-al 'ulum. He established a similar connection to Mumbai, in this case to a well-known dar-al 'ulum, an affiliation that at the time was also proudly displayed on his website set up by his son. A few years earlier, he had traveled to Mumbai with his son, where he met the president of the dar-al 'ulum, who is also a Sufi sheikh. The ambition of this imam, too, is to raise funds locally for the purchase of a new, bigger building. Years before this, he had failed to become an Urdu teacher, and serving as imam and head of the dar-al 'ulum is now his main occupation. In 2009, his efforts to raise funds suffered a serious setback when money he had locally collected to be used for *qurbani* (ritual sacrifice of an animal on the occasion of Eid al-Adha) in India turned out to be unaccounted for. Needless to say, many local Muslims suspected motives of personal gain behind the fund-raising for the extension of the dar-al 'ulum that this imam is seeking to legitimize with his ties to a Barelwi institution in Mumbai.

Another theme connected with participation in transnational Ahl-e Sunnat networks is what many of my interlocutors who were followers of the Ahl-e Sunnat called the "struggle against the Wahhabis." Followers of the Ahl-e Sunnat frequently use *Wahhabi* as a derogatory blanket term for their religious opponents, even those not actually affiliated with traditions of Salafism and Wahhabism, such as the Deobandis, including the Tabliqi Jama'at, who, like the Ahl-e Sunnat, follow the Hanafi school of law. When I met the head of the Raza Academy while visiting his office in Mumbai in 2009, he opened the conversation by asking me what I thought the reasons were for Wahhabis making so much headway everywhere. In fact, throughout India and Pakistan and also in Mauritius, the Barelwi ulema are steadily losing followers to the missionizing efforts of the Tabliqi Jama'at and the Salafis (Alam 2009, Sikand 2007).

The transnational dimensions of this sectarian rivalry and threat to the Barelwi constituency and Barelwi institutions are obvious. Without exception, all the Mauritian imams and ulema affiliated with the Sunnat Jama'at (Ahl-e Sunnat) that I have ever met have said they find it necessary to also fight this threat transnationally with the help of media. For example, one imam in northern Mauritius who is known for his video sermons in Mauritian Creole in support of the Sunnat Jamaat put it this



FIGURE 4. Stall selling CDs and DVDs in front of the Jumah Mosque, Port Louis, Mauritius. Photograph by the author.

way: “The Wahhabi are sincere, but they have wrong ideas. Their arguments are not good, but their salesmanship is [Zot ban largiman pa bon, me so salesmanship li bon]. In contrast, the Sunnat Jama’at’s arguments are good, but their salesmanship is not. Their way of presenting is not good [Zot fason presante pa bon].”

In Mauritius, sectarian rivalry was even a key impetus in the formation of Ahl-e Sunnat networks between Mauritius and India in the very beginning. In fact, when the Kutchi Memon leadership invited Abdul ‘Alim Siddiqi to visit Mauritius for the first time in 1928, one reason for bringing Siddiqi to preach and missionize on the island was to counter the Ahmadis, who at the time were at the peak of their influence among Mauritian Muslims (Donath 2013: 181–182, Jahangeer-Chojoo 1997: 211–212).

In Mumbai’s Bhendi Bazar neighborhood, a maulana who heads a dar-al ‘ulum and is imam of the adjacent Sunni mosque stands for a rather different kind of transnational Ahl-e Sunnat network with Mauritius, which very much resembles an extension of established Sufi *murshid-murid* (spiritual master-disciple) relationships in the Firdausi and Qadriyya Sufi orders (*silsila*). Since the nineteenth century, Bombay has been an important hub in the formation of a transoceanic shrine-based religious economy involving Sufi ties (Green 2011). The maulana belongs to a family connected to the well-known Firdausi (a collateral line to the Suhrawardiyya order) shrines of Bihar Sharif and Maner in Bihar. The maulana’s father, who had migrated to Bombay from Bihar—incidentally an area from which large numbers of people migrated as indentured laborers to Mauritius in the nineteenth century—established the mosque in the Bhendi Bazar neighborhood in 1929. When I inquired at the mosque about a meeting with him, explaining that I had recently come from Mauritius, where I had often heard his name mentioned in the previous few years, the maulana displayed the impressive demeanor of a Sufi sheikh. I could see him being revered by his followers who were bowing before him, following him deferentially and kissing his hand, while gently stroking their faces and hair with their hands that just had received the touch of the sheikh. When he received me in his office after the *maghrib* prayers on a rainy evening in July 2009, the atmosphere immediately resembled that of a small *darbar* (courtly setting). The maulana sat on an elevated thronelike pedestal in front of a low desk with a calendar, books, a landline phone, and two fancy cell phones on it. At the other end of the small, air-conditioned room, two young men stood stiffly next to the door under a large picture of the shrine of Ahmad Riza Khan in Bareilly in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, with its characteristic black-and-white dome. In the middle part of the room, the maulana’s sons and the teachers and senior aides in the dar-al ‘ulum sat on the floor, while supplicants could be seen quickly entering and leaving the room, kneeling before the sheikh in the hope of receiving a hearing of their requests. Receiving the honorable treatment extended to a foreign guest, I was assigned a place on the floor with a comfortable cushion right in front of the sheikh’s pedestal to begin my audience. I was, after all, placed in the role of a seeker of truth, who had come from far away to learn about the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama’at. Confirming most of what my Mauritian interlocutors had told me about him, he recounted how he had come to Mauritius for the first time in 1988, at the invitation of a Mauritian businessman from a suburb of Port Louis. This man,

while on a business visit to Bombay, came to offer Jummah prayers at his mosque and, subsequently, became his *murid*. The businessman's family has been hosting the maulana in their home in a suburb of Port Louis on his almost yearly visits to Mauritius ever since. While the maulana is also invited by the Jummah Mosque and the Sunni Rizvi Society of Port Louis during his stays, his network consists of an independently established and growing circle of *murid*, who revere him as a Sufi sheikh. An enlarged and framed photograph of the light emanating from the two *bal mubarak* the maulana had brought to the half-finished *dar-al 'ulum* in eastern Mauritius could be seen on the wall of the sheikh's office and reception room above a picture of the shrine of 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani in Baghdad. It was the same photograph that Anwar had shown me in Mauritius six years earlier. The personal encounters with the traveling Sufi sheikh, his visual appearance, noble lineage, and his embodiment of piety, as well as his mastery over sacred objects, ultimately constitute this Ahl-e Sunnat network between Mumbai and Mauritius. The bodily presence of the sheik himself is the medium of the divine, and the promise of miraculously apprehending the divinely inspired light its aspiration.

Among my interlocutors in Mauritius, I often heard doubts about whether these transnational ties and exchanges were "really" in the service of propagating the Ahl-e Sunnat, and not just undertakings for personal, and even monetary, gain. In Mauritius, not only the suspicions and actual accusations of embezzlement in fund-raising activities by Mauritian imams connected to the Ahl-e Sunnat network, but also the visible economic side activities of visiting Indian maulanas, mostly in the textile trade, led some to the conclusion that those who use such transnational networks ultimately do so for personal gain and economic profit. As Asif, an accountant in his early thirties from a town in northern Mauritius, put it, "I have often observed these maulanas coming and going, and have listened to imams who have great ambitions to start a new *dar-al 'ulum* here and there. But in the end I think there is always a personal interest. I don't believe it is just to spread the message of Islam." That is, for some of my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors, the setting up and perpetuation of a transnational Ahl-e Sunnat network is to an important extent firmly rooted in the local ambitions of religious entrepreneurs. Accordingly, aspiring to the cosmopolitan credentials derived from involvement and visibility in such a network can be traced back to local politics in a Mauritian town or a Mumbai neighborhood.

But the opposition some of my interlocutors drew between "true" religious aspirations on one hand, and personal and political aspirations on the other hand, requires reconsideration. Especially on the Mauritian side of the network, the desire for more "direct" relationships to centers of religious authority located elsewhere, and political and economic aspirations in a local context, cannot be neatly separated. Claims of a more immediate connection to desired centers of political and religious power, or to desired moral values and goods, often go hand in hand with claims to power in other political and economic domains. Thus, the link

between religious aspirations in a transnational network and local political and economic ambitions does not easily fit an instrumentalist account. These elements are often part of the same process, so that aspirations to establish more intensive links to religious authorities and the places associated with them cannot simply be reduced to desires for socioeconomic mobility.

RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION

Asif's observations and those of others among my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors on the possible motives of actors involved in transnational Islamic networks between Mauritius and South Asia raise the question of the relationship between religion and globalization, which is a focus of growing interdisciplinary interest. For quite some time it has been obvious that theories of modernization and secularization do not account for the growing visibility of religious mobilization in the contemporary globalizing world. In many parts of the world the spread of modern ways of life has also been accompanied by the foregrounding of religious identities, as well as by heightened activism in the field of religious reform, conversion, and the emergence of piety movements in a wide range of religious traditions. Nevertheless, until recently theories of globalization have said relatively little about religion. Among those approaches that do focus on the role of religious practices and traditions, the religious manifestations of globalization have often been treated as an epiphenomenon of what many analysts of globalization often consider its core dimension—the spread of neoliberal capitalism. For example, heightened religious activism is often interpreted as a symptom of unequal development, as a stress symptom among marginal and deprived people who struggle to make sense of the new complexity and the upheavals that the introduction of global capital brings about. This interpretation has been especially popular in the analysis of the spread of religious “fundamentalism” under conditions of globalization, where analysts have taken the former as “a defensive reaction against the fear of a violent uprooting of traditional ways of life” (Habermas 2003: 32; see also Castells 2004).

The study of Islam and globalization is a case in point. In a range of studies, developments such as the rise of Islamist movements, the growing presence of the various piety movements in the Muslim world, and, more generally, the spread of orthodox and standardized forms of Islam are portrayed as ultimately traceable not to the dynamics of religious traditions themselves but to forces outside religion. For example, Olivier Roy has argued that the rise of contemporary Islamism and literalist movements such as Salafism is tightly connected to the cultural disruptions and dislocations that characterize migration in a globalizing world, making uprooted people susceptible to simplified and “fundamentalist” forms of Islam that are not bound to particular cultural backgrounds (Roy 2004).

More recently, anthropological studies of religion under globalization have sought to correct the image of religion as a relatively marginal and epiphenomenal

dimension of globalization that continues to guide investigations of the links between religion and globalization. Thomas Csordas, for example, has posited religion's centrality in globalization processes at large. Stressing the interdependent relationships between religious and other dimensions of globalization, he points out that neoliberal discourses and ideologies of globalization have strong religious overtones (Csordas 2009). This perspective is somewhat different from what Jean and John Comaroff have described as the interdependency of religious mobilization and what they call "millennial capitalism." According to them, alongside a range of other social phenomena, recent religious expansions such as Pentecostalism are ultimately "concrete, historically specific outworkings of millennial capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 334; see also 310–315). Putting more stress on the significance of religious traditions in assessing the relationship between religion and capitalism as two key dimensions of globalization, Joel Robbins argues that religious ontologies and local understandings of global capital are often tightly interlinked. Theorizing about religions that emerged from an "axial age"—such as Christianity—and which posit a stark opposition between this world and a religious otherworld, Robbins points out that such religious cosmologies not only make such religions more transposable between cultural contexts but also have a profound impact on how people locate themselves within relationships of center and periphery that are central to the workings of globalization. Further, he suggests that religious traditions that resonate most powerfully with the experiences of marginality that are foundational to the experiences of globalization for many are also most likely to thrive in the contemporary world (Robbins 2009). My analysis of religious mobilizations among Muslims in Mauritius speaks to these approaches that stress the interdependency of religious and other dimensions of globalization.

Mauritius is an extreme example of a society that at no point in its history found itself outside processes of globalization. Uninhabited in precolonial times, the island was taken over by a succession of Dutch, French, and finally British colonizers, who turned it into a maritime outpost, a trading entrepôt, and eventually a plantation colony. Its entire population traces its origins to other parts of the world, owing to the migration of French and other European settlers and colonial administrators, and Indian, Chinese, and European trader families, as well as the ancestors of the vast majority of Mauritians, who were brought to the island as slaves or indentured laborers. Since the beginnings of contemporary neoliberal globalization and the setting up of "export processing zones" in the late 1970s, economic activity in Mauritius changed from dependency on a vulnerable sugar monocrop, which left most of the population poor, to rather successful and diversified arrangements. The latter above all rest on textile manufacturing and tourism and, more recently, also include information technology and finance services. With further intensified integration into global economic flows since the early 1980s, the majority of Mauritians have experienced vast improvements in their standard

of living, in addition to expanded public infrastructure in the fields of education, health, and transport, and in the provisions of a rudimentary welfare state. Hailed in the 1990s by the World Bank as an “economic miracle,” Mauritius has been one of the success stories of economic globalization in the non-Western world.

RELIGIOUS MOBILIZATIONS IN MAURITIUS

Since independence from Britain in 1968, the Mauritian government and state institutions have been dominated by middle-class Hindus, particularly those of North Indian background. Under their leadership, state institutions in this former plantation society have embarked on a politics of cultural citizenship that stresses the origins of Mauritians in other parts of the world. The promotion of diasporic “ancestral cultures” with colonial genealogies that, in turn, largely consist of religious traditions is the most salient aspect of this policy of nation building.² As mentioned before, Islamic traditions play the role of an official ancestral culture for Mauritian Muslims, who share with Hindus an Indian origin. Such recognized ancestral cultures enjoy not only the support of transnational networks but also the encouragement of Mauritian state institutions. The latter are concerned about managing and regulating the relations between the different religious groups in Mauritius. Violence between Hindus and (Christian) Creoles in 1999 heightened concerns about the competition and political struggle between members of different ethno-religious groups that took the form of destructive “communalism.”

In Mauritius, Gujarati trader families, who settled on the island as free immigrants with often substantial amounts of capital, have traditionally played the role of Islamic institution-builders. Originating in western India, these traders used the colonial connections established in the context of British imperial expansion in the nineteenth century to settle in and move between East and South Africa, Madagascar and the Mascarenes, and the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia (Markovits 1999, Kalla 1987). They have largely been responsible for the spread of reformist and more standardized forms of Islam in Mauritius.³

Nissar Ramtoola is the mutawalli (president) of the Jumma Mosque of the capital Port Louis, which the government recognizes as the chief mosque of the country. He belongs to the Kutchi Memon community, who built the mosque in the nineteenth century and have controlled it ever since. Being fluent in English, French, Mauritian Creole, Urdu, and Gujarati, he has extended family connections throughout India and South Africa, as well as the United Kingdom, and is part of a prominent trader family that owns an important business agglomerate in Mauritius. These links are paralleled by the religious networks of the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at, or Barelwi, tradition that extend between these places. For example, a Barelwi Sheikh from Durban is the spiritual guide of Nissar Ramtoola's children, and in his function as president of the mosque he regularly hosts imams,

accomplished performers of devotional poetry, and other religious authorities from South Asia. He has also set up links between the mosque and a dar-al 'ulum in Pretoria that translates Barelwi writings from Urdu into English, and with an Islamic college in Coventry that trains ulama. Highlighting the claim that the mosque is the supreme Islamic authority in the country, Nissar Ramtoola played down the sectarian struggles among Mauritian Muslims and their transnational ramifications. In conversation with me, he stressed instead that "we are the chief mosque in the country, and we are open to all regardless of their affiliations. We represent the chief authority in many practical questions, such as halal certification and the end and beginning of Ramadan; we are open to all in search of guidance, to those who have questions about how to live as a good Muslim in the modern world. Therefore, my goal is to make the Jumma Mosque more interactive and to be more internationally active."

He also compared the mosque and its work to a fine car that is in need of a "good driver," by which he meant Western-style businesslike forms of advertisement, networking, and organization. Nissar Ramtoola illustrates a relationship between religion and globalization in which there are seamless connections between international businesses and a transnational network of a standardized form of Islam.⁴ These connections have in turn led to the emergence of a cosmopolitan habitus that links this transnational religious network not only with the ability to travel to and be in regular interaction with a broad range of places in the world but also with the ability to conduct life in a way that could potentially be followed almost anywhere. The cosmopolitan credentials of the president of the chief mosque in Mauritius also lend authority to his leadership over what he insists is the most important mosque for all Muslims in Mauritius, despite its actual sectarian affiliation. As the example suggests, the cosmopolitan often contains claims of authority and superiority over others, illustrating its context-bound and contested nature (cf. Hawkins 2010).

It is precisely this combination of superior education and wealth, a taken-for-granted cosmopolitan familiarity with other parts of the world, and the credentials of being part of an authoritative and transnational Islamic network, that Muslims whose ancestors were indentured laborers often jealously admire and seek to emulate. The Fokeerbux family in eastern Mauritius, for example, has successfully done so. Having built a small retail and real estate empire in the small towns of northern and eastern Mauritius, where they own several shopping arcades and household and electronics stores, they now count as the wealthiest non-Franco-Mauritians in their area and engage in regular travel for business or religious reasons. In their home village in the northeast, the founder of the family business has built a large, ostentatious mosque ornamented with elaborately decorated imported tiles and a massive dome that is unusual for Mauritius, especially in this quiet village where there already was a mosque of the same sectarian affiliation catering to the Muslim inhabitants of the village.

But many Muslims of formerly indentured family lines who struggle to get by also strive for education, money, and above all recognition by others through linking up with the transnational. As I described earlier, Imam Parvez is aiming, from a much less advantageous position, at the kind of respect and economic improvement that transnational links—to places where business is intertwined with religious networks—can provide. Coming from a small planter family, he now works as a largely self-trained imam with no dar-al ‘ulum credentials. In a modest building, he started an Islamic academy by himself and is now trying to extend it. A few years ago he started to collect donations for an extension of this academy in the eastern town where he lives. As I described in the previous chapter, crucial to this effort are the links that he has established to a Barelwi dar-al ‘ulum of Mumbai to strengthen his project. His son Nizam assists him in running the dar-al ‘ulum and has now found a job as a boat operator in the tourism trade. Reminiscent of Nissar Ramtoola’s characterizing of Indian Ocean-wide religious links through a rhetoric of business and advertising, the imam’s son also expressed the intertwining of transnational religious and economic networks in a language of marketing. Stumbling over cardboard boxes in the crammed and modest office of the dar-al ‘ulum, Nizam compared the combination of religious activities, travel to India, and fund-raising in a businesslike way: “We need to protect our community from the activities of the Salafis and Wahhabis. The main problem we have with them is that they do not respect the Prophet but treat him as an ordinary person, and then they criticize us when we show him the respect we are obliged to show to him, and [they] lead people astray. But it is not enough to just follow the Sunna of our Prophet; one also has to advertise what one does.”

The donations have enabled the imam and his son to travel to India to visit Barelwi ‘ulama and Sufi Sheikhs in order to obtain endorsements for their dar-al ‘ulum project, a trip on which they also purchased textiles in India for resale in Mauritius. In the previous year, the dar-al ‘ulum in Mumbai had sent a *hafiz* (a person who has memorized the Qur’an) to supervise the dar-al ‘ulum’s Ramadan program, seeking to boost its attractiveness. Here, too, striving for economic development and the intensification of global links has occurred alongside religious mobilization. But the same processes have also led to deep divisions among Mauritian Muslims who have aligned themselves with different networks of transnational orthodoxy.

However, this trend toward standardization and transnational orthodoxies has a history that predates the latest wave of globalization, beginning with the unfolding of the Mauritian “economic miracle” in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Ultimately, it started with the breakup of the “Indian,” or Indo-Mauritian, community that originated with indentured ancestors. Preceding the rise of sectarian divisions among Muslims as a consequence of competing piety movements, the period immediately following the Second World War already saw the beginnings of a profound split between Mauritian Hindus and Muslims. The great majority of Hindus

and Muslims came to Mauritius as indentured laborers in the nineteenth century, largely originating from what are now the Indian states of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. Many Hindus and Muslims have shared origins in northern India and can trace their ancestry back to the same districts or even villages. Their immigrating ancestors had been speakers of the regional language Bhojpuri, which remains in use in a particularly Mauritian variety across the religious divide (Eisenlohr 2006a). Hindus and Muslims shared the often harsh lot of indentured workers in the sugarcane fields, lived together in the long, very basic barracks provided by the plantation owners, and later lived amiably side by side as small sugarcane planters in the emerging Indian-dominated villages of rural Mauritius. For a long time the memory of having forefathers who had traveled in common on the same boat to Mauritius was kept alive in the villages as a form of ritual kinship (*jahaji bhai*) across religious lines. The religious divide was much less salient and also more permeable in the past, when religious and other ritual practices of immigrant Indians appear to have been as much influenced by the shared nineteenth-century regional and rural background of most indentured immigrants from India as by their affiliation with two separate religious traditions. The reformist Hindu and Islamic movements that have shaped the contemporary religious and political landscape of South Asia and its diasporas were only beginning to emerge at the time when indentured migration to Mauritius and other overseas sugar colonies was already in full swing. The purist and more standardized versions of the traditions they were propagating had barely reached the rural districts from which most of the indentured migrants departed and had not influenced them to any significant extent. It was, for example, common for Muslims to participate in devotional gatherings where folk versions of the Ramayana were chanted, while on the other hand indentured laborers of all religious backgrounds took part in the “Ghoon” or “Tazia” procession on the tenth day of the month of Muharram to commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson Husayn in the battle of Karbala. Even though widely regarded as a Shi’i ritual, a broad range of Indo-Mauritians joined in the procession, which resembled an inclusive folk festival more than a Shi’i event of commemorative mourning (Edun 1984, Jahangeer-Chojoo 1997: 278–281; see Williams 1990 and Korom 2002 for a comparable trajectory of this public ritual in the Caribbean). Starting at the turn of the twentieth century, “respectable” Muslims began to reject this exuberant and communally mixed festival owing to an increasing trend toward religious orthodoxy. Already in 1912 the Mauritian civil servant R. N. Gassita, himself a Muslim employed in the Education Department, noted that the relatively poor “créoles Lascars,” Muslims of mixed Indian sailor and African background who had been present in Mauritius since the French colonial period (1715–1810), were the only ones left to celebrate the “Ghoon.” “This festival that extends over ten days draws a large crowd to the eastern suburb of Port Louis. However, the majority of Muslims, considering it pagan[,] refrain from taking part in it. On the other hand, many non-Muslims attend” (Gassita 1912: 306).

Another frequently observed example are Muslim wedding ceremonies and their attending festivities, which for more than a century have been subject to pressures of “Sunnification” (Benedict 1961: 142, Hollup 1996; see also Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff 2007: 128, Jahangeer-Chojoo 1997), a process that already appears to have been under way in the early twentieth century. According to Gassita, whose observations were published in 1912, “After the marital blessings, the dancing-girls perform, but since recently this indecent luxury tends to disappear. This is a purely Hindu custom” (Gassita 1912: 312). However, the process of religious purification and standardization unfolded gradually, and shared ritual practices and modes of participation in rituals did not disappear overnight. For example, in Indo-Mauritian villages both Hindus and Muslims often left offerings such as cigarettes, camphor, or flowers at tree shrines dedicated to Dee Baba, a minor guardian deity. Despite long-standing trends toward orthodoxy, my older interlocutors, when remembering the decades preceding independence in 1968, described Indo-Mauritian villages as places of blurred religious affiliations and shared (even if hierarchically structured) participation in religious rituals. They recalled them as lifeworlds where neighborly solidarity and frequent social interaction across religious lines was considered the norm, and where occupation, dress, and other forms of consumption did not allow one to make easy distinctions between Indo-Mauritians of Hindu or Muslim backgrounds.

By the end of the Second World War, three interrelated developments were beginning to have a profound impact on this shared Indo-Mauritian world. First, Hindu and Muslim elites in Mauritius entered into political competition as radical changes in the colony’s constitution allowed many Indo-Mauritians to vote for candidates in the legislative assembly for the first time, and as decolonization became increasingly imminent. The erstwhile leader of the Kutchi Memons, Abdul Razack Mohamed, set up the political party *Comité d’action musulman*, which was successful in attracting most of the Muslim votes in the late 1940s and the 1950s. Hindus, on the other hand rallied behind the Labor Party, which was gradually dominated by an emerging elite composed of Hindus descended from indentured ancestors who had returned from India and Britain with university degrees. The party was led by the Hindu politician Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, who, in 1968, would become the first prime minister of independent Mauritius.⁵

A second development that played a large role in the breakup of an “Indian” community in Mauritius was the steadily intensifying missionary and religious activist network between Mauritius and India. As already mentioned, beginning in the late 1920s Barelwi sheikhs and missionaries visited Mauritius and, for the first time, introduced a reformist and rather orthodox form of Islam among Mauritian Muslims. These Indian imams and sheikhs stayed in Mauritius at the invitation of the Kutchi Memon traders, who had developed a close relationship with the Barelwi tradition in India and beyond. Aided by the legitimacy bestowed by these

Indian Islamic authorities, the Kutchi Memon leadership was active in mosque building and in normalizing and purifying religious practice among Mauritian Muslims. Among Hindus, missionaries of the reform movement Arya Samaj had begun to arrive in Mauritius in 1910, followed by proponents of the neoorthodox Sanatan Dharm movement in the 1920s. In the late 1940s, these networks were further sustained by the growing number of educated Hindus who went to study in India, and the long-standing trade networks of the Muslim Gujarati merchants with India and the rest of the Indian Ocean region. A third and closely related development was the Indian partition of 1947, whose impact was felt deeply in Mauritius, as the reactions of Indo-Mauritians to it were largely predetermined by the religious networks in which they already found themselves. Seen in relative terms, reformist Hindu and Islamic movements were, at the time of partition, already more influential among Mauritians of Indian background than in India itself. These connected trends were responsible for spreading more orthodox and purist ideas about and practices of Hinduism and Islam in Mauritius, and helped shrink the old spaces of Indo-Mauritian community and sociability that had developed through the shared experiences of indenture and political and economic marginalization in colonial Mauritius.

After independence from Britain in 1968, members of the Hindu elite quickly acquired dominance over the Mauritian government and state apparatus. They were faced with the task of postcolonial nation building in a former plantation colony, where deep communal and ethno-religious boundaries were integral not only to the old division of labor but also to the very self-understanding of a hierarchized “plural society” built around the sugar industry. Instead of adopting a strategy of suppressing and gradually erasing these boundaries through a politics of national homogenization—as, for example, attempted in the Creole nationalism adopted by postcolonial Caribbean states—Hindu elites embarked on a politics of cultural citizenship that emphasized the legitimacy of separate “ancestral cultures.” These “ancestral cultures,” in turn, center largely on religious traditions, such as Hinduism and Islam. Under this regime of citizenship and nation building, the visibly intensified engagement with Islamic traditions has not removed Mauritian Muslims from the national mainstream, despite their minority status; on the contrary, it has strengthened their claims for inclusion. Writing about religious mobilizations among South African Muslims and Hindus of Indian ancestry, Thomas Blom Hansen has remarked, “These global aspirations seek to escape the weight of local history and culture by reaching for other universals—the legacy of Arabic in the Muslim world, for instance, or India’s mythological past” (Hansen 2012: 259). While these observations also largely apply to Mauritius, Indo-Mauritian Muslims and Hindus do not experience marginalization and exclusion from a new national imaginary as South Africans of Indian ancestry often do. On the contrary, religious mobilizations along the lines of globally established major religious traditions

neatly fit the official Mauritian policy of identifying religiously grounded “ancestral cultures” as central to the postcolonial nation, a policy invented and sustained by a Hindu state bourgeoisie.

This postindependence policy of linking the cultivation of diasporic religious traditions to inclusion in the nation already provided a further impetus for religious mobilization among Mauritian Muslims. However, the origins of the current thrust toward a proliferation of signs of Muslim piety and activism can be traced to the economic boom beginning in the 1980s, and to the further intensification of global links with which it has gone along. One reason for the visible growth of orthodox and supraregional forms of Islam since the beginning of the economic boom is that more of the Muslims whose ancestors were indentured started to acquire the means for emulating the cosmopolitan lifestyles and forms of consumption of the Gujarati Muslim trader elites. The more standardized Islamic practices and affiliations of the traders began to constitute an important dimension of what most Muslims viewed as a modern, educated, and globally connected manner of living. The Gujarati trader families, who originated in South Asia—but who have, since the nineteenth century, spread around the Indian Ocean region and, in the twentieth century, to Britain and North America—are globally mobile cosmopolitans. The Islamic credentials that come with membership in particular translocal religious networks form an integral part of the networks of trade and intermarriage that provide the links between these particular Gujarati diasporas. Aspiration to higher, Western-style education also plays a large role in this process of seeking to follow the cosmopolitan lifestyles of the Gujarati traders. Interested in diversifying their businesses, elite traders have, since the Second World War, increasingly invested in the higher education of their children, many of whom have become physicians, lawyers, and other professionals. Beginning in the 1970s, Muslim descendants of indentured workers also eagerly followed suit. In short, for these Muslims, Gujarati trader elites represented a modern, cosmopolitan lifestyle in which economic power, dense transnational connections, education, and orthodox religious credentials are seamlessly connected.

