Translating Ismaili Muslim Experience in Canada: Integrative Choral Pathways of Belonging

by

Hussein Janmohamed

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music Education

Faculty of Music
University of Toronto

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2023

Abstract

This study explores possibilities for blending choral forms of singing with traditional Ismaili Muslim devotional recitations. In particular, the focus is on finding new musical translations as a means of interpreting tradition and negotiating belonging in Canada. In music education scholarship, Muslim musical traditions can often be portrayed in ways that delimit the communities represented. In doing so, Islam may be inadvertently positioned as a problem to be addressed. Furthermore, there is a paucity of scholarship in music education that illustrates the importance of sound and music in diverse Muslim cultures. This study aims to further the conversation. I propose an "enlightened encounters" theoretical framework that draws together post-colonial, indigenous, educational social justice, and Ismaili literature. Autoethnography and narrative research methods foreground the transformative impacts of integrative vocal practices on retranslating Muslim experience in new contexts. Key findings include: 1) Blended sound and music can play a significant role to *feel* faith and embody cultural knowledge; 2) Integrative vocal practices can provide the possibility of avenues for Ismaili youth to navigate delicate relationships of belonging within their own traditions, as well as in the larger cultural context; 3) Engaging in participatory communal activities can provide youth with safe spaces for receiving, translating and interpreting knowledge; 4) Music and sound can have a powerful impact on reconnecting spirituality with life.

Invocation[1]

Way Hay Hee Yo Yo, Way Hay Hee Yo Yo

Bismillah ar-rahman ar-rahim

Ubi caritas et amor, deus ibi est

Vocables*[2]

In the name of *Allah,* the Merciful, the Compassionate

Where there is Love and Charity, God is there

Invocation

Russell Wallace & Traditional

Russell Wallace & Traditional
Arr. Hussein Janmohamed

♩ = 74

Voice

Way hay - ee yo yo, Way hay - ee yo yo, Way hay - ee yo yo, Way hay - ee yo yo.

5

Bis - mil - lah - ir rah - ma - ir ra - him. Bis - mil - lah - ir rah ma -

8

- ir ra - him. U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi est.

13

U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us

16

i - bi est. Bis - mil - lah - ir rah - ma - ir ra - him.

[1] The author has written this music transcription.

[2] Vocables: Syllables without specific referential meaning common to Canadian and global Indigenous and musical traditions.

I humbly submit this research from, to, through, and in return to Guiding Wisdom, the Apparent and the Hidden. I express my gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this conversation with scholars past and present, Faculty of the University of Toronto, mentors, friends, family, community elders, ancestors, those to be born, and the ancestors of this land. I am who I am today due to the service, labours, and care of my forefathers.

The Invocation expresses a hope for a harmonious relationship between Indigenous, settler, and newly arrived communities—unique unto themselves, yet unified in human spirit. This invocation comes from a lifelong quest to seek out harmonious ambience and human resonance in the world—an ambience that brings me feeling of peace, ease, wholeness, safety, uplift, and belonging. Spiritually inspired vocal music and sound has been at the heart of this quest, and continues to be an exploratory musical, sonic medium for my intellectual search. This "Invocation" recognizes a spiritual harmony amongst nations and a vision of coexistence held in a womb of gratitude, care, charity, and love. The "Invocation" represents a creative musical emergence of hearing and feeling a sense of unity across difference as I seek to consolidate my Ismaili spiritual-ethical orientation in these lands on which I live, thrive, and labour. The "Invocation" opens with vocables, as presented through a musical piece entitled "The Gift."[3] The composer is Russell Wallace, Lil'wat writer and musician, with whom I have had the honour to collaborate for many years. The song is about gathering together and celebrating the gift of traditions and transmission of knowledge. The second text, in Arabic, comes from the *Qur'an* and is set to a Gregorian chant tune. The text calls the listener and reciter to humble submission in the name of *Allah* (Arabic name for God) and remembrance of divine qualities of mercy, compassion and care. The third text, in Latin, comes from Christian Gregorian chant traditions. The text declares: Where there is love and charity, God is there. Together, these three pieces are a call to come together with gratitude, love and charity, joined in a common commitment to generously care for others, creation, and ourselves. The "Invocation" recognizes our human responsibility, held in unity of being, to fulfill the work of head, heart, hand, and voice towards respectfully shared knowledge exchange and peaceful relations amongst nations and kin—a peace that resonates Divinely-endowed wholeness and safety, a return to health, and for all.

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[3] It is with Russell Wallace's permission that I refer to "The Gift" here. A choral arrangement of this work is available through Russell's composer page on Cypress Music Publishing.

Land Acknowledgment

Toronto

I am grateful for the gift of learning on the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. I acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

Port Moody

I am grateful to be reading and writing in the final stages of this thesis on the ancestral and unceded homelands of the kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem), səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), q̓ic̓əy̓ (Katzie), q’ʷa:n̓ ƛ’ən̓ (Kwantlen), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), and Stó:lō (Sto:lo) Peoples.

I feel privileged to walk, learn, and grow on these lands.

Acknowledgments

The University of Toronto is a well-recognized institution. The longstanding achievements of the Faculty of Music are innumerable. I am honoured to be here in the proverbial same room with mentors, peers, colleagues, students, and spirit guides. I honour my location on and responsibility to this land. I honour my centre in an Ismaili esoteric Muslim spiritual-ethical orientation. I honour the inspiration and tireless efforts and teachings of my ancestors, parents, cultural community, and music mentors who have nurtured in me creative service. I raise my hands and soften my heart in honour and regard.

Dr. Lori-Anne Dolloff, thank you for the immense compassion, care, and liberating guidance. With your creative trust and affirming belief, you encouraged me to pursue this PhD and to let my wide creative orbit flourish. I'm grateful for the ways you helped me to open my heart/mind, expand my thinking, and pursue new knowledge wherever it was to be found. You have patiently pushed me to find my own way, especially when my adventurous curiosity caused me to get lost in the infinite webs of ideas, conceptualizations, and wonderings. For helping me through to this moment, I am grateful. I am grateful to my advisory committee members, Dr. Bina John and Dr. Nasim Niknafs, who have amplified my interests, encouraged me, and pushed me to think beyond what I already thought I knew.

I am grateful to my family for their unconditional care, unwavering support, creativity, and wisdom that keep me motivated and grounded. Without them holding space for my often-angst-ridden process, I would still be writing. Thank you Neena and Amir Janmohamed (Mommy and Papa) for your continued inspiration. Your stories, creativity, service, resilience, and humanity shape my work, thinking and inquiry. Thank you to my sister, Amynah for your excitement, care and love. I am especially grateful for your belief in me, and your own resilient intellectual rigour that motivated me to keep striving. To my brother-in-law, Arif, I value your appreciation and your openness supporting me to explore my curiosities. I thank my nieces (my young mentors and supporters) Alayna and Mikayla Chunara for your unconditional love and support, and for inspiring me through your dedicated work ethic, commitment to learning, academic perseverance, passion and joyous spirit. To Dr. Shireen Abu-Khader, Roger, Naya and Samia Habis, I am grateful to you for taking me into your home, providing me comfort, and nourishing when I needed. Shireen, I am grateful for the many conversations over gluten-free cakes, coffees,

meals, and telephone chats that inspired me, gave focus, and made it possible for me to undertake this journey with grace. I acknowledge Dr. Zaheed Damani, Dr. Fayaz Alibhai and Dr. Nacim Pak-Shiraz for your steadfast friendship and emotional and moral support. The knowledge you generously shared has helped me to navigate every step along the way.

I acknowledge Dr. James Kippen, my first professor in the doctoral program, who inspired my academic passion and ignited a love for thinking! Thank you for your mentorship and grounding presence. I thank my coursework professors, Dr. Elizabeth Gould, Dr. Bina John, Dr. Nasim Niknafs, Dr. Farzaneh Hemmasi, Dr. Ahmed Ilmi, Dr. Pamela Couture, Dr. Creso Sá, and Dr. Lori-Anne Dolloff for challenging me to question, feel, and explore. I thank you for opening my mind to new avenues of thinking, processes of research, and rigours of academic labour. To Dean McLean, thank you for seeing my potential, involving me, and supporting my practice. I deeply value all the faculty and staff of the University of Toronto Faculty of Music who have helped me administratively, logistically, and creatively. I would also like to express gratitude to Dr. Jane Freeman and the School of Graduate Studies' Graduate Centre for Academic Communication (GCAC) for making me a better writer, editor, thinker, and organizer of ideas, enabling me to write this dissertation. To the graduate writing groups at the University of Toronto and Ryerson University, I raise my hands with thanks for your dedicated service.

I am grateful to Professor Rena Sharon for your mentorship, friendship, and time spent in conversation. Your soulful presence enabled me to stay true to a spiritually inspired creative endeavour, reminding me how intellectual journeys like these can be about hope. I am indebted to Dr. Deb Bradley for her detailed editing, alongside editorial, organizational, and structural recommendations to prepare the dissertation for sharing. I wish to acknowledge the support of Dr. Carol Beynon, Nurdin Dhanani, Dr. Farouk Mitha, Dr. Afroza Nanji, Dr. Ali Asani, Dr. Munir Vellani, Dr. Ali Asani, Dr. Karim H. Karim, Dr. Rita Irwin, Professor Nancy Hermiston, Dr. Amyn Sajoo, Afraaz Mulji, Farhad Nathoo and many other friends across the world for your insights and reassurance throughout the inquiry. Thank you to Rizwan Mawani for helping to edit my glossary and providing the needed energy that took me across the finish line.

I feel privileged to know you, and to be the fortunate beneficiary of your unwavering support. May the blessing of your kindness be returned to you infinitely.

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Glossary

Adab	Etiquette and comportment. Adab refers to a set of values: notions of culture and civilization, manners, social behaviours, refined arts, calligraphy, public speaking, and literary achievement.
Amanat	Trust or entrustment. In the Qur'an, humankind is entrusted with stewardship of the earth and all of creation. In contemporary usage and everyday language, a cherished person or object that is entrusted to another person or group for care and safekeeping.
Bayah	Oath or pledge of Allegiance. For the earliest Muslims, bayah was offered to the Prophet Muhammad as a verbal demonstration of loyalty. For Ismailis and other Shi'a Muslims, the bayah is offered by extension to each Imam-of-the-Time, a hereditary office embodying the continued gift of guidance from Allah to his creation.
Bhakti	Devotion. A movement in medieval South Asia that crossed religious traditions in which poetry dedicated towards a guru/pir or the creator found literary expression, often in song and recitation.
Darkhana	The name used for the principal Ismaili jamatkhana in a national jurisdiction. In Canada, the Dharkhana is the Ismaili Centre Vancouver.
Didar	Persian. Glance or Glimpse, and in literary and poetic traditions, usually the glance of one's beloved. In the contemporary tradition of Ismailis, it refers to the physical (*zaheri didar*) or spiritual glimpse (*batini didar*) of the Imam-of-the-Time in a religious setting.
Din	Arabic. Religion. A term used by Aga Khan IV, the present Imam of the Ismailis in his speeches and *farmans* (privileged guidance to the community) to denote one's spiritual responsibilities, in contrast with *dunya*.
Du'a	A supplementary prayer in the Muslim tradition. For Nizari Ismailis, the central, daily prayer recited at home or in a congregational setting in the jamatkhana.
Dunya	Arabic. World. A term used by Aga Khan IV, the present Imam of the Ismailis in his speeches and farmans (privileged guidance to the community) to denote one's worldly responsibilities, in contrast with din.
Fateha	Arabic. "The Opening." The first "literary unit" or chapter of the Qur'an. Also, a term referring to the prayer over the grave of the deceased.
Geet	Geet in Hindi and Urdu refers to a poem set to music. Geet are Indic forms of song such as *hamd* and *nashid* in Muslim traditions. In the Ismaili tradition, geet refer to songs of festivity, and expressions of devotion to the

	Imam-of-the-Time. Contemporary geet may be composed by any community member and performed in social settings, often with music.
Ghazal	Originating as a form of Arabic poetry, the ghazal or "love poem" travelled to South Asia in the 12th century and today is part of the poetic legacy of countries throughout the Muslim world. Ghazal are written mostly in Persian; the form creates certain moods, atmospheres, and combinations of emotions. Familiar master poets include Hafiz or Rumi.
Ginan	An over 500-year-old tradition of sung devotional and poetic literature of South Asia particular to the Ismailis and related groups such as the *Imamshahis*. It is also part of a wider tradition of recited poetry and *adab* traditions of Ismailis of other regions (*nashid, qasidas, madoh*, etc.). The current canon of ginans amounts to approximately 800 individual compositions.
Halal	Arabic. Permissible. Part of a system of actions and behaviours (including dietary) that are encouraged and permitted by the Qur'an and later Muslim schools of law.
Hamd	A musical genre that features religious chants set to lyrics praising Allah (God) and the Prophet Muhammad respectively popular in South Asia.
Haram	Arabic. Forbidden. Part of a system of action and behaviours (including dietary) that forbidden by the Qur'an and later Muslim schools of law.
Ilahi	Mystical (Sufi) poetry that had become a major branch of Turkish literature by the middle of the 13th century. Ilahi can be found in Bosnia and other parts of the world. This type of poetry is also often sung in the *sama* ceremony.
InshAllah	Arabic. If God wills. An expression of hope and trust used by Muslims in everyday language, in which human agency is entrusted to an omniscient Creator, Allah.
Jamat	A group or gathering. Persian in origin but used primarily in South Asian Muslim communities to denote the entirety of a bound community within a particular geography. In recent contemporary Ismaili usage, it also refers to the global Ismaili community.
Jamati	Adjectival form of Jamat
Jamatkhana	Persian. Congregation hall. In South Asia, jamatkhana is a place of communal and social gathering for Muslim communities such as the Bohras, Memons, and Ismailis. In Ismaili usage, the jamatkhana is the primary site of religious, education, and social congregation for the community.

	The jamatkhana is one of several sites of Muslim piety for various communities.
Khane	A colloquial term for jamatkhana. Primarily used by families of Gujarati-speaking origin. *Khano* is the equivalent used by Ismailis of Sindhi or Kutchi-speaking origins.
Madoh	A praise poem. In the context of the Ismailis, the madoh is a sung poem recited at religious gatherings in Tajikistan and Afghanistan and is most often in Farsi, Tajik, or Dari. Historically madoh was also accompanied by instruments such as the lute (*rubab*).
Maqam	Arabic. A mode or station. In musical usage, it refers to a key or scale. In mystical usage, it also can refer to a station of a wayfarer on his or her mystical quest and journey.
Mawla Ali Madad	"O Master, offer Thy help." This phrase is a response to Ya Ali Madad.
Mehfil	In its South Asian usage, it is a festive gathering where activities such as music, poetry, singing and dance are performed. Often rendered as "music party" by Ismailis of South Asian origin. In this context, mehfils often involves songs of praise and devotion, including ginans and geets.
Mukhi	The title used for a head of community or village elites and their local government in Western India and the Sindh. The word is derived from the word "mukhiya" meaning "foremost." In Ismaili usage, the Mukhi is an appointed religious representative in local jurisdictions globally.
Murid/Murshid	Arabic. Follower or devotee. A term used most often by Persian Sufi, or mystical, communities to denote followers on a particular spiritual path or tariqa. Amongst contemporary Ismailis, it is also used to denoted followers of the Imam-of-the-Time with the Imam being designated as the Murshid (or rightly guided leader).
Naat	A musical genre that features religious chants set to lyrics praising Allah (God) and the Prophet Muhammad respectively popular in South Asia.
Nashid	Chants. A vocal genre of praise in Muslim traditions sung either a cappella (vocals only) or with instruments according to a particular style or region.
Qasida	A structured form of praise poetry recited by Muslim communities. Amongst Ismailis of Persian and Arabic origins, qasida are part of a tradition of compositions in praise of the Imam-of-the-Time that are recited in the jamatkhana setting.

Quodlibet	Latin. What you will. A piece of music that combines several different melodies in counterpoint, usually popular tunes, and often in a light-hearted manner. More serious quodlibet compositions sometimes combine popular tunes, plainsong, and original music at once. Quodlibet can also refer to an amalgamation of different song texts in a vocal composition.
Salawat	Plural of Salat, prayer. The term for a one sentence formula and prayer in Arabic in which a Muslim asks Allah to bless the Prophet. For Sunnis, the Prophet's companions are also included and for Shi'i Muslims including the Ismailis, the progeny of the Prophets are also incorporated into the short form. In the Ismaili tradition, it is often recited in unison in congregational religious settings or individually as an act of prayer and is repeated
Sama	Arabic. Listening. Amongst Muslim mystical communities such as Sufis, it is a participatory listening experience for religious purpose. The sama experience, its audition, is reliant on the initiate intentionally engaging in this active and complete sense of listening to achieve union with the Divine.
Sari	A traditional dress worn especially by South Asian women. The sari consists of a long piece of thin cloth with one end draped over the head or over one shoulder.
Seva	Service. In Indic traditions such as those of Sikhs and South Asian Ismailis, the concept of seva has been institutionalized as an ethic and ideal in which one serves other members of society regardless of religious affiliation in a voluntary capacity. It is often seen by Ismailis as being an act of devotion and a blessing to be given the opportunity to serve.
Shahada	Arabic. Testament. In Muslim usage, the term refers to a verbal declaration in which one acknowledges Allah as one's creator and Muhammad as a prophet of Islam. For Shia Muslims, there is also an acknowledgement of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law as an inheritor of Prophet's mantle of guidance.
Sufi	Adjectival form of *suf*, or wool. A term, which has come to mean someone who is part of mystical quest within the Muslim tradition to be united with God in one's lifetime. Many Sufis are part of formalized *tariqas* or communities with distinct lineages of spiritual leadership with set forms of religious practices (e.g., zikr, wird, etc.) in distinct spaces of worship (e.g., *zawiyas, tekkes, khanaqas, masjids*, etc.)
Sukoon	Silence
Sunna	Arabic. Tradition. A system of behaviour and comportment based on the sayings and actions modelled by and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.

Tasbih	Persian/Turkish. Glorification. Amongst South Asian, Persian, and Arabic Muslims, a rosary in which God's name is glorified. Amongst Ismailis, it also refers to an act of supplication and prayer in which the Imam is asked to intercede on a believer's behalf to bring peace, succour, and ease to their life and the lives of others.
Tariqa	Arabic. Path. A term used by Muslim mystical communities to denote a "way" or path to the Divine.
Venti	Supplication. A poetic form within the ginan tradition in which a member of the Ismaili community takes a stance of humility beseeching the Imam for some form of grace.
Yaqzan	A short form for the story of "Hayy ibn Yaqzan," a story by the 12th century Andalusian poet, Ibn Tufayl.
Ya Ali Madad	Ar. "Oh Aly, offer thy help." Amongst Ismailis, a greeting upon first meeting other members of the community and upon leaving.
Zahir	Apparent or outward. It is often contrasted to *batin*, inward and hidden. In the Ismaili tradition, it is also used to refer to the physical aspects of one's life as opposed to the spiritual.
Zikr	Arabic. Remembrance. In a ritual context, it is the repetition of God's name in praise and glory amongst Muslims. In the Ismaili tradition, it is also used as a genre of repetitive praise chants in a congregational setting, in which names and formulas extol the virtues of God, the Prophet Muhammad, or the Imam.

Chapter 1

1 Ismaili choral music: Background and Introduction

Toledo Cathedral. 2013.

UBC University Singers: Choir tour to Spain.

Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Toledo.

Recital halls and churches: Grand. Majestic.

Acoustically generous.

Around a winding road on a coach.

A vision of an old walled city.

Reminders of days gone by. Mediaeval. Feels like home.

Entering the city gate, a threshold

Into a world of magic, conversation, curiosity, wonderment.

Where are we?

Reminders of Ismaili Centre Vancouver.

Islamic.

Arches. Presence. Familiar.

Here I have been before.

Tour guide leads us . . . Muslim artisans, Jewish Synagogues, Christian cathedral

Dialogue, arts, integrative, making together

Mutual and reciprocal respect

I know this place. I know this feeling. I love it. Crave it. Am I home?

Am I in jamatkhana?

Ancestral remembrance

A mirror

Reflecting my soul.

Yet, a city. A town. A social space.

Of the

West. East. South. North.

Yet neither.

Thresholds, on thresholds, crossing, entering, exiting

Into the Toledo Cathedral

Frankincense. Fragrance. Incense.

Entering inner sanctuary.

Singing the sacred

Morales, Gesualdo

A wellspring of emotion

Overcoming

Subsuming

Overtaking

Relentless, outpouring

Streams and rivers of acknowledgement

My soul is Home

I have missed this feeling, this knowing

Aliveness and recognition mirrored back to me

Sacred remembrance

Resonance

The magic of the meeting

Enlightened encounters

Remembrances

Didar

Mombasa

National Youth Choir

Jubilee

Füssen.

Arrivals. Departures. Presences.

New thresholds of remembrance

Inner world matching outer world

Audiated feeling.

Embodied hearing manifest

Soul of the music, soul of the city.

In the heart.

Abiding, dwelling.

Here. Now.

I am the Church. The Mosque. The Jamatkhana. The Temple. The Field.
We are the Church. The Mosque. The Jamatkhana. The Temple. The Field.
Our music the architexture we create.
Co-labour. Co-operate.
Re-Co-gnition.
Informing. Amplifying. Vocalizing.
What I love.
Iqra*.*
Read. Recite. Write. Make!

One year later, I was on a luxurious coach on an Eastern Canadian tour with the Elmer Iseler Singers. I felt at peace, calm, without clutter in my mind and heart. I was clear on my job, my role, my contribution, my labour, and my responsibility. How lovely is this dwelling place in which I have gratefully immersed myself—vulnerable, open, clear. I took out my laptop and wrote. From the heart of this dwelling came a surprising flow of energy, reawakening a vocational vision for the next few years of my life. Having turned 45 years old that year, I felt an urgency to consider how to contribute to the world in the next part of life. How would I give back? What work have I been called to do but not yet fulfilled? What have I done that I can share? Like a wave, the PhD appeared before me. I felt a powerful sense of agency, intuitively informed by the *antera* (gut), to embark on this quest that has been revealed. In my gut, I knew there was magic here. I could feel it in my bones. I knew in the core of my core that there was something of benefit to Muslim youth: finding their voices and developing their senses of agency in the world. This feeling was an embodied call, an inclination, a sparkling voice inside, energizing my being. How could choral music play a role in translating Ismaili[4] Muslim experiences in Canada?

On tour across Eastern Canada with Elmer Iseler Singers, we perform one of my compositions "Nūr: Reflections of Light" (Janmohamed, 2014/2022)*. This piece, based on the Verse of Light in the Qur'an, was commissioned by the Aga Khan Museum for the opening of the Ismaili Centre Toronto. The Elmer Iseler Singers and a small group of Ismaili singers premiered the work in*

[4] The Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, generally known as the Ismailis, belong to the Shia branch of Islam. The Shia form one of the two major interpretations of Islam; the Sunni is the other.

the presence of Prime Minister Harper, His Highness the Aga Khan, his family, Ismaili community elders, and civil society leaders. The moment was not lost on me. There we were, a mixed group of singers, presenting a Qur'an inspired piece, opening an Ismaili jamatkhana [5] *in the presence of a mixed audience of community and government leaders. Ismaili and choral cultural traditions in conversation, symbolized hope for peaceful relations, dialogue, and cooperation, so much part of Islamic historical consciousness.*

At every performance, the conductor, Lydia Adams, asked me to speak. I am moved with wonder, speaking about a Muslim-inspired work in a Christian church. I look out to the audience and notice the homogeneity in the demographic of the audience—an all too familiar experience of a South Asian Muslim choir boy growing up in Central Alberta in the mid-seventies. I have little recollection of the content of my speech. What I do remember is the spirit of my final line—expressing hope in a culture of division and misrepresentation— to mingle joyously and effortlessly in each other's light. I expect to return to my position in the choir, when to my surprise, a roar of enthusiastic applause fills the room. I am taken aback, my hand on my heart, humbled and with grateful. What did I say? What just happened? I believe that something I said resonated, and, in that moment, we were all reminded of a possibility for openness, dialogue, and peace.

While sitting on the tour bus between rural and urban cities across Ontario, I reflected gratefully on such profound experiences and for the privilege of making this musical offering. An authentic part of myself felt fulfilled and complete. I wondered how choral music could be a force of peace that reaches into all communities. I also wondered how Muslim cultures, rooted in a way of peace, could reach beyond borders to all communities. The message was loud and clear. My heart raced faster. I was in it now. I began to live into what would become a seven-year PhD journey. Despite intensified scholarship on decolonizing classical music and choral arts in music education, I hungered to know how the strengths of a "colonial vestige" could be joined with my community's cultural resources to support the continuity of an Ismaili imagination. In a divided world, could integrative musical knowledge be a tool for a community's thriving?

[5] Derived from the Persian, "jamatkhana" is a place of congregation. In Ismaili usage, the jamatkhana is the primary site of religious, education, and social congregation for the community in which the daily prayer, the du'a, and poetic recitations are recited.

1.1 What this thesis is about

> There is a human impulse it seems—fed by fear—to define “identity” in negative terms. We often determine “who we are”—by determining who we are against. This fragmenting impulse not only separates peoples from one another, it also subdivides communities -- and then it subdivides the subdivisions. It leads to what some have called the “fraying” of society -- in which communities come to resemble a worn out cloth—as its tight weave separates into individual strands. (Aga Khan, 2006, para. 30)

In this music education study, I consider the needs of Muslim youth who seek to reconcile their relationship with their inherited traditions within a Canadian context. I highlight the challenge of living in an environment where Islam and Muslims are positioned in negative terms in relation to the West. Against this backdrop, I discuss the challenge in music education of teachers and scholars seeking to better serve Muslim learners but who inadvertently crystallize negative perceptions and divisions. To address these interwoven challenges, I turn to critical scholarship in music education, post-colonial theories of counterpoint, and diverse perspectives on integrative knowledge for inspiration. Additionally, I weave into this academic texture Ismaili Muslim teachings that emphasize our human responsibility to come together across differences. I take the opportunity to clarify the essential role of sound and music across the Muslim world and the pluralistic emergence of music and sound in diverse vernaculars. I centre choral music narratives of two living in Canada. I bring out my ethnographic narratives as a first generation Canadian and the narratives of a second generation Canadian to illustrate how an integrative approach to music might serve to reconcile difference and cultivate belonging. It is my hope that Ismaili-centred choral narratives might reorient our music education research gaze towards a different understanding of music and sound in Muslim experience; It is my hope that this study provides some insight that will inspire further dialogue in music education about serving the needs of Muslim youth.

1.2 Islam and the role of music and sound in Muslim cultures

I now briefly introduce Islam and the role of music and sound in Muslim cultures. I refer to Muslim cultures as an orienting lens to move our educational gaze away from a singular story of Islam as a religion, and towards Islam as an integrative worldview expressed in diverse cultural contexts. A quarter of the world's population is Muslim; and there are two major branches, Sunni

and Shia. Many interpretations of Islam exist within each branch. It's important to know that groups such as the Sufis include Sunni and Shia adherents. Historically, division does exist between moderate and orthodox interpretations of the faith. However, there is an understanding of plurality unified by the Testament of faith: *La ilaha illallah muhammadur rasulullah*: an affirmation of the unity of God (Allah) and recognition of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the messenger of Allah. The Shia branch of Islam also recognizes Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet as the holder of hereditary spiritual authority for the community. A Quranic directive to believers of submission to God, the quest for love, knowing one another, and improving society shape the lived experiences of Muslims. Further, acknowledging and affirming an interconnected shared humanity Muslims are given a sacred responsibility to use knowledge towards collective goals of improving the quality of life for all peoples. Thus, the relationship between faith (*din*) and life (*dunya*) are inextricably linked.

The cultural practices and lived experiences of Muslims are expressed diversely, in vernacular cultures globally. Geopolitical conditions influence the cultural practices of the faith, and in some instances sadly lead to oppressive regimes and governments, as well as extremist activities that misrepresent and abuse Islam, using it for violence and division. Loud oppressive voices are further represented on media outlets that sadly position Islam as an enemy. Thus, telling back the stories of peaceful, pluralistic Muslim cultures, ones that have made and continue to make far-reaching contributions to knowledge and societal good is important and necessary.

“Despite abiding ambivalence and orthodox condemnation” (Catlin-Jairazbhoy, 2004, p. 251), music, sound arts, and epic poetry flourish in a variety of ways. Within diverse interpretive Muslim traditions, the conception and identification with sound and music changes. The use and performance of music and sound also changes with geopolitical positions in which they are practiced and lived. Devotional music and sound influence this everyday ethical soundscape, which is “part of the acoustic architecture of a distinct moral vision, animating and sustaining the ethical sensibilities that enable ordinary Muslims to live in accord with what they consider to be God's will” (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 8). Domains of mind, heart and hand, rational, aesthetic, ethical, and social all work together to aid in creating conditions for comprehending the divine and reminding each other of our shared humanity. Culture (including music and sound) becomes a dynamic vehicle for aesthetic reception, creative expression, devotion, community cohesion and societal uplift.

1.3 Who are the Ismaili Muslims

My study focuses on the Shia Ismaili interpretation of Islam, a transnational esoteric branch of Islam, whose followers are unified by a pledge of allegiance (*bayah*) to a living spiritual leader, His Highness the Aga Khan.

Ismaili Muslims (Ismailis) reside across the globe in Western China, Central Asia, Syria, and the Middle East, Africa, India, Pakistan, and diaspora. Migratory movement and displacement due to a variety of socio-political challenges bring Ismailis to all parts of Europe, North America, Australia, and beyond. In Canada, where I am located, "there are between 70,000 and 80,000 Ismailis. . . . The largest settlements are in Toronto and Vancouver, with substantial communities (*jamat*s) located in Calgary, Edmonton, Montreal, and Ottawa" (Karim, 2011, p. 265). While the bulk of the Ismailis living in Canada are of Indian (Gujarati) origin who migrated to Canada from the East African countries of Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania (Karim, 2011, p. 265), Ismailis across the country represent a rich global diversity of people and lived experiences. Ismaili migration to Canada occurred as early as the 1950s with significant increases in the 1970s and 1990s (Nanji, 1983).

A large wave of Ismailis arrived in Canada as refugees due to the expulsion of Ugandan Asians in the early 1970s. Early Ismaili immigrants represented primarily South Asian populations. Civil and political unrest in Central Asia in the 1990s saw the growth of Afghan Ismaili populations, who also came to Canada as refugees. More recently, civil unrest and political strife in Syria saw another wave of Syrian Ismailis finding refuge in Canada. Along the way, Ismaili peoples from many parts of Iran, Tajikistan, many parts of Africa, India, Europe, Pakistan, and beyond have continued to make Canada their home. Today, with continued unrest and lack of safety in Afghanistan, a new wave of Afghan peoples will arrive in Canada.

No matter the ethnic, linguistic, social, and cultural living traditions of Ismailis worldwide, Ismailis, like all Muslims, are unified by the testament of faith: *La* ilaha illallah muhammadur rasulullah. As part of the Shia branch of Islam, Ismailis also recognize Hazrat Ali (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet) as holder of hereditary spiritual authority for the community (*Amir al-Mu'minin*, commander of the faithful). Ismailis offer allegiance to a living spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, believed to be the direct descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, "being their 49th Imam through the line of the Imams Ali, Ismaili and Nizar" (Asani, 2002, p. 2). According to

Ismaili belief, as *Hazar Imam* (Present Imam), “by virtue of his direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter Fatima (d. 633) and son-in-law ‘Ali (d. 661), is endowed with special knowledge (*ilm*) to interpret the Qur’an and provide authoritative guidance” (Asani, 2001, p. 156) on all spiritual and material matters. This allegiance also comprises a commitment to care for creation, and use knowledge to improve the conditions of all of society, especially the most vulnerable.

1.3.1 Khoja Ismailis

I belong to a small group of Muslims globally, the *Khoja* community. Khoja Ismailis (Khojas) are a subgroup of the Ismaili community tracing their roots to the western regions of the Indian subcontinent, specifically, Gujarat, Sind, and Punjab. Members of this group have also been popularly known as Khojas, Shamsis, Momnas or Satpanthis. *Satpanth* means “the true path,” the name under which it is believed that Ismailism was preached in the 15th century by emissaries or preacher-saints (*Pirs*) sent by the Ismaili Imam. Khojas constitute a distinctive minority numerically and based on their religious history and beliefs. Today the Khojas live in most parts of modern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, concentrated in western India, in Gujarat and Kutch, and the Sind region of Pakistan. Today, though a numerical minority, the Khojas form the majority of the Ismaili community members in North America, Europe, East Africa, and the Indian subcontinent (R. Mawani, personal communication, October 7, 2021).

Khojas have had to redefine their communal identity several times in the 19th and 20th centuries “in response to a complex variety of factors, some internal to the community and some external” (Asani, 2001, p. 155). Once consisting of multiple strands, the community’s identity has been narrowed in its scope “as it entered into the modern world, so as to better fit spaces deemed appropriate by new cultural and religious environments” (p. 155). Prior to the 19th century the Khojas were a group of individuals who shared common Indic[6] spiritual and cultural practices

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[6] I use the term “Indic” to describe the Indian subcontinent context within which the Ismaili tradition historically interacted with local cultures, folk traditions, spiritual movements and indigenous religious groups. I designate this context as Indic, rather than Hindu for two reasons. The first is to avoid the projection of modern notions of distinct religious identity onto the study of the past that developed in contexts of communalism and nationalism in colonial and post-colonial India. The second reason is to divert any perceptions that the subcontinent’s cultures are intrinsically Hindu from purely a religious perspective. Projecting a specific religious identity onto indigenous cultural elements delimits the nuanced cultural interactivity and interconnected religious pluralism within which Muslims coexisted. The term “Indic” acknowledges the milieu in which Ismaili tradition developed—with a cultural, geographic and ethnic nuance rather than a religious one (Asani, 2002, p. 5).

with other peoples across the Indian subcontinent. Khoja religious and cultural life uniquely blended Indigenous cultures, Hindu and Muslim traditions, as well as Shia and Sunni customs and beliefs. The community resisted being categorized as either Muslim or Hindu in essentialist terms. In the latter half of the 19th century and early 20th century, this began to the change as the group's leadership encouraged a more (Perso-Arabic) Islamic identity and westernization (Karim, 2021, p. 46). The establishment of British rule over India came with a systematic institutionalizing of India, through various practices, into a nation of communities defined along religious lines (Hardy, 1972, as cited in Asani, 2001, p. 159). British rule also created a general concern among the Muslim elite to articulate clearly what it meant to be a Muslim in this new context. "In the process, several definitions of Islamic identity were articulated, none of which had space for the amalgam of identities" (Asani, 2001, p. 159) with which until then Khojas had come to identify.

Culturally integrative being and expression is very much part of the *Khoja* experience. "Ismaili pirs articulated their beliefs transculturally in Indic languages, cultures, and symbols" (Karim, 2021, p. 47).

> Satpanth produced a unique lyrical tradition of ginans (derived from the Sanskrit jnana, "knowledge"). Like Sufi preachers in the subcontinent, Satpanth spirs drew from Indic scripture to explain their path (Halani, 2018). The "Vedas and their derivative and subsidiary traditions—spiritual (Vaishnavite bhakti), legal (dharma as defined by Manu's Laws) and mythological (Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas, etc.) . . . . were seamlessly fused together into the Ginans by the spiritually inspired creative genius of the Pirs" (Alibhai, 2020). (Karim, 2021, p. 47)

Thus, South Asian Ismaili musical expressions developed through multivalent integrative cultural encounters. In Indic contexts, Ismaili sounds emerged out of a confluence with many diverse spiritual movements (*bhakti*). Musical traditions were also borne out of an intersection of Indigenous, Vedic, Persian, Arabic, and Indic vernaculars. The music of the lands carried a spiritual fragrance. There was no separation of sacred or secular. Whether in Hindustani classical forms or Gujarati folk idioms, the messages of Ismaili faith came alive in these new multivalent Indic cultural forms. The devotional expressions were composed in many languages including Gujarati, Khari Boli (proto-Hindi-Urdu), Punjabi, Sindhi and Siraiki/Multani (Esmail, 2002 as

cited in Karim, 2021, p. 47) and are still sung today in religious gatherings of South Asian Khojas around the world.

As Ismailis migrated to East Africa and other parts of the world, Ismailis adopted local traditions as a natural part of integration and thriving in new environments. In East Africa, Khoja Ismailis were immersed in integrative Swahili ecosystems where Arabic, Indic, local traditional cultures, and British colonialism merged. The Ismailis in East Africa thus migrated from an already complex polyvalent Indic culture to another pluralistic cultural context in East Africa. Not without socio-political and geopolitical challenges, intersecting knowledge systems shaped the tapestry of being. The community had to learn how to critically engage with the diversity of experiences and assemble new cultural expressions. Home life, Ismaili community life, and societal lived experience integrated aspects from the vernacular, popular, and colonial cultures in which we lived. South Asian, British, and Swahili cultures all mingled in a dynamic holism shaping a new expression of tradition, lived experience and faith. Qualities of openness, adaptability, creativity, curiosity, and resilience, with a vision towards maintaining good relations with the new society, helped the community to thrive.

I now live in Canada, a predominantly Western, Judeo-Christian cultural context. At the same time, Canada is also a place of pluralistic confluence among diverse Indigenous, European settler, and immigrant communities. The Ismaili community across Canada is also diverse. This Canadian context, though mired in the negative effects of colonialism and challenges of exclusion due to difference, carries the possibility for cultivating and integrative way of knowing and being that enriches all of us. How the Ismaili community negotiates its internal and external diversity in the process of sustaining and revitalizing its cultural heritage in this environment will be challenging and exciting. I am enthusiastically optimistic that the pluralistic heritage of Muslim societies—not only in the subcontinent but also across the world—may offer us applicable lessons from which we can learn to shape our collective identities here in Canada.

1.4 Determining who we are by determining who we are against

After the 2021 murder of a Muslim family in London, Ontario, which left a 9-year-old boy orphaned, I spoke with a young Muslim family from Pakistan who had been living in Toronto for several years. The father expressed that he and his wife are also a young, modern, liberally educated family. Their son shared the same name as the orphaned boy

> *in London. They too, walked together as a family on the street. He stated he had a fear of expressing himself as a Muslim. He was afraid of being singled out and excluded, even hurt. He did not feel safe to walk around carrying a Muslim identity. He presented as South Asian. No one would otherwise know his Muslim affiliation. Yet, he felt singled out and unsafe as a Muslim. Another young man I met, born in Canada, who had a European father and South Asian East African mother, expressed a similar fear. He lacked a feeling of safety walking down the street. Even though he presented as White (to me), his Muslim identity created in him fear of being singled out for his affiliation. These are lived realities of young Muslims, who constantly must negotiate integrative belonging agency.*

Transnational societies are becoming the norm. Cultures, ideologies, religion, and diverse ways of seeing the world are converging with "high-velocity interaction" (Patel & Brodeur, 2006). In this increased pace of interaction, "we encounter the stranger more often and directly" (Aga Khan, 2015, para. 42) politicians, world leaders, community leaders, and individuals are called to exercise compassion and plural approaches to human interaction to generate understanding and peace. The need to address issues of exclusion and inclusion related to diversity, together with the need to positively counter negative and divisive rhetoric continues call for education initiatives that can build spaces for positive encounters with others. Initiatives such as the Institute of Canadian Citizenship, the Global Centre for Pluralism, Aga Khan Museum, Small World Music, Cultural Pluralism in the Arts, and many others across Canada illustrate a commitment to supporting programs that promote understanding, representative expression, and bridge divides.

Bhimani (2019) explains that since September 11, 2001, the increased presence of divisive "national concerns about who Muslims really are and what they will do to Canada and real Canadians have intensified fears and anxieties about home-grown terrorism" (p. 224). Bhimani underscores:

> These material and value-based threats have been discussed upholding claims to ensure the security and sanctity of Canadian society by underscoring the danger of illiberal Muslims and radical Islam to Canada as a modern, liberal and multicultural society. In response, anti-terrorism legislation passed immediately after 9/11 and its permutations like Bill C-51 outline the two-tier citizenship Muslims are subject to, with their rights and

> civil liberties under constant question and possible reprisal. Further, in Canada's goal to be a global leader on terrorism taking an uncompromising stance against those Canadian citizens that the government deems terrorist, Bill C-24 allowed the striping [*sic*] of citizenship, despite it being a right and not a privilege. Given that terror has been marked on Muslim bodies, such unilateral power of a government outside of the rule of law is both unsettling and troubling (p. 225).

Bhimani suggests that in Canada's support at the time of its American neighbours against the global threat of a radical Islam, "the project of shaping the war on terror has been articulated through Canada's own survival as a nation ontologically part of Western civilization" (p. 225). Bhimani explains that positioning Canada as Western re-whitened the nation's settler-colonial roots and re-established Muslims as out of place racial constructs (Arat-Koc, 2005, cited in Bhimani, 2019). "This has flattened Muslim subjectivities to one-dimensional social realities" (p. 225). Bhimani explains that "national discourses and state practices embedded in the logics of colonial modernity and empire illuminate the fault lines of supposed inherent oppositions in values, ways of life, political interests and world views of 'Muslims' to 'real Canadians'" (p. 225).

Mamdani (2004) argued that such "political encounters," which rely on cultural differences defined as theological Otherness, are abstracted out of the very history and social relations that produce the political identity of "Muslim" and position Muslims as "diasporas of empire" (Naber, 2014). Nandy (1997) added that colonialism "colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities," (p. 170). Calderón (2011) discussed ideologies of "flattened epistemologies," colonial blind discourses, and normative multicultural education (NMCE) and critiques metaphysical assumptions in curricula of Western civilization that are entangled with Judeo-Christian philosophical traditions that "render gaps in knowledge invisible" (p. 158). "An important aspect of an epistemology of ignorance is the realization that ignorance should not be theorized as a simple omission or gap but is, in many cases, an active production" (Tuana, 2004, cited in Calderón, 2011, p. 158). Islam in this context becomes a monolithic global enemy, not as a friend containing a wellspring of knowledge that can benefit society. This rhetoric of fear is a result of a "clash of ignorance" (Aga Khan, 2006; Virani, 2016; Karim & Eid, 2012; E. Said, 2001/2014). The term, "clash of ignorance," describes the roots of divisive ideologies that position imagined enemies in a

monolithic and one-dimensional light. Fear of the unfamiliar manifests in barriers to dialogue and perpetuates perceptions of the so-called enemy. These clashes of ignorance invoke a kind of psychological violence, a mentality and attitude that does not see difference as strength, does not acknowledge the contributions of historic and contemporary civilizations, and does not engage a cooperative spirit towards common goals of peace and unity. Clashes of ignorance fertilize divisive definitions of identity that position us in opposition to others.

At a Maclean's Town Hall (2015), Prime Minister Trudeau took a stand against anti-Muslim discourse. He stated that he "stand[s] firmly against the politics of division, the politics of fear, the politics of intolerance or hateful rhetoric" (38:42). Trudeau continued to say:

> I think Canada and indeed any modern society does best when we understand that diversity is a source of strength, not a source of weakness. The elements on which we are similar are always far greater than the elements on which we are diverse . . . we need to remain focused on . . . keeping our communities united instead of trying to build walls and scapegoat communities—I'm going to talk directly about the Muslim community—they are the greatest victims of terrorist acts around the world at the present world; and painting ISIS and others with a broad brush that extends to all Muslims is not just ignorant, it's irresponsible. (Maclean's, 2015, 39:16)

Bhimani (2019) argues that such national consciousness imprints a Muslim cultural politic that constricts Muslims to being seen as either victims of Islamophobia or threats to the state. "It is reductive to think that these are the only ways Muslim subjectivity is being enacted within Canada" (p. 226). Bhimani argued that

> multicultural nations are involved in processes of differentiation in which it claims difference and incorporates it. This process reconstitutes who are more Other than Other. In doing so, boundaries within the nation and between bodies are defined. That is, Muslims do not occupy a singular subjectivity or position. Rather they are always relationally positioned. (Ahmed, 2000, as cited in Bhimani, 2019, p. 226)

Islam is regarded as a faith of peace, seeking peaceful relations with others and working with others to create knowledge that will bring peace to society. Sadly, Muslim communities at large live and have lived in war/conflict zones plagued with totalitarian governments, civil insurgence,

and poverty. In this highly fragile environment, misperceptions and misrepresentations of Islam regularly appear on global mass media and political rhetoric. Interconnected forces of homogeneity and globalization add to this misunderstanding and continue to pervade the public ear. Internally divisive Muslim voices across the world also add to this tension, and small minorities of “loud” Muslims contribute to on-going misrepresentation of a peaceful faith. Additionally, contributions of Muslims to modern science, mathematics, optics, philosophy, and art are absent in curricula and popular knowledge. The rich diversity of Muslim cultures is made absent by dominant news and social media rhetoric that replace multi-layered civilizational histories with a “single story” (Adichie, 2009) of a monolithic and oppressive faith. Around the world, Muslim societies face destruction of culture, as well as poverty and a lack of access to a good quality of life. Fear of the foreign other and mentalities of superiority continue to fuel politically charged rhetoric about Islam as an enemy. Negative representations of Muslims in public discourse, mass media, and in the minds of citizens create psychological and “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 2003, p. 24) and conflict.

Education is an antidote that can fill knowledge gaps. As Muslims continue to share their stories, diverse stories will slowly weave themselves into dominant knowledge to create new tapestries of understanding.

1.4.1 Relationships with faith and religion

In a study of youth in Germany, Günther (2013) explains that the religiosity of adolescent youth (the diverse group she interviewed) varied between “rather orthodox readings of Islam, indifference to or outright renunciation of religious issues, agnostic positions, and positions detached from either orthodoxy or dogmatic readings, or outside the bounds of religious institutions” (p. 111). Thus, the “single-story” idea of Muslims as enemies of progress, defined by one who adheres steadfastly and narrowly to a particular religious tradition, must be challenged. How an individual defines faith, religion, and their relationship is based on how they choose to see themselves.

From diverse religious and cultural perspectives, scholars discuss the need to preserve a flame of faith (Boyce-Tillman, 2009; Patel & Brodeur, 2006; Ramadan, 2004; Stone-Davis, 2016). They explore how religious communities can affirm, sustain, and articulate religious identity within secular environments, additionally in “high-velocity interaction” (Patel & Brodeur, 2006, p. 22)

with diverse peoples, cultures, and faiths. Ramadan (2004) asks:

> How can the flame of faith, the light of the spiritual life, and faithfulness to the teachings of Islam be preserved in environments that no longer refer to God and in educational systems that have little to say about religion? (p. 126).

Ramadan explains how first-generation migrants successfully transmitted an intuitive understanding of and a respect for faith. In some cases, migrants came from countries where God (Allah) was in the social and sonic vocabulary of daily life. A constant sacred presence and awareness and "blind faith" (A. Janmohamed, personal communication) motivated social action and identity construction. Ramadan explains that it was this "sense of God" that passed into their children's consciousness. In a secular environment where there is a reduction of spirituality to ritual technicalities in the second generations, Ramadan reports that youth express the need to know more, feeling the need to move on from feeling alone to real knowledge to have the means to live consistently and balance the demands of morality in everyday life. Ramadan (2004) proposes that second generation migrants must understand the context of traditional knowledge, and with a critical spirit be able to understand, select, reform, and eventually innovate "in order to establish a faithful connection between the universal principles of Islam and the contingencies of the society in which Muslims live." (p. 128). "Islamic education," Ramadan explains, is concerned with joining education of the heart (God consciousness and awareness of responsibilities to selves and the human family at large) and education of the mind (understanding the messages of scriptural sources and their relation to everyday life). The Aga Khan (2005) expresses to an audience in Karachi, Pakistan that:

> A great risk to the modernization of the Islamic world is identity loss - the blind assumption that we should give up all our essential values and cultural expressions to those of other civilizations. In order to contain this risk, for it cannot be totally eliminated, we must re-invigorate our own value systems and cultural expressions. This includes the sciences and the ethical structures that go with them, but also architecture and the design of landscape and towns, literature, music, philosophical thought, and the free space they require. (Aga Khan, 2005, para. 17)

The challenge, thus, is finding the balance between upholding universal principles of the faith while reinvigorating cultural traditions and value systems in diverse contexts.

For Muslims across the world, migrating across fragmentary religious, social, private, communal, social, ceremonial, and educational spaces, it is vital to create spaces where they can explore their understandings of religion and the place it has in public life. Connecting with cultural forms, including devotional aspects, is an important part of the journey to interconnect their allegiances to faith and lived experience. If Muslims are unable to connect to these anchors of knowledge tied to religious understanding, it will be difficult for them to spark that flame of faith and engage their interpretations of faith in resonance with worldly knowledge and practices of society. The Aga Khan (2003) asks:

> In what voice or voices can the Islamic heritage speak to us afresh—a voice true to the historical experience of the Muslim world yet, at the same time, relevant in the technically advanced but morally turbulent and uncertain world of today? (para. 3)

The Aga Khan emphasizes the need for Islamic voices to be true to the historical experiences of Muslim societies and peoples while also finding relevance in the world today. Global societies are struggling to address issues of exclusion and inclusion related to diversity. Within this context, misrepresentations of Islam by external forces and loud minority voices from within place Islam in a negative light and create narrow conceptions about Muslims. Muslims are forced to find ways to keep the faith alive in this enflamed political and social reality and to retranslate their understanding in language and contemporary vernacular. In addition, in the contemporary situation, in which divisive rhetoric is fuelled by racism, exclusive practices, and long-term impacts of colonialism, it is important for minoritized peoples, including Muslims, to renegotiate their knowledge systems in ways that resonate with the world in which they live.