The religious networks that the Gujarati traders are involved in are diverse and in competition. As already mentioned, the old rivalry between the Kutchi Memons and their chief competitors, the Sunni Surtees, also exists on the level of sectarian affiliation. The Kutchi Memons have a long-standing affiliation with the Barelwi tradition, while the Surtees have developed a deep relationship with the purist school of Deoband. In Mauritius, the latter current is, above all, manifest through the global piety movement *Tabliqi Jama'at*. However, since the 1970s, a third transnational network of Sunni Islam reached Mauritius, without the traditional mediation of Gujarati traders. Locally known as “Tawheed,” a Salafist Islamic current began to spread when a number of Mauritian Muslims who studied in Saudi Arabia became inspired by a Wahhabi-influenced and highly purist version of Islam that—in contrast to the reformist movements of South Asia, such as the

schools of Deoband and Bareilly—rejects the authority of the established schools of law, such as the Hanafi school, which is predominant throughout South Asia. In contrast to the Barelwi and the Deobandi traditions, which were at least initially introduced and led by Gujarati traders in Mauritius, the spread of the Tawheed current represents an attempt by some Muslims of formerly indentured family lines to connect to a large transnational Islamic movement bypassing the traditional leadership of Gujarati traders. The rise of the Tawheed is also the expression of a desire among some Mauritian Muslims to acquire cosmopolitan lifestyles and identities without having to emulate the Gujarati traders and implicitly recognize their leadership role.

It is important to understand that this trend toward religious mobilization, along with the rise of more standardized and reformist forms of transnational religion, is also embedded in a broader Mauritian politics of pluralism and nation building. According to Mauritian state policy, religious traditions with diasporic linkages to centers of religious authority in other parts of the world fulfill a key role in ensuring equitable and peaceful coexistence among Mauritians. Even more, since Mauritian state policy suggests that Mauritius is composed of “communities” that define themselves through diasporic links, adherence to one of the recognized major religious traditions that are supported as “ancestral cultures” in Mauritius has become central to local notions of citizenship. For Muslims, Islam represents the “ancestral culture” that legitimizes their place in a Mauritian nation.

MEDIA IN RELIGIOUS NETWORKS

Media infrastructures are widely considered to be among the main forces of globalization. Together with the spread of capital, they have brought about the kind of “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989) that is often regarded as the core of processes of globalization. As far as the cultural dimensions of globalization are concerned, Arjun Appadurai has pointed to the emergence of a global media imaginary that makes it possible to imagine lives elsewhere for comparison, self-evaluation, and building aspirations at a much greater scale and frequency (Appadurai 1996). It is clear that religious discourses and images have an important place in such a global imaginary; and indeed, many have credited media practices for what some have called a “return of religion” in the contemporary world. There is widespread evidence that contemporary religious mobilizations are inseparable from religious media practices, and it is clear that the presence of religion in the public spheres of many countries, as well as in transnational publics and subnational counterpublics, is formidable (Hirschkind 2006, Lutgendorf 1995, Meyer 2004, 2015, Meyer and Moors 2006, Oosterbaan 2008, Schulz 2012). There is thus a firm link between the great visibility and dynamism of religious traditions and global media infrastructures and the kind of media practices they make possible. Indeed, a global media presence has now become part of universalizing claims of several major religious traditions.⁶

The relationship between religion, media, and globalization can be cast in more specific terms. Certain religious traditions have become more visible and widespread because new media infrastructure and practices have resulted in a greater presence of religion in the public sphere. In addition to that, I suggest, there is also, from the perspective of many religious practitioners in the contemporary world, an inner relationship between the global reach and connectivity of contemporary media infrastructures and the global reach and cosmic universality that characterizes the ambitions of certain religious traditions, especially Christianity and Islam.

But there is another important link between religion, media, and global connections, one related to what scholars of religion have described as the intrinsic relationship between religion and media. This link has, at first glance, little to do with, and long predates, current processes of globalization. Religious traditions can be understood as institutionalized forms of interaction between religious practitioners and a religious otherworld, however this is conceived. Various kinds of media, with their material and technical dimensions, enable these interactions, whether in the form of images, scripture, the human voice, or nowadays, audiovisual technologies and the Internet. Furthermore, in many situations of religious media practice, there are theological foundations and motivations for the preference of certain media over others, such as the preference of scripture over images in Protestantism and mainstream reformist traditions of Islam. This intrinsic link between religion and media is a key to understanding the links between religion and the global. The phenomenological resemblance between, for example, Christian and Islamic cosmologies centered on the notion of the transcendent and the ways many people experience their position in a globalized world as attested by theorists of religion and globalization, needs to be measured against a related, second kind of resonance between the religious and the global in the field of media use. There is a parallel between mediated interactions with a religious otherworld and uses of media aimed at connecting to faraway places in a globalized world. In both cases, many project their wishes to engage with a spatially removed or transcendent other in more direct and immediate ways onto the latest media technologies. That is, at least in many Christian and Islamic contexts the drive to make “live and direct” connections with God (Engelke 2007) or other spiritual authorities resembles the desire to overcome time and space in this world through instantaneous connections in the deployment of advanced media technology.

Therefore, understanding the relationships between religion and processes of globalization is possible only when one considers the intrinsic links between religion and media. Most research on uses of contemporary media technologies in religious contexts, however, has been less concerned with the phenomenological resonances between religious and globalized media use and has instead coalesced around two main arguments. The first centers on religion in the contemporary public sphere, suggesting that the Habermasian notion of the secular public sphere is questionable, and that, moreover, the boundaries between religion, entertainment,

and advertisement are becoming progressively blurred (Meyer and Moors 2006). Also, in this context, scholars have argued that the deployment of new media technologies in the public sphere undercuts the power of established religious authorities, such as traditional scholarship of the ulema or state institutions regulating and controlling religion, in the case of Islam (Echchaibi 2011, Eickelman 2005, Eickelman and Anderson 1999). This latter “democratization” thesis postulates a link between newer media technologies, such as the Internet, and the pluralizing of religious authority, because of the changes in access and the participation in the public sphere that they make possible. While this kind of research has put more emphasis on the interactions between people in the public sphere and the role religious matters play in them, a second, different strand of research has stressed the religiously disciplinary character of these new forms of media, in many contexts. In this work, there is a shift from focusing largely on interactions in the public sphere, toward uses of media technologies in interactions with the divine. Usage of, for example, the latest audiovisual media technologies among Muslims listening to sermons, recitations of scripture, and devotional poetry has been described as a technique of the self that brings about a state of greater piety and closeness to God (Hirschkind 2006). Here, theologies of religious mediation particular to the religious tradition at hand play a central role in guiding media practices, such as in the choice of a specific media technology over others.

As mentioned, new media technologies are not just domesticated for use in established practices of interacting with the divine; they may also be the focus of hopes for an improved and more “direct” relationship with the divine. This was the case in the introduction of printed vernacular scripture at the time of the Reformation in Europe, and in the contemporary use of sound reproduction technologies among pious Muslims in a religious tradition where the voice, especially in the recitation of scripture, has long functioned as the privileged medium of God. Here such hopes center on the intrinsic link between media and religion as traditions of interaction and communication with the divine. This link, then, becomes the focus of desires for a more “live and direct” quality of encountering the divine through the shift to a new, supposedly superior medium. Increasing numbers of religious practitioners in the contemporary world seek more direct and immediate connections with the divine or other desirable realms of value, ideally doing away with mediation as much as possible, and, ironically, they do so by deploying more and more complex technical apparatuses in pursuit of this goal. But this link between religion and media that often leads to the search for a technical solution to bring about “live and direct” interactions with a religious otherworld also has important implications for understanding the relationship between religion and globalization. The parallels between the spread of media infrastructures enabling instant forms of interaction across the globe, and the drive for instant and more immediate access to God or religious otherworlds, show the extent to which religious traditions drive the processes of globalization. That is, the fascination with

global media infrastructures that often stand for one of the core dimensions of globalization cannot be understood in isolation from theologies of mediating the divine. At least for many Christians and Muslims, there are important religious foundations for the desire for immediate, “live and direct” interactions across large distances that characterize life in a globalized world.

In the following chapter, I show in greater detail how my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors treat technologies of sound reproduction as “vanishing mediators” (Sterne 2003). For them, sound reproduction enables seemingly more direct and immediate connections to devotional events, with their performative effects, and ultimately to God. Such media ideologies about sound reproduction also influence the maintenance of the long-distance networks of Mauritian Muslims. In this context, a sense of being a Muslim minority rather far removed from the main centers of religious authority in the Muslim world heightens concerns about orthopraxy and the authenticity of religious practices. Newer media practices designed to bring about a more direct and immediate access to remote centers of religious authority therefore simultaneously respond to two deep-seated and mutually entangled wishes. These are the desire to establish improved and more direct relationships to the transcendent, and the wish to link up more efficiently within far-flung religious networks in this world, such as those between Mauritius and South Asia. Safeguarding the appropriateness and authenticity of *na’t* poetry performances through mediatic connection to centers of Islamic authority in India and Pakistan is one particular example of a broader role that contemporary audiovisual media play in intensifying the global links in the Muslim world. Such religious media practices among Mauritian Muslims show that the search for more immediate relationships to the divine and more direct connections within transnational religious networks in this world are closely intertwined.

The Materiality of Media and the Vanishing Medium

Among Mauritian Muslims, *mahfil-e mawlud* are long-established, religious speech events that have become thoroughly integrated with sound reproduction. Those who create these speech events are predisposed to use sound reproduction technology, since Mauritian Muslim assumptions about the authentic transmission of authoritative religious discourse have become identified with and materialized in such technology. First, such assumptions cast sound reproduction technology as supportive of a key element in the process of spiritual intercession that practitioners seek as the performative effect of reciting devotional poetry. In terms of the *mahfil-e mawlud* as speech event, transposition as a particular strategy of entextualization and organization of participant roles is just such a key element. Transposition is the inserting of a text in an unfolding speech event in a way indicating the text's origins in another spatial and temporal context. This strategy is in turn located in a deictic field constituted in performance (Hanks 2005).

A second force responsible for the adoption of sound reproduction in devotional practices of Mauritian Muslims is practitioners' desire for personal and immediate relationships with spiritual authorities, such as the Prophet Muhammad, as they strive for faithful and conventionalized repetition of devotional poetry. According to some Mauritian Muslims, sound reproduction technology fulfills such desires both by facilitating perceived immediacy in spiritual interactions and by sustaining the authentic transmission of conventionalized religious discourse on multiple dimensions. Outlining the role that sound reproduction plays in such instances, I also discuss how the desire for immediacy in spiritual interactions revolves around the dialectics of semiotic tones, tokens, and types, and finally, I relate this dynamic to the problem of repetition and change, in which the modalities

of storing performed signs play a crucial role. The process of domestication of a media technology (Silverstone and Hirsch 1992) that I describe is primarily motivated by actors' folk models of how the performance of the devotional genre works as a means of spiritual intercession, and how electronic sound reproduction as a technology becomes part of religious and linguistic performance. In more general terms, this suggests that linguistic or, more broadly, semiotic ideologies predispose certain kinds of change rather than others; and in some instances such changes may include how different media are valued with respect to each other. In my examples, the kind of change achieved appears to be in line with the linguistic and semiotic ideology of recitational logocentrism widespread in some Islamic traditions, and with the links between wishes for immediacy and electronic media technology.

In the previous two chapters, I described how Mauritian Muslims have recently come to treat sound reproduction as enhancing and authorizing the transnational circulation of devotional discourse and poetry. In this chapter, I investigate sound reproduction as the alternation between the storing of signs through media and their performative recontextualization, showing how the media-supported devotional practices that are the focus of this book testify to the intertwining of signification and the materiality of media. A sense of immediacy between religious performers and spiritual authorities emerges though the combination of sound reproduction informed by a semiotic ideology of recitational logocentrism with the deployment of particular deictic markers in discourse. Deictic markers are textual and grammatical elements that establish links between discourse and persons, objects, and spatial and temporal frames. Examples include personal pronouns, possessives, and temporal and spatial markers—like *then*, *now*, *here*, and *there*—that require knowledge of a particular context for understanding what they refer to. In order to demonstrate the interlocking of media and performative practice, I provide a detailed analysis of devotional recitals of *na't* poetry.

Uses of new media technology have long been held responsible for deep socio-cultural transformations (Deutsch 1953, Anderson 1991). Often new technologies of this type are portrayed as exerting a powerful impact on the settings where they are widely used, raising questions about the interface between new technologies and the settings in which they are adopted. However, the notion of a boundary between media technology and its new social and cultural settings, on which such an investigation depends, is itself problematic. This is because media ideologies, ideas, and background assumptions about media and mediation that circulate in a certain sociocultural context may not only condition the adoption of new technologies in profound ways but also may become an integral part of the technology itself (Boyer 2007, Eisenlohr 2004: 25, Gershon 2010). Linguistic anthropological approaches can facilitate a better understanding of how uses of sound reproduction have shaped the recitation of devotional poetry, which this book is about. In recent years, linguistic anthropologists have analyzed the transformation of publics through uses of new media technology (Barker 2008, Spitulnik

1996), the migration of strategies of voice representation from oral discourse to written online interaction (Jones and Schieffelin 2009, Jones, Semel, and Le 2015), the creation of new identities and selves through new forms of enregisterment on television (Goebel 2008) and radio (Swinehart 2012), the technological reproduction of voice (Kunreuther 2014, Weidman 2006), and new forms of language standardization in online communication (Brink-Danan 2011, Handman 2013). Linguistic anthropological theory and methods can also provide insights into how uses of new media technology become part of religious practices, a topic that has become the subject of a steadily growing literature in social and cultural anthropology. They can suggest, too, alternative accounts of the adoption of new media in sociocultural contexts by pinpointing how particular assumptions and expectations about media drive and condition this process. Media ideologies are so much an integral part of media technology that the formal and material properties of technologies can sometimes be understood as the crystallization of often long-standing assumptions and desires regarding mediation as a process of interaction between human and divine actors.

While analyzing Mauritian Muslims' performance of *na't* in greater detail and showing how uses of electronic media have become a key part of this devotional practice, I seek to specify the discursive and textual strategies that media practices support. The latter are, in turn, essential to this religious performance in its diasporic setting. Mauritian Muslims' engagement with sound reproduction is motivated by wishes for the immediate presence of the divine. In this, media technology enables a sense of relative immediacy among Mauritian Muslims that can be traced to particular semiotic ideologies, "basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world" (Keane 2003: 419). Studying how Mauritian Muslims have made sound reproduction part of practices of spiritual mediation therefore requires an investigation of the semiotic and, more specifically, media ideologies that enable these Muslims to treat sound reproduction as a way to circulate and transmit devotional discourse that authenticates the latter.

Analyzing the performance of *na't*, I show how electronic mediation has become an integral part of the "deictic field" in which it is situated. The latter consists of linguistic acts of deictic reference in a particular context of interaction as part of a wider, historically constituted social field of power relations and positions that transcends the immediate setting of performance.¹ I then address the question of sound reproduction and illustrate how Mauritian Muslims' uses of this media technology can be seen as a response to a more widespread dilemma surrounding the tension between spiritual immediacy and religious mediation through typified forms of discourse and performance. Integrating linguistic anthropological theories and methods with those of media studies, I investigate the alternation between storing signs and their performative recontextualization. In doing so, I treat discourse circulation as a mediatic practice that demonstrates the interlocking of signification and materiality.

Because na't is best understood as a transformative practice, its performative aspects are especially important. Reciting na't not only establishes a special relationship to the Prophet Muhammad by praising him profusely and invoking his spiritual presence, but it also fills reciters and their listeners with love and affection for the Prophet and turns them into more pious Muslims. Several of my respondents explained that by opening one's heart to the Prophet, one builds a personal relationship to him and, therefore, "becomes a better person." Na't is a performative technique that creates a pious disposition, as well as certain affective stances, especially deep affection and love for the Prophet, resulting in a sense of visceral closeness to him. As na't is a fundamentally performative practice, there was a perceived need for a technology that, to many, appears to be a medium of storage for the correct Urdu pronunciation and the appropriate recitational style.

DEVOTIONAL GENRES IN A DEICTIC FIELD

In this section I describe how na't unfolds as a speech event and then indicate how participants of such speech events treat electronic sound reproduction as an enhancement of the performance. Listening to na't on, previously, cassettes and then CDs, as well as to na't recordings circulated as mp3 files, also frequently influences performance of the genre at mahfil-e mawlud. My interlocutors told me that listening to these recordings modeled their sense of how na't should be recited. Anwar said after a mahfil-e mawlud he had organized with other relatives:

Writing na't is very difficult, and only learned scholars can do it. It is easy to exaggerate, and so we have to rely on those who know what is correct and what is not permissible. Also, those reciting need to have a good voice, one that touches the heart of those listening. There are very few people in Mauritius who can do that, but we use cassettes as guidance when we do mawlud. A good voice can make you feel the love for our Prophet inside you. The reciter can make you feel sad, or can make you joyful when you feel close to the Prophet. The best reciters move people that way, so they can feel the same way as the one reading na't.

According to Anwar, the textual authenticity of na't, and the production of pious affects, are brought together through performance. Reciting the "correct" text in the appropriate performative style produces strong emotions in those participating, which ultimately turns them into more pious persons. Ultimately, the success of the performance also depends on the receptiveness of the audience. Some of my informants described the ability to hear in a sensitive way as "hearing with the heart" (*dil se*).

Most of the mahfil-e mawlud I attended were held just before weddings. Several days before the two mahfil-e mawlud from which I took the excerpts discussed below, which were held to celebrate weddings taking place at the family homes of the respective brides in a town in the north of Mauritius, groups of



FIGURE 5. Still from a video recording of a mahfil-e mawlid. Photograph and video by the author.

relatives gathered to listen to na't recordings and decide on a "program" for the mahfils, which would occur two days before each wedding. When I asked Anwar how he and his friends plan for a mahfil he said, "Sometimes it is spontaneous, right before an event. At other times—like a mahfil for an 'urs—it has to be well planned. Good planning is necessary, because once you get into reciting na't, you can't get out. I am ambitious and I enjoy reciting, and I cannot stop once I start. But for a mahfil one also needs control, because one also needs a *diskur* [a formal address related to the occasion that has brought about the mahfil, usually delivered in Mauritian Creole]."

On both occasions, men and women were in separate rooms, and the event opened with a Qur'an recital (*khatam Qur'an*), concluded by *darud sharif*, an invocation of blessings on the Prophet, the uttering of which is considered to accrue spiritual merit (*sawab*), followed by prayers to God (*du'a*). The main part of the events consisted in the collective recital of Urdu na't. Each time, the recital was led by two young men who had received training in na't khwani by Indian imams residing in Mauritius; these young men were locally known for their voices and their accomplished performative style. Others present for the mahfil-e mawlid joined in to repeat lines and to recite na't or parts of na't that are very popular and which they knew by heart based on their cassette and CD experience.

In an analysis of a mahfil-e mawlud as a speech event, the religious discourse performed falls into three categories: (1) recitation of scripture or of formulaic, easily replicable utterances, (2) contextualizing comment by single participants, and (3) performance of na't poetry itself. These different types of discourse in the speech event are additionally set off from each other because they entail three different linguistic codes available in very different degrees of proficiency in the local linguistic repertoire of the Mauritian Muslim community. These include Arabic; Mauritian Creole, the predominant vernacular language of not only Mauritian Muslims but also nearly all Mauritians; and, commonly, Urdu.

Here I focus on how, especially with regard to the first and third types of discourse, the efficaciousness of the speech event rests on particular strategies of entextualization and on the performers' shifts between particular participant roles. By *entextualization*, a term coined by Briggs and Bauman (1992), I mean the process by which performed discourse acquires textual qualities—that is, it becomes a relatively bounded, recognizable, and replicable chunk of discourse we call text, which can be detached from one discursive context and fit and grafted into others. In linguistic performance, texts are transported from context to context—that is, they are decontextualized from prior contexts and recontextualized in a new discursive context, a different social and temporal setting in which language is used. By *entextualization*, or *text-building*, I mean potentially limitless sequences of de- and recontextualization of discourse. This perspective emphasizes texts as ongoing processes rather than as fixed products. An analysis of this process of textuality shows that a text exhibits accumulated traces of the social relationships leading to its production while also indicating the anticipated moral and political futures that the ongoing process of textuality is directed to.

Looking at the first type of discourse that constitutes the mahfil-e mawlud as a speech event, such as in Qur'anic recitation, the performing participants orient themselves to the text as animators, whose agency is clearly different from that of the assumed composers and sponsors of the text. Here I draw on Goffman's conceptualization of the speaker role as comprising different components—the composer or “ghostor” (a term inspired by *ghostwriter*); the sponsor or originator, who takes responsibility for what is said; and the animator or relayer, who is actually uttering the words (Irvine 1996, Levinson 1988, drawing on Goffman 1974: 517–520)—that is, different agentive roles a speaker can inhabit with respect to the performed discourse. Recitation of scripture constitutes a strategy of entextualization that one might call replication (Urban 1996, Shoaps 2002). The ideal is to reproduce a more or less precise token of the text in the setting of the mahfil-e mawlud, while making it clear that the performers uttering it are by no means either the composers or the originators responsible for the text. Instead, the performers are dealing with divine scripture or with formulaic utterances such as the ritualized Arabic benedictions in honor of the Prophet that are known as darud, which frequently precede and follow the recitation of na't. Generally, this strategy

of entextualization suppresses the deictic origins of the discourse, as it cannot be attributed to any particular person, social, or spatiotemporal setting. Darud, like many other ritualized and formulaic religious utterances, such as the Lord's Prayer in the Christian tradition, do not have recoverable authors or originators. Uttering them places one in the role of an animator.

This maximally contrasts with the second text-building strategy, the contextualizing comments by single participants in Mauritian Creole. An example from a performance on the occasion of a wedding is the short speech by a single speaker wishing the future couple well, and which often also connects the wedding and the couple to the theme of marriage as a *sunna* (recommended and customary practice) of the Prophet. Here the participant roles of composer, originator, and animator are unified, because the speaker takes full responsibility for what is said. He does not pretend to animate someone else's words or utter some scripted discourse already performed somewhere else. That is, the discourse is fully grounded in the individual's performance and does not point to a deictic origin elsewhere.

The third strategy of entextualization, and the one I am mainly concerned with, is what the psychologist and linguist Karl Bühler called transposition (*Versetzung*; Bühler 1965 [1934]: 134–140, Haviland 1996, Shoaps 2002). It involves the creative insertion of a text into the speech event at hand in a way that points to the former's origins in another spatial and temporal setting. In other words, the text has recoverable authorial origins somewhere beyond the speech event, and its recontextualization in a speech event unfolds in a way indicating these origins. I suggest that the performance of na't poetry, the central component of mahfil-e mawlud as a devotional speech event, effects such a transposition. Composing appropriate na't poetry is considered a difficult task best left to qualified scholar-poets. Na't are often attributed to such prominent scholar-poets as Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi (1856–1921), the founder of the Barelwi tradition, who was known as an accomplished composer of na't (Khan Barelwi n.d.). Na't is therefore deictically grounded, because its performance involves textual and grammatical elements pointing to its authorial origin: its composition and original recitation by a qualified scholar-poet. This assumed origin is important because many Muslims in South Asia and Mauritius consider some compositions, especially those by Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi, to be at least partly divinely inspired. The elements pointing to this authorial origin include the respective deictic markers.

The deictics of attributing na't to particular agents are highly ambiguous. If the performance is an act of transformative devotion, the reciters need to take personal responsibility for the praise poetry in honor of the Prophet. Indeed, numerous na't are directly and personally addressed to the Prophet. Many of the deictic markers, therefore, are ambiguous, because the "I" of the devotional discourse can be simultaneously attributed to prominent scholar-poets recognized as or otherwise assumed to be their authors—thus pointing to the context of composition—and appropriated by the performers as the actual mahfil-e mawlud unfolds. This

kind of transposition is, as a result, markedly heteroglossic in a Bakhtinian sense, but very different from the recitation and replication of scripture or other formulaic utterances. Let us consider the following na't excerpts, which the performers adopted from a locally produced audiocassette and one CD (Chady 2000b, 2001). Example 4.1 expresses in exuberant terms the devotee's encounter with Madina, often considered the Prophet Muhammad's favorite city and a common metaphor for the presence of the Prophet in na't poetry. It also features a sample of deictic makers that play a key role in the process of transposition.

EXAMPLE 4.1

Phir karam ho gayā		Once more [he has] favored me with a gift of Madina
main madīne calā		Here I go to Madina, to Madina
Main madīne calā , main madīne calā		How could I describe [my] heart's joy
Kyā batāun milī dil ko kaisī khūshī		How could I describe [my] heart's joy
Kyā batāun milī dil ko kaisī khūshī	5	When I heard the good news
Jab yeh muzdah sunā		that I am to go to Madina
main madīne calā		When I heard the good news
Jab yeh muzdah sunā		that I am to go to Madina
main madīne calā		10 When [my] glance falls on the green dome [of the resting place of the Prophet in Madina]
Gunbad-e sabz par jab paṛegī nazar		When [my] glance falls on its minaret [of the resting place of the Prophet in
Unke minār par jab paṛegī nazar		15 Madina]
		What joy this will bring [to me],
Kyā surūr āegā		here I go to Madina
main madīne calā		What joy this will bring [to me],
Kyā surūr āegā		here I go to Madina
main madīne calā		20 My impure feet on such divine ground [Madina]
Mere gande qadam aur unka karam		My impure feet on such divine ground
Mere gande qadam aur unka karam		God, preserve [my] honor, [let] me go to Madina
Lāj rakhnā khudā, main madīne calā		25 God, preserve [my] honor, [let] me go to Madina
Lāj rakhnā khudā, main madīne calā		

In this excerpt, I have highlighted deictic particles, locutives, and evidentials. As the act of transposition unfolds in performance, it also recalculates the values of the deictic elements, as they now point not only to the context of author/formulator of the poetry but also to the animator in the present performance, who is now taking responsibility for the discourse. These are first-person personal deictics, and verb forms agreeing with them, throughout the excerpt: *main* ("I"), and verb forms *calā*

and *sunā*, and the first-person possessive pronoun *mere* (“my,” lines 20 and 22). There is also use of the temporal deictic *phir* (“then, afterward, another time”) on line 1. A further way of grounding devotional poetry in the context of the present performance, in maximal contrast to the recitation of scripture, is the use of the evidential *kyā batāun* (“how could I describe/tell”) on lines 4 and 5. Evidentials are functional linguistic devices that indicate a mode of knowing and, especially, the speaker’s attitude toward the knowledge. In many languages, evidentials are grammaticalized. The use of evidentials directs attention to the speaker’s own stance and therefore individualizes and personalizes the speech, while the ambiguous participant role this evidential points to can also be attributed to both the formulator and the animator.²

Similarly, in the following example (4.2), in addition to the first-person possessive pronoun *merā/mere* the temporal deictics *kal* and *āj* play similar roles in bridging the context of composition or formulation of the poetry and the context of the performance at hand, because they point simultaneously to the “yesterday” and “today” of the scholar-poet uttering the poetry for the first time, and to the individual performers who recite in the present context.

EXAMPLE 4.2

Lab pe na't-e pāk kā naghmah kal bhī thā aur āj bhī hai		Sweet and pure na't have adorned [my] lips in the past , and are also manifest today
Mere nabī se merā rishtā kal bhī thā aur āj bhī hai	5	My relationship to my Prophet has been there in the past , and is also manifest today
Aur kisī jānib kyon jāen aur kisī ko kyon dekhen Apnā sab kucch gunbad-e khazrā kal bhī thā aur āj bhī hai	10	Why turn anywhere else why approach anybody else If your source of favors has been there in Madina in the past , and is also there today
Apnā sab kucch gunbad-e khazrā kal bhī thā aur āj bhī hai		If your source of favors has been there in Madina in the past , and is also there today
Lab pe na't-e pāk kā naghmah kal bhī thā aur āj bhī hai	15	Sweet and pure na't have adorned [my] lips in the past , and are also manifest today
Mere nabī se merā rishtā kal bhī thā aur āj bhī hai	20	My relationship to my Prophet has been there in the past , and is also manifest today

Another way to anchor the poetry in the present context of performance is the use of the vocative case to underline personal spontaneous appeals to friends, as in *dosto* (“O friends”) on lines 4 and 5 of the following example. Strongly resembling Shi'ite traditions, it eulogizes the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson Husayn, whom

the performer also adopts as “my imam.” Alongside the use of first-person personal deictics (*merā*, ‘my,’ on lines 3, 7, 10, 12), as in the previous example, this has the effect of further personalizing the discourse. Therefore, it deictically grounds it in the particular context of the performance, while the words also remain in their role as pointers to the world of the poet-scholar in the original context of composition.

EXAMPLE 4.3

Bāgh-e nabī ke phūl hain	In the garden of the Prophet, you are the
A'la maqām hai	most beautiful flower
Hazrat Husayn, āp ko merā salām hai	O Husayn, my salutations to you
Us kī namāz kitnī hasintar hai dosto	Friends , how beautiful is his [last] prayer
Us kī namāz kitnī hasintar hai dosto	5 Friends , how beautiful is his [last] prayer
Sajde men zir-e teigh bhī	Prostrating himself before his creator
Merā imām hai	even under the enemy's blade, this is my
	imam
Sajde men zir-e teigh bhī	Prostrating himself before his creator
Merā imām hai	10 even under the enemy's blade, this is my
	Imam
Hazrat Husayn, āp ko merā salām hai	O Husayn, my salutations to you

Example 4.4 features yet another formal means for establishing links between the recited discourse and the context of performance: the use of the locutive verb *pūcho* (imperative of “ask”) on lines 2 and 4, which is a way of attributing personal responsibility for the word, here, for future discourse, among those present in the actual performance.³

EXAMPLE 4.4

Us kī a'zmat ko	1	If you want to have an idea of his [the
farishton kī nazar pūcho		Prophet's] greatness, ask the angels
Us kī a'zmat ko		If you want to have an idea of his
farishton kī nazar pūcho		greatness, ask the angels
Jis ne sarkār kī pehlon men	5	Who have found their place at the side of
jagah pāyī hain		the Prophet

To sum up, among the textual and grammatical forms grounding the poetry both in the authorial context and in the present act of performance are, above all, deictic elements, such as personal deictic markers. These include possessives and temporal—and in many na't, also spatial—deictic markers, use of the vocative case, and use of locutives and evidentials.

We can now also identify additional devices that specifically point to the authorial origins of the na't beyond the frame of the present performance. These are the

use of a ritual, “ancestral” linguistic code—that is, Urdu in the Mauritian context—extensive metrical, phonetic, and semantic parallelism characteristic of this devotional genre; the extensive use of metaphors marking the discourse as scripted poetry; and in many *naʿt* the mentioning of the pen name of the poet (*takhallus*) in the last or penultimate line of the poem (*maktaʿ*). The latter is a frequently recurring generic convention, as in the following excerpt:

EXAMPLE 4.5

Sab qātilān-e āhl-e Muhammad ke wāste	1	For the sake of the progeny of Muhammad
Sab qātilān-e āhl-e Muhammad ke wāste		For the sake of the progeny of Muhammad
Ehsān qassam khudā kī wo jannat harām hai	5	O Ehsan , may their murderers be strictly banned from paradise
Ehsān qassam khudā kī wo jannat harām hai		O Ehsan , may their murderers be strictly banned from paradise

Comparing the alignment of participant roles in performing *naʿt* with the recitation of scripture, we can see that there is much more overlap between the participant roles of composer, responsible sponsor or originator, and animator in the performance of *naʿt* than in the recitation of scripture. In the latter, the roles of formulator and originator are always clearly separated from the role of animator, which the performers in a *mahfil-e mawlud* play, not bearing any responsibility for the uttered discourse.

However, even though the *naʿt* performance textually highlights the deictic origins of the *naʿt* poetry beyond the frame of the actual event—this is what constitutes its reportive marking as a representation of a prior speech event—this does not mean that Mauritian Muslims who take part in a *mahfil-e mawlud* bear no responsibility for the performed discourse. On the contrary, an identification of the performers with the “I” of discourse in *naʿt* is in fact crucial to this devotional genre as a means of pious transformation and discipline. What is most characteristic of how *naʿt* is entextualized in the devotional speech event is the tension between *naʿt* as texts that were composed by respectable and identifiable poet-scholars who might also be seen as their originators, and the relayers or animators who recite the poetry, but who seek to perform in a way that piously transforms themselves and others listening by spontaneously mobilizing certain emotions. I suggest that this tension between relatively scripted, iterable poetry, and personal enactment of highly emotional devotional discourse, is momentarily resolved by an unstable overlap between the poet-scholars’ roles as originators and the roles of the Mauritian Muslim performers in the devotional event. Performers have to draw on authorized poetry presumably composed by prominent scholar-poets,

but they also need to highlight their own agency in and responsibility for the performed poetry. The replication of the deictic structure of the original text in the target text performed in the devotional event aligns the performers' selves with those of the poet-scholars, and this merging of stance and agency results in the experience of pious affect. The provisional unity of composer, originator, and animator as effected by the deictic devices employed in foregrounding the affective dimensions of the performance is central to the particular project of religious discipline at hand, as it establishes relationships between the performer's self and the states of affairs described in the poetic text.

SOUND REPRODUCTION AS DEICTIC GROUNDING

Sound reproduction intervenes in the process of entextualization that is central to the practice of *na't*. The circulation of *na't* through electronic media, as in *na't* recorded on CDs, does not suppress its deictic origins but instead, in the eyes of many Mauritian Muslims, actually helps secure them as sources of authority and authenticity. Electronic mediation of *na't* supports the process of deictic grounding that not only distinguishes *na't* from the recitation of scripture but also is, in fact, indispensable to its success as a technique of intercession and subject making. As mentioned in chapter 2, the attribution of *na't* to authoritative scholars and poets functions in much the same way as other forms of genealogical authority in other Islamic traditions. In those, the authenticity of religious discourse is reckoned by tracing its transmission through long chains of reliable interlocutors (*isnad*), the chief example of which is the study and transmission of *hadith*.

The specific point at which use of the electronic medium enters the practice of devotional Islam in Mauritius is the process of entextualization that I have called transposition. The electronic medium accomplishes this by supporting the provisional merging between the agency of the performers in the *mahfil-e mawlad* and the agency and responsibility of authoritative scholar-poets. This merging is unstable and needs constant support, and it is possible only when the origin of the *na't* is deemed to be authentic—that is, when the authorship of a respected scholar-poet can be assumed. Electronically circulated *na't* is often treated as especially well authenticated, since many Mauritian Muslims believe that the process of reliably transmitting the poetry is greatly enhanced by the use of sound reproduction.

For many Mauritian Muslims, the electronic circulation of *na't* not only projects a presupposed context of past authentic transmission of discourse but also entails the effect of authenticity in future performances, such as in the authentication of *na't* performances modeled on or otherwise informed by authoritative *na't* recordings. As explained before, many Mauritian Muslims consult and listen to these recordings as models for “live” performances, and several of my respondents, such as Mohamed, a former school principal, saw them as guides to safeguarding against inappropriate performances. He stressed that *na't* recorded on

cassettes and CDs play an important role in distinguishing a correct recitational style from *filmi* (resembling the Hindi popular cinema) performances: “Reading na’t should not be done in a dramatic, exaggerated way as in the films but should be from the heart: sentimental, with a soft voice. This comes naturally for those who love the Prophet, and in this way they can create an impact on the listeners.”

Even though he argued that the right way of performing comes naturally through affection for the prophet, a few moments later he added that sound reproduction in fact provides important guidance in arriving at the performative style he advocates. “The influence of the films is so strong that the na’t cassettes and CDs are necessary to give the right example of how to read na’t. It is because of them that na’t has become more popular, and that people pay more attention to reading in the right way, and not with exaggeration.”

That is, according to Mohamed, affection for the prophet alone is, after all, not fully reliable as a means to bring about the right performative style: media technology plays a key role in guiding local performers toward the right recitational technique. Thus, the recordings, too, play a key role, in ensuring that the perceived authenticity of the performed poetry is maintained in their future transmission and circulation. For Mohamed, the recordings address this necessity of maintaining qualitative integrity across performances and across the chain of transmission of na’t.

The use of electronic sound reproduction supports deictically grounded transposition through the projection of a past authoritative origin, which can, in principle, be recovered. That is, sound reproduction becomes part of the indexical ground of deictic reference to such authoritative origins (Hanks 1992). Mauritian Muslims’ use of sound reproduction therefore condenses the social process of de- and recontextualizing discourse via long chains of reliable interlocutors, because the ideology that this medium is transparent brings about the sense of an immediate connection between the discourse of scholar-poets and the discourse of the Mauritian performers. It is important to realize that such a projection of past and future authentic transmission of discourse is ultimately inseparable from the material qualities of the medium of circulation.

ENTEXTUALIZATION AND TECHNOLOGY: STORAGE, REPETITION, IMMEDIACY

The mediatic dimensions of discourse circulation provide an interesting perspective on the issue of social and cultural change often associated with uses of new technology, because both themes revolve around the problem of repetition. *Repetition* here means the possibility of performing signs and performing social acts more than once in such a way that they can be experienced as “the same” as in the previous instances. Thus, the issue of technological mediation is not central to my analysis just because Mauritian Muslims have begun to use techniques of

sound reproduction in their cultivation of na't. Regardless of any use of contemporary electronic technology, the process of de- and recontextualization of discourse is always a mediatic process, because discourse circulation raises the issues of storage and repetition of signs, which enable their travel between different contexts.⁴ Storage and repetition therefore also constitute the condition of possibility for subsequent acts of appropriation or rejection of circulated discourse, such as parody, imitation, comment, refutation, elaboration, or translation. Entextualization as a mediatic practice simultaneously enacts two interlinked processes—on one hand, storage and repetition, and on the other hand, the reinscription of singular dimensions of particular performances into their more conventionalized aspects.

In order to be available for repetition in different contexts, traces of performed signs have to be materially deposited in some storage medium, such as the human body, writing, or an electronic technology such as sound reproduction. Discourse circulation then consists of potentially limitless sequences of storage and repetition. Here Charles Sanders Peirce's distinction between semiotic tokens and types is useful for an analysis of how such sequences of storage and repetition of signs unfold. While *token* refers to the singular and material presence of a sign in each context of occurrence, *types* refers to the conventionalized dimensions of a sign that enable us to recognize the fifteen token realizations of "the" on a single page as instances of the same word (Peirce 1932: 141–142). This recognition of tokens as realizations of types has become commonplace in linguistic analysis, and it is doubtless the predominant approach to the problem of repetition of signs among scholars of language. But it is important to realize that repetition of signs also involves the reinscription of performed semiotic tokens into existing semiotic types, or their cumulative condensation into new or altered semiotic types. Taking a Peircean perspective, these types comprise not only the Saussurean symbols constituting a linguistic code but also presupposed aspects of indexical and iconic sign relations that produce the likeness between token realizations of a performative event.⁵

In the performance of na't, these are the multiple sign relations that constitute na't as a typified speech genre, such as the dense semantic, phonetic, and rhythmic parallelisms that build and characterize the poetic text; the relations of presupposed co-occurrence between the poetic text; the use of Urdu as a linguistic code; the social identities of the performers; and the expected setting of the performance constituting the mahfil-e mawlud as a speech event. Finally, the performance as a whole stands in an indexical relation to authorizing prior events, of which the actually unfolding performance is presumably only a replica. Given this complex layering of sign relationships, the claims of some authors that there are no objective repetitions of signs and performative acts seem to be especially plausible here (Derrida 1991, Weber 2001). Nevertheless, Peirce's concept of the semiotic type seems indispensable for the very possibility of repetition, which is of central importance to those practicing na't in their concerns about

the authenticity and efficacy of the performed poetry. Even though it is valid to stress the difference between semiotic tokens, such as in the differences evident between performances of the “same” na’t, the notion of the semiotic type is fundamental to the iterability of the sign, as it distinguishes what kind of difference in language and other kinds of performance still counts as a repetition, and what from a particular perspective already appears to be something entirely new. In other words, in order to be available for new performances in new contexts, traces of semiotic tokens not only have to be deposited in some form of material storage but also must be reinscribed in a broad range of semiotic types, which these traces may also potentially rewrite.

The important point is that different kinds of material storage may have different consequences for the ongoing circulation of discourse. They may affect the dialectics of storage and repetition of signs in ways not only conditioned by their material or formal properties but also shaped by the sociocultural evaluations of such forms of storage by their users. As Sabir, a young man in his twenties, put it after a na’t performance: “Cassettes and CDs bring to us the voice of the na’t khwan in perfection. It is as if you were actually present when he is reading na’t; it is almost like the entire emotional experience of being there. The old books cannot do that. You hear not only the correct words but also the correct way of reading na’t. It is a more direct way to learn about na’t and to be touched by it.”

For Farhad, the young aspiring na’t khwan, it was important to re-create during a na’t performance the divinely inspired context in which learned scholar-poets composed their best na’t. “Take for example *Mustafa-e jān-e rahmat pe lakhon salām*. The Prophet was present when Al’a Hazrat [Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi] wrote this na’t. Al’a Hazrat saw the Prophet in front of him, and in this state he composed the poem.”

He pointed at one of the written collections in booklet form that are often sold together with na’t CDs. “In this booklet you find the correct text, but the emotional tone that stirs others and that tells them in what state Al’a Hazrat composed the na’t is in the voice. And for most people, listening to a CD is the only way to feel this; and that is why there is so much benefit in making and distributing CDs.”

That is, reciting na’t appropriately and effectively is not just a matter of repeating the correct text that can be credibly linked to an authoritative source, but is also about creating the affective context and pious emotions of love for the Prophet in oneself and the listeners in the particular act of performance. The performance of a particular na’t involves the re-creation of a divinely inspired affective context among the listeners and performers that, according to those cultivating the poetry, was part of its original composition. For Farhad, sound reproduction can safeguard the qualitative integrity of the poetry, ensuring that the emotions Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi felt when the Prophet appeared before him are maintained and accessible across successive performances and can, therefore, be re-created in pious performers of the na’t. In this way, partaking in such a qualitative continuity

across performances also indexes the participants' commitment to, and the continuity of the spiritual tradition and authority of, Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi.

Here I suggest that Mauritian Muslims' use of sound reproduction also testifies to a utopian wish to overcome the tension between affectively loaded immediacy such as that lived in the creative, radically contextual quality of situated real-time discourse, and the stereotyping patterning that corresponds to the semiotic types in language and other forms of semiosis, such as in the faithful repetition of poetic texts.⁶ According to the semiotic ideology of recitational logocentrism that informs *na't* as a devotional practice among Mauritian Muslims, the dissatisfaction with the written text as a medium between the poet-scholars and *na't* performers centers on a disjuncture between the pious performance, with its transformative qualities, and the written text. In this context, treating sound reproduction as an authenticating technique is, above all, founded on the wish to find a medium that erases its own traces, a "vanishing mediator" (Sterne 2003: 218, cf. Bolter and Grusin 1999) that promises relative immediacy in seeming to minimize the multiple steps of transmission and mediation between the divinely inspired context of composition and the listener's experience.

Technical media have a tendency to withdraw in the act of mediation. The functioning of such media is tied to their capability to relegate their own materiality and technicity to the background in order to convey what they are supposed to mediate. Media are supposed to give presence to the images, discourses, and sounds they mediate and not to unduly distract from them by calling attention to their own material and formal features. The latter happens when the act of mediation is disturbed by a technical failure, through, for example, a dropped cell phone call, a scratch on a record or CD, or a failing computer screen. When technical media operate in expected ways, they have a tendency toward self-erasure that seems to be a condition of possibility for their proper functioning (Krämer 2008: 273–275, Mersch 2002: 65–66). This helps explain why "new" digital media have become the latest focus of fantasies for immediacy, as their users wish to enter into "live and direct" contact with others. Such wishes for a "vanishing mediator" that have accompanied the history of sound reproduction for a long time are deeply paradoxical, because the search for a technical solution to do away with layers of mediation eventually results in the deployment of ever more complex media apparatuses and networks (Eisenlohr 2009).⁷

An important characteristic of sound reproduction reinforces desires for a "vanishing mediator" that appears to provide immediate access to what it conveys. This is the lack of phenomenal difference between a voice and its reproduction. Whether produced by a body or technologically reproduced, the sonic event remains the same in kind. The fact that we are here dealing with same physical event has led media theorist Wolfgang Ernst to describe the relationship between sounds and their technical reproduction as *gleichursprünglich*, or "equally original": "The phonographically recorded voice is therefore not merely its illustration

or representation [*Abbildung*], but that voice itself, *gleichursprünglich*, reproduced every time it is played” (Ernst 2012: 44). Sounds and their technical reproductions thus command the same kind of presence, which has the potential to powerfully distract from the technological artifice of sound reproduction.

Another key feature of sound reproduction technology distinguishes it from writing and gives rise to hopes for a “transparent” or vanishing medium: sound reproduction does not require recourse to semiotic types in the process of storing performed signs. While storage through writing involves the interaction of performed tokens with semiotic types to make storage possible, sound reproduction allows for the possibility to store traces of tokens without mediation through types. The latter occurs only when listeners retrieve signs from storage, but it is not part of the act of storage itself, such as in writing. While there is no storage of tokens as such, only a storage of their *traces*, the fact that semiotic types are not involved in the act of storage easily encourages just such an impression of tokens, with their singular qualities, being stored directly. Surely, the conversion of sound waves into digitized plastic bumps on a CD, and the reassembling of a similar acoustic signal through an optical reading of such bumps, is not an act of directly depositing a token for storage and retrieving it, but a depositing and reading of its traces. Alluding to Derrida’s notion of the trace as *ur-writing* (*archi-écriture*),⁸ Friedrich Kittler writes, “All concepts of trace, up to and including Derrida’s grammatological *ur-writing*, are based on Edison’s simple idea. The trace preceding all writing, the trace of pure difference still open between reading and writing, is simply a gramophone needle” (Kittler 1999 [1986]: 33). The medium of storage of a particular technology of sound reproduction codetermines the formats and characteristics of recorded traces, whether recorded and stored via Edison’s gramophone needle or CD technology. In contrast to writing, such as in the case of written booklets that accompany collections of na’t poetry, sound reproduction does allow for greater possibilities to retrieve signs along with their iconic and material qualities that Peirce referred to as “tones” or “qualisigns” (Peirce 1932: 142, Munn 1992: 16–17), here in particular the singular qualities of a specific voice.⁹

This reinforces a sense of immediacy and transparency. “As if there were no distance between the recorded voice and listening ears, as if voices traveled along the transmitting bones of acoustic self-perception directly from the mouth into the ear’s labyrinth, hallucinations become real” (Kittler 1999 [1986]: 37). Moreover, the qualitative integrity of the poetry across performances supported through sound reproduction re-creates pious feelings in the performers while reinforcing their commitment to a spiritual tradition and authority. For many of the Mauritian Muslims cultivating na’t, sound reproduction technology seems to hold out the promise of immediacy in that it appears to be a vanishing mediator.

It is important to note that the impression of a vanishing medium is situational, present in some Mauritian Muslims and absent in others. This becomes evident when we compare the ways in which sound reproduction functions as

a presumably vanishing technical medium for many Mauritian Muslims as they listen to recorded *na't*, with the ways in which the genre's language operates as a medium. Sound reproduction as a technical medium is, of course, not the only component of the larger process of mediation between Muslims and the divine that the recitation of *na't* seeks to bring about. It supports the circulation of religious language, especially concerning what Mauritian Muslims consider its proper vocalization. Looking at the language of the *na't* genre, it at first appears to be the very opposite of a vanishing medium. This is because of its foregrounding of the poetic function of language (Jakobson 1960). The poetry is powerful precisely because it saliently highlights the formal and aesthetic properties of its language, its crafted beauty and extensive metric, and its semantic and phonetic parallelisms. In other words, the poetic language of *na't* seems to successfully operate as a mediator between Muslims and the divine precisely because it strongly draws attention to perceptible characteristics of language such as these. Viewing religious language as a medium, it is hard to imagine how it could ever seemingly disappear in the act of mediation. On the contrary, its successful operation as a mediator in religious settings involves making itself more perceptible.

The role of such religious language as a mediator between Muslims and the divine cannot be traced to particular linguistic forms of the genre. It would be futile to try to identify presumably "disappearing" elements of poetic language in a successful performance of *na't*. Nevertheless, the dialectics of salience and withdrawal also obtain for language as a religious medium, but in a slightly different way (Eisenlohr 2011b). In the case of *na't* recitation, the role of poetic language as a religious medium more closely relates to perceived faithfulness relative to the conventions of the *na't* genre. It is in relation to such conventional expectations that poetic language can problematically be salient or recede into the background, giving way to the encounter with the divine it is supposed to produce. In semiotic terms, these generic conventions can be described as presupposed indexical relations (Silverstein 1995 [1976]: 204–206)—that is, normative expectations about what signs, linguistic and nonlinguistic, should co-occur. The latter include identities and participant roles of performers and audience members, the qualities of the spatial setting, and of course, the language uttered and the vocal style in which the poetry is performed. When all these come together in expected ways, conforming to the norms of the *na't* genre and its established modalities of performance, *na't* as a form of religious mediation unfolds smoothly and normally.

In this state, *na't* can function as a medium, not because of the phenomenological disappearance of its materiality, but because the forms and elements it consists of do not become problematically salient for the time being. However, reciting *na't* in such a way is always a delicate performative achievement subject to failure. This became clear to me through my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors' concerns about qualities of the voice in recitation as well as worries about overall recitational style. When, for example, the recitational style of a performance reminded listeners too

much of film songs, they perceived this as a break with the established conventions of the na't genre and its performance. The recited language of the genre suddenly became problematically salient, interrupting its smooth functioning as a medium. It did not recede into the background in the face of what it is supposed to mediate or bring about—namely, the personal encounter with the Prophet. Instead, the departure from what are considered proper norms of the genre rudely dashed any hopes for a pious encounter, foregrounding the material forms of the language instead, in ways that listeners considered problematic. For Farhad, who saw in na't a means to re-create the divinely inspired atmosphere in which he assumed that Islamic authorities such as Ahmad Riza Khan Barelwi had composed the poetry, sound reproduction was a means to ensure that a recitational mode clearly distant from “film style” (*filmi taraz*) would be safeguarded. For him, one had to strike a careful balance that expressed the emotionally overwhelming encounter with the Prophet, but which steered clear of the agitation and perceived excess of film style, with its unwelcome associations of romantic love and sensual dance. In order for this to happen, Farhad stressed, the proper style of recitation had to be carefully invited—or literally, “be seated”—into the na't (*na't men taraz baiḥana*).

But others among my interlocutors had a different perspective. For example, Nazeer, a tailor in his sixties who is also known as a na't khwan, fondly remembered the days when Muslims in Mauritius listened to na't performed in Indian films, such as by the late Mohammed Rafi (1924–1980), one of the most famous male playback singers of the Hindi cinema at the time. For this na't khwan of an older generation, there was nothing wrong with reciting na't in “film style.” He also had no objections to na't accompanied by instruments such as the *daf*, a drum that resembles the *ravan*. The latter is the emblematic instrument of *sega* music closely associated with Mauritian Creoles and their dance traditions. Nazeer also told me that, when preparing for a na't performance, he listened to *qawwali* devotional music—popular in South Asian Sufism—for inspiration. Returning to our discussion of na't as a religious medium, Nazeer stated that the same vocal “film” style that Farhad would strongly deplore for spoiling the divine encounter that the performance is intended to bring about did not at all constitute breaking generic conventions. From Nazeer's perspective, even when a na't khwan performed in film style, the presupposed indexical relations between the different constituent components of the na't performance remained intact. For Farhad, this would constitute a scandalous departure from the na't performance he expected. In other words, the recitation of the poetic language of na't as a medium of the divine can function as a presumably transparent or problematically salient medium simultaneously, depending on perspective.

To conclude, sound reproduction has become integrated into previously established religious practices. I have argued that this process is primarily driven by Mauritian Muslim assumptions about this technology. Islamic traditions regarding the reciting voice and the transmission of authoritative religious discourse strongly

influence these assumptions. More particularly, two notions about sound reproduction play a prominent role. First, that sound reproduction supports a particular form of entextualization central to the practice of *na't*, allowing a merger of the agency of the genre's performers with that of revered poet-saints. The second key assumption is that sound reproduction supports immediacy in relationships with spiritual authorities, that it provides a range of affordances that allow listeners to project onto it their desire for a "vanishing" medium. The most important of these affordances is that sound reproduction enables qualitative integrity in the authoritative transmission of voice. This is made possible by the circumstance that a voice and its technical reproduction result in the same kind of sonic event. Following Wolfgang Ernst, a reproduced voice is not simply a representation but that voice itself. This confluence of technological affordances and theological assumptions about the voice in Islamic traditions ultimately accounts for the enthusiastic adoption of sound reproduction in Mauritian Muslims' devotional practices. Nevertheless, the performative realization of an encounter with the Prophet through *na't* recitals is always a delicate achievement that may also result in failure. Moreover, Mauritian Muslims disagree over what exactly counts as a good, successful performance. Therefore, the success of such performances in bringing about a rapprochement between Muslims and the divine is situational, and a *na't* recital may simultaneously fail and succeed as a process of religious mediation.

The Work of Transduction

Voice as Atmosphere

But what of the qualities of the voice? Those among my interlocutors who habitually listened to the *na't* genre offered a variety of descriptions for these qualities. Still, they found that the characteristics of voices were difficult to put in words. Doing justice to the importance they placed on vocal qualities requires a detailed examination of the voice in *na't* recitals, analyzing its sonic dimensions as atmospheres. To this end, I lay out the notion of transduction for studying religious vocal performances and their effects, applying it to religious sounds. Using spectrogram analysis, I compare examples of different styles of vocal performance of *na't*, focusing on those that my Mauritian Muslim respondents deemed to be especially authentic and powerful. In the process, the links between the transductive power of particular sonic events in performance, their tonal morphology, and states of religious experience become evident. Sonic events in the devotional contexts I analyze turn out to be atmospheres with “real,” objective existence that devotees intermingle with through the transductive and immersive power of sound.

As noted earlier, the reciting voice and its qualities are a key site where the power of religious performance became manifest for my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors. Above all, this appears to be in line with the general centrality of the voice and its sonic dimensions in Islamic contexts (Messick 1997, Gade 2006, Jouili and Moors 2014). The voice is also central to the paradigmatic logocentric recitatorialism explored in previous chapters. Concerning ideas about the voice, the Indian background of Mauritian Muslims should be considered, too. Not only did the voice develop into the most prestigious form of musical expression in an emerging “classical” canon patronized by middle-class modernity in India since the late nineteenth century (Weidman 2006), but there are also long-established

histories of vococentrism in South Asia, with accompanying hierarchies in favor of the voice, traceable to precolonial times (Wolf 2014: 12–13). At the same time, a range of scholars in the humanities working from European perspectives have considered the voice and its qualities enigmatic and inscrutable. In these intellectual circles, two aspects of the voice especially account for its association with the ineffable and the profound. These are the voice's links with the body and, conversely, its often-perceived "spectral autonomy" from speakers' bodies and subjectivities (Žižek 2001: 58).

First, following Roland Barthes's famous formulation of the "grain of the voice," the voice can be considered most intimately linked to a speaker's body, signaling in its unmistakable individuality the presence of the speaker's body, even against a person's intentions and subjectivity: "The 'grain' is precisely that: the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue" (Barthes 2012 [1972]: 506). The voice is thus not only a permanent reminder of the embodied nature of discourse but also a direct and involuntary manifestation of body as such, indissolubly bound to and heralding its earthy existence. As a useful counterweight to the abstractness and antimaterial biases of Saussurean semiology, Barthes treatment of vocal performance reasserts the presence of the body, including its instinctive dimensions. According to this perspective, the voice thus features as a diagnostic of deeper bodily truths and expressions that are not controllable by human intentionality.

In contrast, several thinkers have taken the dissociation of the voice from bodies and subjectivities as a starting point for theorizing its nature and particularities. Instead of postulating a deep and involuntary connection between a speaker's body and her voice, they have been fascinated by the voice's spectral autonomy. This perspective on the voice takes issue with the long-standing tradition of viewing the voice as the innermost expression of an actor's subjectivity, the established logocentric viewpoint that is also behind the widespread anthropological use of "voice" as a trope for agency and subjectivity. One way to arrive at such a perspective on the voice is the experience of listening to one's voice in the moment of enunciation, with the frequent result that one's own voice is heard as an "other," or stranger (Waldenfels 2006: 198–199), an insight that resonates with Derrida's comment that "the voice hears itself" ("la voix s'entend"; Derrida 2011 [1967]: 65). Even in everyday experience, one's own voice, often assumed to be a core manifestation of the self, is thus haunted by an uncanny foreignness. One can listen to one's own voice while, in the process, a distance between the self and its voice opens up, betraying the aspects of the voice that cannot be encompassed by intentionality. The voice thus acquires features of an autonomous object, which from a perspective that takes for granted a deep link between voice and subjectivity is an unsettling experience.

Theorists such as Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar have accounted for this autonomy of the voice from the subject in psychoanalytical terms. They have cast the voice as an embodiment of psychic dimensions that elude signification and the

control of a subject aware of itself. Dolar has drawn on Lacanian psychoanalysis in order to do so, specifically on Lacan's notion of the real. By this, the latter meant an undifferentiated wholeness of absolute presence that is forever lost as infants develop awareness of themselves as separate beings. Such undifferentiated wholeness can later be experienced only through traumatic gaps and inconsistencies of the symbolic order, the sociocultural array of semiotic differentiation and signification of which the chief paradigm is language. According to Dolar, the voice is the embodied trace of what Lacan called the *objet petit a*, or the unattainable object of desire that emerges as the result of the traumatic occlusion of the real through the symbolic order (Dolar 2006: 11). As a consequence, the voice is an "object" different from the subject to which it is often thought to belong, and it is characterized by otherness in corporeal terms.

Shifting from a psychoanalytic to a media perspective, the haunting otherness of the voice is also a feature often ascribed to the acousmatic voice, a voice separated from the body that produces it (Chion 1994, Macho 2006, Kane 2014). The acousmatic voice has become common through the spread of sound reproduction technology. It has long been an object of fascination and spiritual imagination, such as in reported experiences of hearing the voices of spirits, ghosts, the dead, or even God (Schmidt 2000). Jonathan Sterne has argued that desires to hear acousmatic voices, especially the voices of the dead, were an important part of the nineteenth-century cultural milieu in North America and Europe that motivated the development of sound reproduction technology (Sterne 2003). Other scholars have argued that the acousmatic voice, despite its mundane ubiquity in modern media worlds, still serves as a reminder of the voice's enigmatic and disturbing aspects: "It [the voice] deprives us of distance and autonomy. If we want to localize it, to establish a safety distance from it, we need to use the visible as the reference. The visible can establish the distance, the nature, and the source of the voice, and thus neutralize it. The acousmatic voice is so powerful because it cannot be neutralized with the framework of the visible, and makes the visible itself redoubled and enigmatic" (Dolar 2006: 79).

According to Dolar, the acousmatic voice is thus a reminder of the difficulty to submit voices to the control of subjects, and of voices' propensity to become objectlike and dissociated from selves. Acousmatic voices have also occasionally become the target of conservative critiques, such as in Murray Schafer's denouncement of "schizophonia" against which he posited his notion of organic, pastoral soundscapes (Schafer 1994 [1977]). As noted earlier, such voices decoupled from their sources that previously were the object of much awe and fascination have become an ordinary feature of present-day lifeworlds around the globe owing to the spread of sound reproduction technology. Nevertheless, listening to one's own recorded voice can be an experience of the "otherness" of one's own voice. In such contexts, the "otherness" of the voice is less a matter of Lacanian psychodynamics and more an instance of temporal and spatial displacement combined with the

circumstance that, for many, the recorded voice will sound different from one's own voice when it is listened to while speaking. The latter is the result of technologies of voice recording and reproduction, as well as of the listening habits that have become part of them.