I draw upon Shah-Kazemi (2012), who cites Corbin to describe necessary renewal of tradition. Corbin suggests:

> a tradition transmits itself as something alive, since it is a ceaselessly renewed inspiration, and not a funeral cortège or a register of conformist opinions. The life and death of spiritual things are our responsibility; they are not placed 'in the past' except through our own omissions, our refusal of the metamorphoses that they demand. (Corbin, 1971, cited in Shah-Kazemi, 2012, p. 76)

Esmail (1998) submits, “no living tradition can honestly sustain itself by reference to a static standard or model derived from the past” (p. 5). He explains that a living tradition evolves through a process of continual remaking, “not only of the new in terms of the old, but also of the old in terms of the new” (p. 5). Old ideas are continually enriched with new dimensions under the impetus of new responsive experience to contemporary conditions.

It is in the urgency of today’s world, where we “cannot ignore the world in which all live and work and its concerns . . . the world has come to us” (Gould et al., 2009) that I set this research. I submit that through a revitalized engagement with musical, sonic, vocal arts traditions within Muslim cultural archives, young people might find a pathway to feel, hear, and know the flame of faith in a way that they can interpret through the assembly of all the cultural archives and ecosystems in which they live.

1.5 Muslims and music education: Refractions of binaries

In both the province of Ontario and globally, educators in schools and community settings are exploring plural approaches and perspectives to education that counter ignorance about Muslims and Islam (de Quadros, 2018; Halstead, 1994; Harris, 2006; Huseynova, 2012; Izsak, 2013; McAndrew et al., 2010; Niyozov, 2010; Niyozov & Pluim, 2009; Rissanen et al., 2015; Zine, 2001). McAndrew, et al (2010) and Niyozov & Pluim, 2009) explored perspectives in education that counter ignorance about Muslims and Islam and foster dialogue and understanding. Halstead (1994), Harris (2006), and Izsak (2013) discussed the perspectives of some Muslim communities about the role of music in life, and how to make accommodations to better serve Muslim communities. In fact, music in Islam flourished in a wide variety of forms “despite abiding ambivalence and orthodox condemnation” (Catlin-Jairazbhoy, 2004, p. 251). Muslim peoples interacted with diverse cultures and faiths across the globe (Karim & Eid, 2012). Muslims adopted and wove local cultural expressions, styles, and modes of delivery with their own to reshape identity, practice faith and contribute new knowledge in new contexts (Racy, 2003; Schimmel, 1975; Shiloah, 1995). This is true for many Muslim cultures globally, including for Ismailis across Central Asia, the Middle East, China, India, and Africa. Although “music” is not understood in the European sense of the word (Stokes, 2015), it has been vital in expressions of faith and community building, even today. However, it is important to make the distinction that when discussing music and sound arts in the Muslim world, across communities, definitions

differ, expressions differ, and interpretive relationships to the faith differ. Ideas about music that *de-link* musical and sound cultures with a living experience of Islam or that narrowly define the role of music in Islam in relation to the religious, flatten the rich relationships with sound and music within Muslim life.

I have had conversations with music educators and music directors asking for resources to overcome Islamophobia and accommodate Muslim children. A choral colleague from the United States acknowledged that they knew very little about the musical traditions of Islam or choral/vocal music of Middle Eastern countries. They saw several pieces available through different publishers, but my colleague did not know how these pieces fit into or represented Muslims traditions. This colleague asked for resources about Muslim culture, strategies for structuring lessons, and guidance on curating artistic programs. I was touched by their follow up question asking how I envisioned the role artists could play to bridge gaps and remind each other of our shared humanity. Another choral colleague sent me an urgent message about a young Muslim chorister who was pulled out of choir by his parents due their interpretation of what role music played in Islam. This colleague expressed deep concern and disappointment and wondered what could be done. While I know my colleagues came from a genuine place of care, I wondered whether their perspectives inadvertently positioned Islam as a troubled space that needs to be dealt with.

Music education scholars have offered helpful resources to increase understanding and better support Muslim student in the classroom. Halstead (1994), Harris (2006), and Izsak (2013) have gracefully addressed the important issue of permissibility of music in Islam with thoughtful calls for sensitivity and possibilities for needed accommodation. I am afraid that the scholarship might inadvertently position Islam as a problem to be fixed, potentially threatening the sustainability of dominant organizing principles against which difference is constructed. I wonder whether focusing on this aspect of some Muslim interpretations of culture and tradition further inscribes how “individuals come to understand themselves, for the most part, only in relation to the universal or totalitarian notion” (Calderón, 2006, as cited in Calderón, 2011, p. 158) of dominant culture. There is a paucity of research focusing on the vital role of sound and music in Muslim cultures as a starting place. Scholars de Quadros (2018) and Huseynova (2012) expanded the educational gaze about music in Muslim cultural contexts such as Azerbaijan, Indonesia, and the Levant. Their work broadened an understanding of Muslim expressive culture as dialogic and

emergent in diverse contexts. They acknowledged the vital role of music and sound arts in Muslim cultures, reorienting the educational gaze to ways in which music and sound are essential. De Quadros and Huseynova did not present diverse sites of musical knowledge as "marginal or in relation to a Western framework," (Calderón, 2008, as cited in Calderón, 2011, p. 148). They centred epistemological frameworks that "promote and illuminate tangible and organic needs of non-Western communities" (p. 148). I highlight these perspectives because if Islam is positioned as a flattened epistemic orthodox in opposition to a Western way of being "entangled in Judeo-Christian ideas" (p. 166), we inscribe Islam through a lens of differentiation, claiming and incorporating difference, resulting in educational responses that reconstitute Muslims as more Other than the Other.

In addition, discussing Muslim cultural life through music only as a defined category of artistic endeavour, delimits the culturally embedded value of sound arts, vocal arts, and music more across the Muslim world. While in a Western ear, expressions such as Quranic recitation or recited (or sung) devotional poetry *can* sound musical because the forms have melodic contours, rhythmic elements, a sense of phrasing, dynamics, and changes in tempo—attributions of musical elements taught in Western music (Gillani, 2020), "to insist in a Muslim context on understanding sound and listening in terms of "music" is to impose a European category onto people who often resist it: "recitation" (*tilawa*), spiritual "audition" (*sama*), "remembrance" (zikr)—terms often applied to one or another form of sonic art, are not, for many Muslims, necessarily "music" (Stokes, 2015). Stokes also problematizes seeing music in terms of 'aesthetics.' In doing so is "to assume works, creative geniuses, expert critics, individuated acts of contemplation—not what we witness in most music cultures, and, as many have pointed out, a limited way of understanding even our own" (p. 93). Stokes further explains that to insist on thinking about music in the Muslim world in terms underlying Islamic aesthetic principles is "to make a host of wilful assumptions about the unity, the coherence, and the transmission of those principles" (Faruqi, 1980, 1985, 1987 as referenced in Stokes, 2015, p. 93). An essentialist definition of music (or non-music) in the Muslim world denies the capacity for that music to speak as intimate utterances of the human spirit. This distinction is important when thinking about sound and music in Islam, and these factors are important for considering the essential social, spiritual, moral, and communitarian role of music and sound across the Muslim world—a

reorienting educational gaze from which one can consider music education and Muslim experience. This study aims to further the conversation.

The world of Muslim music is expressed in many styles, forms, and repertoires. One can find, for example, simple folk melodies, contemplative reflections on the spirit, driving dance rhythms, and socially responsive music. In addition, diverse Muslim cultural contexts shape the plenitude of expressive sound culture and arts that cannot be defined by a single sonic story. I submit that Muslim cultures should be considered as dynamically responsive cultures in which sound and music play an integral role. Viewing Muslim cultures in this way may offer opportunities to expand the horizon of thinking about how and where music happens in Muslim experience, taking care not to impose that view on all Muslims. Understanding music as part of a rich archive of lived experience and "funds of knowledge" (González et al., 2005) in the home and across the thresholds of public and private space may enable educators to "understand the construction of cultural identity and the emergence of cultural personality" (p. 48) for Muslim youth. "Grasping the social relationships" in which Muslim youth "are ensconced and the broad features of learning generated" (p. 48) are key to better understand the complex perspectives otherwise bracketed out of public spaces, classrooms, and rehearsal rooms.

1.6 Choral education

I have discussed some of the challenges of seeing Islam and Muslims as an enemy of progress. Now I turn the readers' attention to choral music and the dilemma of choral music as a space that also marginalizes difference.

Choral music education, as a predominant dimension of Western soundscapes in schools, contributes to shaping sensibilities and subjectivities that youth bring (or not) to the public sphere. "Choir refers originally to the place in the church where the service is sung and by extension to those who sing it" (Hillier, 2012, p. 61). I think of a choir "as a group of people singers gathered to sing composed and harmonized music in the Western canon" (de Quadros, 2019, p. 15), rooted in sacred European Christian traditions. Choral music may also include a multilayered *a cappella* approach to singing that requires a certain level of music literacy and skill:

> typically, but not exclusively, composed for more than one voice part with each group constituting people of similar vocal range. The sections called soprano, alto, tenor, and bass typically include at least one singer and can grow to dozens on any voice part (p. 15).

I also understand choral music as “formally constituted with a conductor whose role is defined and a pedagogy articulated and studied” (p. 19). Notwithstanding the plural manifestations of group singing in diverse cultures and traditions around the world, my orientation is one in which non-Western group singing does not fall within the choral singing paradigm (p. 15). I refer to choral music that is “framed in Western ontologies” (Hall, 1996, as cited in de Quadros, 2019, p. 15). The simplest way I can describe it for those not familiar, is that choral music is an art form connected with Christian church services:

> Formalized musical conventions of European liturgical and courtly music fuelled the emergence of this genre. Until the eighteenth century, music created for this ensemble was almost exclusively intended for the church, and even today a significant portion of choral music is intended for use in, or at least inspired by, a Christian liturgical setting (Shrock, 2009, as cited in de Quadros, 2019, p. 14).

Choral music (and some years of band) provided the medium through which I learned music in schools. In the choral environment where sacred choral music was at the heart of the learning, I found resonance. I could relate to lyrics about the love for God, prayers for mercy, recognition of our shortcomings, and pleas for forgiveness. These mediations were very much part of the Ismaili devotional sentiment. In addition, the beauty of the music and singing in harmony captured my interest; the sacred content spoke to my sense of piety as a Muslim. When we sang during church services, the music was part of sacred ceremonies that reminded me of everyday and festive Ismaili communal occasions. I also sang in a jazz choir in school. The lyrics and content were more secular, and the chords tuned differently, but overall, I considered the sound “affect” under the umbrella of “choral music.” Thus, choral music as a form of group singing is the conceptual frame with which I engage the choral encounter.

I note that choral music is also taken up in a variety of communities and a variety of ways to provide kinship, belonging, spiritual support, and integration into society, social connection, social action, and diverse musical expression. In popular contexts, aspects of vocal harmony that

remind me of choral singing appear in a variety of ways in everyday soundscapes, media, and music. In *a cappella* groups, gospel choirs, back up vocalists, or duetting performers in popular songs, vocal harmony is part of the popular musical landscape. Canadian Indigenous groups such as Piqsiq and Tzo'kam use vocal arts with contemporary music approaches for innovative expression, preservation of culture, and socially engaged responsiveness to lived socio-political realities and impacts of colonialism. Toronto-based intercultural singing groups that preserve and revitalize global traditions like Blisk, Awaaz Ensemble, Turkwaaz, Darbazi, and Hawanim emerge in an evolving pluralistic knowledge soundscape. It is not uncommon to hear diverse traditional, cultural and faith-based groups singing in collectives. Group singing or "vocals only" music by Muslim artists such as Zain Bikha, Ali Keeler, Sami Yusuf, Samira Noorali, Hor Hazreti Hamza, and Iman are popular globally. Within diverse Muslim cultural spaces, one also hears collective recitation, chanting and singing of devotional poetry. Singing in vocal harmony, a key feature of choral music that I love, is very much part of a pluriform musical landscape. Harmony and what I interpret as choral sound is, thus, very much part of my music education and the larger musical soundscapes in which we live, work, search, and connect. This is the sonic world I centre in this study. However, here is a dilemma.

1.6.1 The choral dilemma

In today's highly charged social justice calls to action, choral music institutions are under a critical microscope. Choral organizations are challenged to reconfigure governance, implement new diversity, access, inclusion and equity protocols, and open practices to honour Indigenous knowledge and the pluralistic knowledge of the larger society. Scholarship in music education continues to confront hegemonic practices and offers various approaches to address social justice, cultural diversity, and inclusion. Jorgensen (1996) explained that artistic practice, like educational practice, is not neutral but commits to ideologies that *empower* some and *disenfranchise* others, *attract* some and *repel* others, *includes* some and *excludes* others. Researchers have explored multicultural approaches (Anderson & Campbell, 2011; Elliot, 1989; Kwami, 2001), social justice lenses (Allsup & Shieh, 2012; Bradley, 2003; Gould, 2011; Hess, 2014; O'Toole, 2005; Vaugeois, 2009) and feminist models for inclusion (Cheruvallil-Contractor, 2021; Gould, 2011; Noddings, 1986; Wane, 2011). Scholars have advocated for participatory approaches in music including composition, experimentation, and collaboration (Bolden, 2009; Bolden et al., 2020; Friesen, 2017; Karlsen & Westerlund, 2015; Marsella, 2021;

Schafer, 1986; Vaugeois, 2009). Critical education scholarship also emphasizes the needs of students, their diversities, marginalities, imaginaries, situations, and musical identities. Writers highlight challenges and issues within the system and offer practices that can act as counterpoint to the hegemonic systems. Campbell (2002) argued that while progress has been made, “there is still work to be done as teachers strive to bring meaningful musical experiences of multiple cultures to their students” (p. 27). Bradley (2007) raised concerns about studying and performing music from other cultures within a social justice view that reiterates an inadvertent colonial culture of somehow needing to “rescue” another culture. Gould (2008), Karlsen (2014), and Karlsen and Westerlund (2010) advocate for democratic music education spaces that lead to student agency. They advocate for pedagogies that inspire students to explore the intersections of their multiple musical identities. Allsup and Shieh (2012) describe this stance as one that reaches “beyond incomplete musical engagements and into larger and more intertwined social, artistic, and political domains” (p. 47, emphasis added). Bowman (2001) called on music educators to re-envision music education away from only technical instruction, toward education of a person’s character who can thus be better equipped to deal with the changing circumstances of the society in which they live. Sometimes an “us-and-them” outcome emerges that frays the education cloth and does the opposite of what educators intend. Jorgensen (2006) offered an approach that is not “this *or* that,” but is “this *and* that.” Vaugeois (2007), O’Toole (2005), and Bradley (2003) underscored how choral music is a colonial vestige that limits, excludes, others, and subjugates cultural specificity. These researchers speak to the breadth of research facing the multifarious challenges within choral music and music education to better serve society.

I add a community-illuminated distinction about choral music. From my lived experience in Ismaili contexts, the words “choral” and “choir” are unfamiliar to some members of the community globally. The visual representation of the word itself, the pronunciation of the word, or the felt experience of being in a choir is unfamiliar. Some members of the community, like my mom, were sent abroad to Europe to attend boarding schools so that she could obtain a good education in order to be more competitive in a meritocratic society. Many of these international boarding schools were Christian schools. Students like my mom participated in Sunday church services. My mom sang in the choir and accompanied the hymns on the piano. She is familiar with the choral tradition in that context and knows what choir is. I’ve met many community members who are also familiar with choirs in these and in variety of other contexts. However, in

the general community, the form and words are strange. Some people reading community announcements about Ismaili choir events, auditions, and news might stumble over the words "choir," "chorus," "choral," and "chorale." The word remains unfamiliar to many community members, particularly as the Canadian Ismaili community expands in its transnational demographic. When I speak with community members or people generally who come from Eastern cultural contexts, I find myself having to explain my work using references to church choirs. In addition, when we started the Ismaili choir in Vancouver, some members of the community asked why we were calling our group a choir. They felt that the word was too Christian and that we might consider a name more resonant with our cultures. I remember feeling troubled by this because naming the group a choir positioned us as part of a choral culture where there previously was no representation of an Ismaili community. Calling the group a choir helped orient the gaze of others away from a religiously minoritized musical group to one like them. These communal tensions with terminology and associated identity further orient choir and choral music as a colonial Christian vestige.

Higher education music programs, in particular, have been called out for not responding to calls for action and transmitting music "as an isolated activity *within* culture" (Elliot, 1989, p. 11), not *as* culture. Vaugeois (2009) argued that while values of unity, listening, tolerance, and collaboration are inherent expectations in choral performance, standardized structures separate music as a subject of contemplation from its lived socio-political realities. Not seeing beyond the four walls of standard choral practices, Vaugeois argued, produces a citizenry that is "ill-equipped to make informed decisions about how we might contribute to the development of contemporary culture" (Vaugeois, 2013, p. 7). Indigenous researchers in education and music education globally also challenge colonial structures and call for change. Those who teach choral music, seen as a colonial vestige, must turn towards decolonizing approaches to serve the development of culture and society. Higher education music programs have a responsibility to reorient their practices to reflexively evolve with the needs of society.

Vaugeois (2013) suggested that "performing our art form without the knowledge, tools or *imaginative need* to be political actors" (p. 221) creates Foucauldian "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1977, as cited in Vaugeois, 2013, p. 217)—individual subjects who are completely unaware of the social realities outside the rehearsal or concert hall. By accepting uncritically that the aesthetic and "universal language" of classical music is enough to unite people and provide a

transcendent experience, participants may not realize the "deep ambivalences locked into universal fixities" (Ashcroft et al., 2003, p. 9) that control collective imaginations and aspirations. Amplifying only the aesthetic gives music a greater authority than the experiences of the individuals and the life experiences they bring to the musical space.

Vaugeois (2013) ardently called on classical music practitioners and philosophers to interrogate hegemonic discourses inherent in the art form by situating the political in music education. Vaugeois argued that musical meaning is embedded in contemporary relationships. Frith (1996) also described music as socially constructed, reliant on the collective sounding of a group of people. For Frith, as for Vaugeois, social and political realities that construct diverse subjects also intersect. Music thus becomes more than an aesthetic experience but one that is socially and politically engaged, demanding the pursuit of beauty and ethical decision-making. Without becoming critically aware of how systems, practices, and philosophies produce docile bodies that ignore the marginalizing discourses, Vaugeois (2007) suggested that we cannot act as active agents in society, adding that making music apolitical "implies that it does not matter where the music comes from or what histories might be represented or misrepresented by the presentation we choose to make" (p. 15). Vaugeois (2013) argued that if music educators do not recognize the assumptions about art and value for it, as well as the ideologies that contribute to the process, we will be unable to consider the roles that "diverse cultural expressions, our own and those of others, play in the lives of different communities and how perceptions of value play out politically and economically" (p. 13). Through inward looking classical *modus operandi,* Indigenous, racialized, and gendered subjectivities continue to be made absent and misrepresented. These apolitical musical discourses must be interrogated.

Vaugeois (2009) recommended three "music-making practices, as practices of and for social justice" (p. 15) to shift the discourse: "troubling knowledge and material realities, noticing and addressing systemic barriers, and opening spaces for non-hierarchical relationships that take difference and multiplicity as both given and desirable" (p. 15). To address non-hierarchical spaces for student engagement, Vaugeois (2007) offered strategic methodologies rooted in feminist post-colonial perspectives. These methodologies challenge top down patriarchal, formal, standardized systems and "open spaces for change, developing new and unexpected connections and ways of thinking, Deleuzian lines of flight constitutive of what they simultaneously territorialize (outline) and deterritorialize (destabilize)" (Gould, 2011, p. 139). Vaugeois (2009)

recommended methodologies that focus on composing, learning by ear, collaborating, improvising, experimenting, arranging and adapting ethnic music, exploring unusual sound sources, and building pieces around imagery (p. 18). Vaugeois (2009) emphasizes that creative pedagogies and arts-based participatory approaches to education that encourage students to explore multiple roles and ways of working with others" (p. 19) can offer practical approaches and tools to engage contemporary issues of social justice.

Jorgensen (1996) reminds readers that "education is not only about transmitting knowledge from one generation to another, if by transmission we mean passing on a received tradition of wisdom, beliefs and practices in a relatively pure form. It is also about critically reconstructing, reinterpreting and re-examining that knowledge for the present and future" (p. 37). Choral music migrated with Christian settlers to Canada and was vital to shaping their sensibilities and subjectivities, emphasizing the importance of religion and religiousness. This does not mean that the form cannot culturally evolve. Just as musicians from around the world sustain, preserve, and revitalize their traditions, including through popular music forms, hybrid forms and more, could choral traditions rooted in European culture, relocated in a new plural cultural and Indigenous context such as Canada, have the potential to also evolve dynamically?

Choral music educators cannot simply hide in our private cultural spaces and silently, quietly produce knowledge for ourselves without considering the strengths of the larger pluriform cultures in which we live, and the ethical responsibility to produce a pluriform musical culture that shapes and is shaped by an ever-changing diverse society. The danger with a solely protectionist or resistance approach is that it can result in extreme and rigorous interpretations of historic traditions and ideologies, thus producing docile bodies unable to make critically informed decisions about how to contribute to contemporary culture (Vaugeois, 2013). For the choral arts to evolve, no choral community can afford to refuse metamorphoses that will not only renew the traditions but also invoke new possibilities for service. The choral community needs to expand its outlook. To live in the present, just as migratory traditions struggle to ceaselessly renew *their* histories within transnational diaspora(s), choral traditions in Canada may have to struggle to renew *their* histories—through reconciliation with Indigenous cultures and through transcending systemic barriers that exclude in new pluralist vernaculars and conversations with diverse, hybrid, and popular cultures in our midst. There is a need to nurture communal and

educational conditions that enable youth to access and critically explore the interrelated sonic environments in which they live.

1.7 My community music practice at the contact zone

My community music practice arises from living in contact zones, "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). In these contact zones, I negotiate intersections of multilayered identities including South Asian, Ismaili, Muslim, fourth generation Kenyan, Canadian, and more. A variety of music and sound associated with these identities naturally co-mingle in these contact zones. Being Ismaili Muslim is an umbrella identity that shapes me and that I shape as I navigate the world. I acknowledge the grounding spiritual, ethical, social, and intellectual values held in cultural traditions that orient my participation in the world, and enable me to belong in a larger universal orientation of a socially conscious society. I learned that Canadian values are our values; to fulfill one is to fulfill the other. I also learned to be critical of what new practices I take up or leave behind, never compromising the grounding ethics of faith. I was taught to critically engage, take up, and leave behind, to shape and combine best practices that generate a connection to universal values that sustain Ismaili ways of being within larger Canadian expectations of citizenship and service. Singing at community events, joining in congregational recitation in jamatkhana (prayer hall) or singing vocal harmonies in choir, provided multiple aural and oral sites for remembering and enacting a spiritually inspired social vision. How blending familiar and unfamiliar vocal traditions at the contact zone might impact Ismaili experience has been my vocational quest.

Exploring the "architextures" (Dr. Munir Vellani, personal communication) of multilayered choral sound, music, and congregational recitation motivates my practice and research inquiry. I sing in choirs, write compositions, develop, and facilitate choral co-creation, collaborate with vocalists and communities from diverse traditions, conduct choirs, and explore what a culturally integrative choral and vocal arts practice could be. I have worked in diverse settings from within global Ismaili Muslim communities, to larger education, interfaith, and intercultural settings, often with newcomers, refugees, and peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds searching for connection and fulfillment. My work has forced me to look at my practices, how they resonate,

how they do not, highlighting the exclusions and considering how to change things to meet the needs of the Ismaili community to which I belong. As soon as I think I have found an answer to solve a problem, a new problem arises that needs to be addressed. The work is generative and reflexive, an ongoing conversation within myself, with people I meet, and with the larger classical music field. The practices change, yet the core inquiry revolves around how ancestral traditions can come alive in new plural contexts through the choral sound, cultural dialogue, and music. Outcomes of joy, hope, friendship, fun, and fulfillment are at the heart. For me, creativity and community has always been about that, and my work seeks to harness those values. This integrative creative practice, combining Ismaili ways of being and choral arts experiences, have created a container for me to tap into embodied wisdom and a way to animate that wisdom in response to the needs of the moment.

Harmonizing traditional Ismaili Muslim prayers and making simple arrangements traditional chants unveil the possibility of hearing traditions in a different way while maintaining the integrity of their orally transmitted forms. The traditionally recited melodies can remain the same while the vocal harmonies add something new and different. The effort to find equilibrium has been important in a larger practice of seeking reconciled belonging. Over time, I began to introduce these arrangements to the community, first as experimental creative inquiry with the Vancouver Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir. These explorations led to workshopping and co-creating arrangements that we shared publicly as a choir and with the Ismaili community across North America. It was always important for me to have this dialogue with the community, and while I was also from the community, the larger community that was unfamiliar with choral traditions could have a say and guide the creative processes. The source material we used in the choir and that I eventually began to share in other ways globally was part of our community's experience. The environments in which I was raised taught me that the new musical outcomes had to resonate in the communal vision, to enable affirmation of faith and ways of being that supported service to improve the lives of others. Some elders challenged why we were applying what they called a "Christian" art form to our traditions. I did not always understand their perspectives, and as a young creative found myself resisting their queries. After over 25 years, I am still discovering the nuances of the critical questions they asked. These critical questions sparked creativity and artistic curiosity that led to reshaping how we did choral music, what we called it, what music we did and when, and how we interacted with community teachers, elders,

scholars, and friends of all ages and diversities. My co-written article with Mehnaz Thawer, an alumnus of the Vancouver and Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choirs (Janmohamed et al., 2013) illustrates in detail the different approaches we took to explore and express our Ismaili identity. Since then, my practice has developed, integrating more co-creation, mentorship, cross-cultural collaboration, and composition—singing in multilayered vocal harmony forms the scaffolding and architexture of these musical encounters. I learned to weave Ismaili teachings into the work, telling narratives that amplified what I understood were goals of community cohesion, building bridges, awakening the spirit, and affirming our commitments to faith and action in society. Finding a new harmonized and harmonizing musical language became a way for me to harmonize a sense of belonging.

As I meet and work with global communities, I continue to hear questions from diverse community elders about the use of an art form that many consider to be Christian and European. I am reminded how in highly polarized political contexts, where power is held by militant and dogmatic forces, that by claiming Islam as their religious association, the Ismaili community could be in danger due to what may be perceived as heretic. What is important is that I am in continuous dialogue with the community in some way, directly or indirectly. I continue to have rich conversations, engage in cross-cultural collaborations, and explore a creative back and forth to evolve practice. The more things evolve, the more they can open spaces for inclusion and belonging. Whatever creative endeavour I take involving community cultural knowledge, it is important that the community feels supported, amplified, seen, valued and comfortable. I also seek to put forward the possibility of new horizons for the community as they negotiate their relationships with faith, tradition, and contemporary belonging. I hope that through the reflective thinking that happens inherently in the practice, an enabling environment is created wherein my community and I can safely rediscover their varying relationships with the traditions of their historical conscience and their contemporary making of self. If and when blending the familiar and unfamiliar can bring out sacred feeling and memories of belonging that individuals and communities seek, then indeed that is my hope. I seek the community's blessing and their love as my effort is not only for me but more so for them.

I feel lucky to have had many opportunities locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally to work with Ismaili community leaders, scholars, congregants, musical artists, elders, and volunteers to shape musical practice vis-à-vis choral experience. Through many hours of

deliberation, conversation, and shared effort, I feel grateful to have formed a creative trust that allows for an ever-evolving community-oriented artistic practice. It has been critical to demonstrate how the new interrelates with the old and how the creative practice does not aim to challenge but to foster the inherited value systems and feeling of faith. In every site globally, a different set of circumstances and different confluence of people result in new conversations and processes that help to create a sense of continuity while sustaining the traditional value systems. It is this global engagement, and local engagements with global diversity that have shaped how I think of myself, how I receive knowledge, relate to Ismaili community aspirations, and how my practice ebbs and flows through a choral horizon.

Ismaili community leaders and elders acknowledge the need for cultural revitalization for youth. When I hear from an elder, “thank you for your devotional songs, I remembered my Lord,” or “what you young people have achieved is already so much more than what we achieved in our lifetimes,” my heart is full. When I hear that the newly shaped traditions and musical forms offered solace to an ailing family member or when a youth shares how their Ismaili and Canadian identities find congruence through the practice, I am humbled. When community leaders encourage respectful revitalization that carries the power to move the youth, I feel grateful. I feel extremely fortunate to be an instrument of this musical and communal uplift. Alumni of the Ismaili choirs, some of whom have studied choral music at advanced levels outside the community, have taken up leadership positions in the community, leading children’s and youth choirs, running youth choral workshops across the country, and composing their own songs with international reach. I have been invited to lead Ismaili youth vocal co-creation workshops, focusing on identity and pluralism around the world, to provide cross-cultural religious education teacher training and to share my culturally integrative work with Ismaili communities globally. That my interpretive creative pathway could be seen as beneficial to the community whose funds of knowledge ground my practice, tells me something about the practice resonates.

This communally oriented vocal arts practice has provided me with models to continue sharing and reworking, composing new music, and developing more collaborative activities for young people to co-create their own music, regardless of their musical background. Integrating traditional musical forms like Hindustani raga or Afghan poetic traditions with popular music and choral textures, and scaffolding learning opportunities to create, co-compose, and develop

new repertoire, is an ongoing educational goal. Creating opportunities for young people to receive knowledge through a communal aesthetic, musical, creative lens, is a powerful tool that I believe will support Ismaili Muslim youth to explore the horizons of possibility for integrative belonging. This reclamation of unitive practices that support integrative making is my effort, my focus, and my labour. My primary aim for this dissertation is to share an illustrative example of cultural making; my secondary aim is to invite you to collaborate, replenish, add knowledge and share resources to continue this conversation. I recognize that every situation will be different, so I hope this dissertation will bring a new, colourful thread to an already rich scholarship and practice.

As member of a global Ismaili *jamat* (community), I have had many informal conversations about experiences with these kinds of integrative vocal arts practices. I have spoken with people from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Syria, East Africa, South Asia and beyond for whom singing traditional recitations in vocal harmony has resonated positively. Youth have shared anecdotes of their experiences, reflections on process, and stories of their own musical and spiritual journeys. I would often hear their stories in passing at congregational gatherings, at mealtimes during a youth retreat, on a subway or other random meetings. I grasped that there was a mechanism at play in this musical co-construction that generated coherence and amplification of spiritual feelings. A subtle yet profound connection was made. I have spoken with people informally and gathered anecdotes. Together with the embodied knowledge I carry, I have come to feel and hear how being open to such an integrative practice with devotional traditions can impact a sense of belonging and relationship with faith. While I have heard the stories and feel it within myself, I have not studied the phenomenon. Thus, the focus of this dissertation is to systematically examine narrative experiences of my research subjects and to present the findings in a documented form that can be shared more widely.

This study is both an honour and deep responsibility. The study, as my life has been, is motivated by sacred-social inquiry. The communitarian spirit upheld in both Ismaili and choral educational experiences permeates my research. I am part of the communities that inform my being, yet I am also an individual. I do not represent the communities, though I believe that I am responsible to them. As an insider in in the Ismaili community, and differently an insider in the professional choral community, I recognize that I have a dual responsibility. Should I wish to challenge, I seek to do so within a spirit of respect for what the communities have gifted to me and for what

they see as important to them. My professional training in Western music, a source of happiness, joy, friendship, and love, comes together with my Ismaili communal formation, where music was a source of creative agency, community participation, friendship, joy, and deepening of the spirit. I am the contact zone of these experiences. Being at the nexus becomes a research challenge because I cannot separate an Ismaili self from a choral self, nor an individual from a communal self. Experiences reside within me as life giving organs within organs of and within each other. The experiences are complementary and co-habiting. They are inter-dependent, felt in the gut, vibrating at frequencies that bring out my soul's love and devotion to a faith and to the world. Holding both these experiences and many others that I do not discuss or of which I am not even aware, means that separating them objectively is a challenge. The best I can do is to use my limited rational analytical faculties to pull out threads that I put under a musical research microscope to consider. By themselves and together, each thread contains many layers, spatial porosity, and generative malleability. They are the making of those before me, those here, and those after me, generated in cultural dialogue and a search for sacred unity, harmony, and truth.

The holistic, integrative, and cyclical nature of this study makes the linear and text-driven writing process challenging. One idea leads to another idea. One question leads to another. A connection made in one emerging thread leads to a new connection made to a thread already visited, ever expanding. The process is one of inquiry and return, sometimes returning to where I started, now with new insights and pathways for expansion and return. Choosing what threads to spin for this dissertation has been as much a part of the work as the research itself. Often, one thread became a texture in itself, unraveling and opening its inner threads to spaces yet to be known. The deeper I dive, the more conceptual and narrative thickness I find. Thus, this study is a journey of continuous exploration, reflexive self-examination, doubt, creativity, confusion, conversation, and offering.

I humbly invite the reader to enter with me in this research conversation. I offer this interpretive story of a particular time, place, moment, and conversation in research time. If this work does not create a sense of wonder, curiosity, and opening, then indeed, *InshAllah* (God willing), there is more work to be done. If it does, then *al-hamdulillah* (praise be to God), I look forward to hearing where it may lead readers; perhaps we can work together in a time to come.

1.8 Research questions

To guide the research process, I posed the following research questions:

Main Question: How might music play a role in fostering belonging for first and second-generation Ismaili Muslim living in Canada?

Sub Questions:

1. How does the experience of Ismaili devotional music play a role in fostering belonging?
2. How does the experience of choral music play a role in fostering belonging?
3. How does the experience of merging the traditions play a role in fostering belonging?

1.9 Organization of thesis

In Chapter 1, I set the stage for this music education research. I discussed the needs of Muslim youth seeking to reconcile their relationship with their inherited traditions within a Canadian context. I briefly introduced Islam, and who are the Khoja Ismailis to position my participant and myself. I highlighted the challenge of living in an environment where Islam and Muslims are positioned in negative terms. Against this backdrop I discussed the challenge music educators face to serve Muslim learners. I raised the concern that these efforts may inadvertently crystallize negative perceptions of Islam. I highlighted critical education scholarship that outlined the challenges of choral music as colonial vestiges. I introduced my community music practice and what I learned from community members that inspired my research questions.

In Chapter 2, I offer a framework for enlightened cultural encounters. I draw on post-colonial theories of translation and counterpoint together with diverse scholarly perspectives on integrating knowledge to shape a collective future. Additionally, I weave into this academic texture grounding Ismaili teachings that emphasize interconnection and a sacred responsibility to seek and use knowledge to better the quality of life of all peoples. I clarify the essential role of sound and music across the Muslim world and the pluralistic emergence of music and sound in diverse vernaculars. I focus on Ismaili devotional arts foregrounding *zikr* and *ginan*, two devotional forms at the centre of this research study.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the research methodologies: narrative inquiry and autoethnography. Indigenous methodologies speak to me with impact. I weave together Indigenous and Western

research methodologies to provide a larger qualitative research vision that honours the spiritually inspired, communally enacted, ceremonial and social community to which I belong. I introduce narrative research and outline methods of participant selection, data collection and analysis. I then introduce autoethnography and explain how this methodology served as a useful pathway to examine my lived experience. I outline methods of data collection, analysis and writing, and describe a cyclical and iterative process of reading emergent data, thinking, and interpreting what was revealed. I emphasize the importance of this research to benefit not only the educational landscape but also the Ismaili community whose traditions are centred.

In Chapter 4, I represent my emergent autoethnography. I first highlight the pluralistic cultural environment of Nairobi, Kenya, where I was raised and began to experience Ismaili traditions. The narrative then moves to Red Deer, Alberta, where I experienced a continuity of Ismaili cultural practices within a dominant Western context. I describe the centrality of music and sound that animated my lived experience.

In Chapter 5, I describe the development of my integrative choral practice. I discuss how my experiences of choral music, while providing spaces for friendship, musical growth, community, and spiritual uplift, were not integrative with Ismaili devotional music experiences that provided community, creative participation, musical growth, and sacred presence. I demonstrate how I began to bring elements of these traditions together, working with Ismaili youth to develop ideas further. I also lay out a composite summary of practices I engaged to introduce the larger Ismaili community to choral experience. I conclude this chapter with a reflection on my integrative process through the lens of a Mi’kmaw teaching from Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall, *etuaptmumk,* or two-eyed seeing (Marshall, A. et al., 2012).

In Chapter 6, I present the narrative of a second generation Ismaili youth born and raised in Canada. I illustrate her Ismaili experiences within pluralistic musical environments. I discuss the challenges she faces to reconcile her relationship with Ismaili traditions. I also discuss her early childhood choral experiences, which served as a reference point for our conversations about the impact of singing traditional Ismaili chants in vocal harmony. I share my participant’s eloquent stories of emergent unity, love, and ancestral sacred knowing that help her come to know the essence of the traditions and a harmonized truth of herself.

In Chapter 7, I document my insights surrounding translation and practices of revitalizing traditions across boundaries of time and space. This includes re-examining points of resonance and intersection between my autoethnography and my participant's narratives. Our narratives serve as resources for the findings.

In Chapter 8, the final chapter, I restate the research questions and with reference to the research findings and discussion, offer responses to the questions; I also submit implications for community music education and ideas for further research. Finally, I offer concluding remarks expressing a hopeful optimism that indeed, music, when engaged creatively and critically, can be a universal language for translation, interpretation, and cultural remaking for all.

Chapter 2

2 A framework for enlightened cultural encounters

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework for my research. The theoretical framework I draw on stems from the experience of negotiating lived realities as an Ismaili subject separated and divided in the political sphere and in the music education sphere. I came into this research with the idea that my Ismaili musical education was best represented through "devotional and ethical literature".[7] As a Canadian, my Western music education was best represented through classical music—more specifically sacred choral music. I articulate my relationship with these two musical systems through a colonizer–colonized encounter. I link choral music and its practices to the negating voice of the colonizer and Ismaili devotional music practices to the erased voice of the colonized. To understand my experiences and emerging practice of blending traditions, I use a post-colonial encounters framework to enter this research conversation. I first introduce an idea of post-colonial translation that gives negatively translated voices agency through working with the dominant system. Second, I introduce a Western musical metaphor, counterpoint, to enrich the discussion. From a music education point of view, I present scholarship that speaks of bringing together knowledge systems, and engaging methodologies that foster decolonizing endeavour.

2.1 Re-translation, a pathway for agency

Young (2003) suggested that testimonies of those made invisible through colonizing forces must be heard, not as objects of our gaze made static and unreal, "divorced from the whispers of actuality" (p. 8). In being made absent, or being "translated" by dominant forces, it is incumbent on the object of this translation to re-translate itself as it sees (and hears) itself. Freire (1970/1992) submits that oppressed individuals become more aware of their delimited situations through a process of "conscientization" (Freire, 1970/1992). Freire emphasizes the need to recognize the causes of oppression, take transformative action, create new situations, and harness this knowledge to pursue a fuller humanity (p. 29). Young (2003) echoed that negatively translated communities and peoples find agency not only in retranslating themselves (an

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[7] I take this phrasing from the title of the 2015 Institute of Ismaili Studies Secondary Curriculum.

important part of the process) but also retranslating the larger systems that negate them. These counter hegemonic translations must translate and shift the larger society in which it lives. Through this process of translation and retranslation the negated voice can be heard with agency.

Two or more points of view and practices can be brought together to benefit society. The goal is *not* to dismantle the system, bring down the house, nor pull out from underneath the foundations of the house. Our job as educators is to constructively and collaboratively produce knowledge to shift thinking processes. Smith (2013) argued, "decolonization… does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge" (p. 39). Hanohano (1999) agreed that the work to reclaim and form a knowledge weave is not meant to denigrate or place judgement on Western society. (p. 207). Hurtado (2003) explained that diverse constructions of theory and ways of being must *converse* with dominant systems, rather than engage in intellectual debates that only aim to deconstruct *status quo* paradigms. The process is not one of opposition for resistance's sake but one of working for the common good. The translators and the translated emerge in a cultural weave, producing new knowledge that shifts the larger systems. The Onondaga nation's symbolic Two Row Wampum—Gä•sweñta' ("Two Row Wampum—Gä•sweñta'," 2014) also outlines a philosophy of peaceful, friendly kinship that holds multiple knowledge systems with an ethic of care, regard, and reciprocal responsibility. The Wampum acknowledges how each of the Haudenosaunee and Dutch ways are represented by two purple rows running the length of a wampum belt. "In one row is a ship with our White Brothers' ways; in the other a canoe with our ways. Each will travel down the river of life side by side. Neither will attempt to steer the other's vessel" ("Two Row Wampum— Gä•sweñta'," 2014, para. 4). Albert Marshall, an Elder from the Mi'kmaw Nation, refers to a need for Indigenous peoples to develop "two-eyed seeing (*Etuaptmumk*)." Two-eyed seeing is the capacity

> to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing...and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all." (Guiding Principles, Two Eyed Seeing, n.d.).

According to Marshall, two-eyed seeing "is and has to be your guiding principles as to how one should live while you are here on this earth" (Marshall, A. et al., 2012, 00:41)—a way of being and knowing that offers humanistic instructions for thriving. Developing the capacity for two-

eyed seeing is important for combining the best of traditions for a better future. One standardized knowledge system can no longer sustain a global and plural society. Moving forward demands the collaborative development of "theories [that] emanate from what we live, breathe, and experience in our everyday lives, and it is only breaking boundaries, crossing borders . . . that [these theories] will finally be useful "(Hurtado, 2003, p. 216). In the context of Indigenous education, Durie (2005) articulated an interface approach recognizing the distinctiveness of different knowledge systems and generating new insights built from two systems that benefit both systems and where Indigenous worldviews can be matched with contemporary realities. A reciprocal give-and-take is possible when "you're coming from the strength of both traditions to bring it together, rather than [one] tradition opening allow[ing] the other in" (Lori-Anne Dolloff, personal communication, 2017).

Coming together in new cultural formations will not "dilute or de-emphasize . . . distinctive identities . . . What it requires is to ensure that one's individual identity is strong enough to engage confidently with those of other identities as we all walk together along the road to a better world" (Aga Khan, 2017). Xiaotong (2005, as cited by Banban, 2018) echoed "the notion of 'harmony in diversity'" in ethnic relations, pointing out that between the civilisations of nationalities it is necessary to "accept the beauty of your own civilisation, and accept the beauties of other civilisations; share all the beauties and create a harmonious world" (p. 2).

Looking across traditions, critically examining, and drawing together knowledge to create new cultural textures may benefit minority communities while also growing the shared human commons in which we live. The focus is not to simply "write back" as a negated voice but as a contributing voice through a dynamic interface, situating that voice in dialogue and conversation with the dominant systems. Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009) discussed how Indigenous knowledge is used "not merely as content, but to provide innovative ways of thinking and problem solving" (p. 55). The authors referred to a necessary dynamic interface between traditional local knowledge(s), non-local knowledge(s) and contemporary local knowledge(s). Drawing on Nakata's framework of cultural interface (p. 58) they conceived of a framework that explores

> a dialogical exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems, as well as situating the lifeworlds of contemporary Indigenous people in the dynamic space between

> ancestral and western realities. . . . [While] this space is highly political and contested, it also carries a strong reconciling dynamic. (Nakata, 2007, as cited in Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009, p. 58)

Harnessing two systems at the interface provides opportunities for innovation, creative dialogue, and creation of new knowledge (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009, p. 58).

Lee Maracle, Stó:lō elder, writer and activist, stressed that to meet at the dynamic interface and move forward, Indigenous peoples must be in the same room with policy makers to shape a shared future (personal communication, March 21, 2015). Maracle suggested that the knowledge inherent in diverse Indigenous experiences is a vital source of inspiration and catalytic cultural thread to better understand the world and know how to move forward. Maracle (2015) emphasized that "stories are cultural products, maps to social being. Western literature recycles its social structure by gate-keeping stories that provide a different map to an alternate social being. Stories that locate the displaced in their own social place are dismissed" (p. 74). Knowledge stemming from one epistemological root—a European root—that guides curriculum, policy, and dominant structures does not alone meet the needs of Indigenous societies. Maracle (2015) emphasized that Western institutions and society must recognize and affirm that knowledge does indeed exist in other people (p. 113), in their diverse histories, epistemologies, ways of knowing being and living. Porter (2010), in a conflict mediation context maintains that the parties involved in any conflict have the necessary knowledge to find solutions. This expands on Maracle's assertion that on a broader cultural level, epistemologies and knowledge systems that have helped civilizations develop across the world exist and must be in the same room to move forward. Indigenous peoples have the necessary knowledge to contribute to creative solutions for the future.

Bhabha (2017) has written about what is "global," proposing that what is global is not necessarily a reified exalted, predefined goal to which society aspires. What is global is only known as an emergent momentary outcome of thick, multi-layered diversities that intersect in a moment, place, and time. What is global is thus assembled and constituted in that moment. What constitutes the "global" changes based on who is in the room and who is not, what those in the room bring, and the kind of environment in which the voices interact. What is global also changes from moment to moment as different voices transition in and out of the texture. What is

global defies definition and evades crystallization, though it is known in an embodied experience. He explains that a 21st century, contemporary plural society constitutes multiple assemblages of thick, multi-layered identities and social formations. Who and how we are emerges from the interstitial spaces of our meeting(s) requiring an exploratory mindset.

What happens in an in-between moment, at *that* time, and *that* place, with *that* group of people, may reveal a new kind of understanding of who and how we are, and consequently reveal a new, shared pathway forward.

Hall (1997) suggested that meaning making is constituted *in the moment* of an event, not necessarily *after* the fact. Meaning is made in, by, through and with the people present in the encounter. It is *that* moment, *that* time, *that* place, and with *that* group of people through which understandings about who and how we are emerge. Meaning is known in the very act of engaging together. The process and the product contribute to and contain meaning as is experienced by those who participate in it. The participants in the encounter come to know emergent meanings—not as unified monolithic ones, but plural and diversely resonant. In those moments of communion, (Freire, 1970/1992) pointed out the possibility for transformation:

> We cannot legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot legitimately say that in the process of revolution, someone liberates someone else; nor yet that that someone liberates [themself], but rather that [people] in communion liberate each other. (p. 128)

When one looks at Muslim histories, one can see that Muslim thinkers followed this way of thinking. Translation and revitalizing traditions in new vernaculars are not new ideas. From the earliest days of Islam, Muslim peoples have intellectually engaged with translation and harmonious reinterpretation of knowledge in everyday life. They recognized the knowledge inherent in diverse cultures and nurtured a spirit of dialogue in which these cultural products could intersect and reverberate. Muslim societies critically engaged local and regional knowledge with new knowledge systems to refresh and animate traditions with agency in new contexts. Shared humanistic spiritual-ethical principles and common goals for sharing knowledge or betterment were animated through diverse vernaculars and cultural exchanges within them.

To confront the challenges of negative representations of Islam in the world today, Muslims need to harness the lessons of the past and discover in intimate collaboration resonant processes aligned with aspirations of a contemporary vernacular. The pursuit of knowledge, education, and intellectual inquiry has been integral to the ethical practice of faith. Knowledge in Islam is not acquired for its own sake. Knowledge is acquired to understand Divine mysteries and at the same time, to benefit the larger society. How one uses knowledge, exchanges knowledge, and applies knowledge for the betterment of others is as important or more important than simply acquiring knowledge for its own sake. Muslim civilizations have historically promoted cultural encounters and knowledge production rooted in intellectual inquiry, curiosity, openness, empathy, and dialogue. A cosmopolitan ethic led Muslim peoples to interact with diverse cultures and faiths across the globe (Karim, 2011). Muslims adopted and wove local cultural expressions, styles, and modes of delivery with their own to reshape identity, practice faith, and contribute knowledge in new contexts (Racy, 2003; Schimmel, 1975; Shiloah, 1995). Muslim civilizations fostered enabling environments for dynamic intersections and created atmospheres in which knowledge from diverse traditions intermingled. Muslim societies saw diversity as strength and acknowledged an interconnected humanity when interacting with others (Karim, 2011). In their travels across the globe, Muslim peoples adopted and reimagined vernacular traditions to convert, affirm, and transmit faith and to produce new knowledge. Catalytic intersections across Muslim cultures have served to benefit not only Muslims but also the larger societies in which they live. Muslims continue to revitalize their dynamic lived traditions within and in response to the socio-political realities of pluralist global conditions and cultures.

Within this conception, the hegemonic voice, and practices inherent to hegemony become part and parcel of an innovative solution. All voices in a cultural encounter contribute to new knowledge that can shift where power lies and how power is understood. Whether in the interaction of contemporary culture with larger Indigenous groups, diverse cultural groups, faith groups, or in smaller collectives, there are opportunities for emergent cultural products to manifest that may act contrapuntally to hegemonic knowledge. The hegemonic epistemologies and minoritized epistemologies naturally weave their coloured threads into tapestries of new knowledge that benefit all of society, but especially the minoritized communities from which the knowledge(s) have sprung. The process and the representational products look both inward and

outward. Emergent interconnected textures (hegemonic and minoritized together) stand up to and reshape monolithic, reified, and exalted hegemonic knowledge.

It is not the negated voices alone that write back in a counter hegemonic voice. It is the newly created tapestry of knowledge constituting the hegemonic and subverted voices (that does not deny their origins nor homogenize them) that will counter the dominant, hegemonic system. The new weave does not bring down the systems but shifts them, stretches them, and makes them more porous. The porosity on both sides creates hospitable spaces for respectful encounters to take place and new knowledge to emerge. Diverse voices learn with and from each other in an environment that encourages openness, curiosity, and a desire to work together towards a common goal. As an outcome of these interwoven enlightening encounters, the bordered, fear-ridden perceptions of the foreign other soften, fold, infold, unfold, and refold into a possibility for harmonious coexistence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Poly-vocal, thick, multi-layered voices weave together tapestries of knowledge that stand up to and reshape monolithic, reified, and exalted hegemonic knowledge. We come to know ourselves differently. These conceptual frames orient us again to the concept of two-eyed and multiple-eyed seeing that, as the Marshalls stress, is vital to cultivate.

2.1.1 Counterpoint

Counterpoint becomes a useful tool to reimagine the global and to frame knowledge that arises through interactions at a dynamic interface. I draw on Edward Said's (1994) use of counterpoint to discuss the possibility for invisible or negatively translated voices to produce knowledge in conversation with the dominant systems.

> In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. In the same way, I believe, we can read and interpret English novels, for example, whose engagement (usually suppressed for the most part) with the West Indies or India, say, is shaped and perhaps even determined by the specific history of colonization, resistance, and finally native nationalism. At this point alternative or new narratives emerge. (Said, 1994, p. 51).

Said reminds us that cultural representations associated with political realities that make absent, misrepresent and appropriate must also be challenged (E. Said, 1978). He uses the concept of counterpoint as a metaphor for writing back negated voices into colonial literature.

Counterpoint (as manifest in European musical classical music) describes musical textures wherein individual melodies, musical subjects, and fragments of melodies come together in a cross-weave to create harmony and movement. Each voice, strong in itself, weaves in counterpoint with other voices. In the truest spirit of the word (without musical rules and standards), harmony produced is not pre-planned nor pre-arranged. In the simplest form, different melodies and melodic fragments come together to reveal the texture. The texture that becomes known is a result of the sonic forces at hand, in a specific place, at a specific time, and for a specific purpose. The beauty of counterpoint in this sense is that emergent knowledge stems from a process of parallel musical layers sounding together at the same time. In a contrapuntal texture different voices are featured at different times but are never made absent. The dominant voice at any one moment is reliant on the supporting voices, but the supporting voices are never reliant on the dominant voice. Equity is established through an interplay that acknowledges the value and presence of each contrapuntal voice. The emergent effect is a cohesive harmonic knit. According to Said (1994), in order for the fullest version of imperial encounter between colonized and colonizer to be known, negated voices must write themselves back as subjects of their own stories:

> To read these major works of the imperial period retrospectively and heterophonically with other histories and traditions counterpointed against them, to read them in the light of decolonization, is neither to slight their great aesthetic force, nor to treat them reductively as imperialist propaganda. Still, it is a much graver mistake to read them stripped of their affiliations with the facts of power which informed and enabled them (p. 161).

Said explained that various themes play off one another in counterpoint to create polyphony and structure. In the same way, cultural artefacts must be read contrapuntally, “with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (Said, 1994, p. 51). The story

makers must become subjects of their own representations that can "sound back" in counterpoint to dominant discourses with different angles and truths.

Telling contrapuntal stories is essential to re-balance representation. In the counterpoint, when one voice claims itself and tells the story it chooses to tell, that story can lend a necessary counterpoint that redefines and calls into question the position of the dominant narrative—a kind of deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10). In the process, the contrapuntal voice is also redefined and called into question. Without the presence of the counterpoint, the contrapuntal voice is absent, and therefore, does not participate in the re-balancing of relations. When both are present in counterpoint amongst other lines of intersection, even the slightest shifts make room for the possibility for transformative change. The voice that has reclaimed itself can be made present, and as a counterpoint, can re-territorialize the space that it is reclaiming; therefore, it can speak with agency. At the same time, this voice itself can be de-territorialized. The dominant voice also can be de and re-territorialized, taking both to possibilities of new Deleuzian plateaus (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), beyond which neither may have imagined.

In the moment of re-translation, where and how do the colonized and colonizers intersect? Deleuze and Guatarri (1997) recognize the possibility of two concepts—not ideologies—as lines of immanence, coming together and taking new lines of flight. The possibility exists for immanent lines to form, un-form, and reform as they cross. It is in the intersections where the possibility lies to take new "lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997, p. 3) in a 21st century folding, unfolding, and refolding of the global in the local that manifests in continuous encounters amongst peoples. Offshoots of new assemblages that emerge from the intersections appear in a rhizome-like way. Rather than negotiating bordered ideologies and experiences rooted and traced through time with historic narratives, the rhizome assumes that at any time in history, even if there is a break or disruption, a possibility exists for new offshoots to grow.

The Aga Khan (2010) takes the concept of musical counterpoint further by applying it to social contexts:

> When we talk about diversity, we often use the metaphor of achieving social "harmony." But perhaps we might also employ an additional musical comparison . . . We might talk

> not just about the ideal of "harmony"—the sounding of a single chord—but also about "counterpoint." In counterpoint, each voice follows a separate musical line, but always as part of a single work of art, with a sense both of independence and belonging. (Aga Khan, 2010, "The future, the path ahead," para. 24)

Social counterpoint functions because of who is in the room, and who is not in the room. The larger society, and dominant cultural bodies, must recognize the "existence of knowledge in other people (Maracle, 2015, p. 113). Block (2008) has stated that hospitality is not merely a quality to be admired. "In western culture where individualism and security seem to be priorities, we need to be more thoughtful about how to bring the welcoming of strangers into our daily way of being together" (p. 145).

Gould (2013), drawing on Haraway's (2008) notion of a companion-able species suggested that:

> A queer pedagogy of companion-able species opens up spaces for co-creating a vital, always in process table, where all are guests and no one is host, a table where music education messmates commit to practices of regard and response, *respecere,* in ways that compel us to learn from and about each other in the context of humility and doubt" (p. 65).

Voices learn with and from each other in an environment of mutual respect that encourages openness, curiosity, and a desire to work together towards a common goal. Bhabha (1994) took this notion of an exploratory mindset further to define the idea of society. He argued that an exploratory mindset "takes you "beyond" yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present" (p. 4). Bhabha explained that these "in between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself (p. 2).

Plage et al. (2017) reiterated how everyday encounters with negotiating diversity (especially in moments of "friction") have the potential to be "atomic particles" (p. 21) of social relations—points of departure for cosmopolitan opportunities in which individuals mutually consider their positionality, mutually perform reflexive openness, and draw on ethical reasoning to negotiate difference. In a similar way, Hansen (2011) called for education processes in which students can

be reflexively loyal to what they know and reflexively open to the unknown. The process (and emergent representational products) looks inward and looks outward.

Polyphony as a concept is not concentrated in a Western notion of counterpoint. Cultures around the world have thrived on the polyphonic intersections of their lives. Counterpoint in Said's (1994) concept is a relatively new language construction to describe a musical idea in a Western context. The notion of polyphony and quodlibet, however, are older concepts. The lived experience of polyphony and quodlibet in medieval times were held in a spirit of cultural and knowledge exchange. Textures of culture emerged through braided knowledge and were used in common purpose towards a thriving society. These "quodlibet encounters" were expressions of dynamic cultural encounters in natural polyphony—a multi-eyed seeing. Shared spiritual and ethical orientations in vernaculars of plurality became part of a polyphony of existence, a kaleidoscopic co-existence that sought to better the world and one's personal conditions.

2.2 Grounding principles of Ismaili traditions

I knew for sure that we are really One,
And the sobriety of union restored the notion of separation
And my whole being was a tongue to speak,
An eye to see, an ear to hear, and a hand to seize.

—Ibn Al-Fārid (Schimmel, 1975)

Engaging the spiritual (*din*) and material (*dunya*) as inseparable aspects of life is integral to Ismaili way of life.

> *Din* is the spiritual relationship of willing submission of a reasoning creature to [their] Lord who creates, sustains and guides. For the truly discerning, the earthly life, *dunya*, is a gift to cherish inasmuch as it is a bridge to, and preparation for, the life to come. Otherwise it is an enticement, distracting [humankind] from service of God, which is the true purpose of life. Service of God is not only worship, but also service to humanity, and abiding by the duty of trust towards the rest of creation. Righteousness, says the Qur'an, is not only fulfilling one's religious obligations. Without social responsibility, religiosity is a show of conceit. Islam, is, therefore, both *din* and *dunya*, spirit and matter, distinct but linked, neither to be forsaken. (Aga Khan Development Network, n.d., para. 2)

The recognition, affirmation, reclamation, and enactment of an inextricable link between the spiritual (*din*) and the material (*dunya*) echoed in diverse Muslim and non-Muslim traditions are key to living a healthy and prosperous life. At the centre of this spiritual-ethical dimension is the concept of *tawhid* (oneness of God) that "serves as the founding principle that brings an overall harmony to the world, all the while appreciating the diversity of existence" (Dewji, 2018, p. 88).

> *Tawhid* is a conception whose reality enters into human life at many levels. Beyond the doctrinal and ideological planes, where the oneness of humanity is stressed, tawhid mediates one's personal relation to the Absolute, and the maintenance of harmony with the universe. It is a kind of ecology of the spirit that reconciles the apparent multiplicity of created things with the unity of existence. (Said and & Sharify-Funk, 2003, as cited by Dewji, 2018, p. 88)

This philosophical and intellectual orientation resonates across diverse traditions in my perspective. From an Aboriginal perspective, Sammel (2005) explained that

> the concept of spirituality for Aboriginal cultures is similar to that of many of the worlds' cultures, in that the spiritual infuses the person's entire existence and underpins how one relates to the world. Saskatchewan Aboriginal cultures acknowledge that a spiritual person cannot make sense of anything in isolation from their spiritual path, which is why the philosophy of interconnectedness cannot be taught without acknowledgment of the spirit. The philosophy of interconnectedness promotes the ongoing process of encouraging the individual to move towards experiencing connection to themselves, their family, their communities, societies, and to the earth. (p. 22)

I am reminded of the concept of *Ubuntu*, an African Indigenous philosophy that promotes friendliness, community, and social harmony as "the greatest good" (Tutu, 1999, p. 31). Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a central voice in the liberation of South Africans from apartheid, eloquently described *Ubuntu:*

> It speaks of the very essence of being human . . . you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. Who share what you have. It is to say, "my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong to a bundle of life. We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not, "I think therefore I

> am." It says rather: "I am human because I belong. I participate. I share." A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliate or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. (Tutu, 1999 p. 31)

Dorotheos of Gaza proposed a similar vision of humanity rooted in the centrality of God, as a great circle where God is at the centre, and humankind is on the periphery. In this model, if straight lines connecting the centre to the periphery were drawn, then it follows that to become closer to God would be to know one another, and to come closer to one another would be to know God. To know God is to know one another. To know one another is to know God. The Bhaghavad Gita also stated, "They live in wisdom who see themselves in all and all in them, whose love for the Lord of Love has consumed every selfish desire and sense craving tormenting the heart" (Easwaran, 1975/2020, p. 119). The Qur'an reminds us:

> O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from the twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. (The Qur'an Translation by M. Pickthall, n.d.)

The work of the hands, head, and heart to care for self, others, and creation, thus becomes a sacred labour of interconnected and unitive human responsibility. This foundational universal principle is lived out through values of cooperation, empathy, kindness, care, generosity, and kinship. Faith is action. Action constitutes profession and social contribution. Together, the spiritual and material worlds, inextricably linked, become part of a unitive quest for fulfillment and betterment. Through love for God and for creation, the seeker carries an inspirational spiritual substance that orients the heart to seek to understand the mysteries of creation and to acquire knowledge to positively impact society. Islam provides great impetus for the human pursuit of knowledge. The first verse that descended on the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) was *Iqra*, meaning "read," opening the door to read, write, and ponder. The Qur'an urges the mankind to think, ponder, reflect and acquire knowledge that would bring them closer to God and his creation (Wani & Maqbool, 2012). The pursuit of knowledge comprises a

complementary quest for gnostic (spiritual) wisdom and worldly knowledge to be able to live a full life of service.

2.2.1 Remembrance and inner dimensions of life

> The inner assimilation of this [spiritual] substance [of the prophetic perfection], rather than the merely formal imitation of the words and deeds, is the goal of every spiritually inclined Muslim. (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p. 11)

Attention to inner dimensions of life and faith universal across Muslim traditions are emphasized in the esoteric practices of Sufis and Ismailis. Awakening an inner dimension of the soul, a dimension that facilitates contemplation on the Divine, elevates humankind to understand oneself, and reconstituting forgotten knowledge of one's spiritual origin is integral. Virani (2005) uses Ismaili Indic esoteric literature to explain that according to the Ismaili belief, a pre-eternal esoteric or gnostic wisdom (*jnan*) exists, imbued in our heart's abode. Though the soul forgets its lofty status, from the deepest recesses is heard a "Symphony of Gnosis" (a celestial music) making known a deep nostalgia for its lost origin, for which the soul begins its sojourn to seek.

Shah-Kazemi (2006) commented on a sermon by Imam Ali relating to the question of whether a kind vision of God is possible for the human being:

> Praise be to God who is present in the hidden inwardness of things, and whose being is indicated by the signs of manifest things. The eye of the onlooker cannot behold Him, so the eye of one who does not see Him cannot deny His reality, nor can the heart of one who affirms his reality see him. He is utmost in elevation, so no thing is more elevated than He; but He is also close in His nearness, so no thing is closer than He . . . God has not made the intellects capable of defining His qualities, but He has also not veiled the intellects from the essential knowledge of Him. (p. 149)

Shah-Kazemi (2006) explained, "on the one hand, that human intellects cannot define and *a fortiori* know the divine attributes; and on the other, that 'essential knowledge' of Him is attainable" (p. 149). Shah-Kazemi further suggested that this contradiction can be resolved by reflecting on "another key aspect of zikr*,* that of recollection, remembrance, recognition" (p. 149). Through zikr*,* one reconstitutes (re-collects) fragments of knowledge that already exist but that are forgotten. One *recognizes* (or re-cognizes) that which one has already known, and for

this reason can know it “once again.” Shah-Kazemi (2006) cautioned that this does not mean that knowledge is composed of parts that must be compiled together or put back into a whole because knowledge in that sense would be of an empirical order. Rather, remembrance is more like an awakening—an illumination—“which dawns as the clouds of congenital forgetfulness are dispelled” (p. 149). Re-cognizing and coming to know again what is forgotten demands experiential knowledge beyond the rational and empirical. Shah-Kazemi pointed to an intellectual knowledge, knowledge of a spiritual substance that is beyond reason, one that is felt, and re-membered in the heart of hearts.

The True Guide proclaims:
Upon arrival I take my seat within the heart's abode
And all seventy-two chambers resound with divine music.
The darkness of night is dispelled by the vigil
As the Symphony of Gnosis begins
(From “Saloko moto” v. 105 as cited in Virani, 2005, p. 503)

Virani (2005) eloquently used the *ginan* texts to relate how the soul falls into a “profound slumber of ignorance” (p. 505) due to material temptations and becoming bewildered by their entrancing surroundings.

O dear creature, at the time when you dwelt in the womb,
You were imbued with gnosis . . .
(“Hojīre parānī jāre tum gīrabhā thān vasanto,” cited in Virani, 2005, p. 505)

Again, the ginan encourages the believers to recognize (re-cognize) that which is forgotten, that gnosis that already imbues the heart, but that the rational mind does not comprehend. Remembering this true nature, embodying it, expressing it, and finding environments to amplify it all become part of the labour of love and life.

2.2.2 Role of music and sound arts

Culture, including music and sound, are pathways for the soul’s remembrance. Cultural activities including the arts, sound, and music are interwoven into a braid of life including education, health, economic sustainability, climate, and more. Remembrance inspires action, and the making of culture and life in turn inspires remembrance. Embracing the nucleus of an ineffable

mystical knowledge along with dedication to learning from the best of knowledge wherever it is found forms an integrative effort to love, remember, and act towards common good.

> At the heart of every religion there is a vision. But a religion is both more and less than the vision, which it contains. It is more because, if we think of a vision as a conscious process— a cognitive or imaginative activity—it is clear that members of a religious culture do not lead their daily lives by seeking somehow to re-enact this vision in their minds. The vision, rather, conditions their interpretation of the world and their life with another. Their habits of thought, emotion, and speech, the way they perceive and relate to one another, the judgments of value they habitually make, the ideals to which they give common consent—all these factors show a nucleus of convictions about the world, about what counts as ultimately real and important, worth one's wholehearted commitment and striving. It is this nucleus of principles that I call a "vision." It will be clear, then, that there is no means of access to these core values other than the culture which shapes the life of a given people. The vision is implicit in the culture. It is not spelt out in stated principles at first, and then "translated," as it were, into social rules and cultural practices. It is, from the very first, embodied in a way of life. (Esmail, 1998, p. 1)

Sound art, music, devotional and epic poetry have long been an intimate part of life for Muslim communities across the world. Through beautiful recitation, the ear of the heart and listening soul can be awakened and remembrance of the soul's lofty status re-cognized.
Otterbeck and Ackfeldt (2012) explained that music permeated in "Muslim societies throughout history not necessarily because the societies were or are Muslim, but because they are human" (p. 227). Muslims have "long embraced musical language as an elemental expression of human spirituality" (Aga Khan, 2019, para. 4). Listening to music, practicing music, learning music, sharing music, performing music, exploring new musical ideas, and developing revitalized musical expression is part and parcel of human expression in Muslim cultures. Music and sound art are culturally integrative sources for spiritual enlightenment, moral inspiration, and social cohesion (Prince Amyn Aga Khan, 2019). Music and sound in Muslim experience is diverse, generative, and dynamically engaged with identity, representation, social responsiveness, piety, and everyday life. Music and sound are shaped by everyday interactions between peoples,

knowledge, ideas, activations, responses to the world; sound and music, in turn, shape those that interact with it.

> Islamic theological discourse (with its many diverging views) is an important frame of reference for artists, thinkers, and politicians. It is not a script for human action. On the contrary, this discourse is negotiated with and, at times, actively resisted or contested. (Otterbeck & Ackfeldt, 2012, p. 228)

Misreading musical cultures as only theologically shaped does not acknowledge the wide-ranging plurality of music. These forms range from regionally specific lullabies, narrative and epic songs, work songs, and wedding songs to the composed masterpieces of court musicians. These forms also comprise expressions of supplication, submission, and praise in a variety of vernacular and integrative sonic and musical modalities. The musical and sonic cultures and forms date

> further back than Islam as a historical phenomenon, although developments of styles and instruments and the spread of these have followed as logical consequences of the political dominance (at times, imperial power) of some Muslim dynasties and their far-reaching trade networks. (Otterbeck & Ackfeldt, 2012, p. 227)

Sound and musical arts flourished in a wide variety of forms within many Islamic societies. Complex histories, multi-layered cultural exchanges, and musical worlds have always been part of a Muslim way of life (Karim & Eid, 2012), regardless of its vernacular or emergent cultural expression. Historically, encounters and exchanges amongst peoples of Christian and Jewish traditions in pre-Islamic Byzantine cultures also became a part of Muslim civilizations (Shiloah, 1995). In the period between the 10th and the 13th centuries called the Golden Age of al-Andalus, for example, multiethnic culture also flourished and manifested in all forms of literature, poetry, philosophy, historiography, music, and sciences. Muslims, Jews, and Christians participated "in *majlîs*, symposia of intellectuals and poets" who conversed in a shared cultural atmosphere of *suhba*, the "amorous friendship" (Gorgoni, 2014, para. 1). As Islam travelled across the Middle East, the Balkans, the Silk Road into China, Central Asia, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, various parts of Africa, Spain, and the Western world, friendship (and reciprocal respect) amongst peoples in diverse vernaculars shaped life, everyday piety, and

musical soundscapes. Sound and music were as much about identity as they were about human relations, exchange, dialogue, and kinship. The making of sound and musical cultures in these societies impacted everyone and was shared amongst all peoples, regardless of their religious affiliations or cultural stories. Culturally engaged sonic and musical expression was also integral to sharing traditional teachings and oral transmission of the faith (Asani, 2001; Racy, 2003; Schimmel, 1975; Shiloah, 1995). Thus, these rich and emergent musical encounters also influenced the style, mode of delivery, emotional colour, and aesthetic language of even praise, devotion, supplication and piety: Qur'an recitation, the *Azan* (call to prayer of the *muezzin*), mystical poetry, songs of praise, remembrance (zikr), expressions of adoration and supplication (*qasida, madoh, ginan, geet, ilahi, nasheed, naat and hamd*) in a variety of devotional and social Muslim settings appear in diverse languages.

The cultural and musical fabric of Muslim society was congruent across public and private, as well as social and congregational spaces. In pluralistic vernaculars, the sounds of faith and private life were mirrored in the sounds of cultural and public life. The multiple dimensions of life echoed with the emergence of new, hybrid sounds through the emotional colours and sonic forms of the vernacular. A consistency of sonic language shaped an integrative hearing in which people lived their lives. Fahmy (2013) explained the importance of hearing, music, sound, and soundscapes in the elaboration of modernity; the depth and complexity of historical narratives formed a one-dimensional view that produced "soundproof, devocalized narratives" (p. 306). Janson (2016) discussed how Islam functions in dialectic interactions within local contexts, giving particular attention to highly dynamic processes of intersection, assemblage, and syncretism that blur the lines of division and mediate conversation. Kellogg (2015) described the Dutch Syriac community who, with double vocal agency, resound internally in and externally to the human body, which shapes and is shaped by the sensorium. She underscored a nexus of relation between the human body and sensory culture and a blurring of the "secular" boundaries in a complex, inconsistent, heterogeneous dialectic between liturgical (ritual sound) and politics (secular sensory cultures). Eisenberg (2013) looked at a Muslim-Swahili context to explain how Islamic vocalizations (communitarian privacy) resound in public spheres (Islamic soundscapes) that transform heterogeneous Kenyan public spaces to *de facto* private spaces (sanctuaries) and enact their place (citizenship) in society. Similarly, the resounding of Christian church bells turns public spaces to *de facto* sanctuaries. Hirschkind (2004) wrote about forms of dialogue that

navigate conceptual and sensory divides and that separate the pre-modern, pious Muslim listening subject from the modern, political ear in Egypt. Van Nieuwkerk (2008) provided a contextual analysis of art as a boundary marker between different cultures, subcultures, ethnicities, and entertainment in the public sphere to describe the confluence of secularism and its nationalist projects of Islamization, pious art, and globalization. Integrative sonic and musical utterances that took place in such complex cultural contexts provided aesthetic bridges that sustained society and enabled subjects to thrive.

2.2.3 Ismaili devotional arts

જેમ ફુલુ માંહે વાસ	Jem fulu maa(n) he vaas	As is the fragrance in a flower
તીયુ મોરો સાંહીઆ	Tiyu moro saa(n)hiaa	My lord is present in you.
તમેં ગાફલ દૂર મ દેખો	Tame gaafal dur ma dekho	You foolish ones, do not look further
એક જીઓજી જીરેભાઇરે	Ek jioji jire bhaire	The One lives (in you) my brothers (kin)

(“Eji Sab ghat sami maro bharapur bethaa,” Pir Sadardin)

Devotional literature and sound arts are integral in the lives of Ismailis globally. In Syria, Iran, Western China, across Central Asia, South Asia, Africa, the diaspora, and beyond, these aesthetic reminders offer pathways for transmitting affective, ethical, and intellectual awareness to support a spiritually oriented human development. The Institute of Ismaili Studies “Secondary Curriculum” (2015) frames Ismaili and larger Muslim vocal traditions as “Muslim devotional and ethical” (p. 1) oral literature. Oral literatures—poems, stories, and narratives—offered composed memories passed down over time by oral transmission. In the period pre-dating Islam, this kind of composition was common. Poets wrote poems and recited them orally. Some used skilled “reciters” who learned and memorized the poems and presented them in a variety of public occasions. Orality and memory played a large role in transmission. It is said that the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad orally by the angel Gabriel and only expressed in written form years after the Prophet’s death. Teachings of the prophet and the Shia Imams (*Hadith*) circulated orally before being written down by scholars. It was not unusual for people to

know these poems and stories by heart and to memorize the entirely. Even today, traditions are passed down orally around the world.

Oral literatures are considered a part of *adab* traditions, meaning that the devotional literature is of moral and ethical significance. Adab refers to a set of values: notions of culture and civilization, manners, social behaviours, refined arts, calligraphy, public speaking, and literary achievement. Certain poets and storytellers specialized in writing that brought forth these ideals. They wanted to teach readers how to behave and develop positive character while they trained readers in cultivating taste and judgement. This teaching was achieved in different ways, including through humour, satire, and common sense. Adab had a moral and ethical significance, getting its message across through eloquence and the beauty of refined language (Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015).

This ideal of adab inspired some of the greatest works of Islamic literature. Muslim literature first appeared in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, and used pre-existing forms before the coming of Islam. As Islam spread, the messages of the Qur'an and ideal of adab found expression through local vernaculars and encounters with the many cultures with which it came into contact. Expressions include *qasida, madoh, ilahi, nasheed, ghazal, ginan, zikr* and more. In Muslim literature, genres may include love poetry and poetic "expressions of love between two persons, or love of the Prophet and of the Imams, or even love of *Allah*" (Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015, p. 5). Tales comprise another genre that includes fables, anecdotes, and legends. Muslim poets have turned to epic poetry such as *marthiya,* a poem of grief, to express personal and community sorrow (p. 6). Another important genre includes poems of praise, especially popular among poets who depended on the patronage of courts. Poems of praise were also written to celebrate saints and the Imams. *Madoh* is a praise poem that still flourishes today in the Tajik region. G*inan* (written in a variety of languages including Gujarati, Punjabi, and Urdu and preserved often in Khojki script) represent genres that are central to the worship of Ismailis with roots in South Asia. These genres include allegories and stories and can also contain metaphor, simile, and symbolism to convey the message. One of the oldest poetic forms, called the *qasida*, sometimes translated as an "ode," was a rhyming poem used on a variety of themes. Poets showed their skill and love of language by inventively applying rhyme and meter in the qasida forms, which were often lengthy and epic orations. Muslim poets adapted early forms of qasida that told epic stories of lament, heroism, and praise into forms expressing deeply religious

themes, praise of the Prophet and the Imams, and Sufi mystical subjects (p. 7). Turkish, Farsi, and Urdu writers wrote in the qasida form. The *ghazal* or “love poem,” another old poetic form developed in the first century of Islam by Arabic speaking poets, is part of Muslim adab literature. *Ghazal* are often much shorter than qasida. “The greatest masters of the ghazal are mostly Persian, and in the works of such poets as Hafiz or Rumi, the form reached its highest expression” (p. 8). Written mostly in Persian, the form creates certain moods, atmospheres, and combinations of emotions. Oral literature also includes forms of prose that can include the Qur’an, prose literature, hadith, and prose representing exposition and accounts. Historians wrote prose describing important events or about royal audiences. *Safarnama* of Sayyidina Nasir-I Khusraw is an example of prose written by a Muslim historian and philosopher. Often, expository prose served as memoires, autobiographies, and narrative retelling of life stories and experiences (p. 9).

Over the centuries, the range and depth of Muslim literature, in a wide variety of languages and sonic colours, aimed to relate precious human experiences and emotions, often congruent in a certain time and place. It is evident that Muslim literatures existed in diverse expressions and varied from region to region within local cultures. It is important to read and hear this literature keeping their context and times in mind. The literatures and sonic expressions of Persia, Arabia, Tajikistan, China, and India are not the same, but they share a common spiritual heritage. Muslim literature “teaches and encourages thought, which has a moral purpose, and which seeks, above all, to uplift and inspire” (p. 9). The ginan and zikr of the South Asia, centred in this study, are part of this noble adab oral literature.

2.2.3.1 Ginan

In the Indic Ismaili tradition, ginans serve to enhance the spiritual and ethical quest. Virani (2005) explains that the term ginan translated as gnosis, ginan, “a usage apparently unique to the Ismailis, refers also to a corpus of esoteric literature revered by them” (p. 503). *Ginans,* a corpus of over 800 hymn-like poems, emerged in the medieval Indian subcontinent as an outcome of the process of conversion to Ismailism. For many, “the *ginans* are the focus of intense veneration and embodiment of the faith” (Asani, 1992, p. 103), a sonic and aurally transmitted medium to learn key concepts and gain esoteric understanding of the faith. The word *ginan* derives from the Sanskrit *jnāna* and can be translated as knowledge, wisdom, or gnosis (Gillani, 2012). Virani

(2005) further explained Nasr's conception that "'the term *jnāna* implies principal knowledge which leads to deliverance and is related etymologically to gnosis" (p. 504). This thinking suggests that the wisdom of the ginan (and ginan as wisdom) can dwell in the being as "embodied intelligence" (Kossak, 2009, p. 14).

The ginans also utilized vernacular poetic forms and musical modes indigenous to and emergent in a pluralistic Indic cultural ecosystem. Authorship of the *ginans* is contested, though commonly attributed to Ismaili *dā'īs* and *pirs*— "preacher-saints" (Asani, 1992, p. 101), "revered teachers and guides" (Kassam, 1992, p. 2) who arrived from Iran to the Indian subcontinent between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. Poetry became the primary mode through which pirs provided guidance on doctrinal, ethical, and mystical themes. "The poetic and musical nature of the ginans*,* their emotional content (*bhava*), and their religious performance formed a continuum in the medieval Indic universe of devotional songs such as *bhajan, shabad, na'at, kirtan*" (Kassam, 2013). Like recitations of Qur'an and mystical poetry, the aesthetic quality of the ginan and its poly-vocal presentation can have a deep emotional and sensual affect on the listener. Its expressions emerged in everyday and courtly musical forms for which improvisation and creativity in performance were expected.

A continuum of cultural expressions also occurs within the *sounds* of ginans. The ginans weave aspects of global and local Sufi traditions, references to the Qur'an, adoption of bhajan and multivalent sacred Indic traditions, Ismaili esoteric philosophy and ethical teachings, folkloric music, and Indic classical forms in harmony with region. The emergent ginan formations become integrative soundscapes that resonate across traditions and within the sensorium of the Ismaili imagination. The sonic materials of life are the sonic materials of faith. They are inseparable as are *din* and *dunya.* The pointers to sacred presence and remembrance are consistent as people traverse in and out of personal and public space. The public ambience is shared while the private practices and identities can thrive. The sensory conditions create a fluid and consolidative cosmopolitan environment for being, doing and making.

2.2.3.2 Zikr

Zikr is a philosophical, spiritual concept in the as much as it is a defined form and/or a broad description of ceremonies of piety that foster closeness to the Divine and kinship amongst those

gathered. There are many verses of the Qur'an that call the believer to recite zik*r* with remembrance of Allah:

> O you who believe! Remember Allāh with much remembrance (Al-Ahzab 33:41).

> Those who remember Allāh (always, and in prayers) standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying): "Our Lord! You have not created (all) this without purpose, glory to You! (Exalted be You above all that they associate with You as partners). Give us salvation from the torment of the Fire." (Al Imran 3:191)

Even one moment of remembrance during the day becomes a blessing. Glorifying Allah's name "in houses (mosques), which Allāh has ordered to be raised (to be cleaned, and to be honoured) . . . in the mornings and in the afternoons or the evenings" (An-Nur 24:36) is encouraged as much it is in daily life for "whom neither trade nor sale diverts them from the Remembrance of Allāh (with heart and tongue)" (An-Nur 24:37) along with other religious duties. It is through the remembrance of Allah where hearts find rest (Ra'd 13:28) and peace. If one's practice can be such that trade, commerce, and activities of everyday life do not interrupt the zikr, then life itself becomes remembrance (zikr) through which one hears and sees the face of Allah in all creation, wherever they turn. As the poet Rumi eloquently offers:

Your fragrance fills the meadow.
Your mouth appears in a red anemone,
But when those reminders leave,
My own lips open,
And in whatever I say, I hear you

—"Birdsong," translation, Coleman Barks, 1993

Zikr constitutes a sequence of prayers, sung poetry, movement, and collective repetition of affirmations of Muslim faith and names of God: *La Illaha illallah* (There is no God but God); *Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful); *Ya Allah* (Oh Allah); *Hu Allah*; *Muhammad-ur Rasulullah* (Muhammad is the messenger of Allah). The words are repeated and recited using breath and sound to preserve and render present divine knowledge in the heart. Often the initiates recite the zikr to provide background for sung poetry

recitations and vocal improvisations by assigned reciters. The sonic becomes physically embodied through a range of movements from unified synchronizations to individual expressions.

Like diverse expressions of culture across the Muslim word, zikr is animated in a plurality of ways and passed down through different modes of oral transmission. Zikr is produced through diverse cultural modes, expressions, styles, textures, and combinations. There is no single prescribed way to perform or experience *zikr* across the Muslim interpretations or diversities of cultural life. The most common forms are Sufi expressions from Turkey, Iran, and Syria. However, there are many iterations of *zikr* in the many musical cultures in which seekers live around the world. From Gnawa in Morocco to Qawwali in Pakistan, from Uyghur cultures in Western China to the cultures of Mali, Bosnia, Russia, and Central Asia, the *zikr* tradition animates life and culture in a variety of ways. Gnawa traditions, for example, comprise musical events, performances, practices of fraternal kinship, and therapeutic rituals that mix the secular with the sacred. These soundscapes may combine ancestral African practices, Arab-Muslim influences, and native Berber cultural performances. The zikr traditions are, like ginan and other forms of devotional and ethical literature, *integrative* in local cultures, poetic traditions, languages, musical arts, and vernacular practices. These consolidated practices create a congruent listening experience and spiritual ambience congruent with larger cultural soundscapes.

In Indic Ismaili cultures, the “melodies” of the zikr, more commonly known as *tasbih*, seem to be Indic adaptations of Arabic and Persian Sufi recitation styles with modifications that suit Indic linguistic expression. For example, while in one part of the world the text *Ya Rahman, Ya Rahim* may be recited in a spoken sung style, in the Indic context, the text may be vocalized in a melodic style pronounced *Ya Rahmanuh Ya Rahimuh*. The prayer *Ya Ali Tu(n) Rahem Kar, Ya Mawla Tu(n) Fazal Kar* is sung in an Indic form pronounced *Ya Ali Tu(n) Rahemuh Kar, Ya Mawla Tu(n) Fazaluh Kar*, with additional notes on the unaccented *uh,* as Figure 1 illustrates:

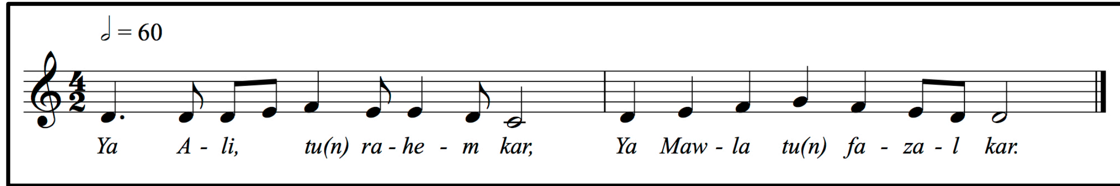

Figure 1. “Ya Ali Tu(n) Rahem Kar” Indic form[8]

Additionally vernacular language formations saw the shift of pronunciations of words like *dhikr* or dha*hir* in Arabic to *zikr* and *zahir* in Indic forms. I share these examples to illustrate how forms and expressions of traditions shifted based on the cultures in which they were immersed.

Tasbih or *zikr* in the congregational Ismaili context are generally recited in unison without instruments. Sometimes pastoral elders, master musicians or a chorus of reciters lead the zikr chosen for the occasion, depending on the context. *Zikr* can be taken up as quiet personal prayer or performed congregationally and in assembly. The devotional recitations are repeated for a set number of repetitions, with intentions of personal piety, praise, supplication, and submission. The *zikr tasbih* are invoked without accompaniment alongside *ginan, qasida, and nasheed* in prayer settings; in *mehfil* concerts performed by musical elders, knowledge keepers, and community participants, the devotional forms are often accompanied with traditional and modern instruments. In social settings, musicians, composers, and singers also compose new melodies for the *zikr tasbih* that sometimes find their way into everyday listening cultures through CDs, YouTube, and other forms of transmission. The making of this aesthetic, social, communal soundscape in new contexts is an important grounding for this research study.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodologies of narrative inquiry and autoethnography through which I collected, analyzed, and presented data for this study.

[8] In this document, the author has written all the music transcriptions of the zikr and ginan.

Chapter 3

3 Methodologies

> I come from generations of storytellers who told tales in words, painted them in art, and sang and danced them in rhythm with the seasons and the sun and the stars. The people were one with the stories and the stories one with the people, and every tale both embodied and sustained the whole. (Kwaymullina, 2014, p. 1)

I resonate with Kwaymullina's (2014) description of Palyku peoples, whom she eloquently described as

> diverse peoples with diverse perspectives. We share much in common, but we are also different individuals from different nations, and our cultures are and always have been pluralist in nature. As such, we do not hold a single, static view between us all. (Kwaymullina, 2014, p. 1)

I understand this same truth for Muslim peoples globally. Within the plurality of Muslim experiences, I carry stories and interpretations of stories from Shia Ismaili Muslim traditions, cultures, and activities—more specifically, Khoja experiences. While collective ancestral and vernacular lived experiences of the people from whom I come shape my perspectives, I speak only for myself. I was brought into the faith, the stories, the narratives, and pluralistic modern lived experiences since birth—raised in a household (and by my extended families) grounded for generations in the rich community-oriented cultural, civilizational, and spiritual ways of knowing and being. I was also raised in a family structure, and ways of knowing and being in which we blended worldly knowledge, education, social, cultural, and devotional activities. I was taught that our lives are enactments and animations of faith and devotion, upholding our sacred promise to care for life, each other and the earth. Generations of both maternal and paternal ancestors have given a life of service to the community and to the larger societies in which they lived. We say that today, we are beneficiaries of their service. Their efforts to sustain traditions of love, service, and humanity over centuries enable us to hear that love and translate it into our times. I have been a fortunate beneficiary of their dedicated *seva* (voluntary service) and been given profound opportunities to also serve the community and societies in which I live. An Ismaili Muslim fragrance infuses all my knowing, making, doing, feeling, and thinking in the world.

Multivalent communitarian, civic, ritual, spiritual, aesthetic, musical, immersive, and participatory ways of life shape my worldview. This Ismaili Muslim imaginary informs my inquiry, my quest, my methods, my hearing, and my interpretation in a constant search to weave resonant theories and concepts, and to articulate an Ismaili humanistic vision with far-reaching implications. My journey has been about learning to translate a sacred consciousness in a world that delimits and negates Islam. While secular and modern academic, cultural, and educational spaces force me to leave parts of myself outside the door, my embodied Ismaili Muslim disposition that reverberates on unity, peace, and harmony, will always be with me, seen or not, known or not, heard or not. I become the threshold and the door, the container, and the story, the storyteller, and interpreter, vibrating with an inner life of harmony. My research methodology is part and parcel of my interpretive quest in life.

I use two research methodologies to undertake this study. First, I use autoethnography to understand my own narratives of identity and practice. Second, I use narrative research methods to conduct conversational interviews with Jenna.[9] Interestingly, the word "narrative" has a shared root with the Indic Ismaili ginan*.* They both share a possible root origin: *gno* or *jnan*/*gnan* meaning to know, knowledge, getting to know, noble, and gnosis. The pursuit of knowledge and the role of the intellect in living Ismaili Muslim traditions finds an epistemic resonance with the aim of narrative to come to know. Narratives, stories, parables, and autobiographies are also common forms of the transmission of knowledge within Muslim cultures and beyond. For these reasons, I felt that narrative methodologies were well suited for this study.

3.1 Participant selection—a relational quality

Kovach (2021) stressed how important it is within Indigenous methodologies that a pre-existing relational quality informs participant selection. It was essential that she knew participants and they knew her. I also knew my research participant. I initially met five participants individually. They had all participated in one of my choral zikr workshops. I asked them similar questions about their choral zikr experience. I narrowed it down to one participant, who showed interested in having further conversations. I had known my participant for almost 20 years, since she was very little. Over the years, I had come to know her and her family personally: her interests, her

[9] Pseudonyms were assigned to my research participant and her family members.

connections, her family, her thinking, and her musical ability, contributing—as Kovach outlines––to a reciprocal research relationship. Jenna and I became friends through my friendship with her mom and family. In 2001, her mom, Aisha, and I worked on an Ismaili community-run national touring theatre-dance production. Since then, Aisha and I have worked on a variety of community-arts and music projects. She always created opportunities for Jenna to be present in the designing, thinking, making, creating, and community sharing. Aisha recognized Jenna's musical ability and offered opportunities for Jenna to cultivate her talent from a young age. Aisha also made sure that whenever I was around, I had opportunities to informally share my work and practice with Jenna and her family. Jenna and I also have had several occasions to work together with other Ismaili Muslim youth and peoples of all diversities beyond the activities that her mom made available. We have sung in choirs together, we have improvised and created music, we have listened to music together, and enjoyed rich conversations with our colleagues and peers about our experiences. As Jenna got older, she and I had rich discussions about community life, the arts, music, and creative practice. I was and am always inspired by Jenna's depth of thinking and her intuitive insight. I always leave our time together feeling uplifted, ripe with questions, ideas, and new paths to explore. This research provides an opportunity to formally document our musical experiences and shared excitement about the topic. Selecting Jenna was not so much a matter of me as the "researcher choosing the participant" (Kovach, 2021, p. 170), but a reciprocal process where we came to a mutual agreement to abide and dwell in this research.

3.1.1 Research participant as conversant

For this point forward, I will the word "conversant" to describe the research relationship between researcher and participant. Throughout the research process, I struggled with how to refer to Jenna when writing or speaking to others about the research. The terms interlocutor, participant, or subject did not seem enough to describe the depth of intellectual communion I felt with the participant. It was not until I had a discussion with Dr. Ali Asani late in the research process that the word conversant emerged. The word honoured our research relationship and positioned Jenna as a living human being, not as a delimited object or subject of research. While the other terms have their place and meaning in delimited and contextual purposive research, I found that my use of them positioned me in a place of power. The word conversant, not without its own delimiting meaning, felt like a word that created an in-between-ness necessary for the interpretive quest.

The word conversant became a translation of an experience of research interviews that felt like a world, not just threads of subjectivities in an objective research quest. Looking into the etymology of the word "to converse," I found a multiplicity of subtlety in meanings that showed a formulation of the roots "con" and "verse," holding many nuanced origins: to move about, living, dwelling, residing, inhabiting, or behaving in a certain way together. The word refers to having open communication between persons, as well as to turn or bend. I was excited to embrace these nuanced dimensions to envision a research world in which one could dwell with mutual regard, openness, turning, and bending. Our conversations felt like they were not about a transactional exchange of words. Rather, together, we would turn, bend, take new lines of flight, return to something said before, and find ourselves in many unexpected "wow" moments of profound awe.

Our conversations, the stories themselves, interpretations, wonderments, and discoveries were containers for dialogue. In the textures of the said and unsaid, we found an enabling ecosystem we could enter, in order to intellectually and spiritually exit, strengthening connection with the ineffable, each other, to sound, music, thought, voice and harmony. Re-*s(ear)ching* became re-*h(ear)ing*, re-*audition*—reading and reciting felt knowledge known and yet to be known. Our collective voices became a vital creative receptacle for coming to know. Narratives became less about individual anecdotes Jenna shared or that I remembered and more about what came to be formed and known in the present moment abiding with each other in curious exploration.

3.1.2 Reciprocity and data collection

Kovach (2021) drew on the Nêhiyaw (Cree) Indigenous cultural value of *miyo-wîcêhtowin,* or good relations, to emphasize how critical it is that "research participants understand and accept how their teachings will be represented" (p. 58). This cultural value is shared in Ismaili Muslim communitarian cultural values. To ensure my participant's rights and welfare were protected, this study was reviewed and approved by a University of Toronto Research Ethics Board prior to its commencement.

The first time I spoke with Jenna was over the phone. I sought permission to turn on the speakerphone and record our conversation on Garage Band (Version 6.0.5, 2012). After she

provided verbal consent,[10] we entered the conversation, which lasted approximately 90 minutes. I was very aware that my own experiences could colour the interview. I initially had planned to speak with Jenna one or two times, as I was particularly aware of not imposing on her time. As questions arose, I sent Jenna messages and emails with questions or requests to speak. These conversations were recorded on Audacity (Version 2.1.1.0) through the speakerphone or in Otter (Version 3.11.0) transcription software. These exploratory calls often lasted up to 90 minutes each. Originally intended as calls to clarify, the interviews became rich sources of data. I informed my research conversant that I would collaborate with her to ensure that what I transcribed and interpreted represented her story as she saw it. I explained that she "would be given an opportunity review and approve transcripts of their words" (Kovach, 2021, p. 58), read my interpretations, revise, add, or remove anything that did not represent what she meant or wanted to be said. I sent Jenna excerpts of transcripts, summaries of writing, and further questions by email throughout the process for her review. I often called Jenna to discuss my understandings. These informal conversations became rich spaces of being and knowing in which we could dwell. Conversing became part of the thinking, reading, writing, and interpreting process— conversations themselves, interpretive events. I read Jenna's feedback and any new information she submitted in writing. This writing and reflection further informed my interpretation and provide deeper insight. Poring over Jenna's offerings, I found it difficult to pull out stories because her stories and reflections, our conversation and shared analysis of the experience, all formed her, my, and our collaborative narrative. The emergent narratives were moments of co-poesies, thinking and making, dwelling, and sharing. The feeling of friendship, trust, and safety held our words. The "dialogic, relational, and reflective" (Kovach, 2010) conversation became safe spaces where we inquired, explored, deepened, and found silent wholeness and knowing. By the time we ended a conversation I usually felt there was nothing more to say.

Jenna's contribution is a cherished *amanat*[11] that I am honoured to share.

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[10] University of Toronto Human Protocol #: 00038623

[11] Treasured gift offered in trust for safekeeping.

3.2 An insider perspective

Though unique to each of our lives, my research conversant and I share experiences within a communitarian Ismaili vision. This enabled me to enter conversations with an already always listening in, with, and through an Ismaili Muslim imaginary and allowed me to add spiritually inspired and culturally animated “thick description” to the thinking and stories that emerged. At the same time, however, this insider knowing carries the danger of hearing within an already socio-political, identity-bound perception of reality that makes opaque the inspirational liberating imaginary. This means that I may have heard what I wanted to hear or agreed with, and imposed my narrative on hers, rather than openly listening to what was being shared, a necessity for a research dialogue that is open, generative, and alive with possibility. My *a priori* knowledge and embodied lived experience and being were difficult to set aside. I knew going into this research that this would be a bias and "shadow in the field" that I would have to constantly face. Were there questions I missed? Were there moments of illumination and insights that I glossed over because I already thought I knew what was there?

I double-checked with my conversant to make sure I was not putting words in her mouth or imposing an already always-knowing narrative. I found myself saying things like, “I don't want to put words in your mouth,” or “I'm not sure if what I'm thinking is what you're saying.” If I did not say these words, it felt like the feeling behind them was always in the “unsaid,” limiting how I heard my conversant. I constantly thought about how I may have been failing to hear her story from her point of view, rather than hearing her story for how she wanted to be known. The more I resisted and tried to leave my interpretive lived experience aside, the more those already-always-listening preconceptions persisted. I shared my fears of being a failed narrative researcher with Jenna. I felt conflicted between how I naturally *felt* I *could* be in the research and how I *thought* I *should* be. Our conversations were a safe space for this tension to be present in the discovery. Jenna was caring, generous, and kind in mutual support. As we found our way through “a co-learning journey” (Williams & Snively, 2016), we had many moments of quiet reflection that left me feeling transformed and excited about where we might go next. We expressed mutual respect and gratitude for the nurturing trust between us.

3.3 Dwelling in the data

The Latin word data is the plural of datum (meaning thing given) and the past participle of dare "to give." The word "dare" is also a root of the word tradition: "to deliver," which combines "across" and "to give." Having this in mind and heart, I considered how to receive and humbly learn from this research gift from Jenna? Understanding that Jenna's research offerings were an amanat given with trust, I was ethically bound to look after this gift. After all, she too, in the act of giving, was *doing* tradition and passing down knowledge that I was fortunate to inherit. It was imperative that my dwelling in the data was sincere and that my thinking, reading, interpreting, and writing honoured Jenna's sharing. Together, our research giving and receiving was a re-making, coming to new understandings. Our stories, while having points of similarity, also in their differences reveal an additive making of how we received and interpreted Ismaili tradition. The common thread and crucible of labour was a quest for unity, harmonious coexistence, and remembrance, both in the data and in our conversations.

Multiple levels of recursive coding and analysis took place. I began by reading the transcripts to grasp an overall idea of what was being shared. Next, I went through each segment of the interview and responded in a free flow exploration, expanding on ideas that emerged in the reading. I drew out common threads and patterns to identify the key points discussed. I did a word-by-word coding and created a word cloud (see Figure 2) on line to provide a different way to discover key ideas.

Figure 2. Word cloud

I wrote the coded words on individual pieces of paper that I then categorized into clusters and themes. I also I made a visual mandala with the data pages, creating an aesthetic experience of the energy and overall feel of the research. This was another way for me to feel, listen to, and take in the research—beyond that which could be communicated in the text. The mandala process is one I learned from my cousin, poet, and writer-educator Sheniz Janmohamed. Making mandalas is rooted in presence and intuition.

I created a mandala of key words from the transcripts interspersed with found materials from nature (see Figure 3). The main intention was to present the key words written on white square pieces of paper to have a bird's eye view. I gathered leaves, flower petals fallen on the ground, acorns, branches, and other materials from the porch in the home in which I was staying. The data was always present in my subconscious. Once the materials were gathered, I would "listen" and position them in the design. I needed this new revitalized, visual, and listening orientation to my work. The installation allowed me to be with the data, dwell and abide with its wisdom, without specifically reading the words. It was a different kind "reading" beyond words.