In my investigation of voice, media, and devotional practices among Muslims in Mauritius, I avoid broad generalizations about the voice in terms of its presumed otherness, such as generalizations evident in the prehistorical and precultural characteristics ascribed to the voice by Dolar, Barthes, and others. Nevertheless, the theme of the otherness of the voice can play an important role in more specifically circumscribed historical and sociocultural settings. One way in which it is relevant to my analysis is its role in religious cosmologies. In my ethnography of voice and sound reproduction among Mauritian Muslims, the Qur'anic paradigm of the reciting voice as the site where God reveals himself is of obvious importance. There, the voice literally features as an "other," as the trace of the fundamental difference between God and human beings. The frequent shifting of the voice between its attachment to the self and its otherness is a common feature of Islamic ritual settings. In the previous chapter I sought to give a detailed account of this shifting between self and other in terms of participant roles, Bakhtinian polyphony, and different strategies of entextualization. Even though the performative recitation of *na't* poetry is not the same as the recitation of scripture, it became clear that an important dimension of such performances is the reanimation of the voices of other actors—most importantly the revered saint-poets that many Mauritian Muslims consider to be the composers and originators of the *na't* poetry they recite.

Highlighting the sonic dimensions of the voice makes it possible to approach the otherness of the voice from a different angle. The starting point is the observation made by a range of my interlocutors who stated that the most powerful moments in *na't* performances were those in which these listeners felt "touched" by a voice (cf. Schulz 2008: 180–184). The register of touch they drew on to describe the effects of the voice on their bodies suggests that the voice reaches and encounters bodies as an "other" from the outside. This chapter is dedicated to unpacking this phenomenon, elucidating this process of bodily encounters with voices in an Islamic setting, and analyzing its effects. In order to do these things, it is necessary to go beyond the frame of analysis I employed in the previous chapter, where I described voices mainly in terms of their social significance and the subject positions they summoned in interaction. It turned out that such voices enable Mauritian Muslims engaged in the cultivation of *na't* to inhabit different and shifting participant roles, thus taking changing positions with respect to other participants, and to align themselves, jointly with others, to specific religious and social values.

Complementing such an analysis of social semiotics, in this chapter I analyze *na't* performances as sonic events, where particular moments of felt sonic intensity lead participants to report strong effects on their felt-bodies, which they describe

in emotional and religious terms. In doing so, I draw on the analytic of transduction. Qualities of the voice, including timbral qualities, are decisive features of the sonic events I investigate. I also show how the performances as sonic occurrences result in the creation of particular atmospheres that my informants described as being charged with piety, with affection for the Prophet, and sometimes even with the Prophet's presence. Combining a sound studies perspective with phenomenological approaches, I trace how sound, in this case the sound of the reciting voice, can be understood as atmospheres, as events emerging and exuding from persons and objects.

In July 2010, I spoke with Shareef at his home about what he thought were good na't performances. Giving me an example, he recited a na't about thwarted attempts to go on the Haj. The devotee is left back home, year after year, because he has no means to go on the pilgrimage. He sees his friends departing, feeling desolate.

Ham madīne jāengen agle baras	We will go to Madina next year
Ham madīne jāengen agle baras	We will go to Madina next year
Har baras yeh sochkar ham reh gaye	Every year we thought so and we stayed

Shareef then remarked,

The caravan [*kāfilā*, drawing on the traditional image of pilgrims traveling by caravan to Mecca] has departed, and you have just stayed at the airport. You have waved them [the pilgrims] farewell. With a heavy heart you return. . . . If you do not know how to recite this, then it will just be an ordinary thing. But if you put emotion in it, then, in that moment, with your voice, your tears will also flow; if your tears flow, all people who are listening, they will also start to cry. . . . Now, you do not just put emotions in it—how should I say—fabricated emotions [*ban emosiyon fabrike*], no. There are emotions, yes, and there are people who fabricate an emotion such as when, after a little while, you see them crying [and then] you suddenly see that they are laughing—they are fabricating emotions, right? But these [emotions in good recitals] are not fabricated emotions; these are emotions that come directly to you, just directly, and that creates an impact. That means there are two kinds of na't khwan: one whose voice just reaches your ear. And another [kind of] na't khwan, whose voice will penetrate your soul. But directly into your soul [*ruh*], and that soul shouts. Then there will be emotions, there will be physical transformations [*pu ena ban transformasyon fisik*]. And he will not be able to hold it back—he will cry, he will scream.

Shareef made a strong point here. According to him, the reciting voice has an impact on listeners far transcending the meaning of the discourse it conveys, as its sonic dimensions appear to play a crucial role. He even suggested that this impact is not a matter of persuasion but acts on listeners “directly,” effecting “physical transformations,” apparently exceeding the agency and intentionality of those listening. It is as if the sonic dimensions of the voice exert a powerful force as they literally make an impact on the felt-bodies of listeners, resulting in a transformation in them.

What does listening to recitation of na't bring about? What is the impact of the voice on the bodies of those listening, and what does it create? According to Shareef and almost all others I spoke to about the role of the voice in the recitation of na't, the sound of the voice, if performed properly, provokes feelings and emotions (*emosyion* in Mauritian Creole, *ehsās* in Urdu). According to Shareef, listening to vocal recitations of devotional poetry causes the emergence of feelings. Speaking in his usual Mauritian Creole with heavy use of Urdu loanwords and interspersed phrases, he pointed out that there is "physical transformation" (*transformasyion fisik*), because "something, a thing is born; one has a feeling" (*ek ciz paidā hotā hai; ehsās hotā hai*). One approximates feelings (*ehsās*) to things (*cīzen*) that are born in the body, provoked into existence by sound. But in order for this to happen, the sound of the voice needs to have particular qualities, a particular sonic profile.

In other words, Shareef and others among my respondents describe processes of transduction, in which sonic energy—the sound waves' deviations from the ambient atmospheric pressure—is converted into different forms of energy in the body, creating new psychological and sensational phenomena in the process. Note that their descriptions of the bodily felt effects of na't performances are not just about hearing as a distinct sense. The effects appear to go beyond the faculty of hearing in a strict sense, since they involve the entire body, its flesh, while provoking the emergence of something new. This bears a striking resemblance to Gilbert Simondon's analysis of transduction as a creative process. Simondon took transduction to be the chief mechanism for the creation of new entities, or "individuals," across a broad spectrum of phenomena, from the creation of biological organisms to psychological phenomena and states. With this, he described how an activity propagates through a given domain in a structuring move, moving from area to area in a manner so that the structuring effected in one area serves as the model for the structuring of adjacent areas (Simondon 1992 [1964]: 313). Transduction is thus an energetic movement that operates in such a way that the new areas reached by it are restructured in ways analogous to the areas of origin of the movement. Sonic processes of transduction are a good example, as variations of air pressure can propagate not just in air but also in other material media, such as water, metal, or body tissue. Here it is important to note that sonic transduction in the body does not simply occur in the hearing apparatus, which transduces sound waves into electrical impulses sent to the brain, but can also work in other parts of the body, such as tissue or bones, a sensation familiar to anyone who has literally felt the bass vibrate throughout his or her body in a dance club (Henriques 2003). What is common to all forms of transduction, including sonic ones, is the analogous relationship between the structuring movement propelling the transduction and the resulting material restructuring in spatially proximate regions reached by the transductive movement. That the sound of a reciting voice can literally make one vibrate in unison with it was also remarked upon by Mohamed in a

conversation about what qualities of vocal recitation actually move an audience at a na't performance:

Patrick: What qualities does someone need in order to make people respond with enthusiasm [to a na't performance]?

Mohamed: First, they have to know the right words. Second, they have to know the mood, or air [*ler*]. Third, the person who is reciting/reading¹ . . . well, there are two ways of reciting: one that comes out of the throat—when it comes out of the throat, you will see that in this person, there is no emotion. But there is another way [of reciting], that comes out of the heart. You can identify the one that comes out of the heart by the emotion in it. That means its sentiment passes through his throat; and when it comes out it causes this assembly to vibrate, you see, like Owais Qadri [a renowned Pakistani na't khwan] does. People such as him, when they recite they make you vibrate. Why? Because the way they are reciting, you will not feel you are here; you will feel you are in Madina, they have taken you to Madina.

In this quote, Mohamed drew links between the sonic impact of a voice on felt-bodies in terms of reverberation, the verbal expressions of heartfelt emotions, and the feeling of being literally carried away by a voice to a more desirable place. The impact of vocal performance as sonic event is likened to an energetic movement that makes the listeners affected by it “vibrate” while also being transported by it, in this case to Madina, the resting place and favorite city of the Prophet. This quote testifies to the entanglement between signification and sonic transduction. The former is evident in the references to the “heart” as the source of deep feelings, and to Madina as the destination of listeners of the vocal performance. However, the aspect of energetic movement central to vocal performance as sonic event, whether manifest in the vibration of bodies or the felt transportation to another place, appears to occur relatively independently from the discursive aspects of the event. Here again, the power of the reciting voice seems to lie in its impact on felt-bodies and the resulting transformations in them. In other words, the most salient and dramatic effects of the voice are grounded in the logic of transduction.

Another key aspect of transduction as energetic movement described by Simondon, the restructuring of a domain progressing from one adjacent area to the next, is also evident in sonic transduction. When talking about na't performances, some of my informants described something similar in terms of the contagiousness of the vocal performance's effects on listeners if carried out by a voice with the appropriate characteristics, transporting emotion in the process. For example, Shareef, elaborating on the sadness of having one's plans to go on the Haj thwarted, also remarked on the contagious nature of the sonic impact on bodies: “But if you put emotion in it, then, in that moment, with your voice, your tears will also flow; if your tears flow, all people who are listening, they will also start to cry.” Remembering another occasion when he recited na't at the wedding

of the daughter of a recently deceased friend of his, he found that when he reached for the microphone and started reciting, the following happened: “So much crying. Not just the bride, but the entire hall full of guests. I was reading/reciting in my style, but this had such an effect that an entire hall full of people started crying.”

The vocal performance worked as a sonic event whose effects rapidly spread like ripples on water, quickly radiating from the spot where a stone dropped in it. The process of sonic transduction that causes this spread of an emotion throughout an audience is akin to an energetic movement that restructures the areas it reaches in the process of spreading out. Simondon described transduction as a process spreading from place to place: “Each region of the constituted structure serves as a principle of constitution for the next region [Chaque région de structure constituée sert à la région suivante de principe de constitution]” (Simondon 2005: 32, cited in Combes 2013: 6). Sonic events turn around the emission and omnidirectional spread of sound waves, encountering and penetrating bodies, effecting changes in them analogous to the structures and shapes of the sound waves colliding with them. At the same time, the last example also shows that certain conditions must be met for the transductive sonic movement to have an effect in the milieu where it spreads. It is not an automatic process. Listeners must be receptive to the desired effects of the performance. This was the case at the wedding, when Shareef recited a *naʿt* evoking sadness and those attending the wedding all remembered the recent death of the bride’s father.

Not only must the audience of a *naʿt* performance be receptive to its desired effects, but also the person reciting must be properly prepared, for the voice to have profound transformative effects on its listeners. In other words, the effects of sonic transduction do not depend solely on preconditions among listeners, similar to the sensitizing and attunement among listeners of cassette sermons in Cairo described by Charles Hirschkind (2006: 74–84), but also depend on the reciting performers. The body social both perceives the voice and is enunciated through it (cf. Feld et al. 2004: 341). For example, as Cassam, one of my interlocutors pointed out:

Now, I say that if someone does not have *shariʿat* [proper or lawful Islamic conduct] in him, when he recites *naʿt*, it is dull [*fad*]. . . . [A]lso for a *naʿt khwan*, if you go and do your *ʿibadat* [worship], in your *ʿibadat* you will gain *shawkat* [dignity]. But if you do not even have *ʿibadat*, and if you are a great singer, you have a beautiful voice, yes; but for reciting *naʿt*, right, later you will see that at the time of the *zohr* [second] prayer, he is still eating, and you will never see him in the mosque. Now, you do not even know if he did *wuzuʿ* [ritual ablutions] or not. Well, all this counts—even if a good voice comes out, it is then all useless [*befāyda*].

That is, according to Cassam, even a beautiful, properly trained voice is worthless and will not have the desired impact on listeners if a *naʿt khwan* does not live according to the values and tenets of an Islamic way of life, including its outward signs. Continuing his explanation, Cassam further elaborated: “There has to be

shari'at in you. For example, for a long time, many na't khwan did not have a beard. The first one who came [to Mauritius] and had one was Qari Fasihuddin Soharwardi [a renowned Pakistani na't khwan]—he had a beautiful beard. And then the people of the Da'wat-e Islami came—they all have beards. And then all others started to grow a beard.”

Other interlocutors also emphasized the need for a na't khwan to be recognizably pious. When talking about Maulana Elias Attari—the founder of the Da'wat-e Islami movement, which is connected to Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at and is based in Karachi, and who is known as a composer of na't poetry—Fareed, one of his Mauritian followers, said, “His na't are full of emotion, and somehow—how should I say—he just makes you desire to go to Madina. From top to bottom, he is steeped in the *sunnat* [the traditions of the Prophet]. He tells you to be practicing; you have to become a good, practicing Muslim in order to be a good na't khwan. If you are not a good, practicing Muslim, well, then, you cannot become a good na't khwan. . . . Like our Prophet said, “Do what I do; do not just do what I say.”

For Fareed, it was clear that the na't khwan's voice alone cannot have the transformative effect that those taking part in na't performances often seek. A voice needs to be complemented by the full spectrum of pious discipline, including its somatic dimensions, in order to be effective. According to Fareed, reciting and listening to na't is like a “vitamin for the heart” but is secondary to obligatory forms of Islamic conduct, such as the five daily prayers (*namāz*):

There once was a famished person. He went to the hospital, and the doctor said, “Take this medicine after meals.” But the problem is that the famished person does not get any meals. In the same way, na't is only a fortifier [*enn fortifian*], an *energizer* to make your soul happy. But if you do not read *namāz*, then na't is like a pill on an empty stomach: it will not help the hungry person. It only works with the obligations, such as *namāz*. Otherwise it has no effect. But if a person is a good *namāzi* [somebody who prays regularly] and also recites na't, his voice is like a magnet: it will be manifest in his voice. The people who will listen will think, “I feel being transported elsewhere, carried away.”

Others among my interlocutors specifically stressed the importance of sincere piety. Here, sincerity becomes both a precondition and the ground for a beautiful, moving voice. As Farhad pointed out, “You see, when a na't is recited by heart, without reading the text from a paper, you are expressing the love for the Holy Prophet when you are reciting. The love for the Holy Prophet can be seen by the people. You see: it can be seen, the love for the Prophet will become visible on your face. In this way it becomes clear that a na't khwan is reciting with sincerity [*khulūs ke sāth paṛh rahā hai*]. And such a na't grips you powerfully [*zor se pakartā hai*].”

Naushad was among the first of my interlocutors with whom I had conversations about the qualities of the voice found in what he considered to be good na't performances. Putting his hand on his chest, he stressed the idea that “the voice

that comes from the heart has more effect. If you are a good servant of the Prophet, you feel it in your heart, it will come from the heart.” According to Farhad and Naushad, sincerity is an inner condition of the self that must also become manifest through outward signs, such as a pious and moving voice, or a particular facial expression showing one’s love for the Prophet. The ambiguities and tensions surrounding the problem of sincerity became clear when I asked Farhad about the visual dimensions of na’t performances, given the increasing popularity of online videos of na’t recitals. He replied that he did not think the visual dimension was very important compared with the sonic aspects of the voice. Imitating the gestures he had seen, he said, “People try to impress their audience. They throw their hands up and down, without *adab* [proper decorum]. But respect is most important. One must be properly dressed and seated, yes, but some throw their hands up and down as if dancing. This has been condemned by ulema.”

There is tension between Farhad’s assertion that visibility is unimportant at best, if not distracting or indicative of a lack of respect, and his earlier point that the sincere piety of a na’t khwan can be read in the latter’s face. The contradiction speaks to anthropological approaches to the dilemma of sincerity, which anthropologists have investigated primarily in Protestant settings. Sincerity in religious practice is also a key theme in Islamic modernists’ critiques of traditionally established ritual practices (Bowen 1993: 80, 280–283). In those historical and ethnographic contexts, a distinction between interiority and the outer comportment of subjects is taken for granted, as is the case in settings influenced by Protestantism. But in Islamic settings historically influenced by the Sufi and Shi’ite inner-outer opposition between *bātin* and *zahir* (Beeman 1986: 11–12, Buehler 1998: 245), sincerity can also be seen as a property of the interiority of an individual. It can, however, only be socially communicated and performed through the display of signs readable by others (Keane 2007: 197–222, van der Veer 2006). Apart from this familiar problem in the ethnography of sincerity in religious settings, sincerity also acquires special significance regarding the voice in na’t performances. As I have shown, some of my interlocutors repeatedly described the voice as an expression of sincere piety in na’t performances. Performers’ need to express their piety is similar to the way Protestants need to perform certain visible or audible signs in order to be perceived as inwardly sincere. At the same time, my interlocutors also saw sincere piety as a *precondition* for an effective and good voice capable of provoking pious transformation and the accompanying sensations in others. They pointed out that an attractive and well-formed voice alone is worthless if it is not accompanied by pious sincerity.

The latter perspective is in tension with the great attention given to qualities of the voice considered necessary to achieve a transformation when reciting na’t and in other religious performances. Or as Mohamed put it, “One has to make this gathering vibrate [*bizin fer vibre sa lassamble-la*], like Owais Qadri does, and take them to Madina.” This is especially the case in relation to the observation that

pious states come about through the transductive impact of the voice, resulting in “physical transformation” and the condition of a “thing being born” in the body. Many conversations about the voice in the recitation of na’t I had in Mauritius revolved around this tension between a preoccupation with sincerity—and therefore with the assumed inner intentions of the performers—and a much more materialist stance highlighting bodily sensations and the impact of sonic events and their energetic forces on felt-bodies.

SONIC ATMOSPHERES

My interlocutors often struggled to describe the impact of the voice during the recitation of na’t, considering it both ineffable and profound. For them, there was something unfathomable about the power of the voice, such as its felt ability to transport one to Madina. Its power appeared to pervade performances but, at the same time, was difficult to pin down. One way in which some sought to capture this elusive quality was by referring to the *air* of a na’t—that is, the tune, but also the performer’s appearance and expressions suggested by it. For example, Shareef pointed out that he produced his first recordings of na’t because “it is important to make sure that people know the original *ler* (akin to the French *l’air*) that one needs to put into it when reciting.” Similar to the English musical notion of an air, the Mauritian Creole term *ler* refers to the vocal rendering of the poetry, more specifically to its tune but also to its aura and what is being expressed and suggested by the manner of reciting. And Nazeer, who has also released recordings of na’t, confessed that he liked to listen to na’t recordings in order to appropriate the parts he liked for his own performances. I had asked him about video recordings of performances and whether he preferred them to strictly audio recordings. He replied, “I am more interested in the sound. . . . If I only hear his [the na’t khwan’s] voice, I concentrate more, I get it just as he is reciting, because I need to steal that *ler*. If I am interested in the *ler*, I have to focus on this.” Here, he suggested not only that the manner of vocal expression is of key importance to the performance but also that the kind of voice conveying a certain expression could be learned and appropriated.

I find it useful to draw a link between the ineffable but reproducible moods that na’t recitation can create and the notion of atmosphere. Here I propose to interrogate vocally created sound as atmospheres, as understood by new approaches in phenomenology. Gernot Böhme, for example, has made the case that atmospheres are not subjective moods but quasi-objective phenomena that exude from objects, persons, and events (Böhme 1993, 1995). As sonic events involve the emission of sound waves (in my examples, differences in air pressure) that are transduced into different modalities of energy when they reach bodies, they provide concrete instances of objective phenomena emanating from persons and objects.² This also pertains to vocal sound. According to Böhme, “Voice is the atmospheric presence

of something or someone” (Böhme 2009: 30). Work in newer approaches to phenomenology has stressed how bodies intermingle with and thereby perceive atmospheres. As sound flows forth from objects, it provides a striking illustration of Böhme’s analysis of atmospheres as “ecstasies of the thing” (Böhme 1993: 110, 1995: 31–34), and of Hermann Schmitz’s description of atmospheres as “the occupying of a nondimensional space or area within the range of experienced presence” (Schmitz 2014: 30).³ The diffuse potentialities of the voice are then something that others can literally bathe in.

In order to understand this process, it is useful to recall the distinction between Leib as the lived, felt body, and Körper as the physical body, which was first made by Helmut Plessner (1982 [1925]) and which became more widely known through its adoption by Husserl (1973: 57) and Merleau-Ponty (2002 [1945]: 329–330).⁴ The felt-body, or Leib (Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011: 242), can extend beyond the boundaries of the physical body. According to Schmitz, its sensations can extend to phenomena that are outside the limits of the physical body but which still pertain to the Leib (Schmitz 1965). The intermingling of the felt-body with atmospheres is evident in the transductive immersion in sound as it collides with or, in the terminology of acoustics, sometimes even “attacks” bodies.⁵ For Schmitz, the space of sound (*Schall*) is one of the foremost instances of a nondimensional space that can constitute atmospheres (Schmitz 2014: 31).⁶ It is tempting to read my interlocutors’ experiences of the reciting voice in this Muslim devotional context as revealed by their accounts through this phenomenological approach to atmospheres. When, for example, Mohamed recounted how a na’t khwan’s voice makes one “vibrate,” and Shareef spoke about this resulting in a “physical transformation,” their reported experiences strongly resembled the encounter with sonic atmospheres, which provoked bodily felt reactions among the listeners. The intermingling with sonically produced atmospheres is also recognizable in my interlocutors’ explanations that the na’t khwan’s voice can “penetrate your soul.” The social dimension of bathing in the same sound event together with others also lends itself to this analytic, as my interlocutors among Mauritian Muslims were aware of the contagious and intercorporeal (Csordas 2008) spread of moods and feelings among those engulfed by the same atmospheric forces emanating from the vocal performance they collectively listened to. As Böhme describes, in reference to the workings of sonic atmospheres, “Listeners will sense tones, voices, sounds as modifications of their own space of being. Human beings who listen in this way are dangerously open, they release themselves into the world and can therefore be struck by acoustic events. . . . Listening is a being-beside-yourself [*außer-sich-sein*]” (Böhme 2000: 18).

In being open to sound in such a way, persons attuned to the acoustic events that are unfolding do not react with feelings; but according to Hermann Schmitz, atmospheres themselves are feelings, often as ineffable as they are powerful, that persons encounter in a literal way. According to this phenomenological approach,

feelings and emotions (the term used by Schmitz is *Gefühle*, literally translated as “feelings”) are not a matter of subjective interiority but are literally atmospheres exuding from objects, persons, and their constellations, filling a dimensionless space between the atmospheres’ sources and human actors encountering the atmospheres. In Schmitz’s words: “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).

My Mauritian Muslim respondents often remarked that the transformative potential of na’t turning them into better Muslims revolved around its emotional impact, which they talked about as powerful but also as something difficult to grasp. At the same time, they described na’t as moving them in concrete ways, such as in their portrayals of listening to na’t as being carried away to a more desirable place. Shareef also referred to the experience of listening to properly recited na’t poetry as “getting on a bus,” while a performative failure to achieve the effective mode of recitation was like “having to get off the bus.” For Shareef and others the impact of na’t as a emotionally powerful technique of pious transformation centered on experiences of bodily movement. Even though my interlocutors found it difficult to verbally describe the sonic effects of na’t recitation, they were not invested in an ideology of sonic ineffability. They did come forward with metaphoric descriptions of suggestions of movement effected through sound that bear a striking resemblance to the propositions of a theory of sonic atmospheres. For me, the deep resonance between my Mauritian Muslims interlocutors’ culturally embedded descriptions of sonic perception and an analytic of atmospheres is a main reason to draw on atmospheres in order to account for the power of sound in the Islamic contexts I have investigated.

Against the background of sound as movements of transductive energy that bodies intermingle with, an analytic of sonic atmospheres adds the vital element of spatial movement that bodies experience in phenomenological, nondimensional felt space that is prior to the three-dimensional space of physics and other sciences (Schmitz, Müllan and Slaby 2011: 245). Writing about the question of emotional effects of music, Gernot Böhme proposes that the interaction between sonic atmospheres and bodies may hold an answer to it, beyond any culturally framed notion of “music”: “The discovery that music is the fundamental atmospheric art has solved an old, always annoying and yet inescapable problem of musical theory, i.e., the question: of what does music’s so-called emotional effect actually consist? . . . [T]he Aesthetics of Atmospheres gives a simple answer to the question: music as such is a modification of space as it is experienced by the body. Music forms and informs the listener’s sense of self [*das Sichbefinden*], in a space; it reaches directly into his or her corporeal economy” (Böhme 2000: 16).

The notion of sonic atmospheres thus draws attention to the fact that the perception of sound always involves modifications of felt space by the body. In sonic performances, such modifications are often patterned, such as in rhythm, the rising and falling of pitch, or the growing and shrinking of the amplitudes of sound waves (volume). If we understand sound as fundamentally transductive and as a phenomenon that commingles with bodies, the encountering of sound as atmosphere involves modifications of felt space that are perceived as suggestions of movement (*Bewegungssuggestionen*, according to Schmitz), which are at the same time feelings. Hermann Schmitz argues that the dynamic characteristics of sound and the vital dynamics of the felt-body are closely interrelated (Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011: 245). The latter's dynamics revolve around an alternation of contraction and expansion, as in breathing.

The dynamic volume of sound is the same as the volume of the vital drive pertaining to the felt-body [Leib] consisting in tension and swelling, as in breathing in, including the privative dilation that releases itself from the swelling, as in the state of fatigue. These kinds of volume come about through suggestions of movement. Such suggestions of movement correspond in the cases of felt-body and sound, and far beyond that, as they make communication through the felt-body [*leibliche Kommunikation*] possible. (Schmitz 2014: 85)

Sound's seizing of the phenomenological felt-body thus operates by suggestions of movement that interact with the felt-body's vital dynamics and movements. It is in this way that we can speak, in Böhme's terms, about sound reaching into corporeal economies, as sound's suggestions of movement are modifications of space sensed by the felt-body.

The links between perception, including sonic perception, and movement are a key theme that an analytic of atmospheres shares with Marcel Jousse's (1990 [1925]) gestural subject, which Charles Hirschkind has drawn on in his ethnography of cassette-sermon audition in Cairo (Hirschkind 2006: 76–79). Nevertheless, there are also significant differences between the two approaches. To begin with, Jousse does not distinguish between the felt-body and the material body. He is mainly concerned with subtle physiological processes in the material body provoked by external stimuli. These are micromuscular “gestures” that, for Jousse, are the ground for all expression and memory (Jousse 1990 [1925]: 23–30). “As the spectator at a fencing session follows the movements of attack and defence, each one of these movements repeats itself with lightning rapidity in his own musculature. Motor waves run through his whole body; in his own person he fights, attacks, fends off, wins or succumbs. The associated sensations of ease and well-being at the right movement, or embarrassment and pain at the wrong movements, are felt by him in the same way as by the fencers themselves” (Jousse 1990 [1925]: 23). Jousse draws a contrast between external phenomena (the dueling fencers) and gestures located in the musculature inside the material body that spontaneously

come about as quasi-physiological reactions to sensory stimuli from the outside. In contrast to Jousse's gestural subject, the notion of the felt-body (Leib) that is foundational for an analytic of atmospheres points to the blurring of the boundaries between inside and outside. As noted, the felt-body exceeds the boundaries of the material body and is the mingling ground of persons and atmospheres as "ecstasies of the thing." Jousse's gestural subject highlights processes of bodily stimulation through sensation indebted to a subject-object divide, while an analytic of atmospheres centers on the intermingling of humans and the world in the felt-body.

Also, unlike the sensations of Jousse's spectator at a fencing match, feelings do not occur only inside the material body. They are phenomena that also take the shape of atmospheres spilling out in nondimensional space (Schmitz 2014: 30), and therefore they are primarily entities outside the material body. Their *Einleibung*, or incorporation in the sense of becoming part of a felt-body, is therefore a process different from the reception of sensory stimuli triggering gestural reactions that Jousse called "intussusception" (Jousse 1990 [1925]: 232–233, Sienaert 1990: 95).⁷

This also points to another important distinction in Hermann Schmitz's work, between things and half-things (*Halbdinge*). The latter are often atmospheric, as they are phenomena that, in contrast to things, can be interrupted, such as the feeling of heat and cold, wind, pain, a voice, or musical figures. They appear and disappear, and "it does not make sense to ask where and how they have been in the meantime" (Schmitz 1998: 188); they can restlessly shift their location in space (Schmitz 2014: 75; see also Griffero 2017). Furthermore, unlike for things, where the cause of an effect and the action through which an effect is generated can be distinguished, for half-things cause and action coincide. That is, they are subject to a twofold scheme of causality (cause/action-effect), instead of the threefold Humean account of causality (cause-action-effect), where the action or causal link that mediates between cause and effect needs to be separated and specified. According to Schmitz, in atmospheres as half-things, such as in the weather, pain, or sonic phenomena, they themselves and the action they exert are one and the same (Schmitz 2014: 75). Pain, wind, or musical figures do not exist prior to or beyond their paining, blowing, or sounding. In contrast, take the example of a rock causing an injury. A rock preexists the action it carries out. In order to account for the effect of the rock as a thing, the action (e.g., the rock's fall) needs to be distinguished and specified in order to link rock and injury. This in turn points to a key difference between Jousse's gestural subject and an analytic of atmospheres. In sonic atmospheres' effects on the felt-body, the atmospheric phenomenon and its impact are identical; its existence and the action it carries out are indistinguishable as it generates its effect: the felt-body's state of being seized by something (*leibliche Ergriffenheit*).