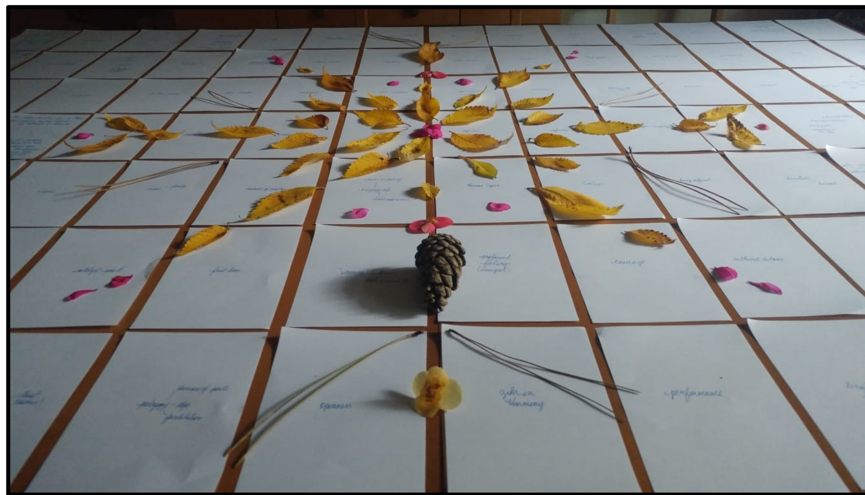

Figure 3. Mandalas of key words

The mandala became an energetic affective sounding board, and acoustic presence in my space. I spent some time taking photographs of the mandala from different perspectives. There were many opportunities to see and feel the data visually and from a variety of angles. The data written on square pieces of paper intermingled with the natural elements in a kind of counterpoint. The soft earthy quality of nature offered an intuitive counterpoint to the harder edged heady quality of the research represented by the squared pieces of paper. The paper became metaphors for the normative, bordered, inflexible, and restrictive; nature became a metaphor for creative, open, possible, and colourful. One enriched the other. The mandala allowed me to see the data in a softer natural light and gave me a chance to combine ways of knowing at the heart of this research. As I interpreted and analyzed the data, I I drew maps and conceptual diagrams that helped me to code and make connections between ideas. This coding process revealed a larger narrative arch that I used to write the research. I cut and pasted sections of the texts within the larger narrative that I wrote.

3.4 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a method that combines aspects of autoethnography and autobiography. The method is used to analyze personal and cultural experience. The method involves the researcher and author reflecting on past activities retroactively and selectively. The author does not solely turn lived experiences into a document. The author assembles the experiences through hindsight. The author remembers moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of their life, “times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience”

(Zaner, 2004 as cited by Ellis et al., 2011, para. 6). These moments may appear as epiphanies that reveal memories, images, and feelings long after the formative incidents took place. Through autoethnography I can describe and systematically analyze my personal experience as an Ismaili to understand larger cultural experiences. In turn, the larger experiences shape my understanding of being Ismaili. My South Asian East African heritage and cultural environments intersect with dominant Western experiences. This intersection creates a complexity of culture and personal experience that can be appropriately analyzed through autoethnography. Additionally, autoethnography "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 3). I am researching topics that I have been intimately connected with since childhood. Thus, my subjectivity and emotionality is very much part of the research process.

I cannot hide this fact nor bracket them out at the risk of objectifying lived experience. I could not see myself "having to distance [myself] from the action" (Bunde-Birouste et al., 2018, p. 3). Understanding the making, the doing, and the knowing that shaped my emergent practice was necessary for me, the researcher, and the reader to understand the larger cultural, musical, ethical, and spiritual grounding of a living Ismaili Muslim interpretive tradition. It was important for me to critically look at the narratives I present and how I came to understand the journey of a cultural merging. My narrative also was tied to a communal narrative, and I wanted "to learn from the people (the insiders) what counts as cultural knowledge (insider meanings)" (Green et al., 2012, p. 309). I wanted to discover what I, as a person of diverse ancestral and cultural life experiences, through my interpretation of a lived Ismaili Muslim imaginary, might count as cultural knowledge and how that resonated with traditional communal and modern life experiences. Were there "patterned ways of perceiving, believing, acting and evaluating . . . practice, or roles and relationships, and other social phenomena" (p. 310) that I developed within and across everyday life and musical experiences? Before I engaged narrative research on how a young Ismaili Muslim growing up in Canada received the practice, I needed to know my story. This knowledge provided a more critical view of my own narratives and allowed me to understand where my narrative and Jenna's narratives resonated, co-existed in counterpoint, and differed all together.

3.4.1 Data collection

My data sources included photographs, musical resources, and texts representing a mix of reflections, observations, and noting of activity. I collected archival photographs from online sources. I reached out to my parents who sent me archival family photos. I also went into my own archives to pull photos that were suitable. Musical resources included archival recordings, documented arrangements, and arrangements that I carried but had not yet transcribed. I also wrote copious field notes and impressions on, with, and through the data—both mine and my research participant's. I made "principled decisions about records to collect and pathways to follow in order to explore the roots or routes associated with a particular meaning, event or cultural process/ practice" (Green et al., 2012, p. 310). I also made "decisions about ways of archiving, analysing and reporting accounts of phenomena studied" (p. 310). The process of creating the narrative involved many iterations, readings, re-readings, re-writing, re-reorganizing, and interpreting. The collection process was analytical and brought new insights along the way. I wrote and then left it aside as I continued with research interviews and interpretation of my narrative conversations with Jenna. Jenna's narrative in turn brought surprising new "rich points" of insights (Green et al., 2012, p. 310) that shifted my point of view and frames of reference about what was happening. At such moments, as Agar (1994) argues:

> cultural expectations, meanings and practices are made visible to ethnographers (as well as members). Rich points, therefore, provide anchors for tracing roots and routes of developing cultural knowledge to build warranted accounts of phenomena from an insider point of view. (Agar, 1994, as cited in Green, et al., 2012, p. 310)

Within these surprising moments of data collection, my narrative evolved. Where I initially interpreted my story as a response to divisive and binary lived realities, I came to know that my narrative began with my birth into an Ismaili Muslim family. I learned that there was another interpretation, not one motivated by opposition, but from the longing to carry traditions of integrative harmony and interpretive quests for unity.

Autoethnography allowed me to focus on first-person experiences of both the object of interest (my practice, process, and cultures), the "process of knowledge discovery and creation," (Pensoneau-Conway & Toyosaki 2011 as cited in Bunde-Birouste et al., 2018, p. 4) and the nature of my delivery. The more insights I gained, the more stories emerged—stories that were

embodied but not yet known or told. I began to write and found myself dwelling in powerful childhood experiences that I did not realize had influenced my hearing of and making in the world until I talked to Jenna. The process opened vivid memories and felt experiences that were embedded in the recesses of my being. I found myself being surprised by the detailed descriptions and depth of feeling, particularly spiritual feelings that I had no idea were there. Their emergence inspired me to speak with elders and family members informally, to confirm anecdotal details and share what was coming up. After all, my family and community have been vital in cultivating the spaces in which I had these powerful experiences. As I wrote, I found myself sitting up in my chair with a sense of gratitude and wonder, thinking about how lucky I was to experience what I did.

3.4.2 Reading, thinking, and writing

Reading, thinking, and writing were part of an integrative process. “The activities of researching and reflecting on the one hand, and reading and writing on the other hand, [were] indeed quite indistinguishable” (van Manen, 1990, p. 126). This made for a complex and time-consuming process where “writing is the method” (citing Sartre, p. 126). Writing was the forum for thinking, rethinking, reading, reflecting, and recognizing. I would read and reread the transcripts again, code, conceptualize, and think. I would write, then leave the writing, letting the thinking continue. The reading and writing were the thinking. The thinking was the writing and reading. Working with the transcripts involved rereading them “while making notes and drawing diagrams and mind maps expressing the gathering of ideas illuminated in the unfolding” (Fleck et al., 2011, p. 21). I started writing “codes” in the margins of the transcripts. I went through the text line-by-line, word-by-word, and took notes. I shared with my family and friends the key words and asked them what they thought were the thematic buckets. I read and re-read. I did free flow thinking and writing from the documented transcripts, letting my mind and heart open to where they would take me. I looked up Arabic and Indic words and translations that offered further subtlety and meaning. I read through the texts again, cut pieces that related to specific ideas and themes, and mapped them out. I struggled continuously with the interconnected conversation, not knowing what themes to pull out or how to do it. Over time, the data became an acoustic reference point through which I metaphorically heard and read my research, seeking out insight and signs everywhere I turned.

3.4.3 Word roots and interpretive subtlety

Important in my research conversation was reading and hearing inward to the subtle inner meanings of the words. “Like poetry,” I discovered, the word “speaks partly through silence: it means more than it explicitly says” (van Manen, 1990, p. 131). I found myself seeking to be “sensitively attentive to the silence around the words by means of which we attempt to disclose the deep meaning of our world” (p. 131). I became aware that there could be infinite interpretations of words held in their implicit depths.

> Speech points beyond itself to the silence, to the word within the word, the language buried in language, the primordial language, from before the Flood or the Tower of Babel; lost yet ready at hand, perfect for all time; present in all our words, unspoken. To hear again the primordial language is to restore to words their full significance. (Brown, 1996, p. 258 as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 131)

I was called to explore the etymology of individual words, seeking out connections and subtlety in the final woven words within the words. The etymology of words, many with proto-Indo-European roots, made it possible to uncover polysemy and nuanced interpretations. I also discovered the intimacy of shared interpretation between words sharing root origins. One example is the root word *sol,* meaning whole. This word forms the root of words like safety, salve, solid, and consolidation. I began to recognize words from my own Gujarati language that were derived from Sanskrit; I made new connections to my understanding. I looked to friends, community elders, and scholars with lived experiences to help inform meaning and nuance. I particularly reached out to my colleague and friend, Dr. Shireen Abu Khader, who informed me about the multiplicity of meaning within Arabic words, a language I do not speak. I came to understand that Arabic words come from root words with multiple layers of meaning that come alive in a language context. Where and how the root word is placed and demarked in a sentence reveals its contextual meaning, for example, the root word *rhm*. Rhm is a root of the word *rahim* (merciful) and *rahman* (compassionate). It also is the root for the Arabic word for womb and care. Understanding this expanded linguistic possibility added to a richer experience of the words my conversant and I used. I have also been able to combine meanings from English etymology with Arabic and Sanskrit roots, Persian expressions, and Gujarati and Kutchi words with which I

grew up. Multivalent and subtle meanings in language laid “bare certain truths while retaining an essential sense of ambiguity” (van Manen, 1990, p. 131).

Translation and deepening knowledge of words and possible meaning assisted in “interpretive thinking” and came to be a vital methodological “proceeding rather than a procedure” (Diekelmann, 2005, p. 5. as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 21). This formulation, based on who and what has come before, made connections to what was being communicated through that prior knowledge, weaving together an expression that could hold these plural perspectives—at least temporarily—that could speak in the moment. I draw here on concepts of encounters and counterpoint to bring together understandings of research and scholarship, lived experience, and new knowledge, faith, and cultural inherited knowledge that shaped the analysis and writing. It was the natural thing for me to do. I cannot get away from it. It is the only way in which I can come to understand the depth of subtlety offered by my conversant.

When I look back at my process, I did not work *on* the data. I came to realize that I received the data and dwelled *with* their gifts in myriad ways of thinking, reading, making, and writing. My methods had to be open and flexible, allowing for “possibilities of how meaning and understanding evolve as stories are heard, read and re-read, shared, and explored” (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 11). I undertook a process of “reading, thinking, writing, re-reading re-thinking, and re-writing” (p. 15). I took copious notes, and I used conceptual maps, mind maps, visual diagrams (see Figure 4), etymological maps, moments of reflection, “sitting” with feeling beyond the words.

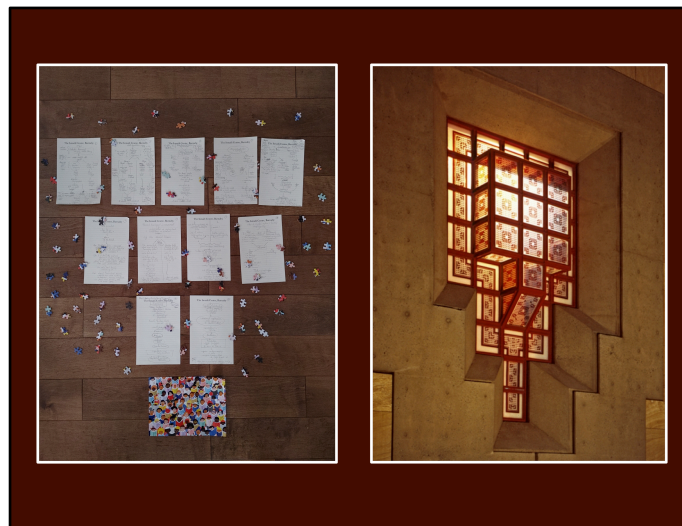

Figure 4. Visual diagram and concept map of data in the shape of Ismaili Centre Vancouver lantern window

I read the transcript, got a feeling, reread the transcript, sought out key words and themes, and free wrote as reflexive thoughts emerged from what I read. I then went back to the transcripts and made connections between the different parts. I again entered a reflective and interpretative process, responding to words, feelings, thoughts, and my own empathic resonances. This seemingly "messy" process allowed for Jenna's stories and our collectively emerging and interweaving narratives to be felt and processed. Finding the rational words has been difficult and remains a process of becoming.

Bunde-Birouste et al. (2018) explains that, "a critical part of autoethnography is the hard thinking about how to "represent" the data. The choice of how, where, and why the story is told will frame the representation of the data and the telling of the story" (p. 12). This was a challenging process as I went into and out of the data, entering the details and exiting out to have a broader view. Reflecting betwixt and between my autobiographic narrative, Jenna's narratives, our co-created narratives, and the theoretical framework, story threads and insights emerged.

3.5 Benefitting the participant and the community

My aim through this narrative is to benefit the Ismaili Muslim youth who told her story, and by extension, the Ismaili Muslim communities in which she dwells. The research must benefit the Muslim community and the larger music education community. The ethical mandate of the Aga Khan Development Network reminds Muslims that a foundational principle of collective social striving is to benefit not only Muslim communities but also the larger societies in which they live. Meeting the holistic development needs of Muslim peoples in regions around the world most vulnerable to political, social, and environmental forces necessitates and hospitably includes meeting the needs of the larger society that is equally affected by limiting socio-political forces. In a similar way, Hanohano (1999) speaks about how restoring harmony and balance for Indigenous learners in a classroom would also automatically restore harmony and balance for the rest of the classroom.

Similar to Kovach's (2021) description in an Indigenous research context, it was difficult for me as an Ismaili Muslim researcher "to determine how much cultural knowledge to include" (p. 58) and what would be appropriate to share. As Kovach (2010) has written:

> With respect to research conducted in an Indigenous community, there are specific ethical guidelines that include, but are not limited to, a mutually respectful research relationship; that the research benefit the community; that appropriate permission and informed consent is sought; that the research is non-exploitive and non-extractive; and that there is respect for community ethics and protocol. (p. 46)

To give thick description and contextualize my practice and Jenna's narrative, I needed to share aspects of Ismaili Muslim communitarian practices. This called for an integral responsibility for me to ensure that I represented, regarded, respected, and honoured the community. Fortunately, I had access to community leaders, elders, and scholars in a variety of written and relational forms. I consulted with these scholars, elders, and community leaders on certain topics, seeking guidance, resources, and contacts who could guide my thinking and orientation. By speaking with people who had knowledge of the global contexts and challenges of dissemination, as well as people with knowledge of lived experience of the culture, I gained an "understanding of the ways and how they intersect with my life narrative" (p. 58) and research responsibility. I have done my best to respectfully incorporate my understandings into the writing, and have done so with regard, caution, and care.

In Chapter 3, I introduced the methodologies of narrative inquiry and autoethnography through which I undertook the research. I introduced Indigenous methodologies together Indigenous and Western research methodologies that best resonated with the spiritually inspired, communally enacted, ceremonial, and social community to which I belong. I outline narrative methods of participant selection, data collection and analysis. I then introduced autoethnography, explained my methods, and described how this methodology served as a useful pathway for this research. I concluded this chapter by emphasizing the importance of this research benefitting not only the educational landscape but also the Ismaili community whose traditions are centred. In Chapter 4, I present my autoethnography.

Chapter 4

4 Communal receiving, singing and making: Interpretive hearing and doing of Ismaili tradition

Chapter 4 represents the heart of my autoethnography. I first illustrate the pluralistic cultural environment of Nairobi, Kenya, in which I was raised. I then relate my experiences growing up in Red Deer, Alberta, where I caught the love for choral music. I take a retrospective journey back in time to share the different ways I encountered music and how music and congregational singing provided a comforting space of belonging amid racism and misrepresentation. I also discuss my thinking that shaped the development of an integrative practice of adding vocal harmonies to zikr and ginan.

Until the age of six, I lived in Kenya, where Swahili culture was Ismaili culture. We spoke Swahili on the streets with each other, with local vendors, and with caring souls graciously helping around the house. Swahili was part of a pluralistic language woven into Ismaili community gatherings as well. We seemed to easily adopt Swahili foods, music, sounds, clothing, and language into our lives. We heard Swahili songs and rhythms at home, in the city, and played by *dandiya*[12] bands that provided celebratory music for Ismaili cultural events. Swahili songs like "Jambo" and "Malaika" were always part of community music concerts. I did not realize how much Swahili culture permeated our lives until 2004, while teaching music at the Aga Khan Academy in Kenya, when I realized how many words used at home were Swahili words. A rice dish we ate regularly at home and community feasts (*jaman*), *akni,* was also common in everyday Swahili cuisine. I remember well the aunties whose akni recipes I loved. Culture bearers like Anaar Kanji, the late Shamash Jamal, Nizar Damji and others wrote Swahili *geet* (festive songs of praise) and songs that the Ismaili community loved. These songs migrated with the community to Canada, where respected music elders and community singers continued preserving and writing new Gujarati and Swahili songs. These songs sustained and revitalized Khoja Ismaili identity in Canada.

[12] Dandiya, also known as *dandiya raas*, is a folk dance of Gujarat, India.

Western culture also became a part of my family's and our community's everyday landscape. Our daily menus at home included British comfort foods like shepherd's pie, pot roast, Yorkshire pudding, trifle, and French fries. We learned to adopt Western culture and participated in the society. Ismaili teachings encouraged integration without losing a sense of Ismaili identity and ethical foundations at the core of our being. This continuity was vital to navigate the political challenges of the time. We learned to see the best of what the West had to offer and combine it with the strengths of our faith traditions to reconstitute life in new ways. We learned to work with others through dynamic cultural processes that sustained a spiritual fire and enabled belonging and meaningful contribution.

My sound world also reflected a relationship with Western music. The swooning voices of Elvis, Jim Reeves, Connie Francis, and Cliff Richards (among others) infused my childhood soundscape. My parents, their friends, and our extended families also listened to these artists. I did not choose consciously to hear them, but they were present in my world. I think that the spirit of joy, remembrance, nostalgia, and love they brought my family made me feel part of them, and them of me. Living in Central Alberta, I listened to the country music strains of Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, and Willie Nelson on the radio. I also listened to soft rock—music by Air Supply, The Bee Gees, Blondie, and Foreigner. I loved the textures and quality of sounds, especially the slide guitar used in country music. The textures and quality of the music comforted me and offered refuge from an "angsty" adolescence.

My Indian ancestry meant that South Asian sounds and music were also entangled in this musical and cultural life world. Hindi film music, Ismaili geet and ginan, *bhajan* (Indic devotional songs), and Indian cultural practices were naturally part of the lived experience. My mom often played Hindi film music on old cassettes at home. I internalized the voices of Lata Mangeshkar, Kishore Kumar, Mukesh, and Saigal, hearing them around the house and during regular visits to Indian movie drive-in theatres.

> *My parents and both grandmas prepare the snacks for our weekly drive-in theatre outing. Samosas, chips, tamarind chutney and an assortment of other treats are packed up and loaded in the station wagon. My little sister and I would take refuge in the back of the station wagon for the evening. Small cushy mattresses, blankets, and necessary toys are available. My mom and dad are in the front, my grandmas are in the back seat, and my*

> *sister and I are at the back. The twilight sky begins to darken as we enter the drive in. A large gravel lot is adorned with posts at each parking stall, holding two silver-coloured speakers. As per our routine, we drive up to one of the stalls. My mom opens the window and pulls in the large silver speaker at the end of a black-coiled wire. She hooks the speaker on the window and raises the window up to secure it. My dad does the same on his side. My mom proceeds to remove her small cassette player from her bag. She pulls out blank cassettes and places them in the player. The recorder is ready to do its job of recording the songs that will be played again around the house. Almost like making a mixed tape, my mom waits for the opportune time during the movie to press the record and play button to record the songs. Once the song ends, my mom presses stop. Food is brought out and we all enjoy our snacks as the movie plays on. My sister and I play a little more and finally fall asleep with our blankets on the mattresses laid out for us.*

These old Indian songs (*puranè geet*) lulled my sister and me to sleep, slumbering comfortably in the refuge of the back of the station wagon. These movie songs integrated South Asian folk music, Hindu *bhajans*, classical Indian music traditions, and Western popular cultures. Musical staples at home included Gujarati songs like "Pankhidane a Pinjuru Joonu Joonu Laage" (The cage looks old to the bird) sung by Mukesh and "Ghungroo Toot Gaye" (My string of bells around my feet were broken) sung by Pankaj Udhas, with tabla and harmonium. This music never felt foreign.

The community youth, my sister, and I also learned, practiced, and led recitals of ginans that were part of our integrative sound world. We participated in yearly regional and provincial ginan competitions, always striving for excellence. Partaking in a weekend of recitations at a provincial final was a regular occurrence. Indic ginans and zikr heard in prayer spaces also spilled over into every life, car rides, and social gatherings.

Post-ceremonial social gatherings also contributed to a heterogeneous cultural hearing and participation. Tea, cake, cookies, akni, *mittho khou* (sweet rice) and *channa* (lentil curry)*,* *mahamri* (Swahili fried sweet flat bread) and *barazi* (pigeon pea coconut curry) and other refreshments served by many young volunteers were served alongside rose flavoured and *sherbet* (rose-flavoured sweet milk). We heard the Ismaili marching band play the "Ismaili Anthem" and a variety of Swahili, Western, and Indic music during flag raising ceremonies. During festivities,

community members danced *garba*[13] and dandiya to newly composed Gujarati, Hindi, and Swahili geets in traditional and modernized forms, alongside Swahili-Indic-Western popular musical hybrids. Songs accompanied by traditional tabla and harmonium alongside songs that sounded like disco music were all part of how I came to hear, join in, and understand Ismaili values and ways of being.

The old Hindi film songs sounded very similar in their emotional colour to Ismaili devotional and cultural expression. Indian classical music, folk music, and vernacular sacred traditions shared spiritually inspired musical material with Gujarati lullabies, geet, *ghazal*[14], ginan, and zikr. These songs and sounds connected me to family and the colours of my South Asian heritage. Even today, I listen to these songs for solace, memories, and nostalgia. I did not always know their meaning, but the vocal strains and musical textures associated with those family outings have an ineffable presence on my heart and mind. Across the breadth of my South Asian *Khoja* Ismaili experience, the sounds in larger society, the sounds of Ismaili social and festive gatherings, and the sounds of devotion within prayer spaces were consistent. When I left *jamatkhana*, an aesthetically integrative cultural space, the world outside sounded like the world inside, affectively resonating emotional, spiritual, and communal colours of jamatkhana. I was, thus, surrounded by an eclectic and pluralistic soundscape that I learned to welcome as part of life, sometimes as part of the same musical textures, sometimes reserved for private spaces, sometimes offered and received in a culturally integrative way.

I share this aspect of my lived experience to illustrate how integrative cultural life shaped who I am and how I hear and know the world. The plurality of sounds, experiences, and cultural making all contributed to how I came to know Ismaili culture. Ismaili culture was heterogeneous

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[13] "Garba is a community circle dance from the northwestern Indian state of Gujarat. The word 'garba' is also used to refer to the event at which the garba is performed. The dance form originated in the villages of Gujarat, where it was (and continues to be) performed in communal gathering spaces in the center of the village with the entire community participating. As with many social events that happen in rural areas, garba also has religious significance" ("What is garba," 2019). Garba is performed during religious festivities and social events such as weddings and parties. In contemporary usage, garba is performed by all genders. In Ismaili traditions garba is common to South Asian and Khoja traditions.

[14] Ghazal is a lyric ode or poem, typically on the theme of love, found in Middle Eastern and Indian literature and music.

and integrative. These integrative ways of knowing animated a spiritually and ethically oriented cultural making, being, and doing.

In January 1976, my family moved to Canada. It was winter. I was five and a half years old. We settled in Red Deer, Alberta, a small city in Central Alberta, in the middle of the province between Edmonton and Calgary, each about a one and one-half hour drive away. We were in the heart of the prairies, or as we called it, "cowboy country." Lush farmlands, golden wheat fields, cowboys, and oil wells (that reminded me of giraffes), surrounded us. There was something there that captured my heart. I liked it there. I liked how I felt. I would go down the block from our house to the edge of a majestic wheat field and stand there at the threshold, looking at it with awe. The horizon, the colours, and swaying wheat in the wind made me feel vast inside. The wheat fields were majestic in their expanse. As I recall, I think I would go to the edge of the wheat field because it reminded me of my own vastness. It was a moment of hope, not for something physical that I desired or was missing from my life. It was a moment of remembrance for something spiritual that my soul longed to know and sought to know in myself and in the world. At the edge of the wheat field, there was hope—recognition and remembrance of my own beauty and vast horizon.

When we moved to Canada, we carried practices, approaches, festivities, and mode of being: foods, cultural rituals, celebratory dancing and more.[15] Our inner world was who and how we were; however, in this new environment, we landed in a homogeneous, White, "Canadian," Christian community. The world outside our home and Ismaili cultural life sounded and looked different. In the next section, I share some of my experiences from a perspective of difference between Canadian and the Ismaili cultures.

My mom, Neena, attended boarding school in Switzerland from the ages of 12 to 17. She sang in the church choir and played piano, accompanying hymns during weekly Sunday church services. She studied classical piano as well. She brought these influences into the house. I remember her

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[15] I recognize that in Red Deer, we faced a new challenge of the diversity between East African Ismailis, Tanzanian, and Kenyan. East African experience, shared across Pan-African Ismaili peoples manifested differently as communities responded uniquely to their local social political environments. As Canada welcomes new communities of Ismailis and peoples from Afghanistan, Syria, Tajikistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, and beyond, the intra-Ismaili heterogeneity and challenges of integrative co-existence are important to consider but are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Thus, my dissertation focuses on East African Kenyan experience.

playing “Für Elise” and other classical music on the refurbished piano we had in the house. She also had a collection of sets of Western classical symphonies by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Chopin, and Mozart. I remember as a 10-year-old in Red Deer, and into my adolescence, listening to and pretending to conduct the orchestral greats.

> *Here I am, standing in the middle of the living room, waving my hands wildly as if I was a great conductor. I imagine myself as an orchestral character, the tails, bowtie—an unfettered artistic genius, long dishevelled hair and all. In those moments I was not Hussein. I was Karajan, Abbado, and Kleiber. The imagined presence and aural past were one. I could feel my being shift—an empowered, inspiring, musical leader of epic proportions. I am these folks, and they are me. I am all the conductors who came before me, and all who will come after me. I am all the music that came before and will come ahead. I have not studied the music, analyzed the gestures, or delved into the detail of structures and patterns. Yet, I am it and doing it. It feels like it is already in me, latent potential, finding life through the mirrored sounds playing on the record players. There is no lecture, no teaching, but still, education—the lighting of an intellectual fire.*

In elementary and junior high school in Red Deer, I also played recorder, saxophone, and clarinet in a variety of wind and jazz ensembles. I recall that I enjoyed playing songs like “Windy” by the Association or Billy Joel’s “Just the Way You Are.” I also joined the Ismaili marching band with my family, and we played Indian, Swahili, and Western songs during march pasts and social gatherings. I also took seven years of Royal Conservatory of Music accordion lessons. I sang in choirs, too. These and many other Western and global sounds, known and unknown, became part of my hearing and doing life.

The dominant colonial culture in which my family lived constantly reminded us of separation and division, but the pluralistic way of doing and making ourselves still carried on. Here in Canada, that naturally integrative spirit, enriched by creative community arts participation, sustained a cultural remaking. We had carried over enough elements of Western harmonization into culture here in Canada that I felt as though there was enough in our inside world that reminded me of the outside world in which we lived.

4.1 Spatial wonderment––Dharkhana, Nairobi

ઇજી જીવ જારે જુગત પામે	*Ejee jeev jaare jugat paame*	When the soul finds the Way
પ્રાણ પોપે રામ રહ્યા	*Paraann pope ram raheaa*	Life blooms like a flower.
અગર ચંદન પ્રેમ રસીયા	*Agar cha(n)dan parem raseaa*	Mingled with adoration, it becomes fragrant as aloe or sandal.
હેતે હંસ સરોવર ઝીલીયા	*Hete ha(n)s sarovar jhileaa*	With love the swan swims on the lake

("Eji Navaroj na din sohamana," Pir Shamsh)

I remember entering the majestic Ismaili jamatkhana (Dharkhana),[16] Nairobi (see Figure 5). My maternal ancestors were instrumental in establishing the building in 1920, and my paternal and maternal great grandparents led the first official ceremonies. The architecture is in a colonial revivalist style. The building adorns the corner of two busy streets in Nairobi. The *jamatkhana*, still there, stands the test of time. The centre is a space for contemplation, communion, dialogue, and celebration.

Figure 5. Jamatkhana (Dharkhana), Nairobi

[16] Dharkhana is the name used for the principle Ismaili jamatkhana in a national jurisdiction. In Canada, the Dharkhana is the Ismaili Centre Vancouver.

I am five years old—short, thin, curious, open. I'm dressed up in a shirt, tie and V-neck sweater. Today is a special occasion day. Strings of white lights shine around the borders and edges of the building like Christmas lights. The entire building is lit up. Light upon light. My family arrives. Compared with the size and grandeur of the building, I am so small. We cross the threshold through the grand wooden doors on the corner. Instantly, I feel big, majestic. I walk differently, more elegantly, in awe—like seeing the Rockies for the first time. Wafting fragrances of lobhan *(frankincense) and* bakhoor *(perfumed wood chips) fill the space. I love these scents. They immediately elevate my spirit. The click-clack sounds of high heels and dress shoes reverberate in the acoustically live hallway. Slowly, the city sounds become a light din. We walk down the long, wide, main hallway (*Figure 6) *towards my favourite old elevator. The elevator has a caged door that a volunteer opened and closed for us. "Ya Ali Madad", the volunteer says.*

Figure 6. Hallway in Nairobi jamatkhana (Dharkhana)

"Mawla, Ali Madad," we reply.[17] *I look at the volunteer. Somehow, I know inside that the volunteer is me! I feel the volunteer in me come alive. Maybe one day, I will run the elevator, serving the community, too. Above the elevator is a large billboard-like wooden piece that displays the "Rope of Imamat."*[18] *I look up to the billboard, as I always did. I do not know why, exactly. I take a moment; I guess it is a part of my ritual.*

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[17] Ya Ali Madad means, "Oh Aly, Offer Thy Help." Amongst Ismailis, a greeting upon first meeting other members of the community and also upon leaving. Mawla Ali Madad means "O Master, Offer Thy Help." This phrase is a response to Ya Ali Madad.

[18] Rope of Imamat: the hereditary connection between the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the 49th Imam, our present-living spiritual leader.

On this day, we take the stairs. The women take the stairs on one side, and the men on the other side. I join my father. I take my time going up. I place my hand on the smooth, varnished wooden banister that is much wider than my hand. The curve of the rail comforts me as I caress it. Sliding my hand along the banister, I fee its support under me. I'm in no rush to get to the top. Many hands before me also caressed these banisters. Do I feel the energy of their piety and prayerful intention supporting me? Feeling the varnished wood and hearing footsteps walking up the stairs slows me down—almost like I want to take a sonic picture of that moment. With each step I take, the sacred gifts emblazon their presence and memory on my heart, soul, and mind. The fragrance of bakhoor intensifies. We arrive at the shoe stall. More "Ya Ali Madad, Mawla Ali Madads" in this small moment of mundane disruption as we remove our shoes before entering the prayer hall, yet still held in the sacred fragrance. We are one step closer to crossing the worldly threshold into the main prayer hall. At the threshold of the prayer hall, a volunteer greets us. "Ya Ali Madad. Mawla Ali Madad." He rolls fragrant halood (perfume with a sweet scent)[19] onto my wrist. Rose meets sandalwood, filling my already awakened senses. Bringing my wrist up to my nose, I take in the scent I love and cross the threshold with intention and love. Plush red carpet adorns the prayer hall, the kind of carpet on which you could draw designs. I used to often draw infinity designs there. Colonia- style velvet curtains with grand valences and dangling tassels flank all the windows. There is a small, plush carpeted platform at the front of the hall, from which congregants and elders commonly sing ginans and lead prayers and lessons. The congregation joins, filling the hall with their collective piety. In the moment, I, too, was the lead reciter. Reflecting now, I think that I was again asking myself, my soul showing me an envisioned manifestation of me, someday, on the platform, leading the congregation, too.

The intermingling fragrances, misty veils from the smoke of the bakhoor, the sounds and the grand decor provide an aesthetic ambience, a multisensory environment for my reception of the sacred gifts (amana) that lift my spirits and bring me comfort. The voices of the lead reciters and the full sounds of the congregation following along create an atmosphere in which I can dwell, reminding me of being in my grandmas' and mom's laps, hearing lullabies before bed. I feel comforted. Safe. I don't recall singing along. Maybe I was? Maybe I was humming along? I

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[19] Lobhan, bakhoor and halood were scents I remember being used during special religious and festive occasions within the jamatkhana.

don't remember. What I do remember is the atmospheric feeling in which I was immersed and the spiritual feeling that suffused my being. What is the feeling? I know this feeling. Why do I feel so good here? I like who I am here. Why do I love that feeling so much? Do I crave it? Do I long for it? I feel this sacred inspiration and inquiry come alive in me.

4.1.1 Ismaili Centre Dubai

Sure on this shining night,
Of starmade shadows round,
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground.
The late year lies down the north.
All is healed, all is health.
High summer holds the earth.
Hearts all whole.

(James Agee (lyrics), music, S. Barber, 1938)

Thirty-five years later, I set foot in Dubai, UAE. I was excited to see the Ismaili Centre Dubai (Figure 7), where I was about to co-facilitate a weeklong music and identity retreat for Ismaili youth from the Arab Emirates region. This was my first time in the region. I remember entering the majestic Ismaili Centre Dubai in the heart of the old town. The architecture blended well into the cityscape, hardly distinguishing itself from it surroundings. The closer I got, the more majestic it felt. I took a breath and entered through the front gates, stopping at the front door. I entered.

*I notice a beautiful, marbled entrance hall with an octagonal granite fountain in the centre of the hall (*Figure 7). *I notice the high ceilings and terracotta colors and patterns on the shiny marble floor. I notice the earthy natural coloured stone walls, reminding me of sites I've visited in Uzbekistan or Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Germany. In the walls are small niches with lights, echoing memories of cathedrals I've sung in. I am drawn in by the long echoing hallway in front of me, feeling so gothic yet something more. I know I am in the Ismaili Centre and at the same time I feel like I am elsewhere, in an old church, reverberating with a frequency of sacred nostalgia.*

Figure 7. Entrance hallway, Ismaili Centre Dubai

Sounds of silence resound in the space. Every step I take is amplified in the space. I walk more lightly to lessen my sonic footprint. I feel like even my breath will be heard. The click-clack sounds dress shoes and high heels walking in the grand hallways of the Victorian style Ismaili Jamatkhana in Nairobi bring their pious intentions here, now in Dubai. I recognize the acoustic generosity here. The majesty of it makes me stand taller, in awe. What is it that I am remembering in myself? Why do I like it here? I feel alive, uplifted, supported. I pause to take it all in and out of me rings Azan (“Call to Prayer”, Figure 8*) with full voice:*

Traditional

Majestic ♩ = 60

Al - lah - hu Ak - bar Al - lah - - - - hu Ak - bar!

4

La - il - la - ha il - lal - lah

Figure 8. “Azan” (call to prayer)

The bountiful acoustic calls me to take my time, letting each tone linger as the next tone enters. I pause and let the magic fill me. I am reminded of Russell Wallace's "The Gift" (Figure 9), *revealing itself through my voice.*

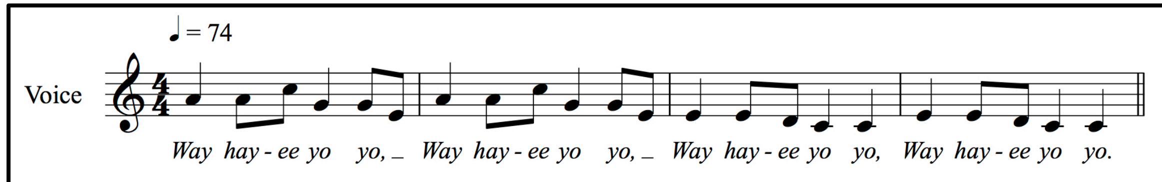

Figure 9. Excerpt from "The Gift," Russell Wallace

Again, I take my time. The sounds of Canadian lands fill the space. The Indigenous centred vocables and Arabic texts comingle in reciprocal reverence—their relational presence enlivened in this acoustic splendour—syncretic, open, integrative. I take another moment to take it in and receive its presence. A feeling of excited gratitude comes into my being: my breath felt suspended, heart expanded, grounded. My shivering spine and expansive energy tell me something is happening. Something has moved. I am shaken. I cannot name it. I cannot explain this movement. It is a feeling of hearing and remembering an ineffable resonance I had forgotten. This acoustic utterance makes its mark on my being. A feeling of being grateful, not spoken, but felt and communicated. The call to prayer and The Gift, unified in sacred spirit, and diversified in their expression, make this moment holy. Sanctus. Qudus. The familiar sounds of these lands, and the unfamiliar sounds of Canadian lands in superposition enrich, amplify, and awaken each other, revealing their common sacred heart. My sound and the sound of the space are one. There is no separation. We are the same yet differentiated.

Whenever I am at the threshold of or within physical spaces like the Ismaili Centre Dubai, the Nairobi *Dharkhana*, or Toledo Cathedral, I enter with an "already always listening" (Amin Virani, personal communication, n.d.) of a sacred longing within; I also hear the realities of my social difference. Here, in Dubai, I was aware of myself as a Canadian and a Khoja Ismaili standing in this contemporary Arabic built environment that was of "my people." As I reflected, what emerged was the familiar feeling I also caught in the reverberating hallways of *Dharkhana* in Nairobi or Toledo Cathedral in Spain—a feeling like that at the edge of the wheat fields in Alberta or standing on the top of cliff on Vancouver Island witnessing eagles fly above me. I was aware that this was Dubai, but I felt like I was in Nairobi, Canada, and Spain at the same time. I

was only in the entryway, a threshold between the outside world and the prayer hall; yet I felt like I was in the heart of sanctuary. I felt whole,[20] all my differences present and sustained by a horizon beyond me—one and many in an integrated whole.

4.2 Communitarian dwelling and aesthetic reception

When I was ten years old, my family learned that my maternal grandmother, *Nanu* (see Figure 10), had passed away in Nairobi. My mom, sister and my ten-year-old self flew to Nairobi to attend the funeral.

Figure 10. Nanu (maternal grandmother) and baby Hussein

It is the day of the funeral. I am dressed in my brown corduroy suit that my grandmother had bought for me. Looking our best is a meaningful way to show reverence and honour. We remove our shoes and enter the funeral hall. We enter the stark rectangular room with white walls and windows, simply adorned. The fragrance of incense fills my senses. Nanu's body is at the front of the hall. I have mixed feelings of sadness yet a kind of ineffable uplift. I do not know what to expect. It is my first funeral of a close family member.

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[20] I use the word "whole" deliberately, with reference to health. Etymologically, the world healthy possibly comes from *sol, meaning whole. *sol is also said to be the root of words such as solidarity, solid, salve, and salvation.

The service includes recitations of Qur'an and ginan, and the customary congregational recitation of the salawat*.*[21] *"Allahumma swali ala muhammadin wa ali Muhammad"* (Figure 11). *Sadness sets in and tears flow. The feeling in the room, the sound of the entire room singing feels so powerful. This salawat tune is different from what is recited in jamatkhana. The words are the same, the colour is similar, but the melody and emotional affect is stronger.*

Music and Text: Traditional

Voice

Al - la - hum - ma Swa - li Al - a Mu -

2

ham - mad - inw wa a - li Mu - ham - mad. al la - hum - ma Swa - li Al - a Mu

4

ham - mad - inw wa a - li Mu - ham - mad.

Figure 11. Salawat recitation

The way of doing salawat moves me. I am shaken. The congregational salawat creates an emotional energy inside me. I feel more open. Tears run down my cheeks. It feels sad yet there is another feeling, beyond sadness and more hopeful. The volunteers tenderly cover Nanu's face and prepare the coffin for departure. We all stand for the recitation of the Fateha and the Namaaz-e-Zyarat, customary prayers within Muslim funerary contexts. I see the men line up in two rows across from each other. My cousin brings me along to stand with him. I'm not sure what to do. I follow. The men tower above me in the line. The elders offer their prayers and permission is given for the zanaza to leave the hall. The zanaza is lifted to shoulder height and placed on the men's shoulders. A sudden powerfully recited man's voice calls the shahada (testament of Muslim faith)*, "*La ilaha illallah, La ilaha illallah, La ilaha illallah Muhammadur Rasulullah*" as the zanaza journeys across the shoulders of the men, sharing the burden and helping the soul to its final resting place.*

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[21] Plural of Salat, prayer. The term for a one sentence formula and prayer in Arabic in which a Muslim asks Allah to bless the Prophet. For Sunnis, the Prophet's companions are also included and for Shi'i Muslims including the Ismailis, the progeny of the Prophets are also incorporated into the short form. In the Ismaili tradition, it is often recited in unison in congregational religious settings or individually as an act of prayer and is repeated.

*The entire congregation responds in an equally powerful way. "*La ilaha illallah, La ilaha illallah, La ilaha illallah Muhammadur Rasulullah*." The sound is immersive; strong; declarative. It feels as though the sound of the prayer is doing the heavy lifting. I can't reach the height of the coffin but stand in the row with the other men who give their shoulder with respect to the passing coffin. We make our way outside the hall, picking up our shoes. I see the men continue to move the coffin out of the building and into the hearse. The shahada continues as the women inside begin the salawat again and recite ginans. The voices in cacophony resonate with a kind of sonic interest. I stand and watch the hearse depart the grounds. My heart is heavy and yet lightened. Goodbye Nanu. I love you.*

Here again, the vocal power of the lead reciter and the congregational response affected me deeply. The text of the salawat is essential to the affirmation and allegiances to faith. The vocal expression functions to strengthen, to declare, to bring together, to support, and to bring comfort. This powerful communal vocal utterance brought sadness and a strange sense of peace in this time of grief. The sounds importantly served the function to benefit the soul's journey. This was a formative moment that showed me the power of community, the power of voices singing together, and the power of shared commitment to connection to faith. The sonic aspect was deeply intertwined in the social, spiritual, ethical purpose. I heard inward in this profound moment, reciting *zikr* to the power of community, the power of the voice, and the capacity of sound to shake me. Little Hussein, in the midst of towering men, reciting the *kalmo,* even though I did not know quite what was happening, I felt safe and comforted. I knew that there was something of value in this recitation and spiritual expression, something to uphold, and something to continue to share.

It's a day of special prayers, a few days after the funeral. I am with my mom and sister. I am dressed in the same brown corduroy suit, beige shirt, and brown bowtie. My mom is dressed in a beautiful yellow chiffon sari[22] *with turquoise paisley embroidery. We enter the building, remove our shoes, and head to the threshold of the jamatkhana hall. Volunteers greet us and roll halood on our wrists. I remember this scent that I love, bringing my wrist closer to my nose to take it in. The thick fragrance of incense and lobhan greet me as I enter the prayer hall.*

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[22] A sari is a traditional dress worn especially by South Asian women. The sari consists of a long piece of thin cloth with one end draped over the head or over one shoulder.

Finding our place in the ladies' section, my sister, mom, and I sit together. My mom drapes one end of the sari over her head like a veil. It's time for the standing prayer to seek strength to face all difficulties and to keep our faith firm. We stand. The women are so much taller, I think to myself. I'm surrounded in a forest of people towering over me, singing. The lead reciter begins.

I cannot see the reciter leading the hymn from the front of the room. I am enveloped by sound of the women singing with unified piety and strength. I feel a spirit of calm, peace and transported uplift. I feel connected, safe, held. The power of the communal voice emblazons itself in the deepest part of my being. The singing ends as the lead reciter offers prayer. A zikr starts. Ya Ali tu(n) rahem kar, ya Mawla tu(n) fazal kar.

I have heard this before and find myself joining in. I come alive in myself with a feeling of confidence since I, too, can join in the fervent pious expression. I feel even more connected to those gathered. The exact meaning of the words I do not know but the feeling of singing it together in this moment provides meaning and connection. I leave the hall empowered, curious, wondering, different. What did I just experience? Can that happen again? Where? How? With whom?

These two congregational experiences were like lessons in how a community came together in a shared allegiance to faith and a collective effort to support my family through a difficult time. For me, these moments of congregational empowerment, often facilitated by and interwoven with vocal utterance, became sites of knowledge that offered tools and processes, and ways of thinking and being that we harnessed to address the challenges we faced. These moments reaffirmed our commitments to brotherhood, sisterhood and kinship; to helping each other in times of need; and, to unify our voices in solidarity and support. Social and ethical ideals of generosity, care, humility, and support were inherently wrapped up in the sonic and vocal. Regardless of my personal position relationship with the zikr and ginan I found comfort and solace that helped me heal from the pain and grief I felt. Singing in this way in a religious context empowered me and made me feel prouder of who we were. Though I was not conscious of it at the time, these formative moments gave the student in me who sought harmony and belonging, more tools, approaches, and ways of knowing that could help.

4.2.1 Reflection on space and hearing

At Dharkhana in Nairobi, the Ismaili Centre Dubai and Parklands jamatkhana the sounds of voices, fragrances, textures, spaces, and aesthetic ambience intermingled with community, hospitality, service, leadership, ceremony, family, and auspiciousness. These multi-sensory communally held aesthetic experiences provided a feeling of comfort and safety. In these environments “I like who I am.” I “feel good.” I “love” the feelings and a quality of being that “come alive” in me. Every threshold I cross invites me into a new multi-sensory aesthetic ambient space that evokes contemplation on different levels. Although they constitute the ultimate purpose of attending jamatkhana, the prayerful moments seemed to be only one of the many aesthetic dimensions I experienced. The aesthetic experiences in their totality contributed integrative cultural, social, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of an Ismaili Muslim lived experience that I loved, grasped, and became curious about. This “fragrance of faith” was suffused in a physical building representing a revival of Victorian architecture, echoing a British colonial architectural form. The plush red carpets, velvet curtains, and interior decoration also echoed British royalty. For me, this integrative South Asian East African Ismaili-colonial formation shaped my sense of understanding of Ismaili ways of knowing and being. I did not know anything different.

On reflection, I now recognize that integrative cultural ways within the threshold of the grand wooden doors of the Nairobi jamatkhana reflected the multivalent Swahili-colonial culture in which my family and community were immersed. At home, the music to which we listened, the food we ate, and the language we spoke also reflected this cultural confluence. Our Ismaili communal spaces and lived experiences were integrative spaces where Western knowledge combined with Ismaili ways of being and amplified the spiritual-ethical-cultural aspirations of the community. These cultural spaces were spaces of hope, of reconnection, of amplification, and consolidation of faith and being. They provided the necessary intellectual, spiritual, and cultural foundations to grow, thrive, and bring our best to the world beyond. The spiritually motivated multi-sensory aesthetic and integrative socio-cultural ways of being and knowing were suffused and embedded within me at an early age—sparking curiosity and a lifelong quest to explore, deepen, and reimagine in my lived experience.

Indic devotional "music" in the prayer hall was in similar musical modes and colours of Gujarati social songs to which we danced garba and dandiya raas during festivities. The same Indic colours and emotions were echoed in Hindi film songs that were part of my aural landscape. The colour, modes, ragas, rhythms, vocal approaches found in spiritual and social vocal expressions were similar. The texts and functions of the music were different, but the Indic forms created a sense of continuity across musical environments. This Indic devotional soundscape intermingled with the larger integrative Indic-Swahili-Western soundscapes in which we lived. Together, they provided sonic environments that, while diverse and integrative, served an essential function to remind community members of what we value—community, uplift, nourishment, togetherness, supplication, humility, and service. These constellations of sound and music helped the community to reaffirm our commitment to the faith and its values, energizing us to contribute our best to the larger society.

These collective, embodied aural soundscapes become a compass leading me towards to seek for more of the same. Common elements of spiritual and/or social function, musical and aesthetic amplification, use of the voice, and creative agency were held in my body's awareness. In these moments, I felt amplified. A spark of vocal, aesthetic, communitarian service came alive. These experiences, held in an Indic-Swahili-colonial integrative culture formed a belief system and an Ismaili way of being and knowing. While home, outside world, and jamatkhana seemed separate, their congruent integrative soundscapes wove seamlessly one into another. The musical aspects of life formed unseen conduits of connection. These aesthetic experiences amplified feelings of safety, comfort, and belonging. I think they may have inspired what my soul would chase after and seek to create in life. I believe that these environments awakened the "student" in me to seek out resonant knowledge in the world.

As a child of younger than five years old, this quest was not rational. It was infused, embedded, inherent, leading my heart-mind, my ethical and rational self, to bring itself about and be known in the world. This inspired intellectual being unconsciously (and later in life consciously) sought out practices, skills, and new tools that resonated and recreated those early childhood communal musical experiences in a variety of ways. The search brought me to situations in life in which I witnessed and grasped ways of being vocal that I put together in my own way to bring out the childhood spark I caught. This fulfilled my need to know and to bring peace, comfort, and safety to others (and myself), much as when I was lulled to sleep in my mom and grandmas' laps. I

believe that it was those early childhood formative and integrative musical experiences that sparked what became a lifelong labour and effort. As I reflect on it now, I feel that the soul's resonant ambience was yearning louder than my mind could know or understand. This soul guidance led me to seek out new knowledge that would help me fulfill a purpose in life.

When I heard a choir for the first time, I discovered a new musical horizon to enact my embodied soul's knowing. In the rest of this chapter, I share selected examples of musical experiences (within Ismaili and school settings) that impacted me.

4.3 Doing and singing

4.3.1 Ismaili "anthem"[23] and stuti: Ismaili performance

Our Red Deer Ismaili jamat was a creatively engaged one. Children were always part of any participatory communal activities, particularly reciting stuti together. This was a time when the Ismaili community, predominantly South Asian East African, had just arrived in Canada. The community faced challenges of settling, struggling through the issues of societal exclusion, discrimination, systemic barriers, and integrating into the society of our new home in Canada. Creative community-based activities provided foundations to preserve and revitalize cultural traditions. Artistic expression enabled community members to stand taller in spiritual and ethical commitments, grasp the gifts of our cultural heritage, and to harness them to positively respond to the challenges of the new society. My parents were often the catalysts and leaders who animated the community through participatory arts, crafts, recitation and singing. Many community members also brought their creative energy and leadership to facilitate opportunities for us to creatively engage with Ismaili traditions. The teachers and elders encouraged excellence in artistry and production alongside recognition of the function of the repertoire as pathways to strengthen faith, nurture community cohesion, renew ethical commitments, and uplift the spirit. We learned to recite devotional music and sing social songs. We decorated sets, we made costumes, we practiced, we cooked food and ate together, we laughed and joked around, and we

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[23] What is commonly known in the community as the "Ismaili Anthem" is officially called the *Nashid al-Imamah.* The piece is a commemorative song of praise and allegiance to the Office of the Imamat and the Imam-of-the-Time. The piece is played or sung globally at formal community occasions and governmental visits of the Aga Khan. The piece is sometimes performed locally for commemorative events. As a child I remember fondly playing and singing the anthem on many occasions.

performed. I recall a particular moment that affected my sense of connection to Ismaili culture and communal values. The following anecdote describes only one of many presentations we did in Red Deer.

Our community holds an outdoor picnic celebration marking a special occasion in the Ismaili calendar. The community is gathered. It's a beautiful day. A small community hall opens to a large grassy field. Jamati ladies and men cook marinated mushkaki meat skewers on the BBQs set up outside the main building. Others are preparing the serving tables with salads, curried corn, and potatoes, chutneys, and other condiments. Plastic chairs are spread around the field and around wooden tables set up for senior members of the community. A group of men is playing volleyball in another part of the field. Preparations are being made for the young ones to present their invocation to formally welcome the gathered guests and to initiate, with the permission of elders, the feasting that is about to happen. We have been rehearsing for some weeks now, the singing of the "Nashid al-Imamah," a commemorative song to honour the office of the Imamat held by the Aga Khan. Singing this tune was customary on such occasions. We all receive the red and green coloured sashes that we wear proudly. We are gathered in lines, shortest to tallest, and organized like a choir. We are ready to walk out to where the performance space has been set up, and where we have already practiced our positions. A large, framed picture of our spiritual leader, taken from the jamatkhana, is positioned at the centre of our performance space. Garlanded with fresh flowers, the community symbolically greets and welcomes our spiritual leader. We are led to the performance area and set our positions, in three rows, with the shortest and youngest of us kneeling or sitting on the ground. Those of middle height stand behind them, and the tallest and oldest stand on chairs behind them. We are casually dressed but have been adorned with red and green sashes that unify us (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Children gathered at a community event in Red Deer to sing Nashid al-Imamah

The elders offer a blessing and invite us to begin. Our teachers, my parents, and other community religious education teachers, stand to the side and towards the back to lead us in the singing. The gathered guests join in when they can. There is a feeling of a communal re-pledging of allegiance to our spiritual leader and commitment to the ethics of the faith, to foster unity, kinship, support, community building, and betterment for all. There is a round of applause, some more introductions and welcoming remarks, after which the feasting begins. During a similar event sometime later, an older youth community member connects with me, asking me about joining private guitar lessons. I find myself saying an immediate, yes! We organize, and our parents are notified. Some days later, plans are set, and I make my way to the music school. I enter a basement room; the musty odour of old paper and ink greets me. I am eventually invited into a smaller room for the lesson. I'm excited. I can't wait to pick up that guitar. However, though I thought I was going into a guitar class, I ended up being in an accordion class! Alas, that led to me taking eight years of RCM accordion lessons and theory classes, entering competitions, and playing in accordion bands.

Formalized communal singing in settings outside of congregational ceremonies heightened feelings of faith and a sense of belonging. The musical and textual materials of the "Nashid al-Imamah" were mirrors strengthening and affirming our devotional connection. When recited, the audience symbolically reaffirmed allegiance to the Imam of the Time and to the ethics of the faith. The piece carries a spiritual-ethical message like the ginan and zikr. To perform the concert

expanded feelings of hearing and singing zikr at Parklands jamatkhana as a child. I got to see how we, as children, could sing together and offer musical leadership to the community. I learned how elders led us in rehearsing, accessorizing, and performing together. The teachers empowered us to use our voices to create atmospheres of care, love and spiritual renewal for the community. Here, we, *children* became cultural transmitters for the community. We were given a vital role in strengthening the community's faith and communal commitments. I began to hear and feel the possibility of becoming a creative leader, myself. It was in those moments that I understood how as a community leader I could create animating spaces of belonging for the Ismaili jamat and those in the larger society with whom I lived.

These engagements were expansions of the initial experiences like hearing my mom's voice in congregation with me at Parklands jamatkhana. The stuti experiences became mirrors of those early childhood feelings of peace, comfort, belonging, and participatory contribution. The experiences also became windows into new ways of producing traditional songs. The creative exploration was like a sliding door through which we could enter and exit into experiences and bring into each intangible and tangible treasure from the other. Adding production value, rehearsing together, and approaching the song from an aesthetic point of view reflected memories of hearing my mom's voice congregationally reciting a ginan in jamatkhana. The singing had an affective purpose: to animate feelings of faith and connection. Even the red and green sashes we wore, symbolizing the colours of our Ismaili flag, were of significance. All aspects of the performance were intentionally chosen to affectively remind us of the foundations of faith, whether we realized it or not.

4.3.2 Creativity in ritual performance

I head down the stairs with other Ismaili children to the classroom at the bottom of the stairs. The classroom is a long room, about 8 feet wide and 20 feet long. Rows of brown wooden school desks that we children helped paint are placed along each side of the room. My dad is teaching. We know the routine. Before we start our lesson, we all say the daily prayers together. We all sit in a circle at the front of the room and await instruction. There are ten children on this day. I know that my dad will offer something creative for us. It makes prayers fun and creative. Today, he invites us to each say one part each as we go around the circle . . . only in English

translation! It is fun. We help each other if we get stuck. It seems to take longer than it would take if we recited the prayer normally. It doesn't seem to matter. We end the prayers.

Without realizing, we have supported each other in community, we all have participated, we have said our prayers, we have practiced our memorization of the translation, and hearing it in English, we have even perhaps thought briefly about what it means to us. What I know is that it is fun.

Learning in a creative, fun, communal way was an important part of my connecting with the traditions and culture. My dad and mom, as well as other community members, taught religious education classes. Curriculum included learning about history, rites and rituals, Gujarati language, devotional singing, and performing recitations. Classes took place during evening prayers. We started every class with recitation of the daily prayer. Some children knew all the prayers, some knew a few, so in order to include everyone, my dad, our teacher, broke it down into parts and everyone said what they knew. Sometimes my dad suggested that each person do one part. Those who knew the parts better helped support and carry each person into the prayer and through the circle of prayer. Sometimes, we said the prayer only in an English translation. Sometimes, we said the prayer "normally." I remember it being fun and engaging. In a short amount of time, within the first 10 minutes of class, we did so much. We prayed. We supported each other. We challenged ourselves to remember what we had been learning. We all participated. We engaged with the content. We came together as a community. It is as if my dad knew the magic ingredient of fun and creative exploration that would help us to be more deeply engaged in the prayers. The more we participated, the better we learned. It was a safe space for us to learn and embody faith. This experience was particularly special because our teacher was in the room with us. He supported our creativity. He initiated it. There was a feeling of trust that whatever we did, the tradition was always to be respected and held with regard. The creative approach amplified community learning in a spirit of fun.

Our teachers also prepared us for formal recitation competitions and recitation leadership in jamatkhana. According to custom we learned to perform these recitations formally as would be expected of us. We knew that whatever creative approach we took in the classroom was not suitable in jamatkhana. I do not think it bothered me so much that it was not. What I think was important was that we had both opportunities—the formal performances of and the informal

creative engagement with the cultural traditions. The same teachers were involved in both processes. I learned that both ways of being and knowing could co-exist. For me, both ways of knowing and being had a spiritually, personally, and culturally affirming place in my life. We brought formal elements into the classroom—sitting upright on the floor, starting the classroom time with the prayer, saying the prayer together, using the same content. We understood that the traditions were to be held in regard and respected. When prayers were recited in jamatkhana, I would say the English translation to myself. I brought the *feeling* of communal energy and fun from class into formal settings, deepening my spiritual engagement and pious commitment. I learned strengths in both ways of knowing and being, formal and informal, that helped me to engage with the prayers and rituals in ways that profoundly resonated with me. Learning creatively was an important part of discovering a communal creative practice with the traditions as the centre.

4.3.3 Doing Gujarati *waez*

As part of community devotional recitation competitions that happened provincially, children were encouraged to participate fully. My mom and dad were creative catalysts for such activities, along with other community moms and dads passionate for youth involvement and creative expression. Categories included dua (daily prayer), ginan, *waez* (wisdom speeches), and Qur'an recitation. Our community religious education teachers encouraged us to participate in as many categories as possible, regardless of perceived talent in one area or the other. Not everyone participated in all categories. Other than the Qur'an recitation, my sister and I participated in all categories.

For waez, the competition rules required our age group to deliver 2-minute presentations. She modeled the structure based on how our teacher-elders (*waezin*) presented them. Then she created them using knowledge resources from the community as well as knowledge from other sources. I remember her including knowledge gained from *Science of Mind* or *Reader's Digest* that aligned with the community knowledge to create the expression. She was always creatively engaging the faith-based knowledge in her own way through Western resources and sources that she re-sourced and re-wrote into a creative braid that always felt right and in line with the container in which the traditional knowledge was always enacted. For extra special creative energy, she encouraged us to present the sermons in Gujarati, a language that we were familiar

with but did not speak fluently. We learned the script and how to read Gujarati in the religious education classes, taught by my dad, but overall, we did not carry the language with us all the time. It was in our soundscape and lived experience, although English was the primary language of our experience. Saying the waez in Gujarati added a creative element, a competitive element that made us unique in the larger group of youth who competed in the waez competitions. She took her English waez, braiding knowledge from a variety of sources, to an elder, a relative, in Calgary (a 90-minute drive away) for support in translating the text to Gujarati. I remember having chai and hearing stories of life and faith with the elders. We would leave the waez with them so their work could begin. The elder translated the waez into Gujarati script, and then my mom worked together with him to transliterate it into English script for us to learn. The artistic process continued as we then learned to speak the waez in a familiar, yet strange, language. Not only did we need to understand and connect with the concept, we also needed to be involved in an aesthetic cultural process to bring the Gujarati into a familiar embodied and natural expression. On top of it all, we were required to memorize what we had learned. We always began the waez, as was standard practice, with a verse of ginan, which served as a foundational text from which the conceptual tapestry was woven. The ginan also involved rehearsing, learning, understanding, vocalizing, and reciting as beautifully as we could for aesthetic and ambient effect. Together, the translational, conceptual braiding, the writing, performing, rehearsing, and the understanding together with elders, parents, and kids illuminated a creative interpretive engagement of wisdom held in communal structures that were otherwise presented in normative standards.

4.3.4 Reflection

Such childhood experiences were formative and transformative. Being brought to these kinds of vocal experiences, situations, and best practices in elementary jamati and school contexts provided knowledge and lived experience to fulfill an intellectual commitment to know more about creating peace, comfort, and safety—aspirational goals that transcend barriers of difference. Singing in school provided opportunities for me to pledge allegiance to larger societal values. School music enabled me to learn how to work with others different from me to create musical atmospheres that benefited our larger school community. Ismaili music was a reminder to know afresh our commitments to spiritual-ethical foundations of faith: care, brotherhood, generosity, and improving the lives of others. Singing in a variety of ways allowed for embodied

knowing of shared values and cross-cultural confluence. By renewing pledges to Ismaili faith we committed to spiritual-ethical foundations that crossed boundaries, faiths, and traditions—ethics of care, collaboration, cooperation, purposeful leadership, and creating uplift and peace. My participation in school-based vocal arts, while steeped in Christian religious contexts, helped me grow similar commitments to multicultural values, inclusion, hospitality, and collective effort. Though the content, repertoire, conditions of experience, and leadership approaches were culturally specific, they heightened shared humanistic ethical, spiritual, and social commitments. Through purposeful communal singing beyond the pursuit of purely musical goals, I found a pathway forward. I gratefully received all this knowledge before the age of 10! My being might have known it, but my mind had not yet cognitively captured it. The embodied childhood spark seeking peace, calm, purpose and community manifested through these vocal arts utterances. Early childhood experiences readied my inner student for the teachers yet to come. Various situations and learning opportunities came my way when I was open to catching them. Every unique occasion represented an opportunity for me to gain needed material knowledge that I would eventually combine to shape my own practice.

I am in awe of the creative engagement that was involved and the pedagogical approach my parents and community elders/teachers naturally evoked. There were many elements to this creative engagement with the cultural knowledge funds to which we children may or may not have directly felt connected. The creative elements, I think, helped us to educate other elements of our sensitive beings that helped us imbibe aspects of faith, culture, aesthetics, spirituality, and community life. These holistic creative engagements, I believe, opened a pathway for all the children (including me) to capture distinctive understandings of faith within the collective milieu. At the same time, the experiences honed our creative selves, performance skills, interpretive agency, capacity to reach aesthetic refinement, curiosity about spiritual search, and social belonging.

Key educational aspects that enabled these enriched Ismaili experiences include:

1. Participatory involvement
2. Elders, teachers, kids, families all collectively immersed in the creative process
3. Creativity and interpretation being integral to learning
4. Drawing on and integrating affirming knowledge from outside the standard practices
5. Adding new elements to revitalize existing traditions

6. Pursuit of artistic excellence
7. Our families and teachers believing in our creative abilities
8. Ismaili traditions, cultural knowledge funds, customs, conceptual frameworks and spiritual foundations were always centred

4.4 Racism and musical counterpoint

Middle school experiences offered opportunities to gain new kinds of knowledge, both social and musical that further emboldened and shaped my integrative practice. During that time, I discovered first-hand the impacts of exclusion, inclusion, and division due to diversity.

When I was 10 years old, my family moved to Innisfail, an even smaller town in the province of Alberta with a population of 3000. Innisfail was a 20-minute drive from Red Deer. My dad worked in Red Deer, and we attended jamatkhana in Red Deer. We owned a small corner store named Husnah's Mini Mart, where my mom and I also worked. My parents derived the name of the store by combining my name, Hussein, and my sister's name, Amynah. I worked there with my parents, helping them serve customers, work the cash, and stock the shelves. I felt a great sense of pride, confidence, and even agency as a 10-year-old to be able to do what the adults did, serving satisfied customers. However, we quickly became aware that our family was one of the few families of colour in the predominantly White Christian town. Due to our skin colour, some people chose not to buy from us. They even told their children not to come to our store. Others called our place the "Paki palace" and other derogatory names. On the street, it was common to be called names like "fudgee-o," "holy hoser," "shit on a stick" and "paki" (often with the middle finger). These actions hit me hard. They were stark opposites to the feelings of comfort and safety in early childhood that I had begun to look out for in the world. These experiences denied the spiritual-ethical values and allegiances that I grew up taking in. I remember running to my teachers in tears. They always found the right words to comfort me.

My parents usually told me to ignore these behaviours as motivated by ignorance more than anything else. My parents and ancestors suffered even worse systemic and social realities while living in colonial East Africa, where safety, entry, and access to public services were bound in hierarchies of class and race. My parents reported, "We just accepted it. We were told not to go here or there because it was for only Whites, so we didn't. It was a fact of life." Here, in Innisfail, the racism *did* occupy my attention. I did not accept it. It made me feel terrible, and I

wanted to fix the problem. My parents told me it was ignorance. Unlike in Kenya, where larger numbers of South Asians resided, in Innisfail we were one of few families of colour. The people who lived there did not know about "Indians." My parents told me to be proud of our culture and who we are. All their efforts in the Ismaili community and in our lives helped me to understand that pride. The cultural, musical, and creative community-based work in which we participated contributed to this pride. This work engendered a way of looking inward to Ismaili culture, where I could see strength and value. Yet, the racism persisted.

I wanted to bridge the gap and find a way to fix the problem. A social mission and conscience came to be animated in my spirit—a mission, I believe, animated by early childhood embodied knowing and feelings of spiritual ambience. I also knew first-hand the transformative power of collective singing and sought to create more of those experiences in the world, especially wherever it was not. This newly politically awakened "student" sought solutions and knowledge that might help solve the problem. Life brought me to more musical experiences at school and the Ismaili community that helped me to gain tools and hear the possibilities of for bridging. The following sections shed light on some of those experiences and how they contributed to hearing inward and outward, eventually finding a consolidated merging.

4.4.1 Band

In Innisfail, in Grade 5, I was introduced to concert band. Band gave me skills, tools, practices, and knowledge to build bridges and create feelings of belonging that I did not know at the time would shape my life and practice. I played clarinet and tenor saxophone. Playing in band was the first time I experienced how different parts and instruments could create a harmonious whole. In the band, I learned about timbre, texture, and how each instrument had a role to play to bring out the feeling of the music. I also learned how to be a better musician. I loved playing in the band. Participatory contribution, collective striving, and artistry all made me feel proud and confident. When we were all in tune and played the music well, the outcome was magical. I knew that when I had goose bumps something special was happening. School band was a new and yet familiar experience of community, sound, and collective goals of creating an uplifting ambience.

I also discovered a new perspective on music leadership. A supportive and caring conductor, Mr. Sherman, led the band. Forty years later, I met him again at a music conference in Alberta; I was reminded of the belonging I felt in his musical care. His style was different from my parents'

community-based leadership; yet, the feeling of safety and comfort I felt was the same. Here, however, I was not with the Ismaili community. I was with other children who lived in Innisfail, potentially the children of the perpetrators of discrimination. I would never know. In band, the problems of division in the world outside the music room did not seem to matter. We were all one, working towards a common musical goal. In band, I learned about the role of a conductor to bring all our parts together through artistry. I also learned about the care and intention required from the players to unify our different parts. In school band, I deepened my musical knowledge––how to listen and how to improve my technique. I felt empowered, confident. I belonged to something unique and special. I began to hear in band a way of knowing and being that affirmed and served me well. I also learned in school band a way of being in harmony with others that offered a direct counterpoint to the disharmony I heard and felt in the town.

The big day arrives. The annual parade is about to happen. Our band is marching in the parade. Mr. Sherman has us all prepared and uniformed. We place our portable lyre sheet music clip stands on our instruments. Mr. Sherman takes us through a final warm up and practice of formations and coordination of our steps. I'm playing the tenor saxophone and excited about this high-profile city event. We walk to the parade starting point and are placed in our position in the procession. The parade starts. We play our selection of tunes as we march through the streets flanked by people watching on both sides. We hit the intersection of the main street where I see Husnah's Mini Mart on the corner. I feel proud that I am representing my family in this parade. As we turn the corner, I well up with emotions. I see the whole community gathered on the Husnah's Mini Mart corner. I am contributing to a musical experience. I am marching in a town parade in solidarity with others who potentially carry racist attitudes. The mayor is there. The entire town is there. And here I am playing music from the society in which we live, bringing my brown racialized self onto the streets to entertain and create belonging for everyone! No matter who is there or how they see me, I am contributing through their musical style to their happiness at that time. I am elated. I am energized. I am proud and confident. I am reconciled and whole. I am sounding back.

The music we played represented Western classical, popular, and jazz genres. This did not matter to me because in the music I heard so much other value that I could align with it. Playing in band had a larger social, spiritual, community function that resonated with what I had learned about being human in Ismaili culture. The musical experience also suspended barriers of difference that

animated racism and division in the world outside of the band room. Like being lulled by the voices of the women expressing their devotion in jamatkhana, in band I was lulled into feelings of being held in safety and comfort. Unlike childhood experiences where I passively received and absorbed the sounds, in band, I actively participated in producing the sounds. I was part of a system that with others made the world sound more beautiful for everyone. Band provided another vehicle for hearing outward in the larger culture to shared values and strengths. While the sounds were Western, I seemed to always bring my Ismaili spiritual-ethical disposition and belief through which I understood those sounds, made meaning with them, and immersed myself in them.

At the same time, our jamat had an Ismaili marching band. My mom, sister, some other youth and I played in the band based in Calgary. Eventually, we had a quorum of musically inclined youth in Red Deer who, led by my mom and me, formed a small marching band there. The band always played the "Ismaili anthem" and other songs inherited from the musician elders in Calgary who played in bands in East Africa. The songs we played were dear to the community and vital in cultivating the Ismaili imaginary in Canada. Playing in the Ismaili marching bands with my family was fun and a great way to serve the community.

4.5 Choral resonance and spark

My family had returned to Red Deer. I was part of the wind band and jazz band with Miss Stack, and that was my main extracurricular activity. Band was fun and I built friendships. The band room was a safe space for me. I was also pulled into leadership roles with the Ismaili bands. I was often asked to support the musical learning of younger band members in the Calgary marching band. Until that time, many of the players learned by rote and had been playing in their home countries and in Calgary for many years. The young band members needed music, so I transcribed and notated the songs performed in unison. I began to see how my musical knowledge could foster inclusion and serve the advancement of my community. It was empowering. As a teenage boy in the community, being able to contribute meaningfully meant a lot to me. It was gratifying and motivating. It made me want to learn more about music and to learn how music could serve. It was a community-musical-personal benefit. The more I could learn, the more I could give back. I began to cultivate a participatory two-eared hearing, where I

combined knowledge that could benefit the larger Ismaili community in which I was raised. This was exciting.

What I was about to find out, however, would change my trajectory, putting school band, at least, on the backburner.

It's near the end of my Grade 9 year at Eastview Junior High. My friends and I sit together at a school assembly in the gymnasium. I notice microphones, a drum set and other instruments set up at the front. I am curious to know what is in store. After all the announcements, there is a welcoming musical interlude. We are asked to give a round of applause to welcome the local high school jazz choir. I have no idea what a jazz choir is. The group enters the staged area, two people per microphone. The band enters and takes their spots. I see the conductor also enter. He turns to the audience and says a few words before he turns back around to cue the group. The choir starts singing. My ears perk up. My body feels taller as my interest grows. It does not take long before I catch a new spark—a spark that feels so right. I see myself singing that music. I just know it. There is no doubt. It feels like home. The music is a mirror for something profoundly familiar, yet it is also a window into something strangely unfamiliar. The repertoire is unfamiliar yet the feeling of the music, its effect on me is so familiar. This is a "yes" moment. There is no gap between the thought and my spontaneous action to meet the conductor afterwards and ask to join his group. He kindly encourages me and tells me to come and see him when I get to the high school. He happens to be my social studies teacher that year, remembers me, and invites me to the choir rehearsal. The rest is history.

When I heard the jazz choir, a deep part of myself came alive. I felt a spark. I heard myself in the music. Hearing the jazz choir sing, seeing the microphones, hearing the cool tight harmonies, a light inside nudged me and came alive. I felt a strange kind of safety, comfort, and joy. I belonged there. I believe hearing the jazz choir reminded me of the childhood spark that I caught listening to the jamat sing so fervently the devotional expressions in jamatkhana. This experience inspired me to want to learn more about this way of making music and to be a part of it. I did not know at the time how that knowledge would help me in the future to fulfill my desire to create harmony in the world and fix the problems of racism. The jazz choir reflected another, different way to create the peace, healing, and unity that I so much longed for. My innermost self, who sought comfort, safety, and peace in childhood, had found its method.

4.5.1 High school choirs

I sang bass/baritone in the jazz choir (see Figure 13), chamber choir, barbershop choir, and the large concert choir. Our conductor, Keith Pederson, was supportive and energizing. He recommended me for provincial youth choirs and gave me opportunities to mentor other students. Singing in choirs, adding my voice in harmonic layers with other singers was a new kind of immersion in an all-embracing sound, akin to reciting devotions in Ismaili congregation. I felt enveloped in the sound, much like I felt in Parklands jamatkhana reciting zikr with my mom.

Figure 13. Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School Jazz Choir

In jamatkhana we recited in unison. In choir we sang in layered harmony, all singing something slightly different yet in a resonant whole. We were taught: Listen. Hear. Fine tune. Blend. Unify your voices as one. I learned how to intentionally blend my voice with others without losing the unique quality of my own voice. I was reminded of how every part had a vital role to play in creating the harmony. Mr. Pedersen always said that when we balanced a chord perfectly and sang perfectly in tune, the angels sang with us. He was referring to the overtones that emerged in these moments of vocal unity. His metaphor of the angels hit home. The transcendent feeling, joined by a promise of angels singing with us, inspired me to work harder and invest more into the community of singers. I felt that a spiritual aspect of myself could feel at home here. Singing together in a choir also involved humility, care, willingness to attune to others, and a collective effort—ethical teachings we learned in our Ismaili culture. My worldly musical life and private

spiritual life began to find resonance. I heard the difference in the way we recited ginan in jamatkhana and the way we sang in choir. Yet, in the deepest part of myself, I felt a comforting resonance. I felt belonging. The troubles of a negating social world outside could be set aside for a while. In choir I felt safe. I grew in my capacity for a resonant inner-outer hearing of strengths and differences between cultures. In learning to sing in harmony with others, I found a hopeful way forward.

4.5.2 Choral dichotomies: Resonance and collusion

Singing Christian choral hymns and secular choral music gave me a way to understand our ginan in a symbolic sonic language to which I could relate. The way the voices coincided when singing in layers also felt good. I felt like the experience of prayer was deeper in some way, and that the sacred feeling could be achieved quickly. I did not always understand the words of our ginan, but I knew that Christian prayers shared common themes of beseeching, praise, supplication, and submission. Taken in the context of Sunday services, these musical forms also were part of a social and ethical making of the congregation. The musical forms of asking, creating, sounding, and singing were different from how ginans and zikr were recited in jamatkhana. In jamatkhana, we prayed together in unison. In church, we prayed together in harmony. I did not always feel that sense of uplift reciting ginan or zikr in jamatkhana, except sometimes on special festival days. Praying in vocal harmony made me feel Ismaili in a new way. The texts, forms, approaches, and repertoire were not part of Ismaili cultural experience, yet I felt an ineffable and embodied familiarity.

Singing choral music gave me a subtle new way to express Ismaili sentiment, through an affective language that my colleagues and friends used. I was part of a cultural ecosystem bigger than myself, different, yet very much part of my everyday reality. Though the words were rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions, the spirit behind them and ways of making them reminded me of Ismaili spiritual and cultural life. The choral textures gave me new ways of hearing spiritual colours and feelings that I could bring to hearing ginans. When I sang and heard ginans, I could audiate inner harmonies that otherwise I was not cognitively aware of. The ginan became a living cultural resource ripe with multi-dimensional potential to inspire.

I attributed to choral singing something sacred. The sound itself was sacred, not only the words. I felt the same way singing secular texts as I did sacred and liturgical ones. Texts I did not know

were sacred, like "Rise Up My Love" (from the Song of Solomon 2:10) resonated as esoterically evocative. At the time, I could have not known that, but now in hindsight, I think I was able to hear some aspect of the Ismaili imaginary and faith in those esoteric choral forms. Truthfully, I did not pay attention to the words. Singing harmonies, going through the processes, and feeling emergent affective outcomes, regardless of the text, empowered me. My foray into the art form was jazz and classical singing, mostly of sacred texts, and sometimes, secular poetry. No matter the language or content, choral singing felt spiritual, reminding me of formative aesthetic jamati moments like at Dharkhana in Nairobi or during my grandmother's funeral. The idea of singing in layers, creating harmony, and working towards goose bump moments became a way to translate what I thought was a unique Ismaili "religious" culture in a Canadian secular school environment in which there was no material representation from Indic Ismaili lived experience. Whether it was reciting Ismaili devotions or singing choral music, the sacred feeling was the same.

It is chandraat (new moon festival), a special ceremony on the new moon every month. The Alberta Youth Choir, of which I am a part, is singing in Red Deer at a local church the same evening. I am wearing my black tuxedo, tuxedo shirt and black bowtie. My shoes are polished; I make sure I have black sock, and that I have my music. My family and a relative visiting from Calgary are dressed up in suits and saris for khane. We enter the elevator in our apartment building; on our way down, I mention that I will not be coming to khane. She is asks, "Are you not coming to khane? It is chandraat." Jokingly, I say, "I am going to khane. Our concert is in a church, so it's like I'm going to khane." I said this jokingly, but I think that inside I felt its truth. I looked forward to singing this concert and hearing those sounds in an acoustically live church. My family goes to jamatkhana. I go to choir. Some days later I learn from my father that this relative had called him with concern. He explains that my relative is worried that I would become Christian by singing in choir in church and that she had asked my parents to keep an eye on me.

I believe that singing in a choir amplified my sense of faith in some way. I felt even *more* Ismaili because of it. It added something to my experience of faith and spiritually inspired communal values as an Ismaili. It did not take anything away or pull me in a new direction. I came closer to my own faith. This way of doing music helped me feel the spark of faith. In choir, I not only heard in the heart of the experience a spiritual resonance, but I also learned different practices

and tools for creating that feeling—by singing, listening, working to harmonize, and even breathing together. I could hear outward to a Judeo-Christian horizon and inward to an Ismaili Muslim horizon. They met somewhere in the middle, at the threshold, within myself, in my heart and mind, in coherent spiritual belonging.

Singing in choirs gave me a new set of tools, skills, knowledge, and approaches to refine how to sing with others. In congregational singing, our teachers did not show us how to deliberately create unity. The prayerful moments expressing our common spiritual allegiances provided the bonding factor. Our jamat's shared intentions for cultivating spiritual-ethical foundations of faith and pledging our allegiance to the Ismaili Imam generated unity in our communal recitations. We were not *learning* to sing better. Our love and faith made our singing better, whether we understood or connected deeply with the repertoire. In choir, our commitment to musical goals and pursuit of harmony (regardless of text) showed me how to unite my voice with others. We *learned* how to sing better together. The emergent harmonies made us more loving and faithful to commitments bigger than ourselves, regardless of our individual relationships with the repertoire. Choral tools combined with Ismaili cultural resources created a new hierophanic coherence through which binary identities could be reconciled.

4.5.2.1 Collusion

In choir class, I felt uplift and spiritual resonance. At the same time, I felt differentiated, and in society, judged negatively. In the world outside of choir, I experienced racism because of my skin colour, and later in life because of being Muslim. It was hard for me, constantly feeling like I needed to justify my existence or to explain and fight "against" others in resistance. That was not how I operated.

In my heart, I always hated conflict. I heard the world in an integrative and harmonious way, so being negated in society was hard for me. I did not know how to change it. Music provided a place for a vision coexistence to be alive, to not have to fight, convince, or persuade anyone of the opposite. In the choir room, all the obstacles melted away. I felt safe. I belonged to a powerful spiritual and communal music society. I did not have to define myself by who I was against. In choir, I found a pathway to define myself by who I was and what I cared about most, at least at an embodied level. In choir, I learned how to build deep connection using my voice to harmonize with others.

However, in choir, I was often the only brown person or person of colour and definitely, the only Muslim. My experience of singing in choirs today is not much different. Although the sacred repertoire resonated for me with a wider intellectual horizon of Ismaili devotional and ethical literature, it did not materially represent Ismaili cultures or the integrative experience of life I embodied. The tunes and modes rarely, if ever, represented familiar ragas, colours and emotions of my integrative cultural hearing. I was aware of my differentiation, but negative feelings associated with that difference were subsumed in harmony, music, love, and spiritual feeling. In choir, at least, even if people quietly negated me, moments existed when we were deliberately working together towards a common goal of harmony.

Althusser's (2001) concept of interpellation is useful. Althusser explained how ideology interpellates and recruits subjects:

> As a first formulation I shall say: all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject. . . . I shall then suggest that ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey, you there!" (Althusser, 2001, pp. 117–118)

Althusser (2001) explained that when hailed, the subject being hailed recognizes that the hail was really addressed to them, and secondly that it was really them who was hailed. The individual becomes a subject of the hail when they turn to respond to the hail, and the individual becomes a subject by acknowledging the hail was addressed to them. Accepting the hail gives power to the one who hails. I apply this concept in the case of choral music ideologies, which I argue interpellates singers and recruits them as consenting subjects to the hail. I, as a singer in choir, accepted the proverbial "hail" from the conductor and the systems under which the instruction took place. All the singers and I turned our attention and gaze towards the conductor and the production of a Western choral goal. With the goal of goose bumps and harmony at the centre, we agreed to be choral subjects ready to receive the instruction. We enacted the choral ways of being required of that instruction. In accepting the hail, I colluded to leave aside my unique cultural voice for the promise of transcendent unity with peers. The effects of racism and

negative representations of Islam could be subsumed in choir and even transformed to something positive—a desired outcome in the face of negation. By being in choir, did I accept the proverbial hail from the conductor, too? While a welcome spiritual feeling came over me in choir, in accepting the hail of the conductor and participating in the "foreign" yet so familiar musical sound world, did I collude in my own "cultural erasure?" This tension has always held me hostage. How might I honour the power of the choral form to unify and invoke the sacred while also honouring the richness of integrative Khoja Ismaili devotional and cultural making?

In the Ismaili jamat, as a youth, I did not always fit in. I always felt different than the other youth. I was older than the group of young children in our community and younger than the group of older youth. I was in the middle, neither here nor there. My interests were different: the arts, crafting, classical music, and choir. I was totally involved with all the Ismaili social activities, leading recitations, and participating in cultural performances led by my parents. However, somehow, I felt different. I even had agency, leading music and helping with community events; but did I also collude in the erasure of some part of myself that I did not even know was being erased? The Ismaili world and the Alberta worlds always remained somehow different, and somehow, I felt the need to create harmony.

When I remember back to the Ismaili teachings that resonated with me most, they were about bridging cultures and cultivating kinship within our societies, alongside love for our Imam and commitment to balancing spiritual and material life. My quest was shown to me. I had embodied this integrative ethos early in life. Thus, what I thought was purely a response to racism and negative representation, was more than that. Having written this autoethnography, I realize that my quest has been to keep sustaining an historic Ismaili consciousness, a harmonizing way of knowing and being, that serves as a necessary counterpoint (and natural human condition) standing in powerful resistance, and perhaps even eventually shaping, the larger systems of negation. Negative experiences of life were not reasons to fight *back*, but catalysts to awaken a sacred responsibility to even more fervently fight *for* peace, harmony and betterment.

4.6 A cyclical return: Morning anthem and concerts in school

The research process, its storying and restorying, making sense of my experiences, speaking with Jenna, and reflecting more, brought me to the realization that my choral journey began much earlier than I had been narrating. As a child, I was often immersed in hearing collective singing in jamatkhana, and I was involved in reciting *stuti*[24] and the "Ismaili anthem." I realize that other school-based musical experiences shaped my hearing in the world. I share these stories as a cyclical return to childhood, a formative time for me, when I learned to hear the possibility for barrier transcending resonance across diverse traditions. At school, I was introduced to music and singing from day one. We learned to play recorder, we sang the Canadian national anthem every day, and I participated in school winter concerts. Learning to play recorder was my introduction to learning to read music, a whole new language that I was excited to know. Singing anthems every morning particularly left an impression on me.

I am 6 years old. I am enrolled at George Wilbert Smith Elementary School in Red Deer, Alberta. I have learned to sing "O Canada," the Canadian national anthem. It is early in the morning. I am feeling a bit tired, yet excited. As was the morning routine at school, we would soon be singing "O Canada." I am looking forward to that. I enjoyed singing, and I could do it well. I enter the classroom with a blackboard on the front wall to my right and rows of desks in front of me. A Canadian flag hangs from a flag stand in the front corner of the room opposite the entrance. I quickly get to my desk and put away my things. I am anticipating the singing of the anthem that would happen soon. The teacher is present, saying good morning to everyone and giving us individual instructions to help us get settled. We are all seated now. The teacher is in the front of the room, dressed up in a skirt and jacket. She looks pretty. My heart races because I know she is about to tell us to rise, face the Canadian flag in the corner, raise our hands to our chest, and sing. I can feel the ceremony and gravitas in my heart. Here I am, newly in Canada, now singing the national anthem with everyone else from the larger society that have been here possibly for generations. I recall how I loved ceremony and singing with people in these kinds of special moments. We begin. "O Canada, our home and native land. . . . " I sing with all my heart. I know the words well by now, and I enjoyed singing. I also could match the notes and be

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[24] Stuti is a Sanskrit term that refers to praise or worship. In Ismaili community life, stuti refers to a genre of worship song most often performed outside of the jamatkhana setting.

a strong voice in the crowd. We finish the anthem. There is a moment of silence. The teacher asks us to be seated. The work of learning begins.

Reflecting now, singing the anthem every morning echoed experiences of being in jamatkhana during my early childhood. The formality of the occasion, the gravitas of the song, the unified affirmation of a commitment of citizenship all reminded me of Ismaili communal atmospheres that I had come to feel and embody. Thus, I think that singing “O Canada” reminded me of singing the “Nashid al-Imamah" for the Ismaili community. Both “anthems” were communal utterances of pledging allegiance and affirming what I have come to know as a commitment to upholding shared values of peace, compassion and betterment. I was new to Canada, a child of an immigrant family starting a new life in a country that welcomed and provided safety for our community. Singing “O Canada” became a way of saying thank you for the gift and for affirming a commitment to what we learned were Canadian values of peace, multiculturalism, and volunteerism—values that echoed Ismaili teachings. I do not think that I was fully aware of it at the time, but I was cultivating a way of hearing aspects of Canadian culture that resonated with an integrative Ismaili culture. It was in those early years that I started to feel what was common across barriers of difference.

The time has come for the school Christmas concert. I am excited to sing Christmas songs and carols commemorating Christ’s birth. I am playing the role of Joseph. I feel confident and proud playing such an important role. We are dressed up in costumes from traditional nativity scenes. I am wearing a shepherd costume. We gather in the classrooms to get ready and walk towards the gym where the performance is taking place. My heart races with excitement. We are asked to enter the gym where the nativity scene is set up in front of the stage. I walk to the scene and take my place. The play begins, and we tell the nativity story through carols and songs. There is something special about honouring the nativity, the formality of the concert, and participating in a cultural experience that is so much part of the culture in which we are now living. We come to our last song and finish the concert. The sounds of supportive applause fill the room. Emotions of pride and gratitude come over me. “I like this,” I think. I want to do more.

Why did I love this so much? Was it the performance? The story? The singing? The situation? What was it? As I reflect now, I wonder whether I was so excited because a childhood vision of “leading” a congregation came true. Was it that my soul recognized that I was now one of the

"lead reciters" that I admired at Dharkhana in Nairobi? After all, I was singing religious songs, at the front of the stage, for a special commemorative concert. I was also singing for an audience (like a congregation) for whom I thought this musical concert was an affirmation of their faith and values.[25] The content of the concert did not directly mirror Ismaili cultural experiences and devotional texts. Regardless, I found connection in them. The concert, the theatrical presentation, and the music all had a function to heighten the audience's connections to Christmas and their faith and culture. Reflecting now, I think about how I was participating in an important part of this new society's wellbeing. I was serving this community by singing songs that they loved. At this early age, I could contribute something, through singing with others—something I loved, to create something special for everyone. These musical utterances in elementary school helped me cultivate ways to participate in the larger societal cultural knowledge that resonated with me. The spiritually derived Christian music, the communal effort, the artistic production value, the commemoration all echoed things I valued. I felt that I could be part of something that the new community in which we were living valued. My voice mattered and was part of the feeling of "faith" in a sense, an acknowledgement of shared values. I am not sure whether at the age of 6 I rationally thought about this. I think these school musical experiences gave me new tools, practices, and approaches that brought out embodied childhood memories of safety, comfort, and peace in the jamat. A spiritually motivated, communal musical feeling was awakened in my spirit in a whole new context. I was growing my capacity to hear embodied resonance across cultural traditions, and to recognize the strengths of different cultures that could bring out ways of hearing, knowing, doing, and making that made my soul feel alive.

4.7 Two-eyed seeing (*etuaptmumk*)

I draw on an Indigenous teaching from the Mi'kmaq: two-eyed seeing (*etuaptmumk*), a powerful metaphor through which I have come to understand my experiences. Brought to us by Elders Albert Marshall, and Murdena Marshall "two-eyed seeing . . . is and has to be your guiding principles as to how one should live while you are here on this earth" (Marshall, A., et al., 2012, 00:41). Marshall emphasized that one must develop the capacity for two-eyed seeing, a way of

[25] As a child my impression was that everyone who was white was Christian. However, I acknowledge that some of the audience may have been agnostic, atheist, or practiced other faiths. I cannot know the audience's religious associations for a certainty.

being and knowing that offers humanistic instructions for thriving. Two-eyed seeing is a mentality, attitude, and approach to life built on foundations of openness, curiosity, and responsibility that enable an individual to creatively interpret and bring together aspects of the parallel cultures in which their lives are expressed. Two-eyed seeing acknowledges a reconciliation between the aspects of culture epistemologically rooted and experienced through dominant Western knowledge systems—the institutionalized, societal element that influences young people as they grow, and aspects of culture epistemologically rooted in and experienced through the Indigenous culture that individuals bring. In an article about educating Muslims in a Western context, Niyozov (2010) highlights a conception of culture that one of the teaching participants explained: The teacher regarded

> each student as possessing a “mega culture” and “micro culture” . . . Mega culture to me transcends my students’ realities . . . it is the institutionalized, the societal element as a whole that young people are influenced by as they grow. Mega cultures are often very political, have their own agendas and often manipulate or use their adherence and their followers, and to me that’s abuse. In my classroom I am dealing with the “micro culture,” the individual culture that a student brings to me. That culture is influenced by their fathers’ attitudes towards books and theirs towards girls in school, their grandmothers’ cooking, their mothers’ songs, their level of comfort in their homes, the level of conflict in the home; it’s the reality that the young person brings with them every day to school. (Teacher, as cited in Niyozov, 2010, p. 31)

The micro and macro cultures co-exist. Thus, like Elder Albert and Murdena Marshall (2012) have suggested, there is a need for a reconciling orientation to support an individual’s thriving as they navigate belonging and reconciled wholeness between their micro and macro cultures.

Elder Albert explained how cultivating two-eyed seeing allows for a felt and intellectual space in which an individual can be whole and feel equipped with a diversity of tools, skills, and knowledge to thrive and address the lived realities of their lives. “People familiar with both knowledge systems can uniquely combine the two in various ways to meet a challenge or task at hand” (Aikenhead and Michell, 2011, as cited in Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 331).

Furthermore, Elder Albert emphasized that

> Mi'kmaw understandings are but one view in a multitude of aboriginal and indigenous views . . . and that all of the world's cultures . . . have understandings to contribute in addressing the local to global challenges faced in efforts to promote healthy communities. Thus, one might wish to talk about Four-Eyed Seeing, or Ten-Eyed Seeing, etc. . . . So, here too, one might wish to talk about multiple-eyed seeing. (Marshall, 2012, as cited in Bartlett et al. 2012, p. 336)

The subject of two-eyed and multiple-eyed seeing, and the conceptual framework of finding strengths across cultures aligns very well with Ismaili teachings. Building on historical intellectual orientations of Muslim cultures that sought to expand existing knowledge and combine it with new knowledge to benefit the conditions of society. Aga Khan (2008) encouraged seeking out the best of knowledge of the world that combined Muslim and other humanistic wisdom traditions, to orient a social conscience and spiritual orientation to contribute to personal thriving and the betterment of societies. In the context of rebuilding Tajikistan after communism, he advised that every system has strengths from which to draw knowledge, that when combined can help solve problems and create enabling social and economic environments for thriving. He suggested that in the situation where the ex-Communist world, the Muslim world, and the Western world are preparing to encounter each other, it will be important to draw on aspects of knowledge from all three to build intelligence and serve the needs of society to thrive without letting the equitable achievements of Tajikistan in the decades prior become lost in the new market economy.

> Each of these three cultures has something to bring to the solution of the problems of Tajikistan. The West has many strengths, but prominent among them are science and democracy (with their public mechanisms for self-correction) and private institutions, liberal economics, and a recognition of fundamental human rights. The Muslim world offers deep roots in a system of values, emphasising service, charity, and a sense of common responsibility, and denying what it sees to be the false dichotomy between religious and secular lives. The formerly Communist world, although it failed economically, made important investments in social welfare, with particular emphasis on

> the status of women, and was able to achieve in Tajikistan impressive social cohesion. These are a powerful array of strengths and goals. (Aga Khan, 2008, para. 13)

The Aga Khan (2008) acknowledged that working out how to constructively combine these knowledge systems so that the encounter could help to solve Tajikistan's problems is not clear. However, he suggested four prerequisites for success.

> For each of the cultures, the result should, first, draw on its strengths and, second, be consistent with its goals. Third, the result should be a substantial improvement in the current situation. And fourth, the transition should be humane. (Aga Khan, 2008, para. 12)

In considering the encounter between Western and Indigenous scientific knowledge systems, Marshall, A. et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of recognizing different ways of looking at the world, finding the strengths in those ways, "and mindfully bringing those strengths together, drawing upon the deep understandings they represent, the strengths of each, and bringing them together to work together to go forward on this planet, together" (01:28).

Elder Murdena (2012) emphasized understanding the value of knowledge from two different worlds. She maintains, "two-eyed seeing is valuable when you pick from two worlds and [try] to co-join those two" (06:28). She also acknowledged that doing this merging is very difficult but that it has to be done.

> I know I can't crawl into my culture and say that's all I need to survive in this world. I also know that you need the white man's education to survive in this world and be happy. And I think the white man also needs me for what I have to offer. (Marshall, M., 2012, 06:49)

A capacity for two-eyed seeing enables individual fulfilment and survival, while also responsibly sharing knowledge and using that knowledge. Paraphrasing the words of Chief Dan George, Elder Albert (2012) underlined the benefit of taking the "instruments, tools, and education of 'the white man,' and incorporating them with ours so we can create a better world for everyone" (07:31).

> Our journey here is not meant for one perspective, or one consciousness to get us through. We all need each other. So, the lessons we are trying to put forth now to our young people, it couldn't be much more expedient if we can take the best, whatever tools the white man has brought forth, and the tools our forefathers left us with. (Marshall, A., 2012, 06:00)

This journey of walking alongside each other is about combining, respectfully regarding, and mutually assembling aspects of multiple knowledge systems, those of the wider mainstream, and those of cultural systems that are otherwise marginalized or negated in the mainstream. This approach is about sharing knowledge and being open to what aspects of multiple knowledge systems can be useful to better our situations. All peoples and cultures have something to teach to help fulfill human and societal potential. Elder Albert (2012) explains the need for "a change of attitudes, a change of mindsets" (02:33) to create change. The Aga Khan (2008) encourages a pluralistic "way of thinking, which regards our differences not as threats but as gifts—as occasions for learning, stretching, growing—and at the same time, as occasions for appreciating anew the beauties of one's own identity" (Aga Khan, 2008, para. 15). He called for an ethic for all peoples that enlivens the possibility to accept, work with, explore, and develop understanding of the complexity of human society. He emphasized the importance of reconciling difference, on one hand, and cooperating with common purpose on the other hand. He added that it was important to develop student intelligence and to help them use their knowledge to address societal challenges. Exchanging and building on diverse knowledge resonates well with the concept of two-eyed seeing.

Elder Albert submitted, "basically the education system has taught us to absorb every knowledge we get without actually questioning it or looking at it from another perspective" (04:09). Two-eyed seeing requires the ability to critically distinguish, challenge, and reconcile aspects of the larger cultural textures and aspects of traditional cultures to create something new. A young person needs to learn how to critically inquire and combine knowledge with others and for themselves to create enabling conditions for thriving. One needs to learn to hear, understand, and hold within oneself a space for consolidating sympathetically resonant aspects of multiple knowledge systems while reimagining how a vision for co-joining the uniqueness of those knowledge systems expresses a sense of a fuller humanity. The process also requires co-learning with others, exchanging knowledge, and engaging diverse cultures with reciprocal respect. How

encounters between what the two eyes see are reconciled, negotiated, harnessed, and activated to make life better for all is the question. In a plural context, it seems that it may necessitate perhaps even more than two-eyed seeing—a multi-eyed seeing. The concept offers windows of intellectual opportunity to consider how one negotiates a pluralistic mega culture with multiple diversities, contemporary and global realities, the dominant Western knowledge systems, traditions and micro cultures that individuals bring.

Bartlett et al. (2012) explained that the struggle for anyone in life is to ask oneself and learn "who am I" (05:25). With regard to educational systems, she lamented that if an educational system "ignores a part of who you think you are simply because it doesn't include your people's understandings" (Marshall, A., et al, 2012, 05:28) in the learning process, then the "ability to develop a well-balanced understanding of who you are as a young aboriginal in Canada today is going to be denied" (Marshall, A., et al, 2012, 05:49).