In contrast, Jousse does not distinguish between the perception of things and half-things. Whether a body apprehends a thing, such as an image; a half-thing,

such as sonic phenomena; or an event consisting of an assembly of persons and things preexisting the event (such as the fencers and their equipment in Jousse's example above), Jousseian gestures come about as the effect of sensory phenomena in an external world that is clearly demarcated from the body. These have a specifiable impact that is distinguishable from the phenomena themselves: the internalization of sensory stimuli, such as acoustic stimuli. These internalized stimuli in turn trigger particular physiological processes that Jousse calls gestures, in a traditional threefold chain of causality (the external phenomenon as a cause, the internalization of stimuli as an action, and the gesture as the effect). Jousse therefore offers no means to distinguish the somatic effects of locationally stable and more or less perduring thinglike phenomena from the effects of atmospheric, floating, and vanishing half-things that become part of the felt-body, modeling the perception of the latter on the former.

Jousse's gestures are also different from the modification of the felt-body's sense of being in space that Böhme writes about and Schmitz's suggestions of movement, such as those proper to sonic atmospheres. Jousse's gestural subject inhabits a material body filled with micromuscular dynamics located in three-dimensional space. In contrast, atmospheric suggestions of movement unfold in the nondimensional space sensed by the felt-body. These are movements that do not involve changes in location in three-dimensional space, which is posterior to nondimensional or surfaceless (*flächenlos*) space (Schmitz 2012: 74): "Musical *Gestalten* are webs of suggestions of movement in the medium of tones, that is, foreshadowings of movement without movement enacted by the music itself (through a shifting of the source of sound)" (Schmitz 2014: 88).

In light of this discussion it is not hard to see that an analytic of atmospheres can invigorate anthropological approaches to the sensory dimensions of religion. As part of a larger shift away from a focus on belief and on the analysis and comparison of doctrinal content of religious traditions, anthropologists have called for the study of "aesthetic formations" (Meyer 2008), here meaning the sensory aspects of religious experience, including the culturally and historically contextual dispositions that generate particular sensibilities. The emphasis on the sensual also connects this line of work to the phenomenological insight that our perceptions and sensations of the world are grounded in the body (Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]), a suggestion that has also been productively taken up by anthropologists who have examined the "somatic modes of attention" (Csordas 1993) in a variety of cultural fields, including religion (Csordas 1990, Luhrmann 2004, Desjarlais and Throop 2011).

Such anthropological work on embodied religion speaks to the theme of sonic atmospheres with their bodily effects. Moreover, the phenomenological orientation of this approach by no means implies a focus on isolated individuals, as the bodily dependence of perceptions and sensations also rests on intersubjectivity as intercorporeality (Csordas 2008). Bodily grounding of experience of the world

always already involves the awareness of others as embodied beings, whose sensations of the world are an outcome of their embodiment, just as are our own. Our interactions with others and our orientations to them therefore are also intercorporeal in nature: we interact with others as beings who sense the world through their bodies in ways analogous to the way we do. Intercorporeality rests on this principle of imputed analogy, even if the actual sensations may turn out to be different. My ethnography of religious sound provides an illustration of this condition, since part of the power of listening and being seized by the reciting voice of the *na't khwan* rests on the awareness that listening is potentially, if not actually, a socially shared event. This is also evident from the earlier discussion of the contagious character of sonic transduction and its effects. The pious transformations that my informants talked about when reporting their experiences of listening to *na't* recitations center both on being seized by affection for the Prophet and on being summoned as Muslims, as part of a collective capable of having the same feelings for the Prophet Muhammad, striving together to emulate his example.

The embodied and intercorporeal dimensions of religion also remind us that socially attuned bodies with established habits of listening or other forms of perception perceive sonic atmospheres. As I described earlier in this chapter, my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors pointed out that the effects of a *na't khwan's* voice also depend on pious attitudes and sensibilities among both performers and listeners. My interlocutors took for granted what anthropological engagements with listening have also recently highlighted—namely, that the perception of sound is socially and historically embedded, because bodies are never neutral absorbers of sensory data but instead are culturally and socially shaped (Stoller 1989, Downey 2002, Erlmann 2004, Hirschkind 2006). Auditory cultures, such as those that I learned about through listening to my interlocutors' descriptions of sonic perception, mediate the power of sound. This insight also aligns with phenomenological work on atmospheres, in which actors' receptiveness to atmospheres is not taken to be self-evident. Hermann Schmitz, for example, has distinguished between atmospheres that are feelings which bodily seize someone, and those that are merely observed (Schmitz 2014: 86–87). That is, a certain attunement and receptiveness is also necessary in order to be powerfully affected by an atmosphere.

While the intersubjective, and therefore also intercorporeal, qualities of listening to *na't* are relatively obvious in devotional events as well as in their mediated circulation, it is important to remember that their embodied effects are not limited to the faculty of hearing. The experiential context of religious sound is not confined to listening in the strict sense of the word, as sound can envelop and enter the body in its entirety, a fact best captured through the notion of the felt-body. Sound as atmosphere becomes bodily sensation through the modifications of felt space it brings about. These modifications are in turn effected by suggestions of movement that sonic events revolve around, and ultimately rest on the transductive qualities of sound. In the remainder of this chapter I examine the recitation of *na't* as a sonic

event that foregrounds such suggestions of movement. As vocal sound moves and touches listeners, the voice enacts movements that go beyond the metaphorical. Drawing on spectrogram and waveform analysis, I specifically focus on four acoustic dimensions of performance that na't khwan manipulate in order to create powerfully charged atmospheres—loudness, fundamental frequency, timbre, and reverberation—for the purpose of tracing such emotionally powerful suggestions of movement. Suggestions of movement emerge from the coinciding of several such parameters, creating an overall mood of intensity.

ACOUSTIC PARAMETERS, ATMOSPHERES, AND SUGGESTIONS OF MOVEMENT

My interlocutors' insistence that the effects of a well-done na't recitation are as powerful as they are difficult to describe poses a distinct ethnographic challenge. How is it possible to give an ethnographic account of the power of religious sound if such power and its consequences cannot be fully verbalized by one's interlocutors in the field, and if its effects on one's respondents are not altogether accessible to the ethnographer by direct observation? This challenge is particularly pronounced in the study of atmospheres—which are often characterized, in the words of Hermann Schmitz, by “holistic internally diffuse meaningfulness” (*ganzheitlich-binnendiffuse Bedeutsamkeit*)—as atmospheres seem to be telling us more than can be discursively specified. They appear as distinct, whole entities whose characteristics blend into each other to such a degree that they are difficult to single out by way of definite description (Abels 2016, Schmitz 2005: 104). The powers of sound as atmosphere seem to be at least in part grounded in this diffuseness, resulting in a combination of ineffability and power. If sound as atmosphere is effective because of the suggestions of movement it contains, such diffuse meaningfulness also applies to the movements suggested. Keeping in mind the insight that such movements are powerful in their effects precisely because they are diffuse and cannot be exhausted by discursive description, I do not aim at an impossibly complete analysis of meanings and effects connected to such movements. Nevertheless, several acoustic parameters involved in the production of suggestions of movement can be identified and described. Juxtaposing my respondents' comments on the voice in the na't genre with the analysis of acoustic features of the sounds of vocal recitation that I undertake here, I consider it possible to draw links between my interlocutors' verbalization of how they perceive the effects of the voice of the na't khwan, and sonically suggested movements, resulting in the identification of at least some components of meaningfulness that can be rendered in discursive form.

In the first part of this chapter, I noted how my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors described the sonic aspects of na't recitals in their conversations with me, emphasizing the crucial importance they accorded to the qualities of vocal sound.

At the same time, in order to do justice to sound, its formal analysis is indispensable in order to avoid the immediate reduction of sonic phenomena to language in the analysis. This is the reason I have included diagrams of spectrographic and waveform analysis in this and the following chapter (figures 6–11, 12–15, respectively). Necessitating other forms of access besides discursive description, sonic movements can be brought to light though such formal analysis in ways that are not possible through discursive means. The following analysis in the remaining part of this chapter is thus an attempt to take sound seriously in its own right and to attend to the sonic as a separate mode of knowledge and signification. While stressing that the sonic can in principle operate independently from language and generate knowledge and meaning of its own, my analysis also shows that the sonic and discursive dimensions of na't recitation are in fact closely interlinked.

Also, as I hope to make clear in the remainder of the book, such formal analysis of sonic events by no means sidelines what my interlocutors told me about the sonic aspects of na't recitals. I do not include the spectrographic and waveform diagrams and my discussion of them in order to establish a scientific "truth" about sound that competes with what my interlocutors told me about the sonic dimensions of a na't khwan's voice. On the contrary, such formal analysis complements and builds on my interlocutors' insistence on the transformative and literally "moving" aspects of sonic experiences. As a trained linguistic anthropologist, I take a cue from that subdiscipline; linguistic anthropologists engage in grammatical and other formal analysis of languages used by their interlocutors in the field, even if the latter are not fully aware of such categories and cannot fully verbalize their uses of them, however consequential they may be. Of course, instances of such grammatical analysis can be found in chapter 4. Certainly, the purpose of such an analysis is by no means to render what my interlocutors said less important, but to complement it. In similar ways, a formal analysis of sonic events does not render what my interlocutors told me less relevant but, instead, emerges from the ethnography. When some of my interlocutors said that the sound of a performer's voice carries them away to another place, or that listening to such a voice is like getting on a bus that takes one elsewhere, the striking congruence between such descriptions of sonic effects and neophenomenological approaches to atmospheres points to the necessity of a closer engagement with sonic dynamics, including formal analysis, to get at what such sonic suggestions of movement consist of.

No single approach to the sonic, whether discursive or the formal analysis of sonic events, is sufficient in itself. Just as discursive approaches to the sonic are inherently limited, as scientific representations the spectrograms and waveform analyses also have limits because they represent sonic movements as unfolding in a three-dimensional space. They do not exhaust what Hermann Schmitz has described as atmospheric suggestions of movement unfolding in a non- or pre-dimensional space. From a phenomenological perspective, the latter is upstream to the three-dimensional space of the sciences. The spectrographic and waveform

diagrams, therefore, do not provide direct access to space as sensed by the felt-body; rather, they are signposts intended to show how movements of sonic energy, unfolding along several acoustic parameters, can generate suggestions of movement that are central to atmospheres. This is because the felt-body senses sonic movements as unfolding in nondimensional space, despite the fact that such movements' scientific representations tie them to a three-dimensional space. All this points to the necessity to work with several approaches to the sonic simultaneously.

Listening to recorded na't performances and paying attention to their acoustic particularities, I find that one of the most striking aspects of the recitation is the deployment of an echo, or reverb effect, that has become an integral part of the recording technique. As I show in greater detail below, an important overall effect of the blanket use of reverb in na't recordings is the multiplication of the na't khwan's voice, including the peaks and concentration of acoustic energy it consists of. The latter, in turn, are central to the emotionally powerful suggestions of movement that sonic atmospheres center on. The spatial effect of the echo is directly linked to the spatial logics of atmospheres. First of all, it strongly reminds Muslim listeners of the reverberating sound of the azan (the Islamic call to prayer) in a built environment. This acoustic marker interacts with an aural archive among Muslim listeners, and it flags an institutionalized link to Islamic ritual practice by evoking a common acoustic feature of the azan as it is amplified by contemporary sound-reproduction technology from mosques and their minarets. This is the sound of the call echoing through a Muslim neighborhood, being refracted many times by the surfaces of buildings while the amplified call from other, more distant mosques joins in at the same time. The reverb effect that underlies the na't recording directly cites this common aesthetic feature of the azan, acoustically aligning the recitation of na't with a core element of sonic Islamic practice. At the same time, the echo effect of the recording strongly sets off the performance of na't poetry from other, everyday discursive events, giving it a special, ethereal air. The reverb aesthetic thus marks na't recitation as being in line with established core discursive and sonic practices of Islam, in this case the azan, while simultaneously giving it a distinct, otherworldly quality.

The logic of atmospheres as a spatial phenomenon, exuding from people and objects while enveloping and intermingling with bodies, is also evident in the rapid alternation between spatial contraction and expansion that is part of the reverb as a sonic phenomenon. The echo effect imitates the reverberation of sound when it is reflected by surfaces, such as those of walls or buildings. Sound waves then reach the ear of a listener directly from their source, and also as objects or surfaces reflect them, often multiple times. If the resulting delay between the original sound and its reverberation is more than sixty milliseconds, most humans process the two sounds as separate (Benade 1990: 210), and they hear additional delays as echoes. This presupposes a sufficient distance between the source of an acoustic impulse and reflecting surfaces. Of course, several other conditions have to be met, as the

scattering of reverberations, such as by furniture in a room, can also neutralize the echo effect of reverberation. Rapidly repeating series of reverberations may also resolve themselves in a whine or buzz in a large, uncluttered room, a phenomenon known as flutter echo (Benade 1990: 210). At any rate, the reverb effect now commonly applied to na't recordings creates the sense of being in a very large hall or other spacious built environment where distances are great enough for the voice to audibly reverberate, and where the size of the space in question is large enough for the reverberation time—that is, the time it takes for a sound to die away when being reflected—to be sufficiently long (Howard and Angus 1996: 241). In other words, the echo effect creates the sonic sensation of distance and the dilation of sound in a large space.

Another key parameter in the production of sonic atmospheres is loudness, or the perceived intensity of acoustic energy (the pressure level of sound waves relative to the ambient atmospheric pressure). This is not strictly the same as the pressure amplitude of a sound wave, as perceived loudness is also dependent on pitch and, at tone intervals of less than a second, on duration. Moreover, in the case of complex sounds ranging across a broader range of frequencies, such as those produced by a voice, psychoacoustic research has shown that the brain appears to add the responses of the hearing apparatus of individual critical bands, so the complex sound is perceived as louder, even though the total acoustic energy remains the same (Howard and Angus 1996: 90). Loudness as the perceived intensity of acoustic energy directly relates to how the encounter of sound with bodies is felt, and with what energy a sonically created atmosphere affects and intermingles with felt-bodies. It is an important measure of the intensity of a sonic atmosphere and of the feelings spread through it.

Fundamental frequency is a measure that tracks the rising and falling of pitch, which—when combined with loudness, on which it also has a crucial influence—is another key parameter in the manipulation of felt space that sonic events revolve around. The increase and decrease of pitch, together with the dynamics of loudness, contribute to the suggestions of movement in sonic atmospheres as they intermingle with felt-bodies. Finally, timbre relates to the formant structure above the fundamental frequency that makes up the specific character of complex sounds, such as those produced by a voice. Formants are concentrations of acoustic energy along particular frequency bands that make up the character of a complex sound. The formant structure makes it possible not only to distinguish a voice from other complex sounds with the same fundamental frequency but also to distinguish between individual voices. The perceived characteristics of the reciting voice that my interlocutors described as “clear,” beautiful,” or “moving” are also the result of distinct patters of formants, or overtones, that can be made visible on a spectrogram. Timbre interacts with the movements of loudness and fundamental frequency to produce the moments of felt acoustic intensity that are the hallmark of a sonically produced pious atmosphere and its associated feelings.

The following discussion examines these dimensions while analyzing their interplay in terms of its effects on the felt space and suggested movements—that is, the way in which sonic performance affects the corporeal economy and its movements of contraction and expansion. To illustrate the acoustic dimensions I have mentioned, the diagrams below feature a spectrogram in their upper half to show movements in timbre and fundamental frequency, the x-axis measures time for all values, and the y-axis of the spectrogram measures the frequency of sound waves in hertz.⁸ The acoustic energy of complex tones, such as vocal sounds, is not distributed continuously across a spectrum of frequencies but coalesces along particular frequency bands, thereby building formants above the fundamental frequency of the sound that look like layers on a spectrogram. Furthermore, some formants, or overtones, contain significantly more acoustic energy than others, which the spectrograms make visible by coloring.

The spectrograms should be read as follows. The spectrograms visualize the complexity of acoustic events across a stretch of linear time. The latter is represented by the x- (horizontal) axis of the spectrogram, which stands for the value 0 on the y- (vertical) axis. The y-axis measures the patterning of sonic energy across a range of frequencies (measured in hertz) for a given point in time. In addition, the coloring of the points in the coordinate system indicates the amount of acoustic energy at a given point, on a continuum ranging from green (low) to yellow (medium), to orange (high). As noted, the acoustic energy of complex sounds is not uniformly spread across a given range of frequencies but, instead, typically coalesces around certain frequency bands, some of which may contain significantly more energy than others. The bottom “layer” of such a sound indicates its fundamental frequency, and all “layers” together visualize its timbre.

A waveform progression can be found below the spectrograms in this chapter, the sound waves are centered on a 0-axis, representing the given atmospheric air pressure, while the waves extend between hypothetical 1 and -1 values that stand for the waves’ pressure. The greater the amplitude of a wave, the greater its pressure differential and, therefore, also—with some qualifications—the greater the volume of the sound is. Below the waveform, a graph additionally tracks the fundamental frequency of the vocal sounds.

Let us consider an audio excerpt (figure 6, audio clip 1) from a Mauritian CD recording of na’t,⁹ beginning with the dramatically rendered phrase *koī husne ‘amal pās mere nahīn* (I do not have any beautiful [i.e., meritorious] actions [to my credit]). The na’t khwan begs for the Prophet’s help and intercession on the Day of Judgment. Looking at the spectrogram of this approximately eighteen-second excerpt, the waveform, and the graph tracking the fundamental frequency, we find a striking example of what acousticians describe as the “attack” of a sound envelope, as one encounters a sudden intensification on several dimensions. An examination of the distribution of frequencies in the spectrogram shows that the formant, or overtone, structure of the voice forcefully builds up to the ninth harmonic, the

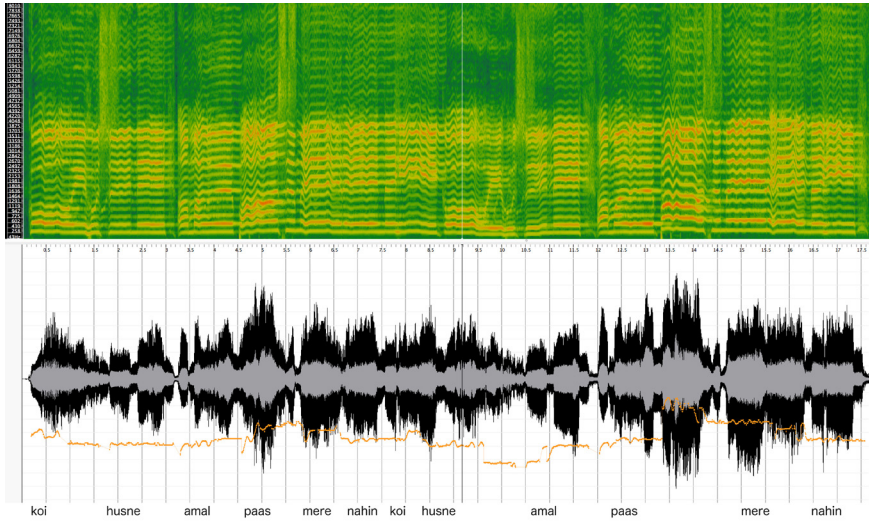


FIGURE 6. Spectrogram and waveform of “husne ‘amal.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 1. “Husne ‘amal.”

To listen to this audio, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.53.1>



spectrum resembling a pattern that Johan Sundberg (1974) has called the “singer’s formant,” a concentration of acoustic energy between three thousand and four thousand hertz that accounts for the particular power of the reciting voice.¹⁰

The rise in the fundamental frequency (which is tracked by the graph below the waveform), combined with a peak in loudness (greater amplitudes of waves) on the second rendering of *pās mere nahīn*, adds a dramatic effect that the modulation of pitch on *pās* further underlines. This also shows the close orientation of the recitational performance to the poetic text, with *pās mere* (akin to “I have”) dramatically pointing to the “I” of the devotional discourse—here the subject’s lack of meritorious actions to his credit on the day of judgment and, as a result, the appeal to the Prophet for help and intercession in his despair. The alternation in timbre, between a concentration of energy in the frequency range of the singer’s formant and moments with a drop in the acoustic energy in the same bands, suggests a movement that, given the transductive nature of sound, is markedly felt by the bodies it encounters and envelops. The effect is reinforced by the combination of the rise in acoustic energy in the bands of the singer’s formant, the overall increase in loudness, and the constant doubling and multiplying of acoustic events

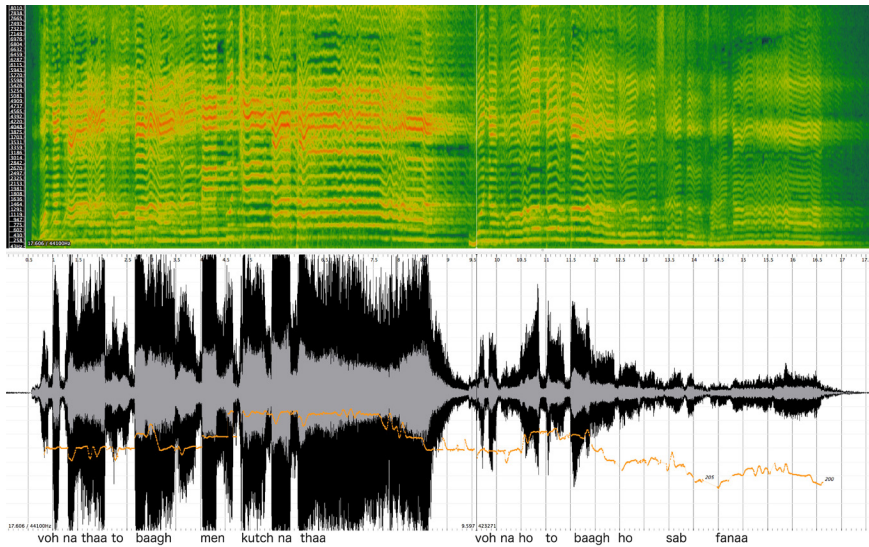


FIGURE 7. Spectrogram and waveform of “voh na thā.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 2. “Voh na thā”

To listen to this audio, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.53.2>



and peaks owing to the reverb underlying the entire vocal performance. What this example shows are pronounced increases of movements along several acoustic parameters—timbre and pitch as well as loudness, reinforced by the reverb effect—resulting in powerful suggestions of movement among those affected by the acoustic event. The sonic movements then also provoke a felt connection to others affected by the same event as the same movements seize them. This is made possible by the transductive effects of sound waves, which lead to sensations of “being beside oneself,” highlighting the permeability of bodies and selves and the fleeting nature of their boundaries in the felt-body’s movement toward enrapture. In the Islamic context at hand, this transduction takes the shape of a sonic event, as a summoning of felt-bodies, a call for community with others sensitive to the event, and ultimately a summoning of this collective by an other, the divine.

Let us consider the following twenty-second-long audio example (figure 7, audio clip 2): *voh na thā to bāgh me kutch na thā, voh na ho to bāgh ho sab fanā* (If he [the Prophet] were not there, nothing would be in the garden; if he did not exist, the garden would be complete devastation).¹¹ This excerpt, too, was taken

from an audio CD recording produced in Mauritius.¹² Eulogizing the Prophet and enouncing utter dependence on him, the na't khwan Fardeen Maraye peaks on several dimensions of vocal acoustics while uttering the words *to bāgh men kuch na thā*. There is a pronounced rise and peak in loudness, combined with a rise in pitch, visible as an increase in fundamental frequency, while the formant structure features a marked concentration of acoustic energy in the singer's formant, here between three thousand and five thousand hertz. This results in a voice that is perceived as carrying far and wide. This sonic reaching out into space is then further reinforced by the reverberation effect evident in this recording, adding a further means to sonically create a great widening of space. The second part of the phrase features a decline in acoustic energy, as the singer's formant largely disappears and the movement carried out by the voice slows and, finally, concludes. The marked reverb effect, which my interlocutors always referred to as "echo," is visible on the spectrogram as a fading into the short break after the first part of the phrase concludes with *thā*. Also, at the end of the recited phrase, the spectrogram displays the continued reverberation of the voice even after the na't khwan has fallen silent. This means that every sonic event, every peak of acoustic energy, is doubled, if not multiplied, resulting in the effect of sonically opening up felt space as sounds are decaying. Here again, the three parameters loudness, pitch, and timbre, as well as reverberation, converge to produce an atmosphere of intensity that generates a feeling of being elevated and carried away, concluding with a return to one's starting position.

In the following audio excerpt, which is approximately thirteen seconds long (figure 8, audio clip 3)—*kāsh mehshar main jab unki āmad ho aur* (If only at the day of resurrection when he [the Prophet] arrives, and I)¹³—we can discern the workings of the reverb particularly well. Much like in the previous example, the echo effect not only reverberates into the pause in its middle but also is visible at the end of the phrase. A particularly striking feature of this audio clip is the long extension of the second syllable of *mehshar* (day of resurrection), where Fardeen Maraye, the na't khwan, holds the complex tone with the same fundamental timbre and loudness for roughly five seconds while extending the syllable into a modulating movement for nearly another three seconds afterward, before pausing briefly for approximately nine hundred milliseconds. In the short pause, the spectrogram provides a clear image of the marked reverb effect employed, which is also evident at the end of the phrase, showing a reverb time of approximately two hundred milliseconds. This is far above the threshold of roughly sixty milliseconds, above which most listeners start to perceive sounds as distinct events, resulting in a powerful echo effect that multiplies the voice of the na't khwan, underlining its force. The na't khwan then resumes with heightened emphasis, his voice peaking on *jab unki*, where a rise in loudness and the fundamental frequency coincides with yet another concentration of acoustic energy in the formants of the three-thousand-to-five-thousand-hertz range. A detailed look at the spectrogram also reveals an

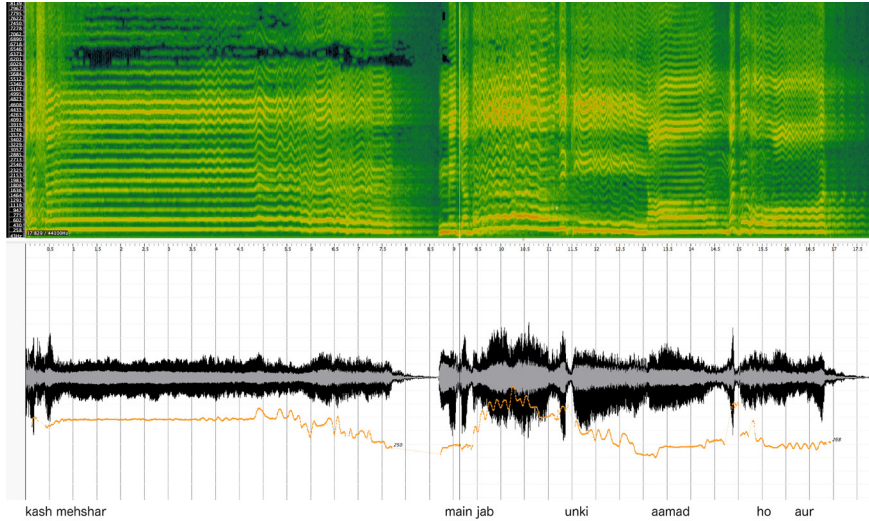


FIGURE 8. Spectrogram and waveform of “kāsh mehshar.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 3. “Kāsh mehshar.”

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.53.3>



extreme vibrato on all harmonies of the spectrum, underlining the acoustic energy of this peak. The long extension of one syllable with its vibrato and modulation at the end, followed by a pause and an abrupt peaking of acoustic energy immediately after, provides a strong sense of movement that sonically enacts being enraptured and carried away, which at the same time is also a movement of transcending the self through the powers of sonic transduction.

In the next audio excerpt, which is approximately twenty-three seconds long (figure 9, audio clip 4)—“*yā Allāh, terī qudraton kā shomār kyā, terī wuṣāton kā hisāb kyā*” (O God, what is the number of your [innumerable] powers, what is the reckoning of your [incalculable] vastness)¹⁴—we encounter a similar drawing out of a syllable, the final one of “*yā Allāh.*” From the outset, this articulation features a dramatic combined peak of loudness, pitch, and timbre structure displaying the pattern resembling the singer’s formant well up to around five thousand hertz. As in the previous example, the drawing out of the syllable breaks into modulation, increasing the forceful movement of opening up space, suggesting the carrying away of those enveloped by it. Extreme vibrato, which can be detected on the spectrogram, reinforces this progression as the *na’t khwan* cries out the name

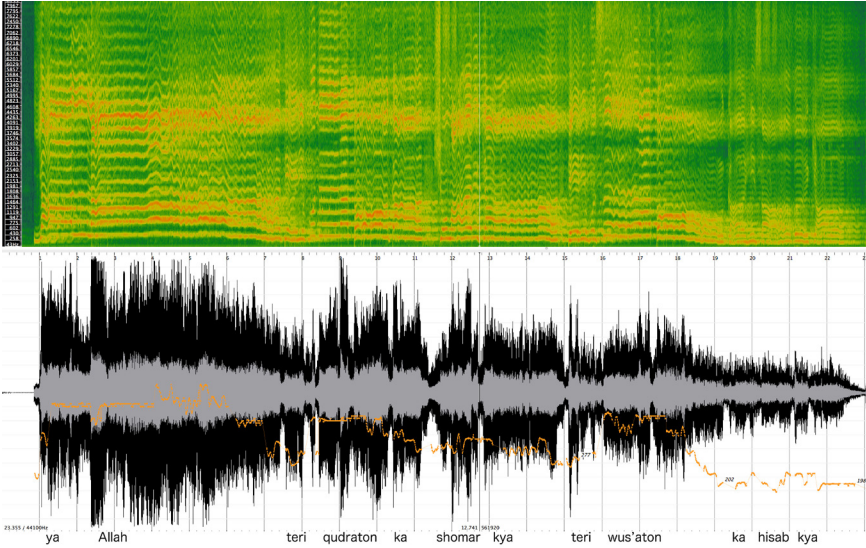


FIGURE 9. Spectrogram and waveform of “teri qudraton.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 4. “Teri qudraton.”