What emerges is a call to create reconciliatory conditions for young people to interpret and consolidate their experience of multiple knowledge systems. The human heart-mind (*man* in Sanskrit) is the alchemical centre and crucible for this cohesion. The first call is to provide learning spaces, teaching mentalities, and attitudes that help young people to be open to, and curious about, combining knowledge that can provide them the resources they need to survive, thrive, and contribute to the greater good. Elders and scholars call for frameworks that nurture two-eyed seeing and capacities for two-eyed seeing. This includes providing opportunities for students to learn mainstream knowledge and Indigenous knowledge and providing spaces to explore ways to bring these together to apply in pursuits to solve societal problems. The second call is towards providing repertoire and materials that help young people to see themselves, to see new perspectives in their unique cultural spaces and in broader culture, and to safely traverse two worlds as they choose. This call to action brings forth the need for production of repertoire and literature that can grow this two-eyed seeing and engage young people with those literatures meaningfully.

Educators are asked to consider how to innovate pedagogical spaces to better help young people to be reconciled and thrive authentically, be fulfilled, and serve. We are called to provide students learning conditions in which they can safely experiment with and combine knowledge systems in a way that enables them to effectively respond to the worldly issues they face.

Diverse and plural repertoires that serve as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors for learners are vital in this endeavour. The Aga Khan (2008) reminds us also to engage this integrative process across peoples, communities, and institutions. This will also require an ethic of openness and curiosity to learn, build knowledge, and apply that knowledge for greater good.

Two-eyed seeing helps me better understand my experiences. From birth to age 6, I was immersed in an integrative Swahili ecosystem that I inhered. This Euro-Indic-African ecosystem provided the cultural materials to shape spaces and sounds that invoked feelings of faith and communal doing. For me, these spaces were comforting. They were intriguing. They created wonder and awe. They made my soul curious. They provided a transcendent, interpellating spark and called attention to a creative human nature as “active, building, creating, shaping agents” (Taylor, 2007 cited in Dharamsi, 2014, p. 8). Singing primarily Christian sacred music in school also brightened that transcendent, interpellating spark harmonizing my sense of knowing and being across diverse spaces. Both spaces gave me tools to create beauty and participate in communal activity. Hybrid Ismaili cultural making was a kind of integrative architexture as was the multilayered choral form. One was about music and culture as integrative. The other was about multiple voices within an integrative texture making something beautiful. The choral could learn from the Swahili Ismaili experience about how musical culture can evolve and welcome the texture of the world. The Ismaili could learn from choral music about intentional listening and approaches to create harmony across multiple parts.

Both cultures work towards Unity with a transcendent Divine, and unity (and harmony) with an immanent divine in in each of us. In both cultures the participants are encouraged to work closely together towards common goals. Transcendence is part of the making, reliant on the co-making. Immanence is part of the realization, held in the co-making. I discovered how the Ismaili vision could be enriched by a choral experience led by Ismaili orientations and aspirations for belonging and social contribution. I also discovered how the Ismaili vision could enrich understandings of choral sound as architectural texture for multiplicity and unity so essential in current divisive and pluralistic societies. I saw the strengths in two cultures and brought them together in my own way. Importantly, the horizons of each were not randomly assembled. The consolidation of cultures was made possible through realizing a spiritual unity across the cultures. Awareness of spiritual unity provided an embodied space through and in which difference could be woven into new textures of meaning and sound.

I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. Lori-Anne Dolloff for introducing me to this Indigenous teaching of the Mi'kmaq shared by elders Albert and Murdena Marshall. I find this teaching powerful in understanding my narrative, and more so, in envisioning the possibility of a "companion-able species" where Indigenous peoples, multicultural immigrant communities, and dominant Western communities, in multifarious cultural assemblages, commitments, contestations and harmonies can come together "around an always in process table . . . where all are guests and no one is host, a table where music education messmates commit to practices of regard and response, *respecere,* in ways that compel us to learn from and about each other in the context of humility and doubt" (Gould, 2013, p. 69).

Chapter 5

5 Developing a practice of choral zikr

In this chapter, I discuss the development of my integrative practice. This tale is about a personal search for integration and a continuity of practice of community arts development, through which the practice is further shaped. I focus this part of the chapter on filling the gap, bridging, and integrating the supposedly two "separate" worlds bound by a sacred unity. I share highlights of my practice to demonstrate my process and thinking. There is more there that I do not mention, but to maintain the focus of this paper, I choose only the highlights. The stories I relay reveal moments of making with community, woven amid moments of barriers, tension, or exclusion in the practice that caused me to shape, unshaped, and reshape as I went along.

In the first part of this chapter, I outline a creative community-based exploratory process through which my practice of merging of Ismaili devotional and Christian choral music evolved. I share some of the challenges and obstacles I faced that were sometimes frustrating but that always inspired further thought about how to shift practice. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss how I introduced the idea of a choral merging to the larger Ismaili community. I discuss what repertoire I used, what we did together, what I said, and how the audiences responded. I also describe the kinds of narratives I used to help the community make connections between the choral experience, zikr, and cultural teachings. I present this information as a composite of activities I have led in a variety of community settings internationally. The shared narratives describe lived experiences, thought processes, and musical responses that influenced the development of my integrative practice, pedagogy, and cultural remaking.

5.1 Harmonizing in jamatkhana: An aha! moment

As a high school student, I remember starting to sing harmonies to zikr and ginan in jamatkhana. When I was growing up, congregational singing was not called "choir." We named the group by the thing we did: stuti group, marching band, ginan group. When we sang "O Canada" in school, we did not name it. When we sang the nativity concert in elementary school, we were actors in the play. So, there was no defined idea in mind about what "choir" was. It was not until I heard the jazz choir that I caught on to the idea of the word *choir*. I may have heard about it or seen church choirs on tv, but I did not think of it really until about in Grade 9. The word seemed to fit

and work for me. I adopted it, more because it was already a part of my spirit vocabulary, it seemed. The way of making music must have become so much part of my being that I organically started singing harmonies in khane.

I am sitting in Red Deer jamatkhana on a red plush carpet. It is another special occasion. This carpet is the kind you can draw designs in. Moving fingers one way across the carpet brought out a light colour and moving the fingers across the other way brought out a dark colour—like a Persian rug. The lead reciter, an elder, takes their seat at the front of the jamatkhana to lead the zikr. I am sitting in a row with a group of other youth. The zikr begins. I find myself making figure eights in the carpet, as I always did. I felt calm when I did that. I feel comforted, and I feel free. On this day, something special happens. As the reciter leads us through the jamat sings, I find myself singing harmony to the zikr. It is natural. It is easy. It is different yet the same. It is like choir, but it also zikr. I wonder if anyone can hear me, so I sing the harmony under my breath. I do not want to disrupt the reverent space we are in, yet I want to keep singing the harmony. I am hearing inward to the spiritual function and purpose of faith, and I am hearing outward to the choral musical function that resonated with my purpose of faith. I believe that in that first moment of hearing the zikr in harmony, I came to know how my mission and purpose—to create harmony and build bridges—could be done.

Merging vocal harmony with zikr and ginan shaped my integrative practice and lifelong vocation. Blending musical traditions gave me a sense of confidence and positive creative agency to sound back to dis-belonging. It was exciting to discover that I could sing zikr in harmony like this. I softly sang or hummed harmonies to myself, being careful not to be heard. I started singing harmonies more and more to myself. To this day, I do the same, especially when I am distracted in the prayer hall. I understood that I could bring the Christian and secular school music education experiences into a direct conversation with zikr and ginan in jamatkhana without anyone knowing. What I was singing was zikr and choir, yet it was something new. I do not have a word to describe what it was. If nothing else, at least in my heart and mind, it was my way of bringing these two musical traditions together. I could finally hear my Ismaili self in the choral, and the choral in my Ismaili self in the same place—a superposition of sorts, sacred hearts as one, the sonic effect textured in a new way. I could not separate one from the other. In a strange way, in my heart-mind (*man*) the two worlds were entangled in each other, reconciled,

inside out, and outside in. My heart-mind became a reconciling space in which the two worlds could abide in integrative conversation and indwelling.

5.1.1 Choral zikr

After my family moved to Vancouver in 1989, I founded the Vancouver Ismaili Choir (see Figure 15). The choir was comprised of a small group of Ismaili singers, whom I discovered sang in community and school choirs also. In 2006, I was invited to form a National Ismaili Youth Choir, an auditioned group of singers from across Canada. Both choirs used notated a cappella music, practiced and rehearsed, as we would have known in school or community choirs. Our repertoire grew to include folk songs from East Africa, choral hymns, and diverse music of the Muslim world. We often collaborated with indigenous, West African, Sufi, and Hindustani classical musicians to inform our work and to create new culturally integrative ways of hearing our sound. We chose to sing folk songs familiar to the community, popular music, and pieces from the traditional choral canon. Over time, we began to consider how ginan and zikr could also be part of the larger cultural tapestry of the music we performed.

Figure 14. Vancouver Ismaili Youth Choir (1998–2004)

In 2001, after the horrific events of 9/11, I became even more aware of the gap between the Muslim world and the West. Forces within Islam and outside Islam were creating division. What I felt as marginalization due to my skin colour in Innisfail was now a marginalization due to my religious identity, a core orienting aspect of my worldview. This went to the core of my being

beyond the material cultural manifestations of my multiple identities. To keep hearing negative representations of Islam and Muslims on the media was like constantly being told that who I was and how I knew myself at the core was unacceptable. On top of it all, this marginalization was not only local to my time and place but existed on a global scale, further amplified by loud marginalizing voices within Islam. It was my impression that Muslims and non-Muslims were attacking the peaceful Islam that I lived and wanted to cultivate in the world. I felt that “I had to protect it somehow” (Günther, 2013, p. 119) and to re-narrate a different story. I knew a peaceful Islam that promoted bridges with others, sought brotherhood and kinship, encouraged beauty and goodness, and reminded believers of the search for and submission to God. An antagonizing and antagonized Islam was not what I wanted to fight for or against. Rather, I wanted to fight for peace, harmony, and understanding. To borrow from Bernstein (1963), I wanted “to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before” (Bernstein, as cited in Buchenholz, n.d.). I strived for music that was the manifestation of a communitarian aesthetic vision of Islam that I had embodied from childhood.

In the late 1990s, large numbers of Afghan members of the community arrived as refugees. The call to represent our diversity was even stronger and strengthened us. A few Afghans I had met and come to know joined the choir, though not for long. I worked hard with the Ismaili choir and Ismaili community members to search out and create arrangements of repertoire that told a transnational story of Islam and Ismaili experience. I sought to envision how a Christian hymn could sit in a resonant counterpoint with folk music of Afghanistan, or a devotional Muslim expression could be in harmony alongside an African folk song. As a collaborative curator of the artistic programming, I wove an aesthetic narrative around concepts of harmony, unity, beauty of diversity, familiar, and non-familiar to translate a vision of a peaceful Islam.

Before this time (9/11) in choir, we had sung diverse folk, popular, and sacred choral music as an expression of our integrative identities. We always sang songs that we found resonated in the community at large and that were familiar to them. In programming music, I always felt that the familiar repertoire helped the audience feel settled and open; then the new repertoire—perhaps something from the choral canon—could be narrated in a way that drew connections to the familiar. In this way, we introduced new ideas. I always felt that once we created comfort, the audience was more open and able to receive that which was new. Further to the discussion in Janmohamed et al. (2013), I realize now that the choir was curating an integrative texture

blending sounds from our cultural collective memory with Western repertoire. We sought to recreate the breadth of our community's pluralistic ethical soundscape in a Canadian setting. We were expressing more than identity. We were expressing an integrative Ismaili cultural ethos through a blended vocal arts medium.

Though some of our repertoire was not "devotional" per se, if I apply an integrative conception where the culture of the prayer hall resonated congruently with societal culture as it did in Nairobi and Indic regions, then even the repertoire we sang reflected in some way the colours of our integrative cultural hearing. This integrative effort would lead us towards further sustaining our allegiances and commitments to faith in a Western context. Our artistic curation and narrative construction also interwove repertoire that would have resonated with Ismaili experiences and aspirations, especially ways to express gratitude love to our Hazar Imam. Even though the songs we sang were from larger folk and popular cultures with which we were familiar, the diverse jamat still felt that we were presenting "Ismaili music." To understand why and to have that discussion is a topic for another conversation. Suffice to say, though, there was a resonance in the Ismaili imaginary with the diversity of repertoire we curated, familiar and unfamiliar (yet conceptually aligned). Expressions of diversity, collaborative arranging, and an integrative curatorial vision within a larger spiritual-ethical-social ethos became the way we created and produced programs. We wove into the texture of our concerts the plural sounds of our lived experiences in Canada.

At first, we did not program ginan and zikr. For various communal reasons, sharing certain repertoire from the private jamatkhana sphere publicly was not encouraged. Similar to Indigenous traditions, our ceremonial or devotional music was not to be shared. We were advised that due to global geopolitical realities, public performance of the repertoire could pose risk for Ismailis living in areas of political instability, where forces like the Taliban imposed repressive ideologies. We complied. That said, and as I have already indicated, musician elders sang geet, and recited ginan and zikr in jamati settings *outside* the prayer hall for *mehfil*[26] concerts at the

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[26] Mehfil refers to a gathering, assembly or party where poetry, classical music, dance, and singing are performed for a small audience in an intimate setting, often described as a "music party" by Ismailis of South Asian origin. In Ismaili contexts, mehfil involves songs of praise and devotion including ginans, geet, and zikr, and may be presented in larger halls and theatres.

cultural centre or at home. My family played recordings around the house and in our cars. These geet blended cultural influences and contained messages of praise, piety, prayerful requests, and part of the larger integrative soundscape that affirmed our spiritual allegiances and ethical commitments. Similarly, in the choir's repertoire, regardless of its musical origins, our devotional ethos was "hiding in plain sight" (I. Jinnah, personal communication, July 11, 2021).

I missed hearing the ginan and zikr that were so much part of the community's spiritual and ethical formation. I also really wanted to hear the zikr and ginan sung with vocal harmonies. In jamatkhana I was often disappointed that fewer people recited along with zikr or ginan, resulting (for me) in a loss of affective power. I longed for the feeling of being immersed in fervent recitations of zikr as I had at Parklands khane with my mom. I often found myself singing harmonies quietly to myself in jamatkhana. If not in the congregation, then by singing harmonies even to myself, I came closer to the feelings I craved. I knew how reciting zikr in vocal harmony felt and I wanted to share that with the jamat, especially in a Western context where the societal culture did not necessarily reflect the integrative cultural milieu we had embodied. In fact, within a colonial reality our cultural knowledge was diminished. I was even more motivated to explore what aspects of our devotional literature could be blended with vocal harmony to write back our cultural voice. If, like in Indic regions, our devotional repertoire was part of the larger ethos of integrative devotional movements in the Indian subcontinent, how could our devotional repertoire or ethos be integrative in a pluralistic Canada?

Thus, I curated devotional music in different way; for example, by including a hymn like "Give Ear to My Words O Lord" (Anderson, 1944), or "Lord for Thy Tender Mercy's Sake" (Farrant, ca. 1530-1580). I chose these pieces because they expressed the same pious sentiments I heard and understood in the ginan "Vinanti Karu Chhu Saheb Mora" (I humbly beseech you my Lord).

ઇજી કર જોડીને એમ	Eji Kar jodine em	Lord! With folded hands
માંગુ હો સાહેબ	maa(n)gu ho saaheb	I humbly ask, O Lord
આશ હમારી યા અલી પુરોજી	aash hamaari ya Ali puroji	Fulfill my hopes, O Ali
હમે ગુનેગારી બંદો દોસારી	hame gunegaari ba(n)do dosaari	I am a sinner and a blameworthy slave.
મારો જીવડો છે તામારે હજૂરજી	maarojivado chhe tamaare hajurji	My soul is in your presence

(“Vinanti Karu Chhu Saheb Mora,” Sayyid Abdul Nabi)

With humbly folded hands, reciting the beseeching texts of the ginan entreat the Lord to fulfill our hopes. The text also expresses the longing of a sinful creature to seek refuge with the Lord, to lay one’s soul at the Lord’s feet. The messages of humility and recognition of one’s submission to God, essential Muslim theological elements that inspire a spiritually motivated social justice, were able to be shared in a public setting, subtly expressing our Ismaili interpretation of faith. It was a way to share the aesthetic choral ambience with the jamat and to also express an “Ismaili” repertoire, avoiding tensions within community circles about publicly sharing the ginan and zikr.

Another example of devotional content was an interfaith chant wove spiritually inspired traditional melodies within a larger multilayered texture. Nancy (Fischer) Mortifee, who ran the Westcoast Sacred Music Festival, taught the Ismaili Choir a “Contemplation Chant” (Sophia Songhealer, 1986). The texture wove five well-known texts and melodies from Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Jewish traditions. The aesthetic ambience of the interwoven melodies was beautiful and resonated with a culturally integrative vision. The piece included an Islamic text, *La ilaha illallah*, very familiar to the choir and *ummah* (global community of Muslims) at large. Including a multicultural chant using this familiar text (that also speaks to oneness) was a gentle way to introduce the idea of harmonizing a zikr. The text and intention of the text was familiar, but the tune, known in Sufi circles, was new to the community. This enabled me to introduce the idea of a zikr in harmony without the risk of using dear and cherished Ismaili ginans or zikr. Translating this text and “tune” seemed more feasible than translating specific tunes bound in normative Ismaili traditions. The “Contemplation Chant”

provided a new musical horizon of integrative being, symbolizing cultures in dialogue; however, not as diverse cultures juxtaposed next to each other, but as diverse cultures braided in a spiritually held texture within one musical piece.

In teaching this chant by rote, a familiar method of transmission in the community, music literacy and knowledge of choral singing or vocal approaches were not necessary. The audience could participate, regardless of their musical knowledge, cultural heritage, or lived Canadian experience. The mostly two-bar phrases of each chant were easy to teach and for the Ismaili jamati members to pick up. Within a few minutes, many people were singing choral textures, experiencing choral harmony in a way that amplified teachings of the tradition and new integrative ways of hearing and feeling. This multi-faith chant showed me how the "architextures" of choral sounding could be used as scaffolds for diverse cultural voices to sound together in harmony and counterpoint, all towards creating a unitive whole. I began to shift my choral practice away from a performance practice of a small group requiring a certain level of musical literacy to a participatory musical process that supported the communal expression of spiritually oriented Ismaili principles of faith.

5.1.2 An experimental laboratory for creating choral zikr

I wondered how else we could harmonize the zikr. If contrapuntal melodies from plural life experiences could be woven with zikr, then what about layering the zikr with homophonic harmonies that used the same texts or texts from within the Ismaili experience? Since I discussed this question in depth in Janmohamed et al. (2013), I will only state here that the choir became a creative laboratory, a safe space, for working with the youth to explore the possibilities and risks of such a creative endeavour. The devotional tunes in harmony helped us to hear them and take them in differently than if they were sung in the regular way. The choir became a laboratory to safely experiment together. We tried reciting ginan and zikr with drones and ostinato, and we creatively experimented with simple arrangements. Experiments led to more curiosity leading to more experiments. When we felt like we had gone too far creatively, someone in the choir would always stop us. We took those moments as signs to reel back and critically examine our actions. Those moments became opportunities to discuss, brainstorm, inquire and reflect on our processes often resulting in deeper cultural insight and more sensitive musical creativity.

The first time I shared zikr in harmony with the larger jamat was during a nationally touring community-run dance-theatre production called *Yaqzan: The Awakened.* I was the co-artistic director with Riaz Rhemtulla, a *Khatak* dancer, and we worked with an outstanding team of volunteer artistic producers, scholars, impresarios, artists, crew, and musicians from the diversity of Ismaili experience across Canada. Both Vancouver and Toronto Ismaili choirs were involved. Over 75 professional and community-based artists came together to tell the story. We also hired non-Ismaili professional production staff, a stage director, lighting designer, and stage manager. Our sound designer included music from around the world where Ismailis lived that—to me in a mystical resonance—transcended the boundaries of sacred, secular, folkloric, and devotional. The chorus of singers included at times the whole cast. We included vocally harmonized zikr as part of the diversity of expression. One of the tunes and texts we used to create a choral moment was "Ya Rahman, Ya Rahim" (O Merciful, O Compassionate). We added simple harmonies of thirds and fifths to create a new texture.

Figure 15. Excerpt from "Ya Rahman, Ya Rahim" sung in thirds and fifths

We also included the salawat heard at Ismaili funeral ceremonies, one that I heard at Nanu's funeral when I was 10 years old. This prayer, commonly known and recited across the global Muslim community, is carried in the Indic East African jamat through a specific tune that I loved. Our a cappella version included an interfaith rendition of the salawat, and a choral

arrangement of *shahada.*[27] The entire production community found great solace in these expressions, and I was proud to be able to present them as part of a larger expression of diversity within the production. This was new for our community leaders to hear. However, not without some trepidation, they allowed for these renditions to be shared, recognizing the need for youth to express their faith and traditions in a new way.

I share an important story here about how the rendition of salawat came about.

It is a few weeks after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in New York. I cannot help but feel conflicted, anxious, annoyed, and worried. Is this how Islam is going to be seen? I know Islam to be a faith of peace. How can I accept the conflicting news that Islam is a source of hatred and violence? What could I do? The questions dwell deep within me, beyond a rational consideration of what to do. I ponder how Islam and cultures of the West might come to a better understanding of each other and coexist harmoniously. Can music help? I feel like it can. So, I let that feeling inform me. In a momentary flash, I receive a musical response. I am driving down Lougheed Highway in Burnaby, British Columbia, pondering, reflecting. I hear loud and clear in my inner ear and heart (perhaps even an embodied recitation calling itself out) the sound of funerary salawat. I think I had just left a funeral ceremony, a place where I found solace and a sense of communal hope. Death, sound, togetherness, and healing seem present with me. The fragrance and ambience of the communal funerary recitations orient my hearing. In another almost superimposed moment, I am struck with the memory of a commonly sung choral round on the text of Dona Nobis Pacem. This round has been with me since I was 14 in high school where I remember its magic since the first time I learned it. It was a song we always sang with the choir on bus trips, at airports, when eating out. It was used as grace. It has been a common text in the many requiems I have sung. It resonated with my own understanding of peace that my faith offered, and peace of the soul. The tune of one of the parts of the round matches exactly the tune of the Ismaili funerary salawat. "No way!" I think. I am elated. I take in the feeling of the tragedy of 9/11 and the immediate media war against Islam. I let the inquiry of conciliation dwell and the musical response comes forth. That day, driving in my car, those choral sounds I

[27] Testament. In Muslim usage, the term refers to a verbal declaration in which one acknowledges Allah as one's creator and Muhammad as a prophet of Islam. For Shia Muslims, there is also an acknowledgement of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law as an inheritor of Prophet's mantle of guidance.

came to love 20 years before arrived afresh in deep conversation with the salawat. It feels like a subconscious reading of a unitive and pluriform embodied being was called forward into this moment. How else could I have thought about this uncanny similarity? It wasn't an act of musical genius I could take credit for. It was a deeply felt resonant knowing that awakened its confluence in the car that day. It felt like an arrival coming out of deep embodied hearing and knowing (see Figure 16).

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Figure 16. “Rest for a Soul”: Salawat combined with “Dona Nobis Pacem (grant us peace)

During this time, I had the impression of big crack in the societal architexture, isolating Islam as an enemy, and deepening an unspoken, and now publicly expressed dichotomy of West and Islam. As a child I felt the racial tensions, but now, I felt the impact of negation of my core ontological and epistemological orientation of life. My choral universe was of unitive harmony. My unique musical experiences provided a counterpoint. My Ismaili experiences were of communitarian aesthetic unity and choral music was about singing together in harmony. My childhood soundscape was of an integrative pluriform confluence. What I was hearing, seeing and feeling on the news, however, was the antithesis—disharmony.

The composition that I have since entitled “Rest for a Soul” was a creative manifestation of the possibility of a cohesively inhered way of being—a message of solidarity and kinship transcending difference. While in the larger society there was cultural division, in music there we could share a vision of harmony. Integrative musical textures could scaffold a vision for reconciliation and reclamation to fill in the cracks of societal disharmony with unitive hope.

One of my jobs was to demonstrate this choral approach to zikr for pre-show talks and with sponsors of the show. Often these demonstrations took place in jamatkhana social spaces with hundreds of Ismailis of various cultural backgrounds gathered. I remember feeling empowered and excited to share this integrative choral innovation with the community. I was in my element, speaking, sharing stories, and leading the gathering in choral recitations. In a profound way, I realize that now I was on the podium, the kind of podium I was curious about visiting Dharkhana in Nairobi. Here, I was leading what was familiar in a new multi-layered way, narrating its connections to our faith and teachings, and as a conductor, inviting the gathered community to actively participate. Only now in hindsight do I realize the immensity of those moments where I was transforming from hearing and receiving culture to leading and co-creating it with and for the community. I always felt a rush of emotions. It was not lost on me that I was given deep creative trust to stand in front of community members to lead such explorations. My childhood yearnings, reception, and loves, together with my explorative musical inquiries and experiments, were coming together in this new interpretive way so many years later. For me, this transformative moment turned what I had felt and known in my heart (singing harmonies to myself) into a sonic forum for communal reception and participation—the kind of communal aesthetic spaces that were part of my inhering of faith and resonant sensitivity.

5.2 Reflection

My practice helped me to consolidate school-based music learning with jamati musical learning in the Ismaili community. Both arenas provide different kinds of social, musical, spiritual, emotional and ethical benefits through their processes, repertoire and function to meet the needs of their unique communities. Public school-based activities linked me to Canadian values and working with others different from me to create music that supported the spiritual-ethical orientations of the larger society. While culturally specific, I always felt uplifted because I could contribute through my voice to something bigger than myself. School-based music was like a window to new perspectives and ways of engaging my voice. Ismaili-based Indic vocal arts linked me to foundational faith-based values and spiritual-ethical aspirations through intergenerational connections with elders, family, and community members. I had opportunities to add my voice to culturally specific musical and cultural activities (and products) that further gave life to the community. Creative engagement with Ismaili vocal arts taught me communal processes of transmission that reflected a continuity of historic intellectual traditions. The binary of choral and devotional experiences, relegated to their unique culture-specific spaces, pulled me like a wishbone one way or another. The news, political, and artistic practices further delineated the separation. The colour of an integrative cultural environment and the teachings of adaptation and enrichment of arts and culture towards sacred and social ends taught me that there was another possibility: consolidating and making whole again. The common values of singing together became a meeting point from which my practice and musical inquiry expanded.

Challenges of exclusion and inclusion related to diversity manifested through racism and negative representations of Islam provided a catalyst for continuing an Ismaili vision of creating peace, kinship, and unity within society. As I have been relaying the story most of my life, my labour of love and life is not to fight against the division and blame that division for my suffering. I realized that my labour has been to hear the flame of faith, the feeling of unity with an ineffable presence and light beyond myself, and to find/create new material realities for to sustain that energy. My labour is, thus, of cultivating a flame of faith and working to create harmony across thresholds of difference to amplify feelings of unity vital to thriving. Harnessing the most impactful methods from school-based choral music and practices of communal Indic Ismaili vocal arts energized my interpretive and poetic quest.

Harmonizing zikr became the starting point for a lifelong journey to know and create harmony within, with, and without. The adaptive process of applying harmony and choral artistry to zikr was possible, I submit, due to my capacity for hearing integrative worlds. This way of knowing was infused like a fragrance in my heart and embodied in my being from childhood. This capacity for integrative hearing in the world was amplified by teachings to build bridges between cultures, keeping the ethics of faith alive, and experiences that sparked my longing to merge traditions. The transformative power of school-based choral music enabled me to hear outward to music from the larger negating culture with new ears. I heard in choral music resonating spiritual and communal values that echoed for me foundations of Ismaili teachings and larger humanistic values. I also saw in choral music difference in practices, techniques, musical structures, and approaches that served the goals of vocal unity, spiritual ambience, and transcendence. I did not hear in choral music specific cultural materials familiar to my family or me: this was an important factor that motivated me to learn how to bring our cultural materials into choral composition. However, regardless of the differing forms, musical content, and materials, I could hear strengths in choral approaches for how to create unity and spiritual feeling so important to me. I learned from Ismaili culture participatory community-based practices, techniques, and approaches that served goals of community unity, spiritual growth, and affirmation of allegiances. These community practices fostered embodied feelings of faith.

Choral music connected me to spiritual and communal energies in a Western context that gave me a new way to listen to the spiritual depths of zikr. Till I heard and sang choral music, the zikr and ginan were just melodies to me. Those melodies were in major and minor modes that I associated with melodies from music classes at school. The tunes were linked with community and represented a fragrance of faith that I sought to amplify. In the zikr and ginan, however, I did not always feel a spiritual intensity I craved. I knew they had the *potential* for profound impact, but that potential was latent. Choral music on the other hand, connected me to spiritual and communal energies in a Western context that gave me a new way to listen to the spiritual depths of zikr. Singing zikr with harmony opened up pathways for hearing inward and outward, with others, within myself, and without uniquely bound cultural musical identities. Zikr became choral. The choral became a zikr.

My different musical environments taught me to hear into and through unity. My capacity for integrative hearing was amplified by teachings and experiences of creative unity that formed the

sound of my soul (and the sound of a shared interconnected human condition). I learned early on in life to listen for unity a state of being forgotten in material antagonisms. Choral music and Ismaili devotional experience reminded me of that unity, through which I could weave two cultural experiences. The merging of the two traditions enabled hearing inward to shared value systems and hearing outward to different ways of sounding that could be combined with different functions for different groups of people. An inner feeling of harmony, inspired, I believe, by knowing the spiritual fragrance of sound and community from early childhood, was a constant reference point for hearing how the unique aspects of diverse material cultures could come together to create similar feelings of safety and belonging. Hearing unity across diverse cultures made it possible for creatively envisioning harmonious coexistence between parts of my life that the world differentiated. Two-eyed seeing (and hearing) made it possible for hearing faith afresh in a dominant Western culture. Together, these integrative ways of knowing enabled me to use the skills, tools, and multivalent ways of knowing from each culture to create what would become a new revitalized Ismaili repertoire (choral zikr).

I put things together in my own heart and mind. I did it for myself, within myself. I had to. I became the site of consolidated knowing. I was lucky to have enabling environments that showed me how music could create community, safety, spiritual feeling, unity, and enjoyment—both school-based and Ismaili community-based. Within myself, I could find a musical harmony that helped me hear myself as an integrative whole throughout life. However, that did not feel like enough. I knew that members of my community were not accessing the benefits of choral music. I knew that our community in Canada was seeking to figure out how to nurture a flame of faith afresh. I also knew that our community was constantly exploring how to consolidate teachings and practices of Ismaili culture with knowledge from the world. I was reminded of teachings of giving back to community and using knowledge to serve the common good. After all, my entire development and spiritual-ethical foundations were bred in community. I learned zikr, ginan, and artistic ways of being from elders and community. Teachers and elders invited me to participate in their creative educational endeavours and to lead community recitation. Through their natural community-arts based approaches, elders taught, directed, led, guided. I absorbed and embodied the cultural life and soundscapes that shaped me. How could I not give back? I next describe some of the pedagogical processes I used to share this two-eared hearing practice with the Ismaili community.

5.3 Sharing choral zikr with the community

In 2007, the community elders asked me to put together a devotional choir, giving us the opportunity to create choral arrangements of Indic ginans, Afghan qasidas, and zikr. The elders recognized the need for youth expression to come alive in this way—a way that would help them hear their faith afresh. Many of the youth with whom I worked became excited about this way of singing zikr. In the National Ismaili Youth Choir (see Figure 17) that I was invited to lead in 2006, we regularly experimented with creating soundscapes and improvised harmonic textures using zikr and ginan as the base.

Figure 17. Pre-performance prayer huddle with the Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir, 2005

We began performing zikr repertoire for jamati events. The idea of singing zikr in harmony started to make its way across the Ismaili community. Over the years, what seems to have been initiated during *Yaqzan,*[28] community elders have invited me to lead choral zikr for large numbers of intergenerational jamati audiences for various events and occasions. These moments became opportunities for me to introduce the larger Ismaili community to singing zikr in harmony. Moreover, these moments enabled me to bridge a gap of access to choral experiences for my community. I was able to bring forth pedagogies that linked the hearing of choral music with the hearing of zikr.

Over time, opportunities arose to share integrative vocal arts approaches with jamats globally. For many of the jamats, hearing and singing the zikr or ginan in vocal harmony was a new idea. While some jamati members might have sung in a choir or heard about choirs, adding this vocal

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[28] A short form for the 12th century story, Hayy ibn Yaqzan

element to our devotional literature needed a respectful approach. Bringing an outside perspective to the community traditions required sensitivity on my part, along with critical artistic responsibility. Renewing these time-honoured traditions required careful consideration. My goal was to open the horizons of possibility, inspire conversation, and respectfully invite participation.

Community sharing would include choral techniques, humour, philosophical commentary, and lots of hands-on participation to create a space for openness and trust. In these spaces I felt alive. I felt excited and humbled to share these integrative interpretations of Ismaili traditions through choral music with the jamat. It is important to say that as I had always learned through family and community, so my creative practice had to include the community. Whatever it was, the practice had to resonate and be in sync with the Ismaili communal imagination to be successful. Including the community in a creative process was critical.

In the next section I will present examples of the live processes, what we did, what was said, and what was felt.

5.3.1 Hearing choral

In this section, I outline a process I developed over 25 years to introduce the idea of the choral sound to the jamat. First, I introduce the idea of choral music and explore assumptions. Second, I describe the process of learning a simple choral technique—singing fifths—and demonstrate the possibility for resonance between choral approaches and ginan. Third, I describe a participatory process of using a children's song "Row Row Your Boat," to creatively engage the choral medium. Next, I describe the use of a multi-faith chant to introduce inclusion of *zikr* in a larger cultural tapestry. I then describe how I introduce a particularly Indic Ismaili *zikr* arrangement to bring the conversation back full circle to where we started. This composite practice illustrates some of the ways in which I have introduced the idea of hearing choral to the community.

The italicized texts that follow in this chapter indicate what I said and did during workshops that introduced choral merging with zikr to the community.

The style of music I have found that supports my musical search for peace is choir music. This form of music may not be familiar to all of you, so I will start by introducing what I mean by choir music. I play an audio recording of the Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir (see Figure

18) *singing Anderson's* (1944)*"Give Ear to My Words, O Lord." I do not say anything about the recording. I invite everyone to think about who is signing this, where they are singing, and what they feel when they hear it.*

Give ear to my words, O Lord
Consider my meditation
Hearken unto the voice of my cry,
My King, and my God:
For unto thee do I pray.

(Anne Tripp (lyrics), music, W.H. Anderson, 1944)

Figure 18. Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir, 2007–2010

The participants reflected on what they heard and reported that this music reminds them of church, that the group singing it was a church group. "Yes, this is a Christian hymn, but this is the Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir singing it," I explained.

This choir came together for the Golden Jubilee of His Highness the Aga Khan and met in different cities across Canada for rehearsals and performances. Our repertoire represented music from societies around the world where Ismailis live in large numbers and where the Aga Khan Development Network functions. We curated music that connected in some way to Ismaili culture, including songs and spiritually inspired music from Bosnia, Tajikistan, Kenya, Europe,

Afghanistan, and North America. We created our own soundscapes and sang multicultural compositions. Singing this Christian hymn was part of the diversity of cultures, which we encounter globally. I chose this piece because the words reminded me of certain ginans and qasida*. For example, look at the words of a verse from a commonly sung ginan, "Vinanti Karu Chhu Saheb Mora" (I humbly beseech you my Lord).*

I project the text on the monitor and sing the familiar ginan. Audience members shift and change their posture in their seats, invoking prayerful gestures. Some sing along. I encourage it. There is a nice feeling in the room: familiar, pious. The ginan, a familiar spiritual expression in Indic Ismaili culture, sets the tone for the choral hearing. I explain how living in Canada, surrounded by Christian communities in Central Alberta, I had to learn how to hear our traditions and feelings of faith in the world around me.

The environment I grew up in also was integrative, where all these elements of life were intersecting and giving life to each other. It seemed natural that I would start to do that myself in the world. It became a way for me to bring meaning to what I was doing in school, as it brought new meaning to what ginans were and could do. The choir style, with its layers and all, was a new way of doing the Christian "ginan" that inspired me to try it with our Ismaili traditions. For our time together, we will explore what singing in harmony feels like and how it might connect to how we hear our traditions and express our faith and love in a new way in Canadian society. This is a chance to experiment with what may be a new musical world for you.

We begin by singing a fifth. I scaffold the learning experience, inviting the jamat to sing one note in unison and then add an open fifth (see Figure 19).

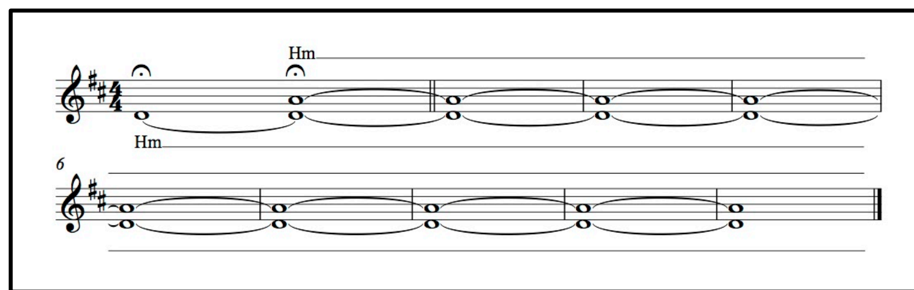

Figure 19. Open fifth harmonic grounding for ginan

I remind the audience that the goal is to be unified as one voice, showing them how to balance the sound through volume, blend, core sound, staggered breathing, unity, and listening. Singing, together in harmony, I remind the audience, requires us to balance what we sing with what we hear is happening around us.

We must attend to what we are doing and what we are contributing, while being attentive to what everyone else around us is doing. We need to be strong in our own, while also in the strength of others, creating a sense of belonging together. Our attention is on both what we are doing and what is around us.

At this point, the audience is ready for the next part. I ask the gathering to keep singing the two notes as I add a third layer. Their job is to hold this foundation, keep firm in it, and be a vessel to support what I add. I sing a familiar and well-loved ginan, "Eji Ab teri mohabbat lagi" (Now I am in love with you)[29] (see Figure 20).

Figure 20. "Ab teri Mohabbat lagi" ginan over open fifths. (Music transcription by author).

I sing the ginan again to the end, emphasizing the flat two at the end of the phrase—the Eb that creates a delicious dissonance with the tonic—if only for my enjoyment. I feel a thickness in the air, a new kind of atmosphere in the room. I see on many faces, though not all, a sense of knowing and acknowledgement of the effect. I land on the tonic and after a few seconds guide

[29] Eye with eye, make our meeting / My Lord, Master, Friend, Beloved / For now I am in love with you.

the audience to quieten the sound. I slowly move my hand down to my sides until the sound dissipates. A palpable silence fills the room. We are held in what feels like suspended time. I enjoy the drama of this lingering silence. I pause. I find it difficult to speak. I do not want to break the silence. I feel it. We all feel it. I can sense it in the audience, more than see it. I relax, surrender, and allow that which arrives to be uttered. There's a sense of accomplishment in the room.

Wow. You're amazing. We're amazing. We are so musical! By singing only two notes plus a third layer, we created this feeling. I can sense that we're all in a different kind of contemplative zone. This feeling is in the air. I believe that this is the feeling of peace. This is the feeling of pluralism. This is the feeling of love and interconnection—beyond words. I believe that in this silence, we can find harmony and unity of being. We need this to hear beyond division. We did this together. What a beautiful moment created with our voices.

I explain how drones are found in Hindustani and Carnatic music as well as in medieval music, choral music, and other musical forms globally. I explain how drones are used as grounding tones over which one or more voices improvise. I highlight this musical feature to centre the ginan securely as an Indic form, while also opening its sonic horizon through vocal harmony to a more Western one.

Hearing ginan and who we are as Ismailis in a new globally resonant way is very much part of how I understand teaching creative interpretations of faith in new contexts. Singing the drones and melody a cappella creates what I think of as very much a Western choral texture, yet it grounds the ginan also in its Indic cultural roots. Through the horizon and window of choral singing, we came to know different dimensions of ourselves and the feelings of spiritual and community unity to which we aspire. We could hear our spiritual selves mirrored in the ambience of the new, and mirrored in the new musical texture, our ginan and cultural forms. What we create and hear is a window through which we can discover new horizons both beyond and deep within ourselves.

5.3.2 Reflecting on singing fifths with the ginan

I think of the long tones we used as a foundation for what we just did, like home, like our spiritual home, expressing God as ever living and eternal. This unified tone reminds me of the

idea of oneness and unity of the soul for which we are taught to search and to bring out through our actions in the world. For me, singing like this entails listening to each other, blending our voices, unifying our intention, working together to create it, and creating harmony—so much a part of our value systems. So, when I sing like this, I am also reminded of the grounding ethics that we are taught to uphold as we live in life. Singing is like a metaphor for life.

What I hear in this way of producing the sound is a magical feeling because the notes sometimes feel harmonious with the home tones but sometimes clash with them, yet they are always fitting. One never knows where the music will go. The combination of notes creates ambiguity. The experience of singing in layers intrigues me. It makes me curious. Bruno Freschi, architect of the Ismaili Centre Vancouver, explained in an interview with Zahra Premji (2020) that “ambiguity gives birth to curiosity, and curiosity gives birth to spirituality” (Premji, 2020, 03:22).

> It's the very nature of the ambiguity that enables you to pause and understand that you're approaching something that is different than any place else. There is a degree of ambiguity that opens personal space . . . We are ambiguous beings, and we need that space. (Premji, 2020, 35:42)

The atmosphere we create is like a fragrance, like an incense-filled room that envelopes us. When we sing together, I feel as though I take in a fragrance of something ambiguous and bigger than myself. The “sa” note represents home. It is a note from which all other notes flourish. The “pa” note fits nicely with the home tone, slightly differentiated, always connected yet distinct. “Do” or “sa” is like the one soul, oneness, from where we come to where we return. Pa or sol is like creation emanating from oneness yet unique, separate and distinct. These two tones together provide grounding onto which I sing the melody.

The melody is another layer—a distinctive combination of notes, metaphorically symbolizing our unique gifts, strengths, ways in which we exist and coexist in the world in relation to what grounds us. The do–sol sung together in a balanced tuning creates a feeling of remembrance of where we came from, held with unity. The melody then fits into a deep harmony that we hear, giving it unique life, a distinct colourful thread. If we hear it deeply and learn to listen to the melody, even with the two notes underneath, I believe we can learn to hear that depth of the spirit in it. We are all like melodies walking on the earth whose actions, words, voices, and thoughts, when thoughtfully enacted, can remind us of the deep unity of our humanity.

We must learn to be and make ourselves as beautiful melodies that invoke and evoke love and unity. We need to learn to look for and hear more deeply into the soul of our melodious lives and to create environments and structures that keep reminding ourselves of that unifying spirit. In this way, our actions and the emergent outcomes of our actions become zikr and reminders of God's beauty wherever we turn. We don't look for it outside of ourselves or just inside ourselves. Each of our melodies becomes a mirror for each other, witness to the achievement of expression of and calling forward oneness.

When I sing in harmony like this, even so simply, I find that I can feel a depth of unity and oneness. The zikr or ginan that may have lost its capacity to make me feel something gets grounded again in this ambiguous sonic land and allows me to become aware of the devotional spirit again. In singing together this way, this feeling is created not only within myself but also vitally with and through others. When we make and find the harmonies, we are agents of our collective making to invoke and evoke a unifying spirit.

Adding layers like this to the ginan and zikr creates this feeling of a familiar ambiguity that I love, giving birth to curiosity, spirituality, and connection. I don't understand the meanings of the words, but I know they are sacred. When I sing ginan in this way, I enter a kind of "architextural" sanctuary in which I can find myself. I become part of the making of the sonic "building" in which not only I enter but others also enter. We erect that building together, of us, through us, and in joint effort among us. In that sonic building, we materially create, enter, feel and hear. There, in betwixt the harmonious sounds, we can also become spiritually alive. I am reminded of Bruno Freschi's (Premji, 2020) thoughts on spiritual architecture:

> In spiritual architecture one goes in to go out. Really, what it means is that you go into the building, go there for spiritual purposes. The building must achieve a quality that you can leave behind, so you go in to literally and spiritually go out. That was a principle. (Premji, 2020, 06:45)

Freschi also noted:

> The nature of space, architectural space, is in itself a reality. . . . The sacred space is an autonomous thing of which you bring a belief to [*sic*]. I don't deliver the belief. And that's a very, very important thing. So, my job was to try to capture the nature of sacred space.

> Your job was to go in to go out . . . and that became the kind of architectural mission . . . Architecture is a unique three-dimensional physical experience, which you bring the fourth dimension, time, your perceptions, and your transitions in using it. I don't do that. You do that. So, we sort of have a partnership in that way. (Premji, 2020, 22:29)

When I add vocal layers to ginan, the ginan becomes like architecture that I can enter spiritually, be curious, and let my imagination be free. The musical architexture, the ginan, is a spiritual space now that I can freely bring my belief to and interpret and feel the way I understand. The words and sounds almost do not matter because spiritual architecture in "itself is a reality." The ginan no longer tells me what I should believe and how to believe. The ginan now is an ambiguous open space into which I can bring and my belief.

The belief I bring, what I love, is a craving for an aesthetic experience, of harmony and unity, of communal making, oriented by an esoteric Ismaili interpretation of Islam, held firmly in a universal, shared human aspiration for unity, betterment, and wholeness, animated in education by the choral. This belief was sparked in in childhood and resonant utterances throughout my life, be it within or outside of Ismaili specific spaces. I caught a fragrance of hearing that became my orienting audiation; I sought to experience, know about, and learn to create more of that feeling in the world.

Ismaili devotional music and the communitarian making, alongside choral experiences, became affective mirrors for each other. What I discovered in the choral was what I knew in the Ismaili devotional, but afresh, anew. Their contrapuntal existence in separate unique spaces (the Ismaili communal and educational musical) demonstrated a material reality that did not resonate on beliefs of unity, co-making, and inhered sacred evocation (remembrance). The separation was exacerbated by political rhetoric, media, and lived experiences of the community. The evocative spiritual capacity of each tradition got caught up in the politics of human forgetfulness. Bringing them together, like two notes in harmony, for me became a lifelong labour shaping my practice and evolving it, as I, and the people who engage it, shape it. What I love and believe stay constant: a search for unity, harmony, communitarian making, and evocation of remembrance, yet, how it looks, feels, and expresses itself is different. Thus, in the merging, I do not lose my connection, but renew it afresh, through the new acoustic textures that emerge.

There is a problem in seeing cultures like to “notes” or “melodies,” separate, distinct, unique, unchangeable, bounded in specific identities. I wonder about seeing culture as textures, as multidimensional spaces that emerge in time and context, in the vernacular, in the contemporary, and in the making of a society that is unified in a human aspiration for animated social conscience. How about seeing culture as integrative of the spirit yet expansive and open to renewed interpretation in contemporary experience? After all, ginan, themselves, are emergent sonic forms borne out of encounters in plural Indic cultures and sacred traditions of their time. Their job is to remind the community of their love for God, connection to the Imam-of-the-Time, and their spiritual commitments to live their best lives. Singing the ginan with carefully considered vocal harmonies enables me to revitalize a hearing of culture as multi-layered and integrative texture.

5.3.3 Singing imitative choral textures–“Row, Row, Row Your Boat”

I introduce the idea of an imitative choral texture by teaching the jamat the song, “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”. My intention in teaching this song is to give jamats who have generally had little experience of choral music a chance to easily, quickly, and in a fun way, experience multi-layered singing, polyphony, canon, texture, and creativity. The activity is about bringing ideas to the room and showing the jamat different ways of creating choral texture. My aim is also to demonstrate how a well-known melody can be creatively adapted while maintaining integrity of the original. My emerging “Pedagogy of (re)Translation” illustrates how reciting devotional traditions in vocal harmony and imitative textures allows for the “original” maintain its integrity in an enriched way. Teaching this children’s song in this way introduces the concept that things can be different while still being the same. This activity serves as a metaphor for interpreting traditions, values and ethics in new ways. This way of teaching gives the jamat a chance to think how multilayered texture and harmonies can enrich and enliven the affective power of traditions, not diminishing them.

I lead the jamat in some of the following ways.

1. Singing the tune in unison.
2. Singing the tune with drones (first on tonic only, then on fifth).
3. Singing the tune in a two- and three-part round.
4. Singing one word at a time.

5. Fast ostinato in half the group with the melody in the other half.
6. Switching groups, slow ostinato with the melody in the other half of the group.
7. Each group starting at the same time, singing the melody in their own tempo and style but all at the same time.
8. Each group singing when and what they want at any pitch and at any time.
9. Each individual singing one by one as I go around the circle inviting them to sing.
10. Creating a soundscape by singing words in an augmented and extended way, then removing consonants, and then shifting to a common vowel.

At various points, I ask the group what they notice, how the sounds change, how the relationship of the melody changes with the drone or other textural combinations. I continue to give instructions and reminders of vocal technique. Creativity thrives, and we have a lot of fun. Regardless of their musical background, everyone is singing complex, layered vocal textures and sounds to which they have contributed and in which they have found meaning for that moment. The audience experiences the choral in a fun, easy, doable, and creative way. They become friends with the choral through experimentation, creativity, fun, and participation. When time allows, we debrief the experience with a variety of questions in pairs, small groups, and large group discussion.

5.3.4 Zikr in harmony

I explain to the jamat that what we just experienced was something multi-instrumentalist, musician, and public intellectual, Maestro Afraaz Mulji, calls “infinite possibilities” (A. Mulji, personal communication, May 22, 2021).

I like this idea because what we just did together demonstrated the multiple ways that sound can be combined, made, created, and organized, creating an experience to which we can then bring our own belief and meaning. Each of us can find something different, a new gem, a new gift, a new interpretation.