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of God. On top of this, the reverb effect is again deployed throughout. The overall movement suggested by the phrase is also striking. It begins with a sharp rise and contraction of *yā Allāh* that is sustained until *wus'aton*, when the poetic reiteration of the phrase *kā shomār kyā* as *kā hisāb kyā* opens and expands, which is also evident in the near disappearance of the singer's formant at the end of the sequence. The “I” of the poetic discourse takes a stance of utter devotion to God, and the movement suggested by the voice in conjunction with the poetic text is again one of transcending the self, of leaving its boundaries behind and extending itself in the quest for the divine. This concludes the bodily felt movement—which is also a spiritual journey—returning to a state of relaxation.

Similarly, in the next audio example (figure 10, audio clip 5)—*past voh kaise ho saktā hai, jisko haq ne buland kiyā* (how can the one whom God has elevated [the Prophet] be lowly?)¹⁵—the technique of drawing out the syllable *hai* with modulation and pronounced vibrato is central to the creation of a sonic atmosphere that transcends the self while opening up bodily felt space, enabling a movement elsewhere, to a more desirable place. Another important dimension of the suggested

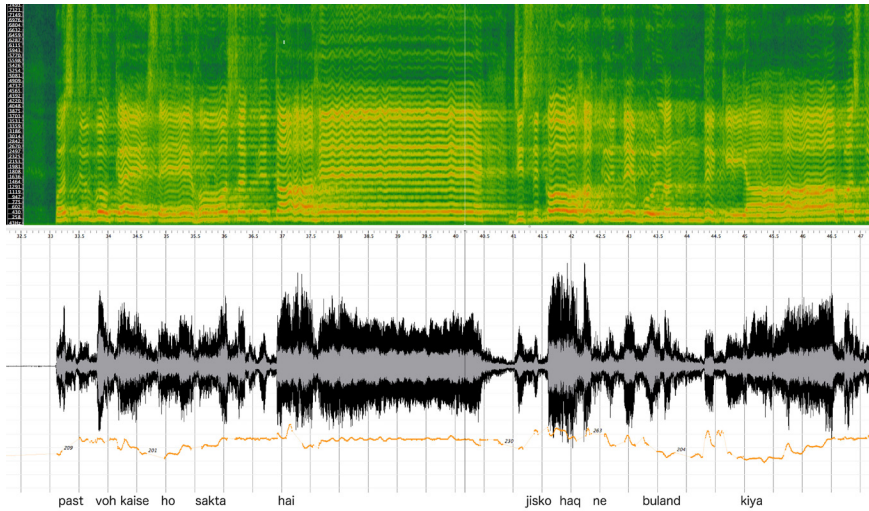


FIGURE 10. Spectrogram and waveform of “past voh kaise ho saktā hai.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 5. “Past voh kaise ho saktā hai.”

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movement in this clip of approximately fifteen seconds is, again, the concentration of energy in the singer’s formant, between three thousand and four thousand hertz, that is otherwise missing in the phrase, and that also ends with the syllable. As in the other examples, the trademark reverb is present, and it is most easily discerned on the spectrogram at the end of the drawn-out *hai*. Here, the reverb time is approximately two hundred milliseconds, a figure comparable to reverb times in the previous examples, providing the sense of a multiplication and amplification of the naʿt khwan’s voice.

Another audio example, approximately twenty-four seconds long (figure 11, audio clip 6)—*unke dāman se wābasta merī najāt, un pe qurbān merī hayāt-omamāt* (my salvation is tied to the hem of his garment [his intercession], I sacrifice my life and death [my entire being] for him [the Prophet])—further illustrates the drawing out of a recited syllable (the first syllable, *wā*, of *wābasta*) here with a pronounced modulation and vibrato.¹⁶ The formant structure features a concentration of acoustic energy between thirty-seven hundred and forty-eight hundred hertz coinciding with a rise in pitch and loudness sustained in a plateau-like fashion,

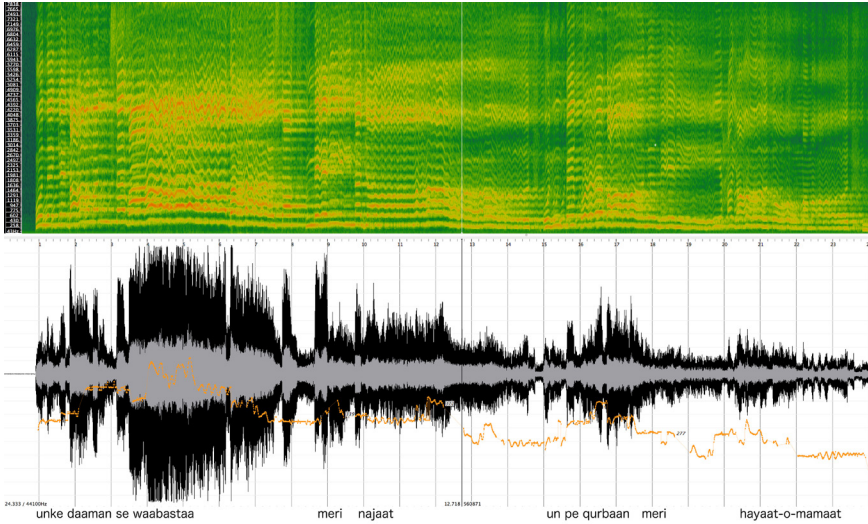


FIGURE 11. Spectrogram and waveform of “unke dāman.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 6. “Unke dāman.”

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the modulation then extending into the next two syllables, *ba-sta*, before breaking off. Much like in the previous example, the overall pattern of the suggested movement is a striking enactment of overcoming the boundaries of the self and reaching out in spiritual terms, and it is followed by a return to the starting point of the movement.

In these examples, I have tracked enactments and suggestions of bodily felt movement found in na’t khwans’ voices. These movements often coincide with the textual dynamics of the poetry, but they operate in modalities different from those normally found in the study of textual and social semiotics. The vocal and atmospheric enactments of the movements I have described unfold in a manner that is autonomous from the workings of discourse and the social alignments the latter produces. Nevertheless, my analysis also shows the strong interconnectedness between atmospheres, as vocally performed suggestions of movement, and the discourses of a religious tradition and its structures of ritual participation. Atmospheres, such as those produced by vocal sound, may always remain diffuse to a considerable degree. However, the juxtaposition of my Mauritian Muslim respondents’ comments on the voice in na’t recitation, the poetic discourse, my

observations of the performance of the poetic discourse, and the acoustic analysis of movements suggested by the reciting voice enables me to situate sonic atmospheres in a particular religious and historical context. From such a perspective, the movements of pitch, loudness, and timbre enact spiritual journeys in search of the Prophet, often to his favorite city, Madina, and as a temporal overcoming of the boundaries of the reciter's self. At the same time, given the shared nature of the sonic experiences, these sonically suggested movements with spiritual loading are also resolutely social, as they not only enable a single devotee's travel to a desired destination but also summon a community of Muslims to this quest. In the examples discussed, sonic contraction and expansion build suggestions of movement, of being carried away and transcending the self. I have described these movements as part of an objective atmospheric condition created by the sound of the vocal performance and its technical manipulation in the recording process, especially evident in the marked reverb effect. But as became clear through my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors' descriptions of vocal sound and its perception, the transformative effects of the performing voice also depend on historically and culturally contextualized dispositions that are responsible for receptiveness to such atmospheres.

Sound as Affect?

Incorporation and Movement in Vocal Performance

The discursive and sonic dimensions of na't poetry complement each other. Although they operate in distinct modes, in na't recitals they frequently work in mutually reinforcing ways. Mahfils are social events, and the sonic dimensions of the performances have particular affordances for creating shared, intersubjective experiences that are distinct from the processes of semiotic mediation I analyzed earlier. One of these shared, intersubjective experiences is incorporation through sonic atmospheres. Incorporation is a key modality of producing shared religious sensations. Such incorporation through vocal sound shows how voices not only move and touch persons in nonmetaphorical ways but also, in the process, bring about a temporary merger of their felt-bodies.

In the previous chapter I analyzed how the vocal recitation of na't poetry emits sonic atmospheres. I showed how such atmospheres effect processes of transduction. Sonic atmospheres encounter and mingle with felt-bodies, enacting suggestions of movement on them. Combining my analyses in the previous two chapters, I suggest ways in which the discursive dimensions of devotional recitation as evident in entextualization and the reconfiguration of participant roles can be fruitfully brought together with an analytic of atmospheres. My aim is to provide, based on my analysis of the vocal recitation of na't among Mauritian Muslims, a richer account of voice in religion that takes the sonic seriously as a dimension of meaning-making in bodily registers.

In the previous chapter's examples of na't recitation, it was apparent that the suggestions of movement contained in sonic atmospheres often align with the discursive dimensions of poetry. This was especially the case when the recitation of na't evoked the major theme of travel to Madina in order to personally encounter

the Prophet Muhammad. At the same time, my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors stressed the interdependence of vocal sound and the pious conditioning of both reciters and listeners. My respondents identified such piety with sincerity or with demonstrable pious practices such as regularly performing the mandatory daily prayers and displaying bodily markers of piety, such as beards. In this chapter I return to both of these points, the alignment of sonic atmospheres with the discursive dimensions of poetry and the relationship of vocal sound and pious conditioning. I do so in order to propose an understanding of the voice that combines the analysis of social semiotics that has so far dominated recent anthropological approaches to the voice with an analytic of atmospheres centered on a neophenomenological account of sensation. I suggest a new direction in the recent sensual and material turn in the study of religion that pays greater attention to its sonic dimensions.

In my analysis of the discursive dimensions of na't performances in chapter 4, I focused on the role of deictic particles in language as they facilitate the merging of the participant roles of composer and animator. This merger brings about a polyvalent "I" in discourse. It enables the reciters of the poetry to align themselves with the authority vested in the saint-poets who are regarded as the authors of the poetry and to take personal responsibility for the words uttered. This recalculation of the values of the deictics—such as personal, temporal, and spatial markers—along with other grammatical devices, such as use of the vocative case, locutives, and evidentials, makes such realignments between performers, authoritative saint-poets, and the Prophet possible. It turns the performance of na't into a meritorious act. I also mentioned that vocal qualities play a key role in the success of the performance of na't, because they indicate stances of emotive piety that listening to the poetry is supposed to bring about. Partly as a result of this sensibility to the voice, sound production technology has come to play an important role in guiding performances of devotional poetry. Sound reproduction has thereby also become an inseparable part of processes of entextualization that enable particular na't to travel from one performative context to another, so they remain the "same" not only in matters of textual accuracy but also in their vocal rendering.

However, the analysis of entextualization and participant roles alone is unable to account for precisely how the voice features in the process of religious mediation that the recitation of na't brings about. This requires a closer examination of the sonic dimensions of the performance. Islamically inflected media ideologies and the key importance ascribed to sonic qualities of the voice turn out to be closely interrelated. Among my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors, the deep concern for the qualia of vocal sound and their effects on those exposed to them, and the prevalent notion that uses of sound reproduction technology greatly support the reliable transmission of such qualities in future performances, were mutually reinforcing.

Following the discussion of sonic atmospheres in the previous chapter, we can now see how the sonic dimensions of the recitation add to the felt authenticity and authority of the poetry in performance. I have described sonic atmospheres

as perceptible phenomena that exude from persons and objects while enveloping felt-bodies. I have also sought to account for them in terms of the suggestions of movements they contain. My main conclusion was that the suggestions of movement in the recitation of the *na't* I analyzed feature a movement of transcending the self while simultaneously being lifted up and carried away. For my interlocutors such bodily felt movement aligned with the key theme of traveling to Madina in order to personally encounter the Prophet. Sonic and musical parameters provide obvious resources for such suggestions of movement. Sonic atmospheres generated by the reciting voice affect felt-bodies, evoking suggestions of movements in them. As my analysis showed, my Mauritian interlocutors described the impact of the voice as diffuse feelings that are difficult to render into discourse. They considered them to be quasi-contagious forces, spreading from one person to the next, enveloping those present at recitals in a shared mood. But the discussion also showed that such atmospheric effects were far from automatic. My respondents insisted that they also depended on certain preconditions on the part of both reciters and listeners. According to them, both listeners and reciters had to prepare themselves with pious Islamic practice in fields other than *na't* recitation in order to be receptive to the reciting voice and experience its desired transformative effects. Also, one has to keep in mind that the recitation of *na't* in honor of the Prophet is a controversial practice among Muslims, who tend to disagree on the legitimacy of the practice along sectarian lines. Thus, sectarian affiliations and the sensibilities that accompany them also influence how a voice reciting *na't* affects particular listeners. The effects generated by sonic atmospheres are, therefore, not self-evident and can vary widely between listeners.

This in turn raises the issue of the intersubjectivity of shared Islamic piety that the recitation aims to bring about. How is it produced? If there is nothing automatic and self-evident about the effects of sonic atmospheres, what mediations account for the shared character of the sensations that my interlocutors reported, such as the feeling of being seized and carried toward the abode of the Prophet? In this chapter I demonstrate that such shared, intersubjective feelings come about as the result of the interaction of two kinds of mediation, the semiotic mediation I described in chapter 4, and the collective merging of those present into a shared felt-body (Leib), which leads to sharing in the same bodily felt movements. In order to grasp this specific sonic rendering of what Csordas has called “intercorporeality” (Csordas 2008), it is important to understand the relationships between subjects, felt-bodies, and their coming together in a shared suprapersonal felt-body through a process of encorporation.

VOICE AND SOLIDARY ENCORPORATION

On the night in August 2003, when I walked with Raouf to the house of Naseem's parents, relatives and neighbors came together for a *mahfil-e mawlud* at the bride's house on the occasion of Naseem's wedding. On that Friday night, the *mahfil* took

place with men and women seated in separate rooms in the home of the bride's family. The participants were all very familiar with the na't genre, mainly because they frequently listened to recordings of performances by well-known na't khwan. Anwar, who is the cousin of the bride, and Irfan were the two main organizers of the event, and Anwar was locally known to be a young aspiring na't khwan himself. Active in transnational Ahl-e Sunnat networks and a follower of a maulana and Sufi sheikh from Mumbai, Anwar thus lived his devotion to the person of the Prophet in multiple ways, his role as an emerging na't khwan being just one among them.

In making a sound program for the mahfil, Anwar and Irfan had listened to two recently released Mauritian cassettes and CDs with na't recitals, *Naaté-Rasool*, volume 6 (Chady 2000b), and *Naaté-Rasool*, volume 8 (Chady 2001), selecting na't for a mahfil in celebration of Naseem's wedding and rehearsing the recitation. Anwar and his friends had gathered in the living room of the bride's house to assemble the program. They had brought audiocassettes and CDs, as well as booklets with texts of the poetry, including handwritten texts some of them had transcribed while listening to recordings.

On the night of the mahfil, the event began with a Qur'an recital that concluded with a darud sharif, the invocation of blessings to be bestowed on the Prophet, which all present recited three times. Then Anwar delivered an address in Mauritian Creole on the Prophet's daughter Fatima as the ideal, virtuous married woman, entirely devoted to the Prophet, while drawing a link to his cousin's wedding. All present then continued to enact the devotion to the Prophet that was the subject of his address by listening to and reciting na't. The recitation of a particular na't very popular at the time was one of the highlights of the evening. Several of my interlocutors told me that "Madina, Madina" was their favorite na't, one that they would also listen to daily, such as when traveling in their cars or in the early morning before going to work. As Anwar and Irfan began reciting the na't, everyone present instantly recognized it and responded with spontaneous calls of excitement. Shareef also told me about the great success of this particular recited poem, remembering that "it was all the rage at the time." Irfan and Anwar were the lead reciters of this na't, its popularity ensuring that most of those present knew the poetry by heart. In many ways, this na't encapsulated what makes the genre so popular among Muslims following the Ahl-e Sunnat in Mauritius: its attractive tune and its focus on the exuberant description of Madina that would not raise any suspicions of unduly elevating the Prophet to a godlike status. As several of my Mauritian interlocutors pointed out, the ineffability of its attraction lay in the difficult-to-describe ways in which the recited poetry would take you to Madina, as Mohamed had put it. That is, its listeners found the recitation moving in a literal way.

In the following, lines marked (IA) were performed by Irfan and Anwar only, those marked (I) by Irfan only, and unmarked lines by all present.

EXAMPLE 6.1

Sallallahu alayka ya rasulallah (I)	May blessings be sent to the Prophet of God
Wassallam alayka ya habiballah (I)	And greetings be sent to the beloved of God
Sallallahu alayka ya rasulallah	May blessings be sent to the Prophet of God
Wassallam alayka ya habiballah	And greetings be sent to the beloved of God
Madīna, madīna hamārā madīna (IA)	Madina, Madina, our Madina
Hamein jān-o-dil se hai pyārā madīna	Madina is dearer to us than our life and heart
Madīna, madīna hamārā madīna	Madina, Madina, our Madina
Hamein jān-o-dil se hai pyārā madīna	Madina is dearer to us than our life and heart
Suhānā, suhānā dilārā madīna (IA)	Madina, the very pleasing and sweet one
Suhānā, suhānā dilārā madīna	Madina, the very pleasing and sweet one
Har ‘āshiq kī ānkhon kā tārā madīna	Madina is the star of every lover’s eye
Har ‘āshiq kī ānkhon kā tārā madīna	Madina is the star of every lover’s eye
Sabhī ‘āshiq-e Mustafa keh rahe hain	All those immersed in love for the Prophet proclaim
Sabhī ‘aashiq-e Mustafa keh rahe hain	All those immersed in love for the Prophet proclaim
Hamein to hai jannat se pyārā madīna	Madina, which is dearer to us than paradise
Hamein to hai jannat se pyārā madīna	Madina, which is dearer to us than paradise
Pahāron hai bhī husn kānte bhī dīlkash (IA)	Even the mountains are beautiful and even the thorns attractive
Bahāron ne kaisā nikhārā madīna	How the spring seasons have brightened up Madina
Madīne ke jalwon pe qurbān jāun	May I sacrifice myself for the splendors of Madina
Madīne ke jalwon pe qurbān jāun	May I sacrifice myself for the splendors of Madina
Hai qudrat ne kaisā sanwārā madīna (IA)	How the Almighty himself has adorned Madina
Hamein jān-o-dil se hai pyārā madīna	Madina is dearer to us than our life and heart

Wahān pyārā ka'aba yahān sabze gunbad

If there [Makkah] is the beloved ka'aba,
here is a green dome [of the resting place
of the Prophet in Madina]

Voh makkah bhī mīṭhā to pyārā
madīna

As Makkah is sweet and beloved, so is
Madina

Phirun girde ka'aba pīyun āb-e zam zam

First I circumambulate the ka'aba and
drink the water from the well of zam
zam

Phirun girde ka'aba pīyun āb-e zam zam

First I circumambulate the ka'aba and
drink the water from the well of zam
zam

Main phir āke dekhaun tumhārā madīna
Main phir āke dekhaun tumhārā madīna
Yeh dīwāne āghā madīne ko āen (IA)

Then I come to see your Madina
Then I come to see your Madina
May this fervent servant of yours be able
to come to Madina

Yeh dīwāne āghā madīne ko āen

May this fervent servant of yours be able
to come to Madina

Bulā lo inhein ab khudārā madīna (IA)

Invite me to the divine Madina

Bulā lo inhein ab khudārā madīna

Invite me to the divine Madina

Bulā lijiye ab to qadamon mein āghā (IA)

Master, invite me to where your
footsteps are

Bulā lijiye ab to qadamon mein āghā

Master, invite me to where your
footsteps are

Dikhā dijiye ab to pyārā madīna (IA)

Now show me the beloved Madina

Dikhā dijiye ab to pyārā madīna

Now show me the beloved Madina

Khudā gar qayāmat mein farmāte
māngo(I)

If God orders us to choose on the day of
judgment

Khudā gar qayāmat mein farmāte māngo
(I)

If God orders us to choose on the day of
judgment

Lagāenge dīwāne na'areh madīna (IA)

Those immersed in love for the Prophet
will be clamoring for Madina

Lagāenge dīwāne na'areh madīna (IA)

Those immersed in love for the Prophet
will be clamoring for Madina

Madīne mein āghā hamein maut āye (IA)

May we breathe our last breath in
Madina

Madīne mein āghā hamein maut āye

May we breathe our last breath in
Madina

Bane kāsh madfan hamārā madīna

May we be buried in Madina

Bane kāsh madfan hamārā madīna

May we be buried in Madina

Madīna, madīna hamārā madīna

Madina, Madina, our Madina

Hamein jān-o-dil se hai pyārā madīna

Madina is dearer to us than our life and
heart

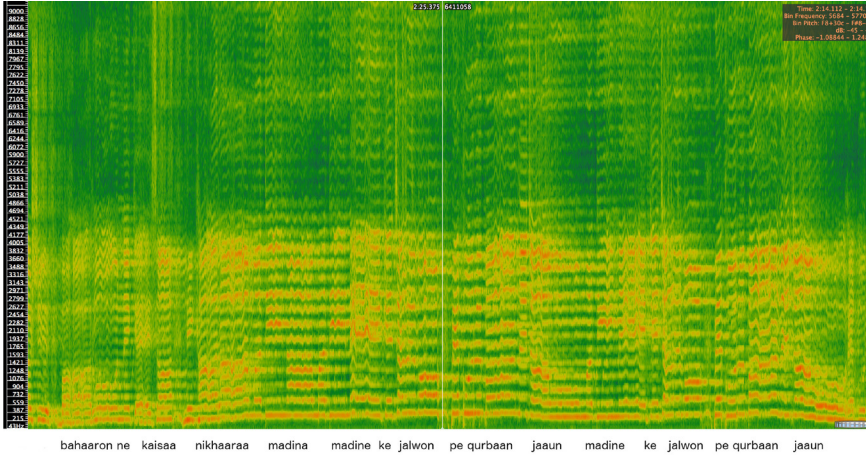


FIGURE 12. Spectrogram of “madine ke jalwon pe qurbān jāun.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 7. “Madine ke jalwon pe qurbān jāun.”

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One of the culminations of intensity in the recitation occurred when all present joined Irfan and Anwar to recite the line “madine ke jalwon pe qurbān jāun.” This line, expressing longing for Madina and love for the Prophet so great that one becomes willing to sacrifice oneself for him, was a moment of special exuberance. It suggested a transcending of individual selves as they merged into a shared movement toward a desired destination, Madina, the favorite city of the Prophet, with its promise of encountering his presence in person.

An analysis of an audio excerpt of approximately twenty-two seconds (figure 12, audio clip 7) from a CD recording of this na’t shows that the phrase *madine ke jalwon pe qurbān jāun*, *madine ke jalwon pe qurbān jāun* displays a dense buildup of acoustic energy in the bands, ranging from one hundred to forty-two hundred hertz.¹ This markedly differs from the end of the previous phrase (*bahāron ne kaisā nikhārā madīna*), where most of the energy in the spectral envelope is found in a range limited to one hundred to eleven hundred hertz.² Here the frequency range crucial to the “singer’s formant” does not even stand out in a marked way, as the timbre features an intensity of vocal sound throughout, up to approximately forty-two hundred hertz. The already considerable volume increases even further, as does the fundamental frequency, before the latter drops abruptly again at the end of the phrase. The na’t khwan’s voice thus features the sonic suggestion of an

intensified, elevating movement, coinciding with the discursive expression of utter devotion to Madina and, by extension, to the Prophet. The reverb effect applied throughout merely compounds the sensation of a movement to Madina, not just by the multiplication of all sonic events it brings about, but also by creating an ethereal sense of distance and the expansion of sound in a large space.

Focusing on the sonic dimensions of the recitation, how can we account for the generation of the shared, collective character of the feeling of being carried away to a pious destination? According to my interlocutors, the recitation produced such a feeling. My respondents also emphasized the quasi-contagious character of such sensations. This raises the question of how vocal sound can turn into a social force. The analytic of sound as atmosphere offers a compelling way to account for the sharing of sensation, because the suggestions of movement that the vocal performance enacts do not act solely on individual felt-bodies. It is more than merely the knowledge that others present are listening to the same recitation that brings about the social character of the feelings provoked by the performance. A merger of the suggestions of movement perceived by individuals results in the emergence of a shared felt-body, or we-Leib. This also produces the collective nature of the moods and feelings exuded by the reciting voice. As described by Hermann Schmitz, atmospheres act on the felt-body, or Leib, in a way going beyond the boundaries of the body as conventionally understood. As Gernot Böhme has pointed out, sonic atmospheres modify the space of the felt-body (Böhme 2000: 16). Discussing how vocal sound affects felt-bodies, he notes,

We listen to a voice in space. We are affectively struck by the voice because we are modified in our own presence in space through the voices we hear. To be present in a space means to reach out into this space through the sensing of the felt-body [*durch das leibliche Spüren*]. This occurs through feeling oneself contracted or expanded, pushed down or lifted up and much more. . . . The extraordinary effect of voices on our present emotional state is due to their immediately modifying our presence in space as sensed by the felt-body. They can make one [feel] contracted or expanded, they can be elevating and redeeming, or dampening and frightening. As tones are called high and low, having a broad base [*barus*], or pointed and sharp [*oxus*], so do our sensations follow the suggestive appeal [*Anmutungen*] of such tones by inviting or forcing us to be present in space in this or that way with the sensing of our felt-body. (Böhme 2009: 30–31)

The notion of felt-body stresses a decentered subjecthood, emphasizing the permeability of boundaries between humans and their surroundings, including other humans. It is precisely the sensation of how one's felt-body merges with those of others in following sonically mediated suggestions of movement that lies behind the power of na't performances. Schmitz called such experiential mergers incorporation (*Einleibung*), or the becoming part of a joint Leib, which thereby creates shared situations.³ In a chapter on "collective atmospheres," Schmitz himself

discussed joint vocal performance as one of the key instances of such incorporation resulting in a merger of felt-bodies. “In the act of singing together[,] solidary incorporation [*solidarische Einleibung*] and suggestions of movement jointly exercised through felt-bodies mutually reinforce each other. They also reinforce the feelings expressed by them and the text into a kind of mood-umbrella [*Stimmungsglocke*] that covers the group atmospherically. This mood-umbrella is replete with sentimental fullness as in folk songs, or is filled with religious devotion, national pride or fighting spirit, etc.” (Schmitz 2014: 59).

This potential for solidary incorporation that is characteristic of sonic atmospheres applies not solely to the act of singing but also to a variety of acts of “musicking” (Small 1998)—that is, a broader range of engagement with performed music resulting in a web of social relations.⁴ As Birgit Abels has recently commented on the relevance of Schmitz for the comparative study of vocal performance: “Schmitz speaks of a solidary incorporation [*Einleibung*] that creates shared situations. In solidary incorporation people plunge into a comprehensive felt-body, into a ‘we-Leib’ that includes the ‘I-Leib.’ I argue that an intrinsically social dimension pertains to this phenomenon, which is also central for the ability of music to community. This is because musical practices have the capacity to make such a processual relationality experienceable and subject to modification through solidary incorporation” (Abels 2017a: 218).

Returning to our example, the voice, in reciting *madīne ke jalwōn pe qurbān jāun* (“May I sacrifice myself for the splendors of Madina”), exudes a kind of sonic atmosphere that compels those listening to become momentarily part of a larger, collective entity with a somatically experienced base. This comes about through a momentary fusion of the felt-bodies of those present into a shared entity, the we-Leib. The result is that bathing in those pious vocal sounds enables one to overcome the boundaries of one’s self and join a community of Muslims while being moved toward the presence of the Prophet together with others. The sonic atmosphere exuded in the vocal performance thus affords suggestions of movement that provide orientation, in a joint effort to reach a pious destination.

While the sonic dimensions of the voice accomplish the suggestions of movement and the ensuing temporary somatic merger, its discursive dimensions work hand in hand with the sonically enacted movements, qualifying them as Islamic and specifying their destination as Madina, the favorite city of the Prophet, along with its wonderful attributes. This is possible because, according to the followers of the Ahl-e Sunnat, the recitation of na’t can bring about the presence of the Prophet and an attendant displacement of the devotee to Madina. Moreover, as I described earlier, the discursive aspects of the poetic performance also help accomplish a merger of participant roles that aligns the agency of those reciting the poetry with the revered saint-poets who were their composers in moments of divine inspiration.

movement that can be experienced collectively, followed by a relaxation of the movement as pitch and loudness decrease in *kyā surūr āegā, main madīne calā*, which is also accompanied by a greater concentration of acoustic energy in the lower bands of the spectral envelope. The reverb effect that provides a sense of spatial expansion is again discernable throughout and most clearly visible in the spectrogram as a decaying echo in the brief pause of approximately 350 milliseconds after the initial phrase, *gunbad-e sabz par*, before the line continues with *jab paregī nazar*.

The process of incorporation described earlier that results in a merger of felt-bodies into a shared we-Leib through jointly felt suggestions of movement is also responsible for the power of the recited lines above. Incorporation is behind the “physical transformation” that takes place in response to the na’t khwan’s voice, as Shareef described it; he also insisted that the voice “directly” enters one’s soul. Furthermore, the voice acts on a collective of persons present, in a quasi-contagious process. As Mohamed suggested, the na’t khwan’s voice makes one vibrate. Taking the perspective of a na’t khwan, he said, “One needs to make this gathering vibrate.” This is a literal way to describe how the sonic atmosphere that a vocal performance emits can somatically unite those present through solidary incorporation under the impact of shared suggestions of movement. As Farhad mentioned, the na’t khwan’s voice then “grips you powerfully,” the sensation compounded by the momentary dissolution of the boundaries of the felt-body as a multiplicity of felt-bodies merge in a joint movement. The discursive dimensions of the poetry then further qualify the joint destination of the movement as Islamic, as Madina, the abode of the Prophet. The sight of its landmarks, such as the green dome and the minaret of the Prophet’s mosque, provokes boundless joy among his devout followers.

The expansive suggestions of movement that my interlocutors described as a feeling of being lifted upward and carried to Madina are not the only sonic feature of na’t recitation that brings about the merging of felt-bodies through incorporation. In fact, this process occurs through sequences of alternating movements of expansion and relaxation. The acoustic and musical parameters I have described, such as pitch, loudness, and timbre, enact such alternating movements in obvious ways. As sonically suggested movements simultaneously act on a multitude of individual felt-bodies, they provide the ground for their merger and, thus, the creation of a new, intercorporeal, and social entity. At the same time, the discursive dimensions of the poetry can strongly underline a sense of joint travel together, as a community of Muslims. Let us examine the following na’t (example 6.2, image 6.3), which also revolves around the Madina theme.⁶ The lines marked with asterisks feature increases in pitch, loudness, and the concentration of acoustic energy in the spectral envelope at higher frequency bands, contrasting with the unmarked lines, which display decreases in all these parameters.

EXAMPLE 6.2

Ek yahī sahārā hai is jahān mein jīne kā

There is just one support for living in this world

Ek yahī sahārā hai is jahān mein jīne kā

There is just one support for living in this world

*Ek yahī sahārā hai is jahān mein jīne kā

There is just one support for living in this world

*Is jahān mein jīne kā

For living in this world

Bāt kar madīne kī zikr kar madīne kā

Speak and recite the remembrance of Madina

Bāt kar madīne kī zikr kar madīne kā

Speak and recite the remembrance of Madina

*Voh tujhe bacāeinge pār bhī lagāeinge

He will save you and guide you to a safe haven

*Voh tujhe bacāeinge pār bhī lagāeinge

He will save you and take you to a safe haven

*Pār bhī lagāeinge

Take you to a safe haven

Un pe choṛ de kashtī gham na kar safine kā

Leave the vessel's course to him and do not worry

Un pe choṛ de kashtī gham na kar safine kā

Leave the vessel's course to him and do not worry

*Kyon bhaṭaktā phirtā hai puch apne murshid se

Why are you roaming around aimlessly Ask your master

*Kyon bhaṭaktā phirtā hai puch Al'a Hazrat se

Why are you roaming around aimlessly Ask Al'a Hazrat

*Puch Al'a Hazrat se

Ask Al'a Hazrat

Voh bataeinge tujko rastā madīne kā

He will tell you the way to Madina

Voh bataeinge tujko rastā madīne kā

He will tell you the way to Madina

*Choṛ kar ghadam unke

Do not fly into the air in search for him

uṛnā tū hawāon mein

*Choṛ kar ghadam unke

Do not fly into the air in search for him

uṛnā tū hawāon mein

*uṛnā tū hawāon mein

Do not fly into the air

Rastā yahīn se hai qurbe haq ke zīne kā

For the way to him is via the Prophet's ladder

Rastā yahīn se hai qurbe haq ke zīne kā

For the way to him is via the Prophet's ladder

*Āp ke qadam jab se āe hain madīne mein	Ever since your [the Prophet's] steps have graced Madina
*Āp ke qadam jab se āe hain madīne mein	Ever since your [the Prophet's] steps have graced Madina
*Āe hain madīne mein	Have graced Madina
Zarra zarra roshan hai āj bhī madīne kā	Every single particle of it emits a resplendent light even until today
Zarra zarra roshan hai āj bhī madīne kā	Every single particle of it emits a resplendent light even until today
*Āe alim cal tū bhī rah le madīne kī	Oh, Alim! You, too, prepare to take the road to Madina.
*Rah le madīne kī	Take the road to Madina.
Bas wohin se miltā hai rāz har khazīne kā	Just from there you will obtain every treasure of this mystery
Bas wohin se miltā hai rāz har khazīne kā	Just there you will obtain every treasure of this mystery
Bāt kar madīne kī zikr kar madīne kā	Speak and recite the remembrance of Madina

As an illustration of the sonic suggestions of movement, consider the spectrogram of the audio excerpt from the recitation of this na't (figure 14, audio clip 9). The alternation between movements of contraction and expansion (cf. Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011: 245), suggested by increases and decreases on a range of acoustic and musical parameters, immediately strikes the listener. This excerpt of approximately forty-four seconds is from the first stanza, in which increases along these parameters characterize the recitation of the first two lines:

Ek yahī sahārā hai is jahān mein jīne kā
Is jahān mein jīne kā

They are followed by two lines of recitation displaying decreases along these parameters, suggesting a relaxation of movement and, corresponding to this, a relaxation of the mood conveyed.

Bāt kar madīne kī zikr kar madīne kā
Bāt kar madīne kī zikr kar madīne kā

The first two lines are immediately discernable on the spectrogram, as they feature greater acoustic energy on higher frequency ranges in the spectral envelope, especially the additional concentration of acoustic energy between four thousand and fifty-five hundred hertz. A moment of marked emphasis is the drawing out of *hai* in *ek yahī sahārā hai* at high pitch, clearly visible as the long, straight line repeated throughout the harmonics on the left side of the spectrogram. These lines contrast

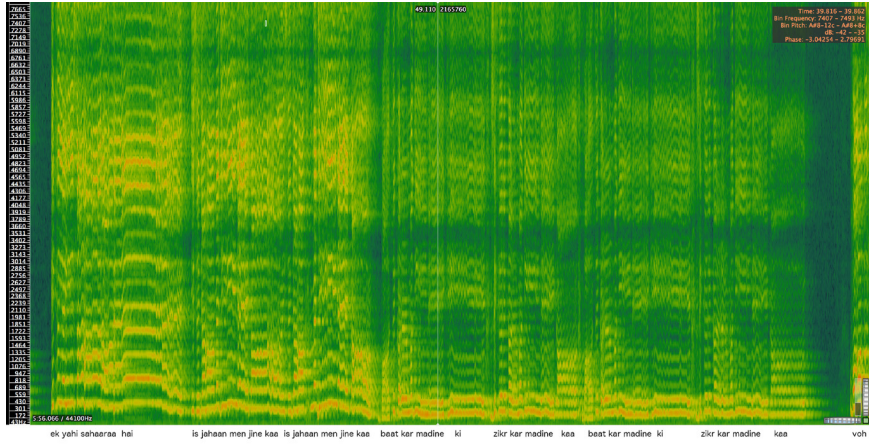


FIGURE 14. Spectrogram of “ek yahi saḥāra hai.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 9. “Ek yahi saḥāra hai.”

To listen to this audio, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.53.9>



with the two following ones, *bāt kar madīne kī zikr kar madīne kā* and its repetition, which show a sudden drop of acoustic energy, with most of the energy in the spectral envelope now concentrated in lower ranges between one hundred and six hundred hertz, accompanied by decreased loudness and pitch. The following separate illustration of the waveform (figure 15, audio clip 9) of this example, tracking volume (wave amplitude) and fundamental pitch (the separate graph in the lower half of the diagram), makes these alternations immediately evident in visual terms.

The recitation features an alternation between contracting and relaxing movements not just between the lines mentioned above but also throughout, following the same pattern of alternation. The marked phrases in the text of the recitation above display a sudden increase in pitch, loudness, and the concentration of acoustic energy in the spectral envelope at higher frequency ranges. They are followed by phrases characterized by a marked decrease on all these musical parameters. The voice thus enacts a sequence of movements that alternate between states of high energy and contraction, and drops in energy, featuring movements of relaxation and dilation. Listeners perceive these suggestions of movements as the boundaries between their felt-bodies blur and their bodies merge into a shared we-Leib, united by the rhythms of sonically enacted contraction and dilation, upward movement and its relaxation. Such a merger of the participants into a shared, bodily experienced whole provides the somatic ground for a community of Muslims on the

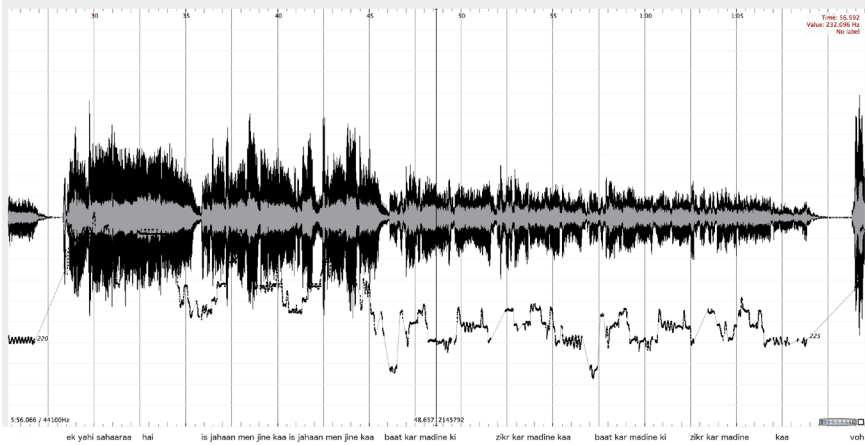


FIGURE 15. Waveform of “ek yahī saḥārā hai.” Illustration by the author.

AUDIO 9. “Ek yahī saḥārā hai.”

To listen to this audio, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.53.9>



way to their encounter with the Prophet. The merger is more than simply a matter of isolated gestures and movements away from where those present find themselves, and toward the destination of their desires. It becomes more enduring and is critically reinforced through a potentially open-ended sequence of alternating movements, suggesting a jolt toward Madina, and a relaxation of the movement, enabling its repetition. The flow of this alternating sequence then provokes the awareness that all present are under the impact of the same suggestions of movements. This brings about a somatic realization that all have begun to partake in the same movements, oriented toward their pious destination.

As is evident from the text, the discursive dimensions of the recitation and their poetic aspects constantly underline the sonic suggestions of movement that act on sentient bodies as an atmosphere. The sonic suggestions of movement I have described in turn resonate with particular social and historical configurations, such as the devotion to the figure of the Prophet and the desire to travel to Madina in order to encounter him personally, that are hallmarks of the Ahl-e Sunnat tradition. This kind of resonance then enables the discursive dimensions of the poetry to qualify the sonic atmospheric movements and their desired destination as Islamic in a specific sectarian sense. Through the medium of poetic language, they express utter devotion to the Prophet, metaphorically identified with his abode in Madina. As discussed in detail in chapter 4, the

recitation of the poetry also features a reorganization of participant roles that results in a merger of the agency and responsibility of the reciters in the performative setting and the saint-poets such as Ahmad Riza Kahn Bareilwi, invoked as Al'a Hazrat, who are assumed to have composed the na't in moments of divine inspiration. As a result, the reciters align themselves with the authority of these saintly figures, while taking personal responsibility for the words uttered, which now feature as personal invocations of each one reciting the na't. These personal invocations are particularly clear in the use of locutives in the familiar form of address such as *bat kar* (speak), *chor kar* (give up/let be), *pūch* (ask). The poetic form of the text, manifest in multiple parallelisms such as in the complete or partial repetition of lines, as well as alliteration, meter, and rhyme, simultaneously bounds and marks off the text from other discourse, making it available for sequences of de- and recontextualization in new settings. The constant interplay of sonically suggested and somatically experienced movement and these discursive and poetic features of the poetry converge in a powerful sense of an Islamic summons to encounter the Prophet, felt in the flesh, the somatic evidence compounding its discursive qualification.

SOUND AS AFFECT?

I have emphasized the close intertwining of sonic suggestions of movement with the discursive dimensions of the recited poetry. This intertwining appears to be in tension with some recent approaches to sound that identify the sonic with affect. In recent years sound has, for theorists of affect, served as one of the prime examples illustrating the autonomy of the supra-individual intensities, movements, and visceral forces that these theorists call affect from language and any other kind of signification—indeed, autonomy from any sort of sociocultural, historical, or subjective qualification.⁷ Accordingly, the “autonomy of affect” (Massumi 2002: 35) is exemplified by the sonic if the latter is understood to be “an asignifying material flux” (Cox 2011: 157), or taken to be a key part of a larger “environmentality or ecology of vibrational affects” (Goodman 2010: xviii). Sound as a material, supra-individual energetic force that exists and propagates without the intervention of perceiving subjects seems to fit recent conceptualizations of affect to a striking degree.⁸ As Roger Shouse has put it,

An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. . . . Because affect is unformed and unstructured (unlike feelings and emotions) it can be transmitted between bodies. The importance of affect rests upon the fact that in many cases the message consciously received may be of less import to the receiver of that message than his or her non-conscious affective resonance with the source of the message. Music provides perhaps the clearest example of how the intensity of the impingement of sensations on the body can “mean” more to people than meaning itself. (Shouse 2005: para. 5, paras. 12–13)

Sound can be understood as events that emit wave phenomena in a medium, and that exist independently from human perception (O'Callaghan 2007). Furthermore, humans perceive sound only within a limited frequency range. That means that the wave phenomena that surround us and provide the physical ground for the perception of sound are largely outside consciousness. They thus take the form of implicated acoustic signals, “noise,” or “non-cochlear sound” (Schrimshaw 2013) that can turn into actual, perceivable sound only under certain conditions and in certain constellations. This has led some scholars in the field of sound studies to identify inaudible acoustic signals with autonomous affects: “The notion of the non-cochlear presented herein is aligned with this particular understanding of non-sound as a model of clamorous silence populated by inaudible yet affective signals, signals that are taken as structurally equivalent to autonomous and infraesthetic affects” (Schrimshaw 2013: 43).

These qualities of sound as it shifts between the perceptible and imperceptible have prompted scholars of affect to draw connections between sound and the Deleuzian theme of virtuality (Massumi 2002: 30–31, 62, Evans 2002: 183). Deleuze distinguishes between actual, individuated phenomena, and the virtual forces of difference and multiplicity behind it that generate the actual. For Deleuze, the virtual and the actual are equally real (Deleuze 1994 [1968]). Virtuality thus understood has played a central role in characterizations of affect as a force full of unpredictable potential beyond political ideology or any other form of intentionality and meaning-making. Affect as virtuality has also become of concern for reconsiderations of the political, based on the notion that affect points to the unconscious and pre-ideological potential for collective change, which some theorists conceive as liberatory (Hardt and Negri 2000). A range of scholars have recently brought forward the phenomenon of sound as a compelling illustration of immanence and virtuality that can turn into actualized acoustic forms in a multitude of ways while continuing to exist mostly in the form of the virtual (Cox 2009, Grimshaw 2015, Hulse and Nesbitt 2010).⁹ In fact, Deleuze himself also used a sonic example to explicate his distinction between actual and virtual, in a discussion of Leibniz's remarks on listening to the murmur of the sea (Deleuze 1994 [1968]: 213–214).¹⁰

An opposition between affect as a material force and meaning as a mental phenomenon, residing in individuals and embedded in language and culture, is a key feature of these approaches postulating the autonomy of affect from signification and subjectivity. The reappearance of a mind-body divide in affect theory, according to which affect as a vital force passes through material bodies, while meaning is located in minds, has been noted before (Leys 2011: 458; see also Kane 2015). Here, I point out that when theorists of affect such as Massumi emphasize the autonomy of affect from meaning, they subscribe to a narrow intellectualist notion of signification that leaves out vast stretches of modern semiotics, especially the Peircean tradition. The latter views semiosis as thoroughly integrated with materiality, causality, and

embodiment, going far beyond the realm of the symbolic (Peirce 1932, Parmentier 1994).

Atmospheres share with affect the quality of an involuntary force that affects bodies while not always subject to conscious awareness. Atmospheres thereby point to the fleeting boundaries between the body and its environment, including other human bodies, because atmospheres are perceived by felt-bodies that exceed the material boundaries of bodies as normally conceived. Sonic atmospheres thus highlight the intermingling of bodies with the seemingly “external” environment. Atmospheres do not function only as bridges that overcome the internal-external opposition with respect to the body. An analytic of atmospheres is also inimical to a dualism between material, bodily forces and signification.

Sonic atmospheres contain suggestions of movement. Movements are not linguistic signs, but that does not mean they are outside the realm of signification. They fit Schmitz’s description of atmospheres as featuring “internally diffuse meaningfulness”: they always generate a multiplicity, if not an excess, of meaning that is hard to define clearly. When an atmosphere conveys “somberness” or “elation,” such a description will always be incomplete, because atmospheres, sonic or otherwise, will always suggest more than can be captured discursively, a condition made even more acute by the multisensory character of atmospheres. At any rate, in Peircean terms, the movements atmospheres suggest to the felt-body are suffused with semiosis, principally indexicality and iconicity, which often occur in combination. This is the case in the examples I have discussed, where the sonic envelopes of the voice’s acoustic energy frequently are diagrams of the spiritual journeys suggested. Following Peirce, diagrams are icons “which represent the relations . . . of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts” (Peirce 1932: 157). Thus, the sonic movements are diagrams of spiritual journeys because of their structural resemblance to them. This resemblance extends across qualitatively different domains, the flux of sonic energy on one hand, and the spatial movements of a devotee to a desired spiritual destination on the other hand. This kind of signification is not the result of an imposition of mental forms on signifying matter. On the contrary, the structural resemblances that make up the iconicity of sonic movements inhere in their materiality.¹¹

Far from being “autonomous” from signification in Massumi’s sense, the instances of vocal sound I discuss in this book are shot through with semiosis in multiple ways. The reduction of meaning and semiosis to the symbolic, to Saussurean signs that are held together by social convention, is central to affect theory’s claims of the “autonomy of affect.” It has prevented theorists of affect, including those who work on sound, from realizing that there are other material modalities of sign relationships that constitute what some theorists misunderstand as nonrepresentative phenomena (Cox 2011: 156–157; see also Thrift 2008). Even though an

ethnomusicologist has recently suggested otherwise (McGraw 2016: 137), sonic atmospheres are therefore by no means nonrepresentative. Such an assessment betrays a truncated understanding of semiosis and signification, owing to the latter's reduction to an intellectualist concept of meaning. The meaningfulness of vocal sound is not the product of an imposition of mental representations on an essentially asignifying sonic materiality. Instead, such meaningfulness is internal to the processual nature of its material forms. The link between particular sonic movements and my respondents' reported sensations when vocal sound moved them lies in the iconicity of the measurable dynamics of sonic phenomena and culturally embedded perceptions of sound. Approaching vocal sound as atmospheres acting on felt-bodies can provide us with an account of how such an analogy of sonic movements and reported sensations comes about.

A key assumption in work inspired by the "autonomy of affect" is that meaning and signification always pertain to states of mind that are characterized by full awareness and consciousness. Accordingly, while the forces of affect operate as biophysical phenomena completely outside consciousness, the attribution of meaning to phenomena perceived through sensual perception happens in states of full awareness, after a temporal lag. This leaves out the entire range of intentional acts and phenomena that happen in semi- or subconscious states, such as the finger movements of a pianist that are below the threshold of full awareness but not entirely beyond consciousness and certainly not outside intentionality (see Leys 2011: 455–458, Gallagher 2006). Atmospheres and their diffuse meaningfulness operate precisely in this realm between full, conscious awareness and automatically occurring biophysical processes. Hence, unlike some recent work on sound and affect has suggested, it is not the case that "in human audition, environmental sound is affective in Massumi's sense; it is registered prior to the activation of semantic, causal, or cognitive listening" (McGraw 2016: 137). Sonic atmospheres are perceived, often in semiconscious states, as suggestions of movement. The perception of sound, whether through the ears or other parts of the body, and the perception of the suggestions of movements, are one and the same: they cannot be dissociated. The suggestions of movement that sonic atmospheres revolve around are not symbolic or cognitive qualifications applied after the fact. On the contrary, they inhere in the very material structures of sounds. They also cannot be explained as a cognitive reworking of auditory perception after a "half second delay" (Massumi 2002: 28–30), superimposing meaning on some prior "auditory real" (Cox 2011). At any rate, the suggestions of movement, such as the sense of travel and being carried away conveyed by the *na't khwan's* voice, are profoundly meaningful, even if they do not conform to an intellectualist understanding of meaning. In semiotic terms, they do not consist of symbols—that is, Saussurean arbitrary signs—but comprise iconic and indexical relations.

There is nevertheless a difference between the diffuse meaningfulness of sonic atmospheres and the more specific Islamic and even sectarian loading that the discursive dimensions of *na't* performance convey. As I have illustrated, sonic

atmospheres contain suggestions of movement. These movements are not devoid of meaning; their meanings are only of a polyvalent and diffuse kind. Poetic performance in its discursive dimensions, including its processes of genre-specific entextualization and its attendant organization of participant roles, then further contributes to this process of meaning-making. As I discussed in chapter 4, these elements of poetic performance specific to the *na't* genre thereby further qualify sonic suggestions of movement as Islamic, and even as Islamic in a specific sectarian sense. The resonance between the sonic suggestions of movement and concrete sociohistorical configurations, such as the *Ahl-e Sunnat's* profound veneration of the Prophet Muhammad, enables such discursive qualifying of suggestions of movement as Islamic.

A layered account of sound and meaning emerges from the investigation of sonic atmospheres in Mauritian Muslims' devotional practices. It transcends the binaries between unqualified, sheer intensity and signification, or between automatically occurring biophysical processes and states of full consciousness in which the mind generates meanings. These oppositions current in contemporary affect theory need to be replaced by a more differentiated account. Such an account distinguishes between more diffuse and more strongly qualified kinds of meaningfulness in sound. It thus avoids falling into the trap of portraying the presence of signification and sociocultural qualification as an either-or question in which there is no middle ground between imperceptible biophysical processes and states of full awareness of socioculturally qualified meanings.

There is another important feature of sonic atmospheres that distinguishes them from understandings of sound as affect. Like affect, atmospheres contain objective energetic flows that humans are not always fully aware of. Unlike affect, however, the effects of atmospheres are not automatic. Not all Mauritian Muslims are fond of the *na't* genre, and they are not equally receptive to the sonically generated atmospheres of its performance. As my ethnography shows, sociocultural qualifications such as established habits of listening, sectarian affiliations and sympathies, and the contextual conditions of performing and listening to the genre all influence the impact of sonic atmospheres—indeed, whether they have any noticeable effect on listeners at all. This is another key reason why atmospheres are not “autonomous” from signification, as they do not exclusively operate at the level of the radically imperceptible. In order to be affected by atmospheres, bodies need to be receptive to them. Such receptiveness in turn also depends on the sociocultural and historical qualification of bodies.

Conclusion

In this ethnography I argue for the utility of the notion of atmosphere in the study of religion, focusing in particular on its sonic dimensions. But atmosphere also appears to be a timely analytic across a broader range of fields. In recent years, intellectually incoherent, if not downright irrational, populist currents have profoundly shaken politics in different parts of the world, including the United States. Liberal commentators have been exasperated by the lack of respect supporters of such populist currents have for academic expert opinions, proven facts, rational arguments, and even appeals to enlightened self-interest. These all seemed to be less powerful than diffuse but widespread moods, affects, and felt truths. In the face of such an apparently widespread refusal of the deliberative register of the political, the analytical category of atmosphere is highly useful for understanding contemporary and at least partly media-driven transformations of the public sphere.

In the study of religion, it has become commonplace to stress that the Habermasian notion of a secular, deliberative public is far removed from empirical reality across the globe. Instead, analysts have stressed how religious images, sounds, and discourses are forcefully present in contemporary public spheres, intermingling with politics, advertisement, and entertainment. Criticizing a long-standing bias toward the study of belief, doctrines, and other propositional content of religion, scholars in religious studies and anthropology have, in the previous two decades, called for a study of the sensual, material, and embodied aspects of religion. My study of mediatized vocal sound in a South Asian Islamic tradition is informed by this sensibility. Nevertheless, the recent surge of interest in the study of material and sensual aspects of religion has entailed relatively little attention to

religious sounds in their nondiscursive modes, a tendency that I aim to counteract with this book.

Affect theory has featured prominently in the recent interdisciplinary study of sound, and it shares with an analytic of atmospheres a number of concerns. Among these is, above all, the need to grasp what cannot be discursively expressed and specified. The analytics of atmospheres and affect alike seek to capture the moods and felt currents that are reshaping politics and public spheres in defiance of the predictions of learned analysts who base their judgments on intellectual stringency and actors' substantiated interests. In my ethnographic study of sonic atmospheres in Mauritian Muslim devotional practices, I demonstrate how central atmospheres, as both objective and intercorporeal phenomena, are to religious experiences and practices. For my Mauritian interlocutors, the voice of a *na't khwan* would lift them above and away to a better place, to Madina, the abode of the Prophet, and possibly even a personal encounter with him. The sonic production of atmospheres that suffused the felt-bodies of these devotees of the Prophet thus contributed to their salvation and spiritual liberation.

This might at first resonate with the hopes of particular theorists that a politics of affect would unleash hidden and hopeful political potentials, break impasses, and thereby play liberatory roles (Hardt and Negri 2000). After all, the power of atmospheres and affects often lies in their utopian appeal to dissolve boundaries, political, social, corporeal, or otherwise. However, it should be obvious that the power of neither atmospheres nor affect is necessarily tied to liberation or salvation. For this, one hardly needs to point to the contemporary worldwide resurgence of populist and ethno-nationalist exclusionary politics and politicians, with their disdain for public deliberation and their thoroughly affective ways of campaigning. Despite the abundance of scholarship on nationalism that has traced its resounding success to rational motivations of actors and objective socioeconomic forces, the appeals of nationalism, too, have been atmospheric from the beginning. Moreover, as students of fascism told us long ago, there is nothing new or liberatory about the aestheticization of the political (Benjamin 1968, 1979 [1936], Jay 1992). The latter is a process that revolves around atmospheres (Böhme 1995: 42–44) and affects.

Yet there are crucial differences between atmospheres and affect as analytical categories. In chapter 6, I discuss how some scholars in the field of sound studies have treated sonic phenomena as a ready exemplification of the intensities and energetic forces they label as affect. Against this tendency, not only has my analysis in this book stressed the entanglement of sound and signification, but also I have argued against the identification of sonic atmospheres with affect. In separating affect conceived as the nonconscious workings of somatic intensities from signification, and by asserting that the former is necessarily prior to the latter because of a "half-second delay" (Massumi 2002), theorists of affect have found a new way to reinstate the body-mind divide. A shortened understanding

of signification and semiosis informs the drawing of such a divide. Considering that sonic atmospheres' primary effect is to intervene in the spatial economy of the bodies of those exposed to them, I have pointed out that the suggestions of movements such atmospheres contain are fundamentally meaningful. In Peircean terms, such movements also constitute indexical and iconic relationships. These forms of semiosis are inherent to the sonically enacted movements that atmospheres contain, and not the product of the imposition of arbitrary mental forms after a half-second delay. Vocal sound turned out to be shot through with signification. Pace Kittler (1999 [1986]: 16), the sonic and its technical reproduction is no pristine "real" in Lacan's sense, uncontaminated by social and cultural qualifications. Further, atmospheres do not fit affect theory's opposition between states of full awareness and biophysical processes that cannot be consciously experienced. Following Hermann Schmitz, atmospheres, such as the weather or sonic phenomena, are "half-things" (*Halbdinge*) that come and go and that can also be registered without full conscious awareness. Moreover, their effects are not automatic, as atmospheres can also be merely observed. In my ethnography of devotional practices among Mauritian Muslims, I have stressed that the sociocultural receptiveness of persons also influences whether a sonic atmosphere can seize them. In other words, the sociocultural and historical conditioning and qualification of bodily perception plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of sonic atmospheres. My respondents entered performances of devotional poetry with an already existing aural archive and sectarian biases.

One of my main concerns in this book was to take the sonic seriously in its own right and to be attentive to its own specific modalities and knowledge. Seeking to do justice to sonic presences that are difficult to render into language, I have approached them as atmospheres that enact suggestions of movement. In my ethnography of poetic devotional performance, the discursive and sonic dimensions of the voice are closely intertwined but not reducible to each other. This becomes especially clear when considering sonic atmospheres' enactment of bodily felt movement. Crucially, such movement figures in more than metaphoric ways. These movements, such as the sensation of being carried away, support the discursive aspects of the poetry but constitute a separate sphere of knowledge. As the ethnography demonstrates, vocal sounds in Mauritian Muslim devotional performances turned out to be representations of social and religious values. However, taking sound seriously requires going beyond treating sonic phenomena as representations of something else.