This is exciting for me because the more ways I can hear things, the more entry points I have to find new meaning. Reciting zikr and ginan in new, creative ways, seems to give rise to more magical feelings. The tight threads that kept the forms contained, now opened, made it possible for me to go inside and explore with a sense of curiosity and fun.

I next take the audience through an experience applying some of these techniques to the zikr.

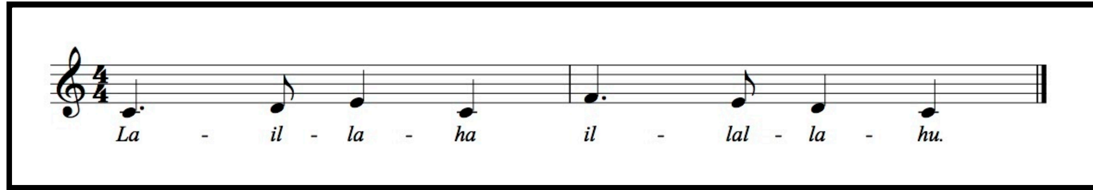

Figure 21. “La ilaha illalla-hu” (There is no God except God (Allah)). (Music transcription by author).

I introduce the idea of harmonizing zikr in a way that will not be jarring to the jamat. I share a zikr used in Sufi practices that was taught to me through the “Contemplation Chant” and through Vancouver-based Sufi teacher Brian Raqib Burke. The text La ilaha illallahu (see figure 21) and shape of the melody resonates with what is familiar to Ismailis, but this tune is not specifically a part of the Ismaili rituals and practices. Though the tune comes from a different source, it gives the jamat a way to experience expressing something familiar in a new musical way. Presenting and translating our stories and narratives as part of a larger society is part of how I understand integrative Ismaili thinking, and I want to show the community through music what that might sound like.

The melody carries the colour of a major scale tonality. The melodic shape is familiar in popular music, zikr, and ginan, and is easily harmonized. The text expresses a shared spiritual principle of unity of being (*tawhid*) shared by all Muslims. The tune is and is familiar and easy to grasp. I teach the gathering a four-part rendition including drones on the fifth, the melody, and one harmony. We recite the chant several times. On each repetition, I offer different choral approaches to unify the sound, keep up the energy of the last note, end the sound together, sit up tall, and sing with musicality. These intentional musical and communal actions also can create the kind of sound quality that calls forth a feeling of unity and connection. It crosses my mind that we have now repeated the zikr multiple times. We have started to “do” zikr, though interrupted by musical instruction and experimentation. Regardless, the zikr has begun. We are immersed in the zikr—the zikr as an event, as a musical object, as experimentation, as source of musical awareness, and as a source of unity and togetherness. We have “done” zikr and heard zikr in a new way, with one ear towards the tradition and the other ear towards a new vocal horizon.

Wow. Feel the power in the room right now. This is the power of singing together in this way. Taking a breath, to me is like saying Bismillah (In the name of God) *together. Releasing is like saying Shukranlillah* (Thanks, be to God) *together. When we listen deeply and work to harmonize our sounds, rhythms, breath, and release, something magical happens. And here we get to experience that musical power while reciting zikr and remembering. What we remember is not only our spiritual connection but ways in which we can feel united with each other. They are both connected.*

I close the workshop with a zikr melody familiar to the community (see Figure 22).

Figure 22. Workshop closing zikr, “Ya Ali tu(n) rahem kar, Ya Mawla tu(n) fazal kar” (O Ali, be Merciful, O Ali be Gracious)

I want the jamat to come back home to a sound that they already know—a sound they may have grown up with. This melody is beautiful. I muster up my courage, because while I have done this many times before, I never know how a new audience will receive it. We have deepened our choral experience through singing “Row, Row Your Boat.” We have applied choral techniques and artistry to a Sufi zikr. We have seen an example of how our devotional sounds can be integrated in the larger textures of music and culture. This has been a process of integrating knowledge, building trust, confidence, and excitement about a choral approach. It is now time to work with a tune and text this community holds dear.

I thank the jamat for their courage, commitment, and risk taking for using their voices in a different way. I tell the audience that we are now going to “bring it all home.” I invite them again to think of this as an exploration, an experiment. If it creates an opening to discover and explore more, amazing. If not, we have work to do, to explore and experiment further until we create more openings and possibilities to know, feel, and interpret an integrative Ismaili spirit in culture and life. I give myself a relative pitch around “c” or “d” and invoke “Ya Ali, Mawla Ali” (see Figure 23). This will be the first harmony onto which the zikr tune will be recited. Most of the community will not have sung this text on this melodic contour.

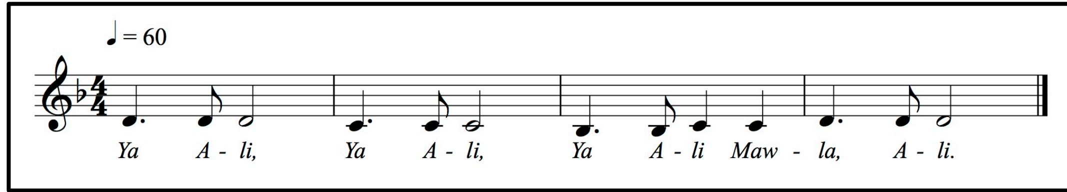

Figure 23. “Ya Ali, Mawla Ali” (O Ali, O Lord/Beloved) lower harmony. (Music transcription by author).

As soon as I invoke the name of Ali, I feel a difference within myself. I feel more uplifted. The gathered audience seems to sit up taller, shifting their positions, taking on a more reverent disposition. I become aware of our common allegiance to the faith. The mention of the name Ali changes how everyone sits and receives this moment.

This text carries a lot of meaning for the community. The repetition of this attribute of God, *Al-Ali*, the Sublime, Most High, is particularly poignant in the Ismaili, Shia, and diverse Sufi cultures. The figure of Hazrat Ali (The cousin and son-in-law of the Holy Prophet Muhammad) is importantly seen as a guiding light and an example of justice. The following two Persian and Indic Ismaili, Shia, and Sufi traditions demonstrate the community’s reverence for the figure of Ali (see Figure 24).

Bi Rūz-u Shab Man-i Shaydā ʿAlī Gūyam ʿAlī Jūyam

By Ṣābir Kirmānī (1925-2007)

[Belonging to the Niʿmatullāhī Ṣūfī Order]

به روز و شب منِ شیدا، علی گـویم علی جویم بـه بـاغ و گـلشن و صـحرا، علی گـویم علی جویم	*Bi rūz-u shab man-i shaydā ʿAlī gūyam ʿAlī jūyam* *Bi bāgh-u gulshan-u ṣaḥrā, ʿAlī gūyam ʿAlī jūyam*	Each day and night I invoke the name of Ali and I seek Ali, In the garden and the meadow and the desert I invoke the name of Ali and I seek Ali
علی روح و روانِ من، علی آرامِ جانِ من علی ذکرِ زبانِ من، علی گویم علی جویم	*ʿAlī rūḥ-u ravān-i man, ʿAlī ārām-i jān-i man* *ʿAlī zikr-i zabān-i man, ʿAlī gūyam ʿAlī jūyam*	Ali is my soul, Ali is my spirit, Ali is my inner tranquillity Ali is the Zikr (Invocation) on my tongue, I invoke the name of Ali and I seek Ali

***

Hak tu(n) Pak tu(n) Badshah

By Pir Shams

હક તું પાક તું બાદસશાહ, મહેરબાન બી અલી તુંહી તું	*hak tu(n) paak tu(n) badshah,* *maherbaan bee (Ya) Ali tu(n)hi tu(n)*	You are the Just, You are the Sinless, Oh Ali the Gracious Heavenly King, You are indeed all.
રબ તું રહેમાન તું, અલી અવલ આખર કાજી તુંહી તું	*rab tu(n) raheman tu(n), ali* *aval achar kazi tu(n)hi tu(n)*	You are the Sustainer, You are the Merciful, Oh Ali, You are the First, and the Last Judge, You are indeed all.

Figure 24. Persian qasida Indic ginan.

I open my arms with an inviting gesture to encourage the group to sing with me (Figure 25).

Figure 25. “Ya Ali, Mawla Ali” lower harmony

The sound and text seem to resonate and come together in a pious fragrance within the gathering. We repeat the phrase two or three more times, until there is a sense of comfort in the room. On each repetition, I give reminders about choral artistry. Some members of the jamat have their eyes closed. Others sit in a meditative gaze, lost within themselves. Others sit with their eyes and spirits with me. I am grateful for the creative trust and space of contemplation.

I sound out in my mind a fifth above the tonic of the melody we have just sung. In a call and response style, saying “my turn,” I sing the new line in Figure 26.

Figure 26. “Ya Ali, Mawla Ali” at the interval of a fifth above the tonic

I sense a bit of a nervous laughter as people hear a new line. It is higher in pitch. I encourage the gathering again, singing along with a gesture of invitation to repeat this a few times until the sound settles. I listen for the stronger voices in the group. They are the ones to whom I assign this part. It is now time to put the two lines together (see Figure 27). I divide the group into two halves. The group picks it up easily. I sing along for one or two more repetitions; then I listen. Both parts are finding stability and balance. There is a sense of reverence in the room.

Figure 27. “Ya Ali, Mawla Ali,” in parallel fifths

The haunting parallel fifths and descending line remind me of gestures of prostration. I notice smiles and appreciative eyes. As the two parts settle, I sing what I know is very familiar (see Figure 28).

Figure 28. “Ya Ali tu(n) rahem kar” melody

The jamat laughs with recognition. They know the tune. Many end up singing the tune with me, forgetting that they need to continue the “Ya Ali, Mawla Ali” ostinato. As they sing, I add a Farsi qasida*,* familiar to the Afghan jamat*.* The tune is similar to the Indic zikr “Ya Ali tu(n)

rahem kar." I remember the first time I heard this qasida I immediately heard how the two melodies could work together. I sing the Farsi line in Figure 29:

Figure 29. "Allahu Mawlana Ali" melody

I notice some faces nodding with familiarity. Others may not know the melody or the qasida reference. However, the texts are familiar. I work with the group in parts, practicing both the Afghan and Indic devotional sounds together. There is excitement in the room. We are now ready for all four parts. I divide the group into four to sing the four-part arrangement in Figure 30. I cue: Harmony 1, Harmony 2, the Indic, and then the Afghan till all four parts are in.

Figure 30. "Ya Ali Tu(n) Rahem Kar—Allahu Mawlana Ali" in four-part harmony

I recognize that most people are singing, and there is power in the room, an energized feeling that brings a more spiritual atmosphere. The faces of the audience are glowing. I feel my heart expanded. I feel open and centred. I sense a love in jamat's eyes. I let the singing continue and

eventually bring it to a close. We linger in the silence. I want to keep that silence for as long as I can.

The gathering applauds and expresses gratitude. I invite the gathering to think of one word that describes how they feel. I explain that once we all have a word, on the count of three we will say that word out loud together and put it into the universe! I give the group a minute or so to contemplate and reflect. “Here we go. One! Two! Three!” (Figure 31 depicts a potential result.)

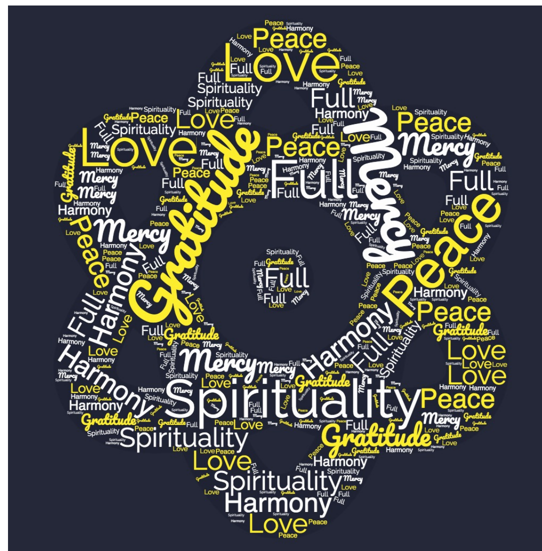

Figure 31. Word cloud of one-word descriptions of the zikr experience

I will likely never know what everyone’s word was. My word is *Shukranlillah* (Thanks be to God).

This is the magic of hearing and singing in ways that amplify our spiritual and social aspirations for remembering our divine unity and creating environments that make harmony and unity among us. The vocal layers become a kind of music that amplifies the spirit and expresses it. It is not a music that seeks to impress or entertain, but instead, it seeks to express completion and wholeness of spirit; and, through collective care the music creates an atmosphere and musical architecture that helps us to enter the depths of our spirit. Through the multiple unique voices in common purpose, we come to know the depths of our spirit. And so, we invest more energy into the whole that then in turn helps us all individually. The individuals and the community benefit. This common effort to create beauty and harmony in a multi-layered way can be a metaphor for how we can be integrative in our lives. Indeed, this is what our Hazar Imam invites us to do—to

improve ourselves, our knowledge, our craft, our skills, our character, and our relations with others to better all our lives. Now imagine if we recited zikr in this way in jamatkhana. Imagine if we all sang with this much love, commitment to unity, intention and creating this atmosphere together at a didar. One day, inshAllah we will. But for now, I hope that our time together has given us a chance to delve deeper into learning of how to create an atmosphere with our voices so we can feel something special.

5.4 Reflection

With an intention to join many voices together through a multi-layered vocal retranslation, the jamat and I were able to create the sense of a "resonant whole" (Aga Khan, 2020, para. 10). This kind of experience is one that I have been fortunate to know singing in choirs in cathedrals around the world. What I love about such moments is that a community with no formal singing or choral experience can create layers of zikr to create the "goose bump" feeling choral artists appreciate and for which they sometimes long. As the zikr runs horizontally, so it enriches vertically. Zikr now exists musically and materially in multiple planes as "interplay of voices, of positioned utterances" (Drever, 2022, p. 25), and a multidimensional "architexture" of remembrance. I am reminded of the words of Hazrat Inayat Khan:

> Another effect of this repetition is that the word is reflected upon the universal Spirit, and the universal mechanism then begins to repeat it automatically. In other words what man repeats, God then begins to repeat, until it is materialized and has become a reality in all planes of existence. (Khan, 1926, "Suggestions by Word and Voice," para. 7)

Zikr is one of the key elements of Sufi ritual musical experience and listening assemblies, sama. The idea of sama is to create a thick spiritual atmosphere or ambience (Urdu: *mahol*) in which ego dissolves to reach union with the Divine. Several elements work together to construct the sama experience. The sonic space is built on a complex set of congregational practices and spiritual exercises designed to "send participants into religious ecstasy" (Rouget as cited in Shiloah, 1995, p. 41). Elements of space, physical embodiment, musical form, structure, composition, zikr (remembrance), prayers, sung (recited) poetry, intention, and community all constitute a sama event. Rhythmic, sonic, and moral attunement is necessary to achieve the objectives of union with the Divine. "Hearing with the 'ear of the heart,' an attitude of reverently listening to music and/or the singing of mystical poetry with the intent of increasing awareness

and understanding of the divine object described" (Lewisohn, 1997, p. 4) is a key feature in the mystical experience and for acquiring sacred presence. The word "sama" translates as "audition"—to listen, to hear. The intention with which the seeker hears, receives, absorbs, and embodies the sonic affect is an important dimension in the sama experience. Classical Sufi theologian, Abū Hafs Suhrawardī, explained:

> Music does not give rise in the heart to anything which is not already there: so he whose inner self is attached to anything else than God is stirred by music to sensual desire, but the one who is inwardly attached to the love of God is moved, by hearing music, to do His will (as cited in Schimmel, 1975, p. 182).

Shiloah (1995) shared the idea that "spiritual audition consists of hearing with a spiritual ear" (Shiloah, 1995, p. 41). The sama experience, its audition, is reliant on the initiate intentionally engaging in this active and complete sense of listening to achieve union with the Divine. The sonic space acts on and mediates the mind and heart of gathered initiates, who in turn contribute to and act on the sonic space. Drawing from the sociology of music, in sama, the musical space is "treated as an active and dynamic material in social life" (DeNora, 2000, p. 18). In the words of Ibn Al Arabi:

My heart has become capable of every form:
A meadow for gazelles, a monastery for monks,
a house of idols; the Ka'ba for the pilgrim.
Tablets of the Torah, the corpus of the Quran.
I follow the religion of love.
Where its camels turn, there lies
my religion, my faith.

(Ibn al'-Arabi, ca. 1213, as cited in Esmail, 1998, p. 28)

The *sama* is also a zikr. The zikr is not just an object of contemplation. The zikr and sama are immersive experiences that create vessels for entering awareness of a spiritual disposition and socially conscious way of life. The zikr, like

> the apt use of a word (in its poetical sense), its repetition, twice, three times, or even more frequently, according to the need of the poem, will not only tend to intensify the internal structure but also bring out unsuspected spiritual properties in the word itself. Further,

> frequent repetition of a word (a favourite game of children, forgotten in later life) deprives the word of its external reference. (Kadinsky, 1911/2004, "Spiritual Revolution," para. 18)

In sama, the zikr becomes like a protective cover that envelopes the seeker in a womb of musical care. At once, the repetition of zikr creates an internal structure that, as the reciters spiritually exit, loses its external reference. The zikr dissolves the veils and dust of the heart to uncover a forgotten essential human nature, and it imbues the mind, heart, and hands, one's being and actions with its transformational energy.

Centring the zikr and building harmonies on that foundation brings out a texture of creative life that I understand is a part of Ismaili interpretive traditions. Making harmonies and improving our voices show us different cultural ways in which communitarian ethics and spirituality can come alive. The zikr becomes a place in which we can dwell: textured, multi-layered, multi-dimensional and sonically rich. InshAllah, in such a space, one that we all have a part in creating, we can experience something new and profound. We "create the sensory conditions of an emergent ethical and political lifeworld" (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 8) in which I believe we can come closer to knowing the depths of ourselves. The process of musical making and collaboration goes beyond normative transmission of objects of knowledge from those who have them to those who do not. Rather, the co-making process sets in motion new lines of flight that provide access to knowledge otherwise unanticipated. The zikr becomes an exploratory mapping in which we become the map and the explorer. The object of zikr as a cultural object no longer succumbs to taste, aesthetic preference, or political dissonance. It becomes a living space for knowing. In this mysterious immanence, there is hope. The texture holds us as one and creates the enabling musical environments that we need to thrive, to bring our authentic selves and contribute the best of our knowledge with others for common good.

In this merging, the sound of our neighbour, the choral sound, becomes a friendly medium of art (an artistic medium) through which an Ismaili subject can enact a spiritual-communal aesthetic making that can invoke the sacred, reminding them of their allegiances and bringing knowledge of different pathways for enacting those commitments.

Fra. Ivo Markovic, a peacemaker, Franciscan Monk, and choir director in Bosnia puts it this way:

> The song of our neighbor affects us, and we receive it and grow through it. Likewise, our song becomes our neighbor's heritage and impacts their growth. In that interwoven spirituality and in the discovery of our own reflection in the other, no one loses, but instead it is the only way to grow. (Markovic, 2005, para. 4)

A space like this amplifies the power to receive humbly the gifts of our neighbours and to see how the strengths of their traditions can bring out the essence of who we are.

> The sound is perceptible activity of the all-pervading life. Different sounds differ in their outer expression, but within it is one and the same activity, which directs all sounds. It is in expression that sounds differ, because of the different instruments through which they are expressed. The deeper we penetrate into the mystery of sound, the more we are able to trace the link that connects all sounds. The link is what the musician calls harmony, and it is in harmony that is hidden the secret of joy and peace. (Khan, 1991/1996, p. 25)

My hope is that these moments of renewing Ismaili devotion through critical engagement with a larger cultural medium can catch a spark and kindle the jamat's curiosity. In the workshop, we got a chance to experience the powerful affect/effect of singing together in this way. We did not do it through somebody else's repertoire, or a composer's song, or other culture's tune. We achieved the affect building on familiar Indic devotional melodies and texts. We had the chance to bring sounds otherwise relegated to private and ceremonial Muslim spaces into a direct dialogue with the sounds of our neighbours in public social and educational spaces. My hope that this kind of critical merging, respectful and responsible experimentation, can inspire us to think of how, in the future, we can support youth to catch the fragrance of a sacred human knowing, to hear across traditions, to draw forth the sound of their hearing, and have the needed practices, materials, tools, and collaborators through which to express themselves with agency as they navigate contemporary lived experience.

Community members of all ages and of different cultural backgrounds were part of these events, and those who resonated positively with the experience shared their experiences with me. I began to wonder how using this integrative approach with a "choral" zikr, ginan, and qasida

might resonate with people from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Tajikistan, and beyond. . I informally spoke with jamati members of different cultural backgrounds. I was fascinated by their common responses about the depth of feeling they had doing zikr in harmony. One young person, Jenna, showed particular interest in exploring the experience further. The next chapter represents my discussions with Jenna.

Chapter 6

6 Jenna

In Chapter 6, I share Jenna's narratives about her experiences with choral singing and Ismaili tradition. I relay the challenges she faced reconciling her relationship with religious traditions, including with the ginan and zikr. I also relate her early childhood experiences reciting zikr in harmony that became the reference points for our conversation about the impact of merging traditions with vocal harmony.

Jenna was born in Ottawa, Canada, the capital of the country. Ottawa is home to the Parliament of Canada, and several embassies and diplomatic delegation buildings. Jenna went to an alternative arts school. She has a Tunisian, Sunni father and a *Khoja*, Shia Ismaili mother. She has had a lot of trouble finding belonging.

I think it's important to note here that I have had a lot of trouble belonging to any one place. I'm Tunisian but I don't speak much Arabic, I'm Indian but I don't speak the language or identify with the culture, I believe in Allah and I'm very spiritual. I feel like a sixth of everything and 100% of nothing if that makes sense, in that my identity is so mixed that I always feel a little apart from the communities themselves.

She comes from a home and community life where her mom, Aisha, was very engaged in the artistic and cultural life of the community. Aisha always included Jenna and later, her younger sister, Nina. Aisha was the artistic director of a community project called Chai Nights. Chai Nights was a participatory community event that aimed to promote the richness of the community's diversity in a culturally inclusive way. Poetry, arts activity, music, demonstrations, performance, and workshops offered by members of the community from diverse backgrounds offered a creative space for community cohesion and integration. This was part of the texture of Jenna's childhood and her youth, during which she formed an understanding of being Ismaili.

Jenna and I became friends through my friendship with her mom, Aisha, and her family. In 2001, her mom and I worked on the "Yaqzan: The Awakened" project. As part of the production executive team, Aisha was always present and supportive. After the workshops, our colleagues and I often enjoyed a cup of chai over a meal to discuss what meaning a creative interpretation of

culture and Ismaili teachings could have for the community. Discussions about music, sound, and the arts led to ideas about how to nurture "the next Rumi."

Jenna's chapter is about how a 2nd generation Canadian hears, receives, makes, and feels the Ismaili experience in her heart. She talks about traditional processes of transmission that negate her, challenging her relationship with the Ismaili identity.

6.1 Plural musical learning and lived experience

Jenna lived with her mom and sister in a large four-story townhouse in Ottawa. Jenna described a giant bookshelf, "reminiscent of a library," in the living room where "years' worth of books were stored away," piquing her curiosity now and then. At home, "a lot of different music was played."

Mom had a huge CD cabinet. She was a particular fan of fusing different genres and styles. The Four Seasons Mosaic soundtrack was on repeat. She was also a fan of the musical Notre Dame de Paris, particularly the songs "Belle" and "Lune." We also listened to artists such as Charles Aznavour (La Boheme), Cheb Khaled, Gipsy Kings, Miriam Makeba, and Indian Classical music CDs.

Jenna took five years of *Kathak* dance (from ages 7–12). Kathak is a Northern Indian dance form that took root in the Mughal era. A Central Asian Muslim prince, Babur, founded the Mughal dynasty in a land called Hindustan (Indian subcontinent) in 1526, following in the tracks of his ancestor Timur (d. 1405). After Babur, the Mughal era spanned the reigns of three emperors, Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. In the environment of royal workshops, Hindu and Muslim artists and craftsmen from the Northern regions of the Indian subcontinent worked with Iranian masters. Their work, under the patronage of the Emperor, catalyzed the formation of new and rapidly evolving styles of art and music that combined traditions. The Mughal era was a time of rich cultural confluence, innovation in which Hindustani music and movement forms such as Kathak came to be.

Kathak dance lessons helped Jenna develop a sense of rhythm and coordination of her body movements with sound. She learned precision, determination, accuracy, consistency, and strength. Through kathak, Jenna learned how to emote using gestures and facial expressions. Aisha also enrolled Jenna in Hindustani vocal lessons—music that linked culturally to the

Mughal cultures in which Kathak emerged. Her mom also took Hindustani vocal lessons and often sang around the house. Jenna remembers "hearing a lot of 'aahs' as she warmed up with scales like *raag yaman*[30] and *bhairav.*[31] Practice for her was sometimes daily, sometimes weekly on weekends. Jenna learned to sing some of these ragas[32] and joined in recitals with her mom and guru. She learned from her teacher about how ragas were linked to certain times of days, and how the different combinations of notes evoked certain feelings and emotional colours in the listener. A key moment for Jenna was "realizing that music could go beyond the notes." She started to consciously recognize that music can evoke feelings and that she could bring out those feelings with her voice. She not only technically learned about ragas and how to perform them, but also learned from her guru about the evocative emotional possibilities of music.

In high school, Jenna started "more significant [vocal] training" and sang in school musicals. She sang in the chorus of her high school production of *Xanadu*, the only Grade 9 student to be selected. The production received nominations for many local awards; they performed their work on the National Arts Centre main stage, an achievement Jenna celebrates. In Grade 11, Jenna participated in a school production of *Les Miserables*, "a large undertaking requiring increased technical capability vocally." On the recommendation of her choir director to enrol in voice lessons to increase endurance and sustain vocal health, Aisha sent Jenna for voice lessons with "a trained opera singer [Jean-E Hudson] with years of experience." Jenna continued voice lessons until she graduated from high school. What she appreciated most was how her teacher told her that they were "working together to discover my natural voice. She believed in getting the fundamentals right, and I fully aligned myself with that." Musical theatre and classical training at at an advanced level gave Jenna a sense of pride, confidence, and value, while adding technical know-how to her already innate musical ability.

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[30] *Raag yaman* is thought to be a possible emotional colour that the ginan "Sahebji tu(n) more man bhave" carries.

[31] Bhairav is an early morning raga in Hindustani music.

[32] The word *raga* comes from a Sanskrit root, meaning colour or passion. The *ragas* are commonly known as emotional frameworks for improvising and composing. Traditionally certain ragas that evoke certain emotional colours are sung at different times of the day.

The first experience Jenna remembers with choir was watching her elementary school choir perform at monthly assemblies. She remembered that "they always wore black pants and white shirts, and they would file ever so elegantly onto strategically placed risers."

With a swift motion of her arm, the choir conductor would lead them through a series of very deliberate and intentional singing. I was in awe that they would breathe at the same time and seamlessly split off into harmonies based on their sections. They did it so effortlessly, too, and I enjoyed myself when I'd see the choir perform. I never thought to myself that I would one day end up doing that with different groups of people, but once again, as is a common theme for me, I just loved the sounds. It was so exciting hearing notes dancing through my ears and lighting up different emotions within me. I realized how sensitive I am to sound, and how I really feel notes and compositions on a deep level.

Jenna never joined choir formally in elementary school (the choir she saw when she was young was discontinued) and instead, she joined the rock-inspired choir in Grades 5 and 6. They met weekly to learn songs by various artists such as the Foo Fighters, Bon Jovi, Genesis, and others. Jenna explained the process:

They'd start off by playing [the songs] with the vocals so we could learn and get used to the sounds and rhythm. Then they'd play the tracks without vocals so we could adjust to finding our places in the music without any support from the original vocals. By the end of it, we did rehearsals in the venue with the band (my favourite part!), and we got ready for show time! They'd always play dramatic intro music as we energetically took our spots on the risers, and I even started off one of the shows playing a drum solo (I took massive pride in being the first note that anyone would hear).

The group performed a matinee for the rest of the school and the "big show" in the evening for parents and loved ones. Jenna remembered that the performances were "messy (as per my mom, the vocals were never really good)," but "the adrenaline rush was a peak experience of my childhood."

Jenna grew up in a "very White school and neighbourhood," so her own musical interests leaned towards popular music. "As a kid you want to be cool, and I really wanted to be cool . . . I wanted to sound like what I heard on the radio, or what I saw in mainstream pop/top 40." We

started to see a need for an integrative relationship with larger dominant popular Western cultures. We did not go into depth regarding this aspect of her life experiences, but I mention it because it provides the story of the larger cultural landscape in which Jenna lives and participates.

Jenna's sound world included diverse global music, musical theatre, popular music, classical Western vocal lessons, Hindustani music, and dance, and *jamati* Indic Ismaili sounds. Plurality was naturally part of Jenna's life and hearing, being, and doing. Like me, Jenna heard and experienced a plural ecosystem that supplied her with emotions and colours through which she came to know and express herself. She pointed out the White culture at school and in the neighbourhood and indicated a difference between what she experienced within and outside of the home. She also talked about wanting to be part of the larger dominant culture that I also experienced.

Her brief statements point to a difference in musical environments, culturally distanced from each other—the Indic and cross-cultural, the Ismaili religious/devotional, and the Western/White environment. In the next section, Jenna describes her response to hearing ginan, a culturally distanced form. In Jenna's musical activities, she reproduced, replicated, and performed pre-existing composed music and artistic repertoire given to her by her teachers, mom, and guru. Communal music making was also an integral part of her musical learning. The diverse musical learning throughout Jenna's childhood and youth demonstrates a differentiated yet interconnected cultural archive that shapes her Ismaili understanding.

6.2 Performing religious identity

Jenna also hears and participates in "devotional music." For her, devotional music like ginan and zikr are part of religious aspects of life. The devotional forms are symbolic markers of identity and tradition that are integrated into jamati and Ismaili cultural life. She hears, recites, and sings ginan and zikr at home with her mom and sister, at khane with the jamat, and at home with her grandparents when they visit Ottawa. First, I share Jenna's story about reciting evening prayers at her nana bapa and nani ma's home when they visited Ottawa. Second, I share Jenna's story about how her experiences there echoed her experiences in jamatkhana. I unravel a tension in these stories between what Jenna thinks and feels the roles of zikr and faith are and what she experiences.

Jenna's grandparents lived in France and visited Ottawa for long periods of time. They stayed across the street from Jenna's family. Jenna, Aisha, and Nina often joined the grandparents for dinner. After dinner, Jenna and the family often said prayers together, a common evening ritual in many Ismaili homes. The order of the ritual at home mirrored the jamatkhana rituals: saying "our *du'a* and then, tasbih, ginan and then always end it with zikr." Saying zikr (out loud) was not part of daily ceremonial rituals. Loudly reciting zikr was typically reserved for special ceremonial occasions. They recited the zikr as would be done in jamatkhana, a cappella and together in unison. This was part of the evening prayer rituals with Jenna's grandparents. Jenna was sometimes encouraged to lead the zik*r*. Reciting zikr, du'a, or ginan were markers of Ismaili identity. In addition, volunteering, and offering time, knowledge, and service to the community––a cherished ethic—showed one's commitment to living the faith. Even at a young age, children are encouraged to volunteer and recite the zikr, as Jenna was. In the context of Jenna's home, reciting the zikr exactly as it was in jamatkhana, for example, demonstrated a performative marker of Ismaili identity that was important to her grandparents.

Her grandparents were "on the stricter side of things" so Jenna would "feel the weight of their expectations" to behave how she thought they wanted her to behave during evening rituals. Whenever there was talk of going to visit her grandparents, Jenna "would, like, mentally prepare myself. Okay, here's what I can't do: I can't be like goofy and silly; and, I have to be well behaved, etc." In addition, her dad was "non-Ismaili" (Sunni Muslim), making Jenna acutely aware that "there's something different about me versus who's represented in the [Ismaili] community." Jenna's grandparents opposed her mom's marriage to her dad. They objected to her mom marrying someone outside the faith. Jenna also knew that having grandchildren not entirely in the faith was something her grandparents had to deal with, "whether they spoke about it or not." Because her dad was non-Ismaili, she potentially could choose to move away from the Ismaili path. This was a cause for concern for her grandparents.

They [my grandparents] would mirror what I felt in khane, the consistent criticism of what and how I was eating, my body and my weight, my relationship status and when I'd get married and have kids, and I felt the weight of their expectations of me to do certain things or be a certain way. I always felt with them that no matter how hard I tried, I'd always have to change more to be good enough in their eyes. I'm the spitting image of my father as well, so no doubt my presence reminded them of him. I always felt that something was wrong with me, and that my

differences were shameful, not to be celebrated or loved. So, I was subdued and not self-expressed around them, because I knew I was being evaluated . . . I held the assumption that something was inherently wrong with me because of how I was treated by the people closest to me at the time.

Jenna said that it was "in her nature as a kid to do what made my parents and grandparents happy and proud of me, rather than listening to my own internal guidance system. It meant more to me what they thought of me." Thus, Jenna felt that she "should probably, you know, minimize" anything "out of the norm" that would amplify her difference and cause anxiety about her not being "fully Ismaili."

6.2.1 Refractions in khane: A "certain filter"

Jenna realized in our conversation that there is a "certain filter" she puts up when entering jamatkhana. She explained that she gets "a certain level of . . . either nerves" or other conflicted feelings when "walking into khane. Yup, Like, every time." At jamatkhana, she cannot be fully herself, echoing the experiences of religious moments at home with her grandparents.

When walking into khane I felt people staring at me. They'd come up to my mom and ask her about my appearance, my weight, if I was doing well in school, and all of this was unsolicited. I used to think that something was wrong with me, and that's why they were paying such close attention. Someone saw me use my left hand to give change for nandi when I used to volunteer and scolded me when they saw me after. I am left-handed, so I thought nothing of it at the time. The more I grew up, the less safe I felt in the community. The more I felt that I would be met with unjustified scrutiny and judgement. Looking back, I realized that there was a lot of racism, sexism, and misogyny in the community that was going unchecked, and the institutions did not take a definitive stand against those things, even refusing to acknowledge them by name.

This othering and negation in the jamat made Jenna question her involvement in the community. Her mom "always told us that we could make our own decisions, so one of mine was to have my boundaries respected by starting to pull away from the community." Jenna began to gain perspective on why she had been othered from an early age. Jenna started to see "less and less of my own values reflected in the community overall." She stated,

In good faith, I could not align myself with a community that doesn't even acknowledge (which is the same as condoning the behaviour) that this is happening. Until I can see that the community (as a whole) starts to make decisive steps forward in this regard, I will continue to question and reassess my place in it.

6.2.2 Bayah: Am I identified with that

Jenna brought up the idea of *bayah,* a rite of passage within Ismaili communities globally. Bayah refers to the act of acceptance of a permanent spiritual bond between the Imam-of-the-Time and the *murid* (devotee). "For Ismailis, this allegiance unites all murids worldwide in their loyalty, devotion and obedience to the Imam-of-the-Time" (The Ismaili, 2022, 03:18) who provides guidance for spiritual and material growth. The pledge of allegiance is an actively engaged, integrative, and wholehearted submission to the Imam-of-the-Time and commitment to upholding the values of the tradition. The bayah is most often given on a child's behalf soon after birth. People who embrace the faith later in life also take the bayah.

When I was born, my mom brought me to khane when I was very small; and, then on my behalf, I pledged allegiance to . . . Hazar Imam and all of that, and I wasn't . . . like . . . I didn't even have words at the time. I was that small, and it just kind of dawned on me after. Yeah, well, I didn't grow up and then choose that. [Pause]. It was. [Pause]. It was done on my own behalf.

Jenna's relationship with bayah provided an intellectual point of reference to help us understand her quest for a more consolidated personal relationship with religious aspects of life. As was custom, her mom took Jenna to khane for the bayah ceremony. Her mom accepted the responsibility to raise and guide Jenna according to communal ethics. Not having the words or agency as a baby to make the pledge herself meant that bayah was taken on her "behalf but without my knowledge." She did not *choose* to do the bayah as a baby.

As she got older, Jenna wondered about her identification with the community:

Like now . . . do I actually identify with this community? Sure? I say I'm Ismaili, but do I actually . . . am I identified with that? Is it something that . . . so it's just lots of questions in my mind about . . . how it all came to be.

The bayah was taken on her behalf so she has that connection to the community, but she also questioned whether she identified with the community. Her grandfather's worst fears seemed to come true, but not because she was not able to fulfill the ritual expectations. How she understood her truest self did not align with how she some people treated her. At home and in jamatkhana, she created a filter that produces a dichotomous sense of self—Jenna at khane (in the religious context) and an authentic Jenna outside khane (in everyday life.) Her fragmentation of self denied her a sense of wholeness and belonging. She was not heard and seen for all that she is, "differences and all." She felt that she was not seen as being "fully Ismaili," creating an internal tension. Differences make up the person; most people seek to have those differences recognized. However, amplifying those differences carried the perception of diminishing the Ismaili aspect of her identity. She was not seen for her total self—differences and all. Any kind of deviation amplified a feeling of being differenced. As a result, she left aside aspects of herself, meaning that she did not bring a full spectrum of her being to jamati contexts. Feelings of being differenced caused Jenna to create some distance from Ismaili community identity.

The ginan and zikr were part of the larger sound world in which Jenna listened and participated. The devotional music was part of a multivalent cultural archive (Niyozov, 2010) and funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) that Jenna encountered. Her grandparents and community actively internalized "family and community resources to make meaning and to describe themselves" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 33). Thus, for her grandparents, the community and even her mom, the communal funds of knowledge (ginan and zikr) became "funds of identity" (p. 33) that were appropriated and used to define their Ismaili identities. However, Jenna did not fully accept the traditions and funds of knowledge as funds of identity. She asked, "Do I actually identify with this community?" Jenna questioned how people used Ismaili "funds of practices, beliefs, knowledge, and ideas" (p. 31). I will now expand the discussion looking at Jenna's experiences and perspectives on the traditions. Her stories will further illustrate the tensions she feels and her desire to reconcile these feelings of being at odds.

6.3 Purpose of zikr

Jenna's tensions and sense of not belonging were further illustrated through her relationship with zikr. When I asked Jenna what she thought the purpose of zikr was, she wondered whether she "should answer based on what I know from the community" or "my real answer which is, I don't

actually know." Her "should answer," based on her past experiences, was that zikr was one of the many ways

to access or to be closer to the Divine, the feeling of being connected or like belonging, or feeling like ultimately devoted, or whatever is one aspect to that; but like, the authentic answer is, I have no idea . . . the truth of the matter is I don't know.

Jenna had no definitive sense of what zikr was other than a feeling about it. Through embodied childhood experiences, she *felt* what zikr could be and imagined that zikr could be. However, what she experienced through normative transmission was at odds with her inner knowing. Jenna believes that not really knowing what the function of zikr is contributes to young people's lack of identification with Ismaili cultures and lack of connection with traditional practices. "Maybe there's something in that about young people, right. We don't actually know the why. The real why." Whatever that reason, Jenna does not think that that real why is passed down sufficiently. She sensed what that why was, but "the truth of the matter is I do not know." Jenna reminded me that trying to "quantify" the zikr in a limited definition when "nothing is quantifiable," is also problematic. Zikr and its reception are "not a one size fits all for everyone." Whatever the context in which the zikr are experienced, how they are defined, recited, received, and interpreted is individual and personal.

Jenna also described an "almost conflicting feeling" in her relationship with the zikr:

So zikr tasbihs, I'd, like, hear the translations read out in khane. Okay. (Giggles). All right. It sounds . . . it sounds, umm . . . there's like a certain familiarity, and then there's also . . . it's at odds with how I'm still kind of dealing with: where do I either fit in, or what is my interpretation of all of these rituals that we do. So, there is a difference. In one I have tended to feel more restricted and less like I can be myself. So that's the difference, and one of them is almost like a conflicting feeling; this is very familiar and growing up we did this with mom, and this holds a special place in my heart. And at the same time, it's at odds with, but do I really identify with anything that I'm saying, like do I wholeheartedly . . . put my whole support behind everything that this community is up to or doing, or, is it something that I've been expected, so I've just fallen into it somehow? I dunno, that's like I guess another conversation.

Jenna stated that she feels "at odds" with the zikr. She wondered whether she identifies with what she says. When she hears the translations being read out in jamatkhana*,* there is a familiarity, yet she questions whether she identifies with what is being said. Not identifying with what is spoken made her think about whether she can put her "whole support behind everything that this community is doing." Her questioning the zikr put into question her identification with the community. She wondered whether she has "just fallen into" the practice and only doing what she is expected to do. She also questioned where she fits in and wondered about her interpretation of the rituals. She sought to have a sincere relationship with the traditions, to develop her own interpretation and not to follow blindly. Like bayah, her participation in zikr and understanding them was a significant factor to her whole-hearted support and participation in and with the community that places strict expectations on her. I have known Jenna as a person who seeks not to simply accept and repeat exactly what is expected, but someone who forges her own pathway of interpretation of the traditions.

6.4 "Singing" zikr[33]

Jenna's questioning why rituals were the way they were, and how she fit in since her dad was not Ismaili, does not change the fact that Jenna loved the singing aspect of the zikr. She connected zikr texts to notes and sang them: "*this* word on *this* note." Zikr was music to her because she could "sing" them. Within a Western sense, the zikr had rhythm and meter, tempo, pitch, melodic contour, dynamics, timber, colour, and texture (Gillani, 2020). Thus, zikr was singing and singing was music

Jenna experienced emotional conflict with the zikr. "I think that the nerves and pressure came from feeling like I didn't totally belong to the community." The zikr are also tied to what she felt was an othering environment. They moved from musical objects she loved to sing as markers of Ismaili identity to being markers of difference and exclusion. The way zikr are performed and the expectations of behaviour that come with them are tied to a normative environment with which Jenna is at odds. The zikr*,* passed down like fossilized cultural artefacts, became

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[33] I choose to use the formation "singing" with quotation marks because within the community there exists a tension about whether one recites or sings zikr and other devotional poetry. Generally, one speaks about "reciting" ginan and "singing" a song or geet. Understanding this sensitivity, for the purpose of this dissertation, I will use both terms interchangeably.

associated for Jenna with unsafe conditions of negation. The zikr, thus, became a source of pain, not a source of connection or affirming spiritual allegiance. Thus, the zikr lost its latent potential to inspire and transform. In a space where she feels negated and conflicted, the cultural knowledge funds like zikr may have lost their capacity to speak; how, then, can Jenna wholeheartedly look to Ismaili traditions to thrive?

Jenna also mentioned an emotional response to hearing ginan in khane, adding to her conflicted feelings.

While I would go to [rock choir] rehearsals during the school day, I was also going to religious ceremonies at night. The first thing that differentiated the two of them was that ginans in khane didn't seem fun. They seemed very serious, and before I really learned about the meanings, I thought they were quite sad songs (just because of the environment). I use this word [sad] because that's how I would interpret the atmosphere of khane at the time.

The seriousness of the ginan event felt intimidating because music was something to which Jenna related as fun and energetic. She wondered why the ginans were so serious and why people sometimes even recited them with subdued or no emotion at all. Jenna, her mom, and sister sometimes discussed on the way home from khane how "people weren't singing with emotion because not everyone understood (and therefore did not relate to) what they were singing." This further fuelled Jenna's curiosity; she wondered, "why would they sing it in the first place?" As Jenna started understanding the meaning of the words, "curiosity replaced the intimidation."

An entangled relationship exists between bayah, zikr and ginan, dogmatic and restrictive expectations of elders, and Jenna's wholehearted commitment and choice to belong. Thomas Merton's words resonate with what Jenna describes.

> *Even where the contemplative is not expressly forbidden to follow what he believes to be the inspiration of God . . . he may feel himself continually and completely at odds with the accepted ideals of those around him. Their spiritual exercises may seem to him to be a bore and a waste of time. Their sermons and their conversations may leave him exhausted with a sense of futility . . . Their choral offices, their excitement over liturgical ceremony and chant, may rob him of the delicate taste of an interior manna that is not*

> *found in formulas of prayer and exterior rites. If only he could be alone and quiet, and remain in the emptiness, darkness and purposelessness in which God speaks with such overwhelming effect! But no, spiritual lights and nosegays are forced upon his mind, he must think and say words, he must sing Alleluias that somebody else wants him to feel.* (Merton, 1984 as cited in Casey, 1999, p. 77)

Merton's words reflected the burden of ritualistic expectation about what Jenna is supposed to do or what she is told to do. For Jenna, simply repeating and singing the zikr blindly was not enough to catch their impact. Knowing the translations of the texts was the first level of understanding needed to work out what the zikr means to her "today in this context." She sought something more. She wished to connect beyond the dogmatic, narrow definitions so she could come to her own interpretations. Until she can resonate and identify positively with various "religious" aspects, she cannot make them an integrated part of her life nor fully commit to what the community does. Until meanings can be grasped, the zikr coexist as part of her knowledge landscape but remain subconsciously felt and "repeated exactly." Jenna has developed an entangled triangulated relationship—familiar and at odds—between the bayah, a vital pledge of faith and Ismaili identity that was chosen for her. She suggested that giving "today's generation a chance to interpret it [the tradition] the way that they see it through their own eyes living human experience today" is essential to help youth revitalize their connections to the traditions

6.5 Choral zikr—a very different experience

Jenna relayed a formative early childhood experience in which she participated in creating music. In the pluralistic soundscape in which Jenna also absorbed the knowledge of ginan, she listened, practiced, and performed in a variety of separate musical activities and spaces. In this story, Jenna was invited by her mom to participate in the creation of music. This creative vocal engagement enabled Jenna to hear a new kind of ethical ecosystem. This was a very different experience than what she described in the previous sections of this chapter.

Aisha was always interested in the choral zikr. During our Yaqzan days, she and I often dreamed about the possibilities of blending traditions, and the potential it could have to support youth Ismaili experience. Jenna was always part of these conversations, discussing, listening, laughing, and participating. Whenever I was in town, Aisha found opportunities for Jenna to observe me leading workshops with the community and to sing with me at home and in khane. This was the

environment in which Jenna and I met and forged our friendship. The choral zikr became a pivotal entry point for conversation and engagement. Much to my surprise, I learned that the zikr exploration we did during "Yaqzan" were what Aisha then transmitted in her own way to Jenna and her sister.

When Aisha, Jenna, and her sister got ready for bed, Aisha asked, "Are we singing zikr tonight?" Although reluctant at times, Jenna would say yes.

The sun would set, dinner would be eaten, leaving a trail of plates behind in the kitchen sink, teeth brushed, showers had, hair braided, pyjamas on, and we'd all go up the winding carpeting staircase to my room, which I shared with my sister at the time. Upon opening the white door with a bright gold knob, you'd see the bunk beds with navy, blue- stained wooden framing, the attached ladder, and the bright orange matching blankets we had for both beds. When we were all settled in, I would hear my mom's voice, [in the] same tone every night, "Jenna, would you like to start?"

Figure 32. Zikr sung at bedtime

This was our most sung chant at the time (see Figure 32). One day, my mom started singing a lower-tone harmony that wove in really well with the original melody, and my mind was blown.

Jenna remembers loving what she heard and at the same time fearing it because she doubted whether she could sing along with her mom. However, Aisha recognized Jenna's innate musical ability early on and always encouraged and supported her. Jenna gratefully acknowledged that Aisha always provided

a safe environment . . . to try and experiment vocally, so, I matched her harmony and carried it for a bit, feeling great about how it was sounding. This experience unlocked my creative ability to construct my own harmonies and layer sound.

As Jenna got older, singing the zikr in harmony with her mom and sister became a regular practice. She tuned in and added higher harmonies.

So, it would be me on the higher harmony, my sister on the melody, and my mom with that same exact, like if we sang it together now, it would be the exact same one that she's been singing all these years. Once we would get started, there was something truly exciting about hearing the notes all weave together.

Already, at a very young age, Jenna heard multi-layered vocal harmonies, importantly with the zikr. The zikr "tune" so dear to the Khoja jamat is centred; it grounded and inspired the family's vocal harmonies. This was a new element vital to Jenna's journey of cultivating and expressing Ismaili traditions. She heard the zikr in a new way, integrative with the Western cultural milieu. While I heard the "Ismaili" and "choral" traditions separately, and discovered their merging, Jenna heard the two worlds already merged. The newly adapted (and merged) zikr "repertoire," that I had transmitted to Aisha and she to Jenna, became additional sources of hearing, feeling, and knowing an Ismaili aesthetic and ethical fragrance.

Jenna was also fully involved in discovering and making harmonious musical soundscapes with zikr. She *made* the harmonies that came from her feelings. She was not told what harmonies to sing. She was given an open and generous environment where she was encouraged to be creative. Jenna did not even know that what she was doing was called harmony. Until her mom told her that it was called harmony, Jenna did "not [even] have a concept of notes, or intervals, or what [makes] it a harmony."

It was more like, here I am sounding out notes that are parallel but don't clash; it comes naturally for me to do so. The harmonies came to me through listening and feeling. It was like okay, so if this harmony is tried and true and safe. What about, where can I discover another one—the process of discovering the other one when it's just me relying on my ears?

Jenna acknowledged that some of the harmonies that she "came out with" were just completely off. "Off tune, off key, you know—if we were talking like musically. It was not a harmony. It was just me singing . . . something."

But it was that safe space so I could do that until I did find . . . oh okay, here's another one that works, and then I would just get intrigued. It's like who made up the rules that this is the

harmony that works, or that is a harmony that works, but what I was singing before doesn't. It didn't work in my own ear. I could hear it . . . I would feel it out a lot.