Writing against a long tradition that sees voice as the expression of subjectivity and closely connected to a person's self, several theorists have stressed a fundamental "otherness" of the voice. As I discuss in chapters 1 and 5, Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar have in different ways argued for the "spectral autonomy" (Žižek 2001: 58) of the voice, betraying an uncanny foreignness. Adding to the theme of autonomous voices, the spread of sound reproduction technology has made the

presence of voices separated from the bodies that produce them, once the object of puzzlement and awe, a banal feature of contemporary lifeworlds. Furthermore, my ethnography has highlighted the importance of religiously grounded ideologies of the voice that feature the theme of the voice as an “other.” In the Islamic setting I have investigated, divine presence permeates the reciting voice, thus featuring an “otherness” of the voice in a specifically striking way. Against universalizing arguments about the otherness of the voice, an analytic of atmospheres stresses the boundary-weakening affordances of sound. Sonic transduction as a process relativizes the limits of bodies and, therefore, also the boundaries between bodies, as suggested in my discussion of atmospheric incorporation in chapter 6. In addition, an analytic of transduction highlights generative powers in a Simondonian sense. Sonic transductions can provoke religious sensations across bodies and subjects, such as the feeling of being carried away to a more desirable destination like Madina. Similarly, among my interlocutors, these sonically enacted suggestions of movement could also result in the sensation of overcoming the confines of one’s self, blurring the distinctions between vocal sound impacting bodies from the outside and vocal sound as pertaining to a defined subject. Approaching vocal sound as a transductive, and therefore atmospheric, phenomenon in its ethnographic context thus questions philosophical and psychoanalytical claims about the radical otherness of voices.

Treating vocal sound as atmospheric is, however, in line with Merleau-Ponty’s insights about the felt-body as both sensible and sentient. Our felt-bodies can be perceived as an “other” insofar as we can make our own bodies the perceptual object of our senses like the bodies of other people, even though at the same time our bodies are the existential ground for our being in the world and any of our perceptions. Our bodies are thus simultaneously own and other, as “I hear myself from both within and without” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 148). Merleau-Ponty used the example of a person touching her hand with her other hand to illustrate this condition of the body as both sentient and sensible (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 133). Even more intriguing is the rapid transformation of a hand from sentient to sensible and its potential reversibility in the case of a “touching of the touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the ‘touching subject’ passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world and as it were in the things” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 133–134). However, sonic practice as atmosphere is a social phenomenon and thus transcends the frame of a solitary felt-body as sentient and sensible. What the study of atmospheres, in particular atmospheric incorporation, can tell us is that our felt-bodies can at least sometimes be one with those of others, even though the latter’s alterity is not effaced by atmospheric incorporation in an enduring sense. In other words, in such situations, our felt-bodies can be sentient together with those of others, while the latter remain sensible to us.

Sound reproduction's central role in the Muslim devotional practices that are the focus of this study highlights how the reproducibility of sonic atmospheres has become part of the technicity of religion. The intrinsic connection of religion and media, including their technical dimensions, has become a fruitful starting point of analysis for the recent "media turn" in the study of religion, where a growing number of authors have analyzed the role of media in shaping religious practices and sensibilities. As I have noted, my Mauritian Muslim interlocutors took the intertwining of technical media such as sound reproduction and their devotional practices for granted, but also expressed doubts and anxieties about this entanglement. Such doubts were linked to more than just the perceived influence of the music of popular Hindi films ("Bollywood") on the recitation of devotional poetry. For several of my interlocutors the routine use of technical artifice such as a reverb effect in recordings of *na't* performances could also be overdone. As Farhad made clear in the vignette at the beginning of this book, exaggerated technical effects in the manipulation of vocal sound turned the recitation of devotional poetry into impious "banter." In such instances, there was no activation of media's capacity for self-erasure that is usually responsible for the powerful feelings of immediate spiritual presence generated by technically reproduced sonic atmospheres. On the contrary, the kind of technical artifice perceived as exaggerated made the technical apparatus of mediating spiritual presence highly perceptible again, thereby occluding spiritual presence instead of conveying it.

The technical reproducibility of sonic atmospheres was one of the main motivations for the widespread use of sound reproduction in the Mauritian Muslim devotional settings this book is about. The reproducibility of atmospheres is prominent in other fields as well, such as urban planning and marketing, where the atmospheric appeal of newly planned or renewed neighborhoods is often carefully crafted through visual effects of the built environment and illumination (Hasse 2012: 65–70, Edensor 2012; see also Edensor and Sumartojo 2015). In particular, Gernot Böhme's theory of atmospheres as "ecstasies of the thing" has highlighted the manufacturing of atmospheres through design, such as in architecture (Böhme 2006). In my account of the intersection of voice and technical media in an Islamic context, the manufacturing and reproducibility of sonic atmospheres emerges as a central theme. The possibility to reproduce sonic atmospheres is grounded in what Wolfgang Ernst has called the *Gleichursprünglichkeit* (the quality of being equally original) of a voice and its technical reproduction—that is, the circumstance that there is in principle no phenomenal difference between the two as sonic events. Nevertheless, several among my interlocutors were deeply suspicious of the effects of accomplished voices that did not belong to a *na't* *khwan* who was demonstrably pious in his overall conduct of life. The technical reproducibility of sonic atmospheres raised the issue of what some of my respondents called "fabricated emotions" standing in the way of piety. A voice and its technical reproduction can

generate the same sonic atmospheres, enacting the same suggestions of movement. Nonetheless, as I hope my ethnography has made clear, the receptiveness to sonic atmospheres cannot simply be technically reproduced in the same way, as it is a matter of listening and other bodily habits, sectarian biases, and aural archives that Mauritian Muslims bring to the audition of na't recitals.

NOTES

1. SOUNDING ISLAM

1. The north Indian city of Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh is known as the ancestral home and site of residence of Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi (1856–1921), the founder of the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama‘at tradition. This reformist tradition fuses Sufism and ulema-based Islam, and its followers are known to be particularly fond of na‘t poetry.

2. There are long-standing Muslim debates about the relationship between musical arts and Qur‘an recitation that are known as the “sama‘ polemic,” motivated by a “strong suspicion on the part of many Muslims that the recognized power of music is somehow antithetical to the ideals of Islam” (Nelson 2001: 32).

2. DEVOTIONAL ISLAM AND SOUND REPRODUCTION

1. The study of hadith, or reported sayings of the Prophet and his companions, represents a key paradigm for this form of authority, in which the main text of the hadith (*matn*) is often preceded by *isnad*, a list of reliable authorities and scholars responsible for the transmission of the text, ideally reaching back to those personally familiar with the Prophet and his companions (Brown 2009, Graham 1993). This paradigm can also be extended to assessing the authenticity of sacred objects or relics (Menon 2015: 113–134).

2. Although officially hailed as a policy of all-inclusive “unity in diversity,” the Mauritian regime of ancestral cultures has a profoundly exclusionary potential. This is because the members of the second-largest ethnic group, the Creoles—a group highly mixed but of predominantly African and Malagasy origins, and which is Christian by religion (28 percent of the population)—do not have claims on an ancestral culture and ancestral language of their own connected to a mayor religious tradition (Eisenlohr 2006a).

3. Siddiqi was invited by, and his stay was financed by, the Kutchi Memon Society of Mauritius, whose leaders constantly accompanied Siddiqi on his missionary activities across the island (Jahangeer-Chojoo 1997: 153–154).

4. It became dominant among Sunnis, the vast majority of Mauritian Muslims. There are also two small groups of Shi'ites of Gujarati background on the island, Musta'li Ismaelis (Bohras) and Twelver Shi'ites (Khoja Ithna 'Ashari). Another group consists of Ahmadis, whose claim to be Muslims is recognized by state institutions and by non-Muslim Mauritians, in general, but is often denied by Mauritian Muslims who are not Ahmadis.

5. The hadith literature displays a veritable mathematical imagination in calculating the benefits of uttering blessings on the Prophet (*darud*). In a compilation of hadith published by Shareef Chady, the following hadith is cited: "Hazrat Anas reports having heard the Noble Prophet say that he who sends him salutations (darood) once, the Almighty God will send him ten of his benedictions, will forgive ten of his sins and elevate his rank ten times" (2000a: 11). The volume also advises uttering a particular darud sharif, explaining, "This darood shareef is equivalent to 10,000 [ordinary] daroods" (Chady 2000a: 13).

6. On the Jama'at-e Islami, see Nasr (1994); see also Ahmad (2009) on the Jama'at-e Islami's rather different trajectory in postpartition India. The Islamic Circle is today known as the Quran House (www.quran-house.org/, last accessed January 10, 2017) and comprises a mosque, an Islamic school, a center for Arabic studies, and a library. Hussein Malick, a Pakistani follower of Abul Ala Maududi, who came to Mauritius in 1958 to direct an Islamic secondary school in Port Louis, founded the institution together with the Mauritian politician Ajum Dahal, whose family had formerly been indentured laborers ("kalkattiya"). The latter then attacked the political dominance of Abdul Razack Mohamed, the leader of the Memons, and his political party, the Comité d'action musulman. The Islamic Circle published two newspapers, the *Minaret* and *La Renaissance*, in French with occasional articles in Urdu and English. The newspapers followed the purist line of the Jama'at-e Islami, and the *Minaret* also frequently reprinted essays by Maududi (e.g., Maudoodi 1959a, 1959b, 1959c, 1959d, 1959e). Both papers launched attacks against the devotional practices favored by the followers of the Sunnat Jama'at, such as mahfil-e mawlud (e.g., Malick 1959, *Minaret* 1961, *Renaissance* 1961b). The *Minaret*, edited by Malick, also published an article, under what appears to be a pseudonym, directly attacking the imam of the Jumma Mosque and his encouragement of mawlud (ur-Rehman 1961). Soon thereafter, Abdul Razack Mohamed, who held a government position, had Malick's residence permit terminated, forcing him to leave Mauritius in 1961. The same year, a planned visit by Maududi was blocked by the government, possibly at the instigation of Mohamed (*Renaissance* 1961a).

7. These debates closely resemble those among South African Muslims of Indian ancestry, where followers of the Tabliqi Jama'at have striven for a "pure" Islam presumably uncontaminated by Indian "superstitions." Thomas Blom Hansen's quote of one of his Tabliqi interlocutors in Durban illustrates this clearly: "Much of what we thought was right to do was just culture and superstitions that our forefathers brought with them from India" (Hansen 2012: 247).

8. Maulana Nurani (1926–2003), was the son of Abdul 'Alim Siddiqi, who played a key role in establishing the Ahl-e Sunnat wa Jama'at tradition in Mauritius in the 1930s. He was a prominent figure in Pakistani politics well known for his dramatic political style and performance centered on his status as a revered Sufi saint (*pir*; see Malik 1990). Maulana Nurani also was the president of the Jama'at-e Ulama-e Pakistan, the political party representing

the Barelwi 'ulama and affiliated institutions and also a regular visitor to Mauritius. He was succeeded by his son Maulana Shah Muhammad Anas Nurani Siddiqui Qadri Madani, who currently heads the World Islamic Mission.

9. Among the latter, for example, were the cassette recordings of the performance of the visiting Pakistani na't khwan Fasihuddin Soharwardi at Goodlands on July 2, 2003, and by Yousuf Memon and Kaleem Noori at the Jummah Mosque in Port Louis on May 24, 2002, sponsored by the World Islamic Mission while it was headed by Maulana Nurani.

10. See Larkin (2004) for a fascinating parallel in northern Nigeria, where the modeling of Sufi devotional Bandiri music on Hindi film songs has provoked deep controversy. In India, the use of film tunes in commercially marketed cassette recordings of Hindu and Sikh devotional songs (*bhajan* and *kirtan*) has led to similar misgivings (Manuel 1993: 114–115).

11. Maulana Nurani in Pakistan has argued, in turn, that a prohibition against performing devotional poetry and reciting litany in praise of the Prophet is equivalent to committing abuse of and insulting (*tawhin*) the Prophet (Malik 1990: 44).

3. ASPIRATIONS IN TRANSNATIONAL RELIGIOUS NETWORKS

1. Being the symbolic center of Islam in the country, the Jummah Mosque was the focus of a long and bitter lawsuit between the Kutchi Memons and the Sunni Surtees that ended in 1908, when the Kutchi Memon Society of Mauritius gained exclusive control of the mosque. The highly charged symbolic role of a centrally located urban mosque in a society where Muslims of Indian background had established themselves during indenture and through the spread of Gujarati trader communities is evident in South Africa as well. Much later than in Mauritius, in the 1990s after the end of apartheid, the Memon-controlled Grey Street Mosque in Durban became the site of sectarian (Barelwi-Deobandi), ethnic (Gujarati versus North Indian), and class-related (traders versus people of working-class-indenture background) struggles that challenged Memon control of the mosque (Hansen 2012: 245–246).

2. The constitution divides Mauritians into four principal “communities”: Hindus (52 percent), Muslims (17 percent), Sino-Mauritians (2 percent), and the general population (29 percent). Those who cannot be classified as Hindus, Muslims, or Mauritians of Chinese origin fall under the category “general population.” Factually these are Creoles and Franco-Mauritians, who are overwhelmingly Catholic. Only the small and multireligious Sino-Mauritian community is not clearly identified with a major religious tradition, even though most Sino-Mauritians are also Catholics. Tamil is another ethnicity that crosses religious boundaries, since many Mauritians who trace their origins to Tamil ancestors are Catholics; but in everyday and official discourse, the label *Tamil* is largely restricted to those Tamils following Hindu traditions. While everyday discourse about ethnicity employs far more fine-grained distinctions, none of these crosscuts the boundaries between major established religious traditions. The exception is, again, ethnic subdistinctions among Sino-Mauritians. Therefore, religion is by far the most significant marker of the boundaries between the “communities” distinguished by both Mauritian state institutions and the larger public.

3. This is comparable to the role that Gujarati Muslim trader communities have played in Natal, where the social distance between them and Muslims of Indian background whose ancestors were indentured has been as significant as in Mauritius (Hansen 2012: 240–246).

4. The cosmopolitanism of the Kutchi Memons and other Gujarati trader communities shows interesting parallels to, but also significant differences from, the Hadrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean. While orthodox Islamic credentials have played a key role in the spread of both the Kutchi Memons and the Hadramis in very different societies, and later in nation-states in the Indian Ocean world, the Kutchi Memons and other Gujarati trader communities tend to be strictly endogamous. This contrasts with the Hadramis, who habitually married local women, creating families dispersed across countries and ethnicities. “The Hadrami diaspora brought together hitherto-separated peoples in single families and in a single religion. In each place, members of such families were both locals and cosmopolitans” (Ho 2006: 189).

5. Seewoosagar Ramgoolam’s son Navin Ramgoolam was prime minister from 1995 to 2000 and 2005 to 2014.

6. For example, Martijn Oosterbaan (2011) has shown in his research on a Brazilian Evangelical megachurch that media representations and other media practices that provide evidence of the global reach of the church also reinforce the universal claims of its religious mission.

4. THE MATERIALITY OF MEDIA AND THE VANISHING MEDIUM

1. In contrast to Hanks (2005), I also include in my analysis grammatical markers that point to various aspects of the context of performance in nonreferential modes. In treating aspects of nonreferential deixis as part of the deictic field, I therefore extend William Hank’s concept. However, as in Hank’s analysis, acts of deictic reference are of primary importance in my investigation of na’t performance.

2. In the context of the Madina motif, the use of the perfective participle of the verb *calnā* (to walk, to move), *calā* in “Here I go to Madina” (*main madīne calā*; also translatable as “I will go to Madina right away”), with future time reference is also of interest here. The performers deploy this grammatical form to emphasize the affective value of the willingness to immediately comply with a request. This in turn contributes to the performative power of the na’t, as the performer is in a certain sense visiting Madina in the act of recitation.

3. I adopt the term *locutive* from Kuipers in a somewhat loose fashion, as a verb that “index[es] the responsibility for the ‘word’” (Kuipers 1992: 88; see also Shoaps 2002: 55); unlike Kuipers I extend its use to situations beyond reported speech.

4. The potential for repetition is a condition of possibility for signs. Or, “the mode of being a representamen [sign] is such that it is capable of repetition” (Peirce 1934: 87).

5. The case for considering icons as types, or legisigns, as Peirce also called them, may not be immediately obvious, since the relations of inherent likeness they signify exist independently from any social process of conventionalization. But the dense phonetic, semantic, and rhythmic parallelisms that constitute na’t as a poetic text also have an iconic quality, which in turn also becomes part of the presupposed, even conventionalized, “type” of na’t as a repeatable event. These parallelisms thus resemble what Peirce called an iconic legisign: Peirce’s chief example of this sign relationship is a diagram, “apart from its factual individuality” (Peirce 1932: 147).

6. Reversing Saussure’s and mainstream linguistics’ assumption that the latter, systemic aspect of language logically precedes the actually unfolding, contextualized utterance, we could assign primacy to the process of “condensation” (Winkler 2004: 124–127) of countless

singular speech acts, or series of semiotic tokens, into the more systemic and conventional type—such as dimensions of language and semiosis that are responsible for its more enduring and iterable aspects. See also Peirce’s insistence that “every Legisign [type] requires Sinsigns [tokens]” (Peirce 1932: 143). Every type requires tokens not only for its existence but also, especially, for its production. Semiosis, then, unfolds as a dialectics between such condensation and the necessary drawing on the already established words and signs of others.

7. The dream of a “vanishing medium” that perfectly reproduces sounds such as voices has been a driving force in the development of sound reproduction since its beginnings. The advertising strategies of the gramophone industry heavily drew on the presumed “fidelity” of reproduced sound (Sterne 2003: 215–286). An iconic example was the 1899 advertisement image of the Gramophone Company (which subsequently became RCA): “His Master’s Voice,” featuring a dog facing the funnel of a gramophone placed on what looks like the top of a coffin. The gramophone presumably plays the recorded voice of the dog’s deceased owner (Sterne 2003: 302). Jonathan Sterne has made the case that sound reproduction technology was an outgrowth of a cultural environment in late nineteenth-century North America and Europe, where fascination with spiritism and the idea of listening to the voices of the dead was widespread (cf. Schmidt 2000).

8. The notion of trace as *archi-écriture* (cf. Derrida 1976: xv) stems at least in part from Derrida’s reading of Saussure’s observation that a sign needs to stand in opposition to other signs in order to be meaningful. Derrida concludes that signs, therefore, necessarily contain traces of what they are not—that is, traces of signs that are absent but nevertheless constitutive of the signs their traces can be found on. The notion of trace thus also points to the impossibility for signs to be present in an unmediated naive sense, since they are shot through with traces pointing to past and future signs: “That is what authorized us to call trace that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present” (Derrida 1976: 66).

9. This argument recalls Friedrich Kittler’s well-known characterization of the phonograph as making the symbolic dimensions of memory irrelevant. According to Kittler, the phonograph implements a form of memory in which “the real takes the place of the symbolic” (Kittler [1986] 1999: 24). Not just memory as storage and retrieval, but also its attendant manipulations become decoupled from symbolic dimensions. Addressing the phonograph’s novel capabilities for time-axis manipulation, Kittler writes, “What is manipulated is the real rather than the symbolic” (Kittler 1999 [1986]: 35). I concur with Kittler’s dismissal of the symbolic in this context, but disagree with his Lacanian assessment of the “real” as free from signification. This standpoint betrays the limitations of Saussurean semiology, as the latter identifies signification with arbitrary signs, such as symbols. From a Peircean perspective on signification, however, the “real” that sound reproduction brings about is shot through with iconicity and indexicality. The strict opposition between a Lacanian “real” and signification is therefore questionable.

5. THE WORK OF TRANSDUCTION

1. My choice of “recitation” for translating *lir* is due to the complex relationships of translation between Urdu and Mauritian Creole that characterize devotional practices among Mauritian Muslims, such as the cultivation of *na’t*. *Lir*, of course, literally means “to read,” but in Urdu a common way to refer to the recitation of *na’t* is *na’t parhna*, which

literally means “to read” but in Islamic contexts also often means “to recite.” Mauritian Muslims familiar with Urdu often retranslate *parhna* into *lir*, in a way restructuring the semantic field of *lir* in a manner including recitation. This use of *lir* will be unfamiliar to other users of Mauritian Creole, especially non-Muslims.

2. Casey O’Callaghan (2007: 46, 55–59) has sharply distinguished sounds as eventlike interactions of bodies or objects with a surrounding medium from wave-theory accounts of sound. According to him, sounds have definite locations and do not travel through a medium like sound waves do. The latter merely transmit information about sounds, making auditory experience possible. The implication for the analysis in this chapter is that atmospheres do not involve sound proper, defined in such terms. The epistemological realist distinction between sounds as locatable events that disturb a medium, and the processes enabling the perception of such events, is in tension with the analysis I am proposing in this chapter. In treating sounds as atmospheres that bodies intermingle with, I extend the realism to wave phenomena, which are the key focus of my analysis of sound. Although I agree that the distinction between sounds as locatable events and the resulting wave phenomena is useful, a decoupling of sound from wave phenomena, and therefore also atmospheres, is not possible if one’s focus is on the perception of sound and its social effects, which is the case in my study of Islamic vocal devotional practices. Otherwise one would have to come to the conclusion that sound, defined in realist terms, has no bearing on sociocultural worlds, a position that the ethnographic and historical record strongly contradicts. Any study of sound as a social phenomena will have to take wave phenomena into account, a point that needs to be raised not only against epistemologically realist accounts of sound but also in relation to accounts of sound as “sonic virtuality,” where sound is defined as “an emergent perception arising primarily in the auditory cortex and that is formed through spatio-temporal processes in an embodied system” (Grimshaw 2015: 93). While I have no objection to Grimshaw’s insistence on the primacy of perception and neuronal plasticity for sound—as is evident in the examples of tinnitus, the so-called McGurk effect, and synchresis—sound as social phenomenon is inseparable from wave phenomena. Following Grimshaw, it is possible to concede the existence of sound in individual minds only.

However, if we take up Grimshaw’s conclusion that “the sound is the object of perception, the sound wave is the object of sensation” (Grimshaw 2015: 98), the social dimensions of sound clearly depend on shared sensations. Therefore, both epistemologically realist and brain-based accounts of sound are insufficient for the study of sound as a dimension of social life, as the latter needs to take all the proposed locations of sonic phenomena into account: perceptions, sensations, and the events producing such sensations.

3. When applied to sound, Böhme’s notion of atmospheres as “ecstasies of the thing” also resonates with Jean-Luc Nancy’s characterization of “sounding” as an extension of bodies and objects: “To sound is to vibrate in itself or by itself: it is not only, for the sonorous body, to emit a sound, but it is also to stretch out, to carry itself and be resolved into vibrations that both return it to itself and place it outside itself” (Nancy 2007: 8).

4. Merleau-Ponty drew an explicit link between his use of *corps vivant* and Leib (2002 [1945]: 329–330) and referred to Plessner’s 1925 essay (1982 [1925]: 270).

5. For phenomenologists like Schmitz, there is a crucial difference between the physical body (Körper) with its definite limits, and the felt-body (Leib). According to Schmitz, “What I call the *Leib* of a human being is the quintessence of all that a human being can sense as being of him, and belonging to himself within the area—not always within the

boundaries—of his body [Körper], without having recourse to the five senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting, or perceptive schemata of the body (the habitual concepts of the own body) derived from these five senses” (Schmitz 2014: 31–32). “The *Leib* is usually a floating ensemble of blurred islands [*ein Gewoge verschwommener Inseln*] among which some are characterized by permanence, structure, and function” (Schmitz 2014: 32).

6. According to Schmitz, “Sound has no surfaces, and therefore its volume is not three-dimensional, but dynamic like a sweeping gesture” (Schmitz 2014: 50; see also 84–85).

7. Jousse also discusses the reception of sound and the material body’s inner reactions to it in some detail, which he describes as “dynamogenising”—that is, leading to the release of energy in the body:

It is the reception of “sound in particular [that] dynamogenises the organism. The dynamogenic effects of sound [receptions] have been the subject of wholly convincing experiments. . . . [S]ince the dynamogenisation of the muscles produces a variety of effects in the organs and vessels which they control, it is no surprise to learn that the sound of a drum can speed the flow of blood from an open vein.” . . . “The [reception] of sound, by dynamogenising the organism, enhances all its activities and, so to speak, increases its vital [and intellectual] capacity. Consciousness experiences this general enhancement as pleasure. *Pleasure is nothing other than the consciousness of dynamogenesis.*” (Jousse 1990 [1925]: 19–20, emphasis in original)

Thus Jousse’s physiological vision of unconscious bodily processes resembles Masumi’s understanding of affect, a connection Hirschkind also affirmatively notes (Hirschkind 2006: 82–83). This, however, is different from the dynamics of atmospheres, which are not to be confused with affects, as I will explain in the following chapter.

8. The analyses in figures 6–11 were made using Sonic Visualiser, on the basis of .wav files. (www.sonicvisualiser.org). Tracking of the fundamental frequency was done with the help of the vamp plugin Cepstral Pitch Tracker (www.vamp-plugins.org).

9. Chady 2003, CD 2, track 9.

10. According to Sundberg (1974), a particularly strong concentration of acoustic energy in the three-thousand- to four-thousand-hertz range enables European opera singers’ voices to be heard over loud orchestras.

11. In this poetic and devotional context, the phrase *fanā honā* (to be destroyed, to perish, to wither) also carries the Sufist connotations of perishing and annihilating oneself in love, or the withering away of the lover in the absence of the (divine) beloved.

12. *Ashiqué Rassool Shah Ahmad Razaa Ka Kalam* n.d., CD 2, track 7.

13. *Ashiqué Rassool Shah Ahmad Razaa Ka Kalam* n.d., CD 2, track 10.

14. Chady n.d., CD 1, track 3.

15. Chady n.d., CD 1, track 4.

16. Chady n.d., CD 1, track 5.

6. SOUND AS AFFECT?

1. The *na’t* appears on Chady 2001, CD 2, track 1.

2. The analyses in figures 12–15 were made using Sonic Visualiser, on the basis of .wav files. (www.sonicvisualiser.org). Tracking of the fundamental frequency was done with the help of the vamp plugin Cepstral Pitch Tracker (www.vamp-plugins.org).

3. “Corporeal communication through the channel of the vital drive—in such cases, I speak of encorporation [*Einleibung*—exists in an antagonistic mode with attention to others as well as in a solidary mode without such attention (e.g., tempestuous courage or the panicked flight of a troop, when singing, playing music, rowing, sawing together, by rhythmical calls, clapping, drumming)” Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby 2011: 251.

4. Christopher Small, who coined the term *musicking*, provided this well-known definition: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small 1998: 9, romanization added).

5. Chady 2001, CD 2, track 2.

6. Chady n.d., CD 1, track 11.

7. In the Anglophone humanities, the “affective turn” can largely be traced to Brian Massumi’s translation of and foreword to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, where Massumi introduces and defines the authors’ use of the notion of affect (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980]: xvi), which the latter derive from Spinoza. There is, however another tradition in thinking about affect originating in psychology and neurology that views affects as elemental bodily states (Tomkins 1995; see also Ott 2017). Authors in that tradition have also asked how affects thus understood can spread between persons (Brennan 2004). However, they cast affect, not as an impersonal force of intensity that passes through bodies, but as neurophysiological processes originating in and proper to individual bodies, even if communicable as manifest emotions. In contrast to Massumi’s adoption of Deleuze and Guattari’s engagement with the Spinozan notion of *affectus*, this latter understanding of affect does not easily lend itself to identification with sonic phenomena.

8. “Rhythm, relay, arrival and departure. These are relations of motion and rest: *affect*” (Massumi 2002: 20, emphasis in original). This characterization of affect by Massumi strongly evokes sonic phenomena, especially in its musical modes. Massumi’s description of affect as autonomous also appears readily applicable to sonic phenomena as it propagates through space, ignoring the boundaries of bodies: “Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect” (Massumi 2002: 35).

9. See also Aden Evan’s discussion of sound as a “contraction” of wave phenomena (“noise”) into perceivable, qualified forms. Musical performance artfully manages an expressive balance between implicated and actualized sound: “To explicate just enough means to leave just enough implicated, to draw the implicated to the verge of clarity, while letting it also extend back into the noise from which it is contracted” (Evans 2002: 183).

10. In this passage, Deleuze criticizes Leibniz for not distinguishing clearly between the virtual and the possible, thereby equivocating on the reality of the virtual (Deleuze 1994 [1968]: 213). Leibniz makes reference to the infinite multiplicity of sounds of innumerable waves that are not clearly audible as they create (or are actualized as, in Deleuze’s terms) the sound of a murmur (Leibniz 1989: 65, 211). In the same work (*Difference and Repetition*) there is also a passage referring to “white noise” as the virtual in which Deleuze briefly mentions sound, along with color and language as one example for multiplicities or virtual “Ideas”: “Ideas contain all the varieties of differential relations and all the distributions of singular points coexisting in diverse orders ‘perplicated’ in one another. When the virtual

content of an Idea is actualised, the varieties of relation are incarnated in distinct species while the singular points which correspond to the values of one variety are incarnated in the distinct parts characteristic of this or that species. The Idea of colour, for example, is like white light which perplicates in itself the genetic elements and relations of all the colours, but is actualised in the diverse colours with their respective spaces; or the Idea of sound, which is also like white noise. There is even a white society and a white language, the latter being that which contains in its virtuality all the phonemes and relations destined to be actualised in diverse languages and in the distinctive parts of a given language” (Deleuze 1994 [1968]: 206). Another, later passage, again in a discussion of Leibniz, also draws a link between the virtual and sonic phenomena: “One can also conceive of a continuous acoustic flow . . . that traverses the world and that even encompasses silence. A musician is someone who appropriates something from this flow” (Deleuze 1998 [1980]: 78, cited in Cox 2011: 155).

11. Iconicity does not depend on mental acts of interpretation or the imposition of arbitrary mental forms on a sign’s materiality. This is only the case for symbols, whose functioning is contingent on the existence of an interpretant, or the condition of being taken as a sign by someone. “An *icon* is a sign which would possess the character which renders it a significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line. An *index* is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as sign of a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not. A *symbol* is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification” (Peirce 1932: 170, emphasis in original).

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