At this young age, Jenna was acutely aware of the concept of harmony and what worked well or did not. Her musical sensitivity guided her, and I propose that the ambience of ginan within her also becomes an orienting reference. Finding harmonies in this way got Jenna "excited for what other combinations of notes there could be." The process engaged her curiosity, built on her musical ability, encouraged her creativity, and importantly, engaged her in a new way with the zikr.

6.5.1 Creative experimentation

Throughout bedtime routines, zikr was the foundation for musical creativity. As her mom held a lower harmony, and her sister sang the melody, Jenna was able to add harmonies. The zikr existed in its familiar inherited tried, true, and safe fashion—horizontal, repeated, cyclical. The harmonies built on the zikr added a new, unfamiliar yet intriguing vertical dimension. Each additive harmony built on the fundamental zikr "tune," running in parallel with the original, created a vertical repetition. What was ritually traced horizontally was now also dynamically mapped vertically. The creative process deterritorialized and reterritorialized the zikr. The zikr was retranslated from an object of religious repetition to a vehicle for creative discovery through (and for) collective benefit. At the creative interface, Jenna became an active agent in the communal making of multi-layered and sonically dynamic textures of faith. The traditional form was never compromised; it remained intact. Yet, the new layers simultaneously changed the form. Both traditional and interpretive processes coexisted to shape Jenna's experience. Jenna becomes an explorer, fuelled by feeling and curiosity, informed by respect and sensitivity to maintain the tried, true, and safe. The creative process enabled Jenna to cultivate a generative, prolific, musically open, and participatory way of being, while actively honouring the tradition. The traditional form was the foundation, while the new layers created a vision of something new and relatable.

Jenna described an experimental process for discovering harmonies. She felt the difference between harmonies that "worked" or did not in her ear. She naturally looked for notes that were parallel to the original tune that did not clash. She naturally sought "tried and true and safe" harmonies. She did not know about the rules of harmony or why one harmony worked when

another did not. She heard and felt it. From a young age, Jenna intuitively understood the goals of creating harmony and what harmony felt like. When she found a harmony that worked, she was “intrigued.” She set out on an improvisatory, experimental, musical search to discover other harmonies that worked, but finding a note that did not work did not mean failure. It became a springboard for a continued creative quest to find harmonies that did work. This experimental process involved hearing, feeling, sensing, tuning, and singing. Jenna participated in a dynamic in-the-moment creative inquiry in relation to the other voices and people—to find notes that worked. Discovering harmonies became an important experimental process in her narrative.

To experiment musically with the zikr in restrictive normative environments is not an option for Jenna. She was already aware of her difference—a difference off the normative path—so to experiment with the zikr was an additional deviation that she did not feel safe to try. Her impulse to not deviate from the norms of behaviour was tied to minimizing any behaviour or activity that further highlighted her difference or created tension in the family. Therefore, in these environments, Jenna felt she should “err on the side of being by the book and less experimental.” It appears that even as a young child, Jenna was aware of socio-political-musical tensions that she mediated. In this environment, experimenting with the zikr represents a deviation from the expected norms. Doing a zikr in harmony, breaking protocol, could position her as someone who also breaks protocols of faith and communal ethical and social expectations of living the faith. She participates in zikr during prayer rituals, the way they are normally performed. However, the social tensions impede her fullest creative participation. She leaves out parts of herself, her cultural uniqueness, her creativity, her “goofy and silly” self, her musical ability, and her interest in experimenting creatively with the traditions. Normative environments become barriers for Jenna to be fully present as she sees and knows herself. Jenna’s relationship with performing zikr has become entangled in the politics of identity construction and recognition. To experiment with the zikr is, thus, not an option in a normative setting, “a very different experience” than with her mom and sister.

Jenna spoke more about when she sang harmony:

The first answer that comes to mind is when it's a safe space to do so, but if you look at the difference between being with my mom and my sister, my mom, definitely being a lot more open . . . to . . . like . . . that she wouldn't go to khane as much . . . she wouldn't enforce anything with

my sister and me. It was just she let us develop our own kind of path, and our own relationship with the community.

All that while, my grandparents were more . . . on the stricter side of things, like you should be volunteering, you should be saying du'a in khane this many times per month, or like you know there was more expectations there, which made is less safe of a place for me I thought to, like, experiment. I thought when I'm with them, I should probably err on the side of being by the book and . . . yeah, less experimental. I didn't realize that it was, like it felt safe for me to . . . like deviate from . . . what their expectations . . . would be . . . versus being just in, you know, the bedroom in the bunk bed with my mom and—a very different experience.

I want to point out that Jenna told the story of zikr with her grandparents and of attending khane through a socio-political lens; whereas, when she told the story of zikr with her mom and sister, she relayed it through a musical lens. There was a separation between the enabling condition of musicality and the disabling condition of religiosity and politics. The affirming musical processes were highlighted as part of the conditions of belonging. With her grandparents, the negating socio-political processes represented part of the conditions of dis-belonging. With her grandparents, zikr was recited as part of a religious ritual, whereas with her mom, zikr was sung as part of an everyday life ritual. Consistent with how I have experienced hearing about zikr in religious settings, Jenna did not talk about them in a musical way. In fact, she referred to zikr as religious objects.

When she spoke about doing zikr with her mom and sister, she highlighted the musical activities, the pedagogies, the feelings, the processes, and the conditions created. In the religious setting, other than repeating the zikr in unison with others as normatively expected, the language of music and musical processes did not find a place. The musical, aesthetic aspect of the experience was left out. Even in her storytelling, she seemed to inadvertently leave the musical aspect out when speaking about the religious context, since musical aspects were not part of the experience. She did not even speak about her musical ear or sensitivity or the role it played in this setting. There was, however, a clear sense of unspoken sensitivity to the restrictive conditions correlated to behaviour, but she did not mention that as clearly as when she spoke about her mom and sister. It is interesting to me that the prayer ritual story negated musical being, hearing, and sensitivity—something she spoke so enthusiastically about earlier.

In both situations, Jenna lived up to expectations, but had very different experiences of belonging. With her mom, Jenna felt safe to choose what her mom asked of her musically, and indirectly what was expected of her socially and ethically. Living up to expectations there was an affirming and validating course of action. With her grandparents, Jenna chose to err on the side of caution and do the zikr as was expected. Living up to those expectations were a negating and invalidating course of action. In both instances, she gained approval by doing what was expected, but in one situation, she held tension and fear.

Whether it was in conditions of strictness or creativity, Jenna still sought to interpret things her own way and forge a pathway forward that made sense for her. Hearing Jenna's stories reminded me of a Walt Whitman poem:

From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
Going where I list, my own master total and absolute,
Listening to others, considering well what they say,
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.
I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.
I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness.
(Whitman, 1856/2022, "Song of the Open Road," Section 5, lines 57–65)

Creativity, singing, and musicality were important for Jenna to thrive and bring her fullest self to the world. These qualities also helped Jenna to discover new relationships with religious aspects of life, to exercise agency, and to interpret knowledge in her own way. Jenna explained that unlike her grandparents, her "mom is a lot more open." Her mom would not go to khane as much, demonstrating that she sometimes deviated from normative expectations. In a similar way, Jenna stated that her mom encouraged her to choose her own way forward. Her mom "wouldn't enforce anything with my sister and me. She just let us develop our own kind of path and our own relationship with the community," something that was vital and important for Jenna. Her mom inspired and introduced creativity with zikr while her grandparents restricted it. In both cases, she complied with expectations: with her mom willingly, and with her grandparents with

angst. With her mom she brought all of herself, including her experimental creativity, whereas with her grandparents (and khane), she felt the need to leave those parts aside.

How did this feel for Jenna?

It felt really . . . like . . . different but new and exciting, because I had only ever heard them in like khane and certain like, only on certain occasions, and sung in a certain way. Yeah. But when I heard that, there was my mom singing the lower harmony. It was like, I remember I was feeling excited. Like all this. Something new sonically here that like really, if you know like my musical ear, it's like very . . . sensitive to that sort of stuff. So, it was really exciting for me the first time. Yeah.

6.5.1.1 Musical sensitivity—felt knowing

Even, like, if my mom would say something to me, like can you repeat that or like, can you sing back to me what I just sung to you, I would be able to do it . . . [small pause] . . . exactly how she did it also. Although I would not pronounce any words of substance other than "mama" or "baba," my mother noticed that I was attempting to match the tone and the specific notes that people would use for their speaking voices (e.g., if someone were speaking in a lower tone, I would try to speak in a lower tone, attempting to match them).

Jenna and I discussed the role music could play to facilitate a sense of feeling more herself.

Like this sense of being connected . . . with other human beings but without the words, 'cause language is one way of communication, but music is a completely different way of communicating, one that has so many different nuances and levels that I'm still exploring. Like, who can explain what makes somebody who's sitting in the audience . . . burst into tears when someone sings . . . I can be sitting there in one moment and someone sings their whole heart, and they're singing about heartbreak, and I will burst into tears. How do you explain what it is that has been activated inside of this individual—what emotions can be transmitted like that? It's absolutely beautiful. So, when I'm able to feel like myself, is when connected like that . . . with other human beings.

6.6 Translation and interpretation of texts

Jenna shared the need for translation as part of a process of "discovering my own relationship to the religious aspects of my life."

The first level of translation requires working out what the zikr means to her *"*today in this context." Jenna does not "read and write in languages that ginan have been written in." As a young child, she sang and imitated the zikr*,* "not knowing what that word is." Making English translations available "of a ginan that was written . . . many years ago" would help her and other youth "get closer to understanding what I'm getting when I'm singing that ginan." Once translations are provided, the next question is to ask the youth, "What does that mean for you today in this context, religious or not religious; how would you interpret these words that are on this page?"

Jenna acknowledged that translations must not be given in dogmatic and narrow ways because each person receives them differently. The translation of the text is but a starting point to provide an English language text to be interpreted. Each person's interpretation will be different because "for another person who's like native to that language, or who has been speaking it their whole life," the meaning they make will be different. Jenna offered an important reminder: "because even in the translation from whatever language it originated from to English, there's a lot going to get lost between the two." Translation facilitates interpretation; it does not provide a dogmatic and restrictive meaning. Translation is the starting point for an interpretive process. Additionally, Jenna pointed to the importance of translating the traditions in a way that could speak afresh within religious contexts and beyond. Jenna emphasized the need for translational processes whereby young persons could bring *their* meanings to the tradition from their own experiences and responses to life. I recall the words of Bruno Freschi: "the sacred space is an autonomous thing of which you bring a belief to, I don't deliver the belief" (Premji, 2020, 22:46). Jenna was not satisfied to receive a translation that was a single story (Adichie, 2009) of narrowly defined canonized knowledge delivering a belief that she was expected to take up without question.

6.6.1 Religious-musical dichotomy

I take some time now to briefly describe a gap that seems to be present in how young Muslims hear spiritually inspired vocal expression in opposition to how they hear music. A handful of

Muslim youth have informally shared with me a challenge they face in how they hear traditional funds of knowledge. I frequently have heard them talk about Muslim traditions as “religion” and not as music or culture. The youth acknowledged that Muslim traditions carry certain desired values and teachings that they consider to be religion. The specific Muslim “religious” repertoire, as they named it, are not what they willingly include on their playlists. Youth have shared with me how hear those traditional expressions make them feel sleepy or have no beat, something they love in the music they listen to. Whatever the youth seek out in a worldly, musical way is not fulfilled with traditional forms. At the same time, the youth acknowledged how some popular music they choose to hear carries what they perceive as values that directly oppose religious values. One of the conversations I had went like this:

> Me: So what kind of music you listen to?
>
> Them: I listen to a lot of different kinds of music. Like hip-hop, pop music, alternative.
>
> Me: Do you have ginan or zikr on your playlist?
>
> Them: No. That is religious. I listen to music on my play list.
>
> Me: Oh, what do you mean?
>
> Them: Well, what I listen to on my play lists is music. Sometimes what I like to listen to has words that are offensive and opposite of our values. The ginans and zikr have our values that we know are important, but that’s religion.

One of the conversations I had with a Muslim youth on at a local subway station went like this:

> Me: What kind of music are you listening to?
>
> Them: Hip-hop and pop.
>
> Me: Do you ever listen to the words?
>
> Them: Yeah, I do. They don’t always have positive messages, but I love the beats. So, I just ignore the words and listen to the music.
>
> Me: Tell me more.

Them: Well, our religion teaches us certain values, but the words of these songs have different values. I love the beats of the music. Listening to Qur'an and Nasheed, they are religious, and I'd only listen to them at certain times.

Me: So, you're saying that when you listen to the beats and music ignoring the words, that the music is okay to listen to then?

Them: Yeah.

Me: I'm thinking that if the music is connected to the words, then do you not still get the energy of the words in the music? So how does that work? What do you think?

This question left us standing in silence for a while, unable to find a way forward. I had an opinion about it, and so did they, but we seemed stuck for where to go next. I shared this idea about the connection between texts and music with my 19-year-old niece. Again, we were led to a non-conversational place. The question and inquiry held us in a confused silence. I drew my question from teachings in Western music about composers who composed art songs, arias, and choral music in such a way as to connect the sounds directly with the text. In art song, as an example, the music plays as important a role in communicating the feeling and expression of the narrator as does the text. The same is true in Eastern cultures where poetry is tied very closely to sound, recitation, or singing. The sound and music carry a spiritual, ethical, and affective energy that directly link to words. I wonder what mental gymnastics a young person goes through to separate or ignore the words from the "beats" in the music they hear. Is this religious, textual, musical, sonic separation a factor of fragmented sense of being that rubs in dissonance with holism and oneness?

The youth above showed a critical awareness of *not* giving up their essential values and cultural expressions. They did not seem to blindly adopt contemporary culture without reflection and consideration. Yet, they expressed a tension in putting aside one aspect of the music or the other in their musical encounters. The youth wanted to participate in the secular musical culture, yet demonstrated a need not to give up what they perceived as religious values and ethics. The Aga Khan (2005) emphasized that to contain the risk of assimilating and giving up essential values and cultural expressions, it is important to reinvigorate "our own" (para. 16) value systems and cultural expressions including the sciences, ethical structures, design of landscape and towns, built environments, music, philosophical thought, and the free space they require. I ask how, in a

Canadian context where Muslims encounter the contact zone between Western and pluralistic cultural heritages daily, what thinking and processes can hold the journey of translation, and how might musical engagement be a container of the "free space" that is required. As Simon Frith (1996) said about expression of ideas and values in music:

> [It] is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities . . . but that they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them. (p. 111)

I place Frith's concept of living ideas and values as a group aesthetic process alongside the problem of how Muslims reinvigorate and consolidate their values in a Western pluralistic context. This conception points to the need for a way to engage youth in group aesthetic processes: creative, participatory musical, sonic spaces in which they can live ideas, values, and their sense of being. Additionally, there is a call to understand these ideas, values, and senses of being in resonance with shared humanistic principles of the larger societal ecosystems in which one lives and interacts. Asking what values come to be known through group aesthetic processes is important to ask, as well as how what comes to be known can resonate with human principles that might provide a bridge for the values of faith within a new Canadian, Western, pluralistic acoustic.

This dichotomy of religious values and "aesthetic-musical" values appears also in some interpretations of Islam. In some schools of Islam, a historic debate exists about the role of music defining sonic expressions as *haram* (forbidden) or *halal* (permissible). Adherents of defining music as permissible and forbidden essentially separate what one might, through a Western lens, consider sacred and secular. However, musical cultures and sonic transmission in a variety of forms have been vital as an elemental part of spirituality in the Muslim world.

I have spoken with many Muslim youth from diverse interpretations of the faith that speak in these religious-musical dichotomies. Separating religion from music in this way rang true in a variety of conversations with Muslims of all ages. There is a separation and tension between the role of text and music. Texts function as holders of religious values while music seems to function as holders of hold Western secular values. Young people seem to be stuck in this

religious-musical tension. The perceived need to choose one or the other can be a polarizing force that fragments a sense of reconciled being as youth respond to the struggles of life. How culturally integrative musical spaces, might provide places for consolidated knowing and being guides this research.

6.6.2 Feeling energetic frequencies

Jenna highlighted the energetic, affective quality of sound that is important in the process of translation.

It's one thing to read something and what that transmits; and [the] sound, it has a unique [quality]. It's like [an] energy. It reverberates at a frequency. It's able to transmit emotion in a way that text maybe can't do . . . sound is one of those things. We're beings that are composed of energy. Sound is energy. Sound produces light that we turn on and off—our everyday light. That's all energy.

Jenna spoke about sound, energy, and reverberating frequencies in the process of translation and interpretation. She talked about knowing deeper, hidden layers of understanding beyond the texts and translations of the texts alone—a felt experience of energy. She came to know foundational energy behind the words that she feels could be evoked through sound. The content of the text while communicative is not enough to grasp such that interpretation is possible. Jenna suggests that translation would include text *and* sound. She speaks about knowing deeper, hidden layers of understanding beyond the texts and translations of the texts alone. She speaks about *coming to know* foundational universal energy behind the words that she feels can be evoked through sound. The content of the text, while communicative, is not enough to make interpretation possible. "Reading" and receiving the *sound* of the zikr, a primordial energy and frequency, is another aspect of understanding that Jenna she seeks. Jenna voices her feeling that "the essence of what it is to sing ginan and zikr hasn't been sufficiently communicated in a way that at least for the people my age that I know...[they] can actually relate to." She says that "somewhere along the way, the how got more prioritized than the why." The how that she refers to is the strictly passed down canonized forms and process with which she is at odds. The textual translation offers a language of transmission that she can bring plurality of meaning too. The sonic translation offers a deeper universal spiritual transmission that she can further interpret.

Reaching the energetic frequencies of sound is important in the processes of translation and interpretation.

6.6.3 Understanding ancestral creative processes

Jenna acknowledged that knowing more about the creative processes of the people who wrote the ginans would help her to translate and interpret them anew:

Like, who were the people who wrote the ginans; like, how did they choose one melody, or why this melody, and has it [the melody] actually carried forward now accurately, or was it completely different? Back then, who was it that had a hand in creating them . . . Could I speak with them about it?

Jenna highlighted music, creativity, and composition. The ginans are viewed as products of a writing process, a compositional effort undertaken by individuals. She used words like "melody" and "writing" that allude to music. She used words like "creating" and "choosing" that suggest composition and creative agency. Implied in her questioning is the relationship between individual writers, musical culture, and literacy that enables expression. Jenna connected knowing about creative processes to learning more about the how and why of the zikr. She said that there was more to reciting zikr than simply because one is told, "it will bring you peace and blessings." She wanted to "know the . . . the *how* . . . the *why*. Why . . . the notes [sings on "na na na"] of the tune *shukranlillah al-hamdulillah*] (see Figure 33)? Who decided that?"

Figure 33. "Shukranlillah al-hamdulillah"

Jenna highlighted the creative agency and interpretive choice of the writers. She wanted to know who decided what notes and ragas to choose and how did the composers "interpret the idea of devotion such that this [musical expression] is what came out." I draw out "the idea of devotion"

here because Jenna seemed to be talking about the nature of devotion: what it meant to ancestors, and how they interpreted what devotion was to them musically.

[Was] it like a frequency that is reverberating . . . like did they choose that [form, tune, notes] because there's an energetic frequency that they were attuned to back then that has like a meditative quality, or that it's known to have some kind of an effect on the brain, or was it just something that someone heard in a dream or in passing? Or was it [that] someone heard someone [else] who chose a certain key to have a conversation in? Even if we're like speaking [in this conversation], we're choosing a key to speak in to deliver our words. So, what if whoever was walking by heard someone in a key and then they went, "oh wow, okay," and then like ran back and wrote this, and this is what we're saying today? Who knows?

Jenna had "so many questions." She wondered about the processes of choosing notes, melodies, and keys; what was behind the "musical" choices? She explored the metaphysical, scientific, practical, and relational possibilities that may have inspired expression. She implied that there was more to our understanding of traditions than was being passed down. She acknowledged the creative agency of writers "back then" who might have had the capacity to connect their expression beyond purely being musical. She pointed to the possibility of a creative hearing of the environment as inspiration for expression—as energetic frequencies or a conversation in passing. Jenna described a writing process that interlinks hearing, feeling, resonating, making, creating, choosing, interpreting, and expressing. Speaking with the people who wrote the "compositions" was another level of translation Jenna sought to find out the "real why" and how of spiritual expression. Hearing ancestral points of view was a way for Jenna to mediate tensions with communal transmission. Speaking with the ancestors would enable Jenna to learn about relational and creative music processes that could inform her experience and expression of "the idea of devotion today."

Jenna is a musical person and a songwriter, so it makes sense that she sought to know more about these dimensions of musical creativity that are "untapped" by the community. I wondered whether other young Muslims thought of these cultural expressions as musical, regardless of their interest in music. If that was the case, then is the gap Jenna highlighted something that, if filled, could help other youth? Does she point to a larger gap of de-contextualization and the exclusion of musical and creative dimensions of spiritual expression? My experience of Indic,

East African Ismaili culture is that the musical, aesthetic, creative, compositional dimensions are not shared as part of the larger communal structures of transmission. Individual artists or teachers in the community may see it that way, but in the general teaching and learning of spiritual expressions, the musical aspects are missing. This is not the case in contexts such as Central Asia where spiritual expression is part of a larger creative and cultural sonic landscape not separated or canonized. On the contrary, devotional expression is emergent and dynamic, and expressed in response to contemporary life. Even in the passing down of "melodies," the musical cultures value improvisation and creative expression in "composing" the texts and revitalizing sonic elements. In some Muslim contexts, learning to recite Qur'an is taught in the context of Arabic *maqam* and musical cultures. Learning Qur'an involves learning about the foundations of sonic culture and reciting the texts in different modal qualities. A friend who is an Arab Christian from Syria mentioned that in his community, if someone wanted to become a singer, they would be sent to a Muslim Sheikh to learn Qur'an. It was the Sheikhs who held essential musical knowledge. Indeed, the communal utterances of Qur'an in the time of the Prophet Muhammad were also inextricably linked with the poetic-musical and creative-interpretive cultures of the Arab world. This knowledge is "something really special" that Jenna felt is vitally missing but could help her to connect with and interpret her feeling of faith.

Jenna took her contemplation one level deeper. She was curious about the processes of interpretation (and translation) of knowledge of love and devotion (a spiritual realm of experience) beyond what words can communicate, such that "this (ginan or zikr or musical expression) came out." She sought a more subtle metaphysical realm of knowledge—a knowledge of the "love and devotion" the ancestors felt that "carries through . . . all the way through until this day." Jenna wondered how ancestors interpreted "the idea of devotion [such] that this is what came out," including "how and why the notes" of inherited traditions were chosen. Jenna amplified a value of curiosity and exploration in relaying her interpretation of the musical expression of devotion. She drew out the possibility of crafting a relationship between intermingling musical and metaphysical hearing and doing. She wondered about the possibility of a former environmental condition that people "back then" might have been attuned to a certain "energetic frequency . . . that has like a meditative quality" that they sought to express; she also wondered about the inspirational conditions for the expression, whether in a dream, in passing, or by hearing a conversation. Jenna highlighted a capacity to hear, attune, receive, grasp energy

beyond words, and to choose and craft sonic materials and utterances (in dreams or in everyday life) that can carry the energetic hearing. She pointed to a kind of hearing inward and simultaneous hearing outward beyond crystalized cultural artefacts involved in the “idea of devotion.” She spoke about what might have happened “back then” as an act of creative agency and an energetically oriented hearing. Learning more about this devotion akin to feelings of “love” could help Jenna to translate and interpret what she grasps in her own musical way.

Jenna spoke about creative choice from a compositional perspective and wondered about how ancestors chose melodies and musical materials to interpret spiritual and metaphysical knowledge. Jenna seemed to be calling for a need to nurture subtle conditions of being and capacity to hold space, dwell, and "be channels" that allow for that which is heard, felt, and known "to come out." I submit that in the realm of exploring a relationship with "different facets of faith," Jenna sought the kinds of conditions and musical processes that allowed her to tap into feelings of "love and devotion"—the same energy felt by the ancestors that inspired their creative expression. The capacity to access, hear beyond, and call forward an eternal love and devotion works hand-in-hand (ear-to-ear) with the capacity to craft and refine the musical and sonic materials at Jenna’s disposal, as an organic responsive expression of spiritual interiorization.

6.7 Safe space, safe sounds

Jenna described how her mom created a safe space to courageously experiment and to explore harmonies “until I’d find another one." One level of safety her mom offered was sharing a zikr that was a short, repeated, cyclical, simple tune. Secondly, this tune was one that Jenna had heard in jamatkhana or elsewhere in her Ismaili culture. There was a familiarity with the tune, and the simplicity of the tune allowed for it to be easily picked up and repeated. Thirdly, this tune was shared by ear, by rote, and perhaps even in a call and response manner that was a standard practice of transmission. Jenna was not expected to read musical notes or understand standardized concepts of harmony before being able to participate. Everything was organic and natural, yet facilitated. Jenna's mom provided simple scaffolding for the musical exploration. She encouraged Jenna and her sister to do the zikr in unison, as it would normally be done. Then, Jenna's mom sang a lower harmony, adding a sonically new element that they became accustomed to. After that, as Jenna got older, her mom encouraged her to discover new harmonies and to sing a higher harmony. At every stage, there was time to settle into the new

sounds and to create a safety into which and out of which experimentation could happen. Fourthly, Jenna's mom consistently sang the lower harmony, and her sister sang the melody. There was a ritualistic familiarity about who sang what "even now" that could provide another level of comfort and safety. Another level of safety was offered environmentally. The zikr ritual took place at home in the bedroom, a safe, warm, and comforting place, braided into an already familiar and loving regular bedtime ritual. Singing comes easily for Jenna, so this provided a further level of safety. Jenna's mom also made space for Jenna to explore and experiment. She invited Jenna without an expectation of a product or reprimands for mistakes. The entire experience—repertoire, content, process, focus on the voice, spirit of care and openness, innovation, and “everydayness”—created an enabling and safe environment for Jenna.

Singing and hearing happened together. Sometimes Jenna heard and responded, and other times she heard while singing with. At only two years old, she already showed a capacity to sing with others in unison and to exercise her musical ability to contribute a new vocal part to the musical texture. Being able to sing in unison and harmony also demonstrated Jenna's musical and vocal ability, strength, and skill to match, reproduce and add to what was happening. Jenna did not specifically articulate it, but she implied that everyone was invested in a common musical goal, either to sing in unison or in harmony. This collective striving inherently involved nurturing supportive energy, listening, tuning in, signing, willingly participating, and caring to hold space with and for each other. Her relationship with the zikr was held and mediated in this innovative, experimental, sonic, aural, vocal, musical, communal, familiar, social, creative container—an enabling environment and participatory way of being that nurtured her growth. The environmental, musical, communal, spiritual, and ethical merged in an integrative and enabling space.

This way of doing zikr allowed for sonic continuity of tradition and simultaneous evolution. Both could coexist. In this safe space, Jenna trusted her own felt and aurally sparked sensations to discover harmonies on the zikr. There was enough music that was familiar, comforting, supportive, and consistent, from which Jenna could experiment musically. The zikr served as a vital sonic reference point for her creative experimentation. The zikr formed the foundation, almost like a cantus firmus, for the creative experimentation. Even at a young age, Jenna showed regard and respect for the zikr. She listened for musical sounds that harmonized with the zikr. With care to find tried, true, and safe harmonies, she honoured and embraced the sacred.

Facilitated by her mom, she wanted to uphold the tradition yet wanted to experiment with what was "new and different." Jenna demonstrated an unspoken care to hold space and create harmonies that ensured all others in the room felt safe too. Even at that age, Jenna demonstrated an innate empathic capacity and sensitivity for the safety of all. She grasped the value of creating sonic ambience and harmony with others for the greater good of all. I submit that her innate sensitivity and aural capacity to hear harmonies also contributed to her empathy and care to produce sounds that held harmonious safety for all making the music, including herself. Her safety in the harmony of the music and safe space that her mom created was sustained as she contributed her voice and harmonic sensitivity to the collective effort created by all and benefitting all.

This innovative hearing shows the potential for a stronger relationship with the tradition and a creative retranslation. A well-established religious ritual and cultural artefact migrated effortlessly and creatively into Jenna's home. Her mom was the vehicle for the migration and translation of ritual between the religious contexts and everyday life experience. Jenna's mom also held both tradition and innovation in her approach. What was for other families only heard on certain occasions was heard regularly and differently in Jenna's home. Jenna outlined the rich enabling conditions in which she came to be in relation with the zikr. Her relationship with the zikr was facilitated (and mediated) in interwoven, multilayered environmental, social (communal), personal, spiritual, ethical, innovative, experimental, musical (and creative) conditions. Jenna was at home, in a warm, familiar, and loving environment with people with whom she already had a relationship. Singing together, and singing the zikr together, was an integral and foundational part of the ritual. The bedtime routine (with the zikr) also occurred regularly as opposed to "only on certain occasions." Doing zikr in this way allowed Jenna to engage the religious, spiritual, cultural, and musical aspects of life creatively in an everyday experience.

6.7.1 Singing harmony in khane

I asked Jenna whether there were times in khane where she felt the same kind of musical connection as she felt singing zikr in harmony at home.

To be honest . . . whenever you're there also. I'm not just saying that. It's like when you're there . . . you represent that safe space for me to be 100% who I am, differences and all included. [I

feel] completely respected, honoured [and] there's like a very deep sense of trust and like safety there. Like you know, if Hussein's there yeah, he's gonna say let's sit in the middle, so we could sing in harmony. 100%! I'm in!

To provide some additional context, the prayer hall is a gendered space. Everyone sits in one space, but the women sit on one side and the men on the other. A natural separating aisle forms in the middle. Often, nobody sits in the middle unless it is a special gathering requiring the space to be filled. Even then, there is a clear separation between men and women. Also depending on the physical space, adjacent to the prayer hall space may exist where many young families sit together to tend to their children. Sitting near each other in the middle of jamatkhana, thus, represented an alternative space that held a promise for something new and different to happen within the congregational setting. Singing the zikr quietly in vocal harmony with the lead reciters, Jenna and I were able to hold an exploratory and experimental space—slightly off the norm but still within the protocols of the space. We challenged the normative with something new, different, and even perhaps deviant, yet exciting. Within the jamatkhana setting, we experienced a similar kind of creative space much like with her mom and sister during their bedtime rituals. Sometimes the congregants sang off key but on harmonies of thirds and fifths without knowing it. Also, when the congregation recited together in an attuned unison, we could hear overtones, especially the fifth. Our adding harmonies simply aligned with and filled in the harmonic spaces without the potential of anyone knowing.

This slight deviation from the norm was as exciting for Jenna as it was for me. The potential of subtly bringing in vocal harmony learned from outside the jamatkhana settings added to the excitement. Our mid-location in the prayer hall and our quiet harmonization all contributed a sense of belonging by bringing more of ourselves, including musical selves, in. This was possible because in jamatkhana unison recitations of devotion express collective piety. Adding a vocal layer, I submit, was another way for us to harmonize our voices in prayerful intent without jarring the pious listening of the congregants. This was exciting for me.

With her mom, Jenna sang zikr in harmony at home outside of the ceremonial space. In this case, Jenna and I sang “in harmony” inside the jamatkhana setting. This, for me, was a small act of rebellion, knowing that even if we sang in harmony with others singing out of tune fifths and thirds to what the lead reciter was singing, perhaps the rest of the congregation would not know.

I also believe that when we sang in unison and we heard overtones, the harmonies were already in our inner ear, subconsciously felt and heard. Singing in harmony in the middle at khane was important because this middle space inside the jamatkhana was where experimentation could happen. The middle was not merely a physical space but a metaphoric space, a threshold and borderland, where something different and new could transpire. Our voices together became a centring hub, a parabolic centre point that allowed for a new hearing of being and belonging within normative spaces. For Jenna, this important integration may have enabled a fuller sense of self; when she felt open, alive, and generative, she automatically amplified a vital energy for others around her to hear differently and engage their commitment to faith anew. Yes, it required others like her mom and I to initiate the possibility, but once that was engaged, the interpretive consolidation happened within her own sensitive ear. Jenna and I together, and Jenna and her mom together, became individual and collective spaces of audiation to hear anew even within the prayer setting. The possibility that this kind of vocal layering could take place in khane and at home gave Jenna an experience of how worlds inside and outside could find congruence.

For Jenna, normative settings restricted her creativity. She was not able to experiment on zikr with her grandparents because of their expectations for her behaviour. What she discovered with her mom during bedtime rituals, which excited her and gave her creative agency to interpret the tradition, she was unable to bring to her grandparents. However, these opportunities to add harmonies with her mom, sister and me in khane were occasions to bring her fullest creative musical self to the religious space. I think that this ability to explore, even if subtly, in the normative space, is critical in helping a young, creative person like Jenna to discover and consolidate her relationships with the traditions. She stated:

If I can be an example of how it's completely okay to question, to reinvent, and to operate in a space that is just outside the norm and still maintain a cordial relationship with a community I grew up in, that would be amazing, because I'm not the only one who is wondering how to harmonize, if you will, the essence of who I am and what I represent with that of the Ismaili community. I have a whole other lineage (the Tunisian side) that I also explore regularly and am deeply identified with. How could people in the Ismaili community approach me with a respectful curiosity, rather than fearful rejection? How can they see my value instead of my differences? How could they see the "me" I know myself to be, rather than my labels? This is at the heart of what I wish for this community—that there is an awakening to the missed opportunity that is the

beautiful harmonization of all Ismailis, and that the musical realm is one such gateway that can lead to true community flourishing once more.

6.7.2 Safe space

Singing in harmony with me and with her mom was a safe space enabling Jenna to be "100% herself," where all her differences were included. During prayer time with her elders or at khane, she could not bring all parts of herself, but singing in harmony with me or with her mom, she could. When we sang zikr in harmony in khane, Jenna brought into khane parts of herself that she otherwise left behind. I do the same. Singing in harmony represents a creative strength she and I hold. Bringing that into khane gave us translational agency whereby we could be more of our fuller selves. Singing in the middle breaks protocol yet makes space for the normative to also be present. The middle space enables a fuller expression of our being and our creativity. It represents our capacity to interpret on our own within the ceremonial setting, which feels empowering. The harmonies, while new and different, do not disrupt what is already normatively happening. This creates a safe space that, even for a few minutes, removes the filters so that we experience an integrative sense of being Ismaili and can return to a feeling of wholeness.

I asked Jenna about the relationship between safe space, the activity, and the people. I wondered whether it was the activity itself, singing zikr in harmony (in the middle with me or with her mom and sister at home) that created safe space, or was it the capacity of the facilitator to create that safe space.

Many people have a really good sense of when someone is interacting with you as a whole human being versus when someone is interacting with you from a judgement or filter or perception of you that there's difference, like you're different; or you may not know what you're talking about necessarily . . . when you're young.

Jenna had "a really good sense of when someone is interacting with you as a whole human being." She said, "If that openness is, like, not there by nature . . . I tend to feel it." She referred to a level of empathetic sensitivity within, an intuitive knowing about whether people received her openly or not. I drew out this thread of "sensitivity" and wondered how her musical ear and sensitivity, her capacity to receive and be sensitive to "something new sonically," to discover "tried, true, and safe" harmonies and to know a ginan from picking it up from the environment,

was related to her capacity to sense when she was or was not being treated as a full human. In this conception, what she referred to as a sensitive ear perhaps was more than a musical one—an inherent capacity to know and feel directly and indirectly. The "ear" is more than an organ of perception but also a condition of reception that is always taking in and registering information—information that affirms and excites, and information that negates and restricts.

Developing the capacity to be sensitive to and receive what amplifies her is an important asset for building and mediating. "I think there's a big difference" between someone who interacts with a young person and someone who listens to and validates what a child has to say simply because they are "just a kid" and "really cute." With her mom and me, Jenna stated,

There was never a time where I would question you or my mom. She felt that how we interacted with her is like "I am my own human being, like in my own right. I'm gonna forge my own pathway, and then everything that I do have to say is valid and heard for what it is . . . that's what creates the safe spaces—[it] is the people as much as it is the activity.

Jenna outlined how people who create safe spaces interact with her as a full human being, one who has agency and the capacity to "forge" their own pathway in life. Acknowledging that what she says, at any level of the thought development, is a valid, worthwhile contribution, is important. Safe spaces allow Jenna to be heard for who she is and what she says. Creatively engaged musical experiences such as singing zikr in harmony provide a window into that experience. The content of the tradition, the different way of performing it, the situation and the people involved, all create a safe space for Jenna.

Jenna illustrated an inextricable interdependence between experimenting, creating harmonies, a musical ear, and the importance of having a "safe space" in which to experiment and create as a life-long intellectual quest. Her musical ear was a faculty of perception on which she relied and that helped her to "feel it out." Her sensitive ear allowed her to naturally sound out notes and discover harmonies that worked or did not. Finding a "tried and true and safe" harmony became a point of reference and sparked her to ask where she could discover another harmony that worked. Being able to explore and discover what worked or not also sparked her curiosity about how harmony works and particularly about "who made up the rules" that certain harmonies work or not. Hearing and experimenting were inextricably wrapped up in discovering and creating harmonies that worked. The safety of "tried and true" harmonies added an implicit subtlety to

Jenna's understanding of harmony. It was important for Jenna to find new harmonies while building on traditional, familiar, respected cultural knowledge funds. Harmonies that worked evoked safety for her.

Jenna also displayed a natural disposition to hold safety and regard for the traditions and the people who participated with her. "It was in my nature as a kid to do what made my parents and grandparents happy and proud of me, rather than listening to my own internal guidance system. It meant more to me what they thought of me." Jenna demonstrated a powerful creative responsibility and respect for the values of her elders. Creativity was not engaged for individualistic vanity or disruption. Creativity was a vital force of flexibility and humility that enabled her to express openness to new questions and new responses over time, and helped her to better understand the traditions and her place in them. "I am more interested in being on this longer-term quest, both in the physical and the spiritual, so that I may master the teachings of my particular life and serve humanity in the long-term." Jenna was sensitive to upholding and mastering teachings in her life that she can use to serve the "greater good." Creating tried true and safe harmonies, thus, could be seen as a metaphor for a musical and intellectual quest for harmony and wholeness in the world.

Safety—the aspiration is to create safe sounds within safe spaces of care and respect—to amplify wholeness. The word "safety" possibly comes from a proto-Indo-European root, "sol," meaning whole. The Sanskrit word *sarvah* (uninjured, intact, whole) is one of the possible origins connected to the word sol. Interestingly, sol is the root word of salve, solid, solidarity, sage, solemn, consolidation. I think also about the word "Islam," whose Arabic root carries polysemous meanings including submission, peace, wellbeing and safeness among others. The possible root meanings of the word "peace" include to make solid, to fix, to fasten, to make firm. In a related yet different sense, the word "harmony" comes from possible root origins meaning to fit together, make, complete, among others. In an interview with Jay Ruzesky, Jan Zwicky (2016) speaks about coherence:

> Music clearly means, but it doesn't mean the same way that language does. Music's meaning is a function of resonance and resonance involves a kind of integrity. Think of a chord. The chord is what it is because of the multiple resonant relations that its individual tones have to one another. If you remove one of the tones or alter it just slightly—like

> turning an E natural into an E flat—you fundamentally change the nature of the whole. A perfectly tuned chord, we might say, is coherent. And that, I think, is the basis of what we mean by lyric thought: it's thinking in love with coherence. It seeks understanding by finding coherence, and it strives for coherence—resonant integrity—in expression. (Ruzesky, 2016, "What poetry is," para. 3)

I cannot help but make a conceptual connection between wholeness, fitting together, coherence, safety, and peace. I add that the word "integrity" comes from integer, meaning whole. Is there a connection here that Jenna made to the quest for wholeness? Is the safety she feels one of wholeness? Is the pursuit of musical harmony vital in the pursuit for wholeness? The relation between harmony, wholeness, and Islamic tradition becomes important in Jenna's narrative. Looking for and creating harmonies, singing zikr with her mom and sister, singing in the middle of khane with me, were all part of everyday life-enlivening aspects of a curious, experimental, social, and musical self. Bringing out one's abilities to do, make, hear, discover, experiment, think, participate, and be part of a process with others to create tried and true and safe harmonies and harbours of safety were all interwoven. Musical goals were not a reductive end but parts of a holistic weave of being. Traditions of zikr and ginan were not reductive ends but integral to the sonic fabric. The merging of zikr with harmonies became an intellectual hub, a safe space, through which to find oneself and be energized by wonderment and one's inherent capacities to be a thinking, feeling, and knowing whole human being.

6.7.2.1 Openness

Jenna felt that a key quality of people who create safe spaces is "openness." When she sang zikr in harmony with her mom and sister or in the middle with me, Jenna never felt that her contribution was not enough or that because she was younger, she did not have something to add or say musically. The group's openness enabled Jenna to participate with confidence. She felt safe and comfortable to contribute. She was welcomed, accepted, and valued. Her voice mattered and contributed equally and vitally to the collective whole. Jenna valued how the people gathered were open to each other in the collective creative process. I believe that the value her mom and I placed on open-hearted explorative creativity contributed to her being able to fit in and contribute her talents, knowledge, gifts, and musicality. I contend that this kind of open and

creative environment, combined with Jenna's inherent musical ear and sensitivity, nurtured through communal musical experience, brought out her abilities, enabling her full participation.

I draw out three aspects that illuminate Jenna's experience: two aspects that she spoke about and one aspect that was implied. First, she discussed the conditions of diversity in which everyone holds a different musical (and cultural, religious, ancestral) background. Second, she described the conditions of creativity by which all contributed, from individual perspectives, something new that "we wanted to create." Jenna highlighted the value of singing with several other people with diverse experiences: a collective vocal effort. She also highlighted the value of creating and co-creating with them. It is important to note that she did not speak about performing repertoire imposed and already notated. She focused on creativity and collective agency to “create what *we* wanted.” Creativity and collective effort were common threads in Jenna's narrative.

Hospitable invitation to sing zikr in harmony with caring others in a safe space sparked an intellectual opening as well. Whether it was singing in harmony with her mom and sister, or with me in a variety of settings, Jenna discussed how the experience fostered openness.

I totally think . . . it does foster more openness because . . . there's something that's the unknown and it's intimidating. [She tries to] like rationalize why I shouldn't, [why I] can't, I'm trying like rationalize why I shouldn't, can't.

Jenna explained that there was something unknown that she felt when singing zikr in harmony for the first time. She recounts that at first, it was intimidating. She tried to “rationalize why I shouldn't . . . can't.” Yet, as discussed earlier, hearing something different and sonically new excited her. The creative process inspired her “to explore that” further, not to say, “oh, this is different; this isn't comfortable; I don't want to do that.”

In a safe, creative, participatory environment with her mom and sister, she felt open. Even as a little child, hearing and singing something new and different inspired openness to try and take it further. She felt a similar feeling of creative openness when singing with me in the middle at jamatkhana. She acknowledged the openness of elders, mentors, facilitators, and other singers in such situations that enabled creativity and experimentation that energized her. The chance to create and experiment in those spaces contributed to openness. The *process* of harmonizing with others on the zikr created a sense of openness. This process required attuning to others, being

open to blending voices, and hearing deeply to find satisfying harmonies. Harmony happened when each person was open to working together towards creating harmony and beauty. Delving deeper, the profundity of the experiences sparked more openness. Coming to know energetic frequencies, essence, love, unity, feeling of *didar,* common humanity, and a truth of self, fostered openness on a metaphysical and spiritual level. In these ways the process of singing zikr in harmony fostered openness.

6.8 Hearing and communicating beyond the words

I think it's like, absolutely, like an art; and it's something that is profound—that can reach the experience of it [the zikr] and enhance the words and the meaning. Like, it's a new way even for people who may not know what it means to get intimately connected with the essence of what it is also. It's like a really powerful access.

Jenna explained that hearing harmonies enhanced the words and meaning of the zikr. Singing zikr in this way brings the zikr to life. The musical encounter "invokes the actual energy and essence of what the words mean for me . . . the essence of the words is what gets brought out." Jenna wanted to connect to that essence. Jenna valued both understanding the meaning of the actual words and coming to know the essence of (and beyond) the texts. In this conception, the process of singing in harmony produced by layers of diverse voices, regardless of their background, can produce access to intimacy with an energy that speaks beyond boundaries of difference or identity with that cultural object. Intimacy with essence, alongside and beyond the words and meaning, allow for connection and a deeper level of translation that can transcend barriers of rational understanding.

Regardless of the zikr text, for Jenna, when the zikr are sung in harmony, they come to serve a purpose: "They all bring me to peace . . . all of them." I remember a conversation I had with an Ismaili youth of Panjabi descent who described the effect of doing zikr in harmony as *sukoon.* The Urdu word "sukoon" is known a state of mind or condition of peace, a felt experience. Singing several harmonies and creating harmony with a group of people created the possibility for Jenna to hear, feel, and access "an energy that emits" and that "transports"—an energy that brings about feelings of peace. The zikr, housed in enriched vertical musical textures, offered Jenna a chance to "reach" into the essence of the zikr—into a memory of "the essence of what it was before it took shape." An alumnus of the Canadian Ismaili Muslim Youth Choir once

mentioned something similar to me. She reported that when she sang zikr in harmony, even though she did not truly know the meaning, she felt more connected to whatever the original meaning was. Jenna was beginning to distinguish and articulate what she *felt* the purpose of zikr is—to reach into profound depths of essence—and ways to do zikr that bring that purpose to life. For Jenna, doing zikr in ways that could invoke such profound experience helped her grasp their intended purpose. Normatively reciting the zikr did not "invoke the same feeling." On the other hand, singing zikr in harmony provided a sonic housing that could produce conditions for invoking those feelings.

For me, whenever I hear harmonies (and, like, especially when it's several harmonies— like five or like a large group of people singing together), there's like an energy that emits that's very, like, it transports me, and then [pause], because I've had such a profound experience with it, that makes me want to understand the words, if they are not in a language that I can understand.

When Jenna heard harmonies on the zikr created with a group of people, "especially when it's several harmonies," she spoke of an energy that was evoked, brought out, released. This energy is one she thinks ancestors may have felt and that inspired musical creation and authenticity in living life. Connecting with this ancestral energy transported Jenna. This indescribable yet palpable energy she felt acts as a portal, a threshold that carries her over into a profound experience of otherworldliness that is indescribable. Having this otherworldly experience sparked curiosity about the mystery of the energy, the traditions, their histories, and the energy that inspired the ancestors.

I delve further into the etymology of the word "energy." The potential origins combine the prefix *en* (in, at, within) and *werg* (work—to do). I am struck by word origins referring to being active: working, action, operation, and doing. Energy is an active process that does something. When Jenna spoke about an otherworldly energy, then, it was an active energy, something almost real yet indescribable. This energy was not a transcendent space outside herself to travel into and then travel back out; nor was it an energy that one could choose to partake in or not, like a consumable object. The energy occurs. It is present, awakened. The way Jenna spoke about it was that this energy is inside, present, and part of the self, not separate from the self. It is the self. Through profound otherworldly experiences, Jenna came to know this active energy in a palpable way.

The musical environment revealed and amplified interiorized energy, alive and active, working, operating within, and labouring. This energy came to be known as Jenna heard harmonies, especially “several harmonies” created by many people singing together. The acts of singing and hearing created the possibility to emit, invoke, and evoke energy. The labour of listening and unifying voices in harmony created a container into which the singer enters and hears. Jenna not only heard the physical harmonies and the voices with which she created them. Together with other singers, she created an acoustic, sonic container—a kind of vibrational sanctuary—to know energy that was already a part of the self. Individuals can enter the sonic sanctuary so that they can exit energetically. This process of singing in vocal harmony, the harmonies themselves, and the energy that comes to be known, all become carriers that help transport the hearing-doing being across thresholds of manifest and hidden aspects of being.

Multiple levels of engaging energy contribute to the experience. The energy of the voices, the energy of the co-labour, the energy of listening, the energy of active participation in this place, this time, and with this group of people contributes to erecting a harmonious sonic holder for something profound to happen. In profundity, otherworldly energies are known. This communal vocal and listening labour is necessary to hear and tap into the energy. The musical labour and aural sensitivity create the possibility to hear a powerful musical affect and to grasp a life-giving energy. The energy is constant and alive, as is the vital work to create containers for the otherwise intangible yet present energy to be known. The refinement of the craft of singing in harmony and the use of musical tools, skills, structures, and knowledge towards the common goal of creating harmony help create containers for the energy to be known and to inspire. The goal is not to define that energy, demand it, control it, name it, or label it. How it may appear and sound in one assemblage of vocalists is different with another assemblage of singers. The energy of collaboration—“co-labour-ation”—mirrors and awakens into consciousness otherworldly energy that in turn informs the labour and inspires it. This co-labour and commitment to harmony with others creates a new safe space in which one can humbly submit their ears and heart to hearing the profound. The energy is always there, but we are often deaf to it in the noise of the world. The act of making music in this way allows one to peel away the noise to uncover the energy. It is important to note that the sonic environment created here involves the zikr. The zikr is an integral part of the texture of Jenna’s experience, an important factor as she strives to reconcile her relationships with the traditions. Revitalizing the tradition by activating its

energetic and translational capacity provides a powerful antidote to the feeling of being "at odds" with the traditions.

Boyce-Tillman (2009) explained that liminal spaces emerging through music have the capacity to provide:

> cultural and personal transformation including its relationship between this space and the everyday world, the loss of boundaries, collective vulnerability, the opportunity to try out new personas, the handing over of responsibility to a higher power and the capacity for joyful play and the possibility of empowerment. (p. 184)

How one hears, feels, knows, translates, and interprets intersections of faith, tradition, culture, and multiple selves is unique to each person. Accessing the liminal through collective labour can be a vehicle for retranslation. At the same time, centering and amalgamating plurality acts to affirm the guiding unity of the soul and nurtures human efforts to create unity. Cultural expressions emanating from a spiritual heart can be a pathway for inherited cultural expressions to weave in harmony with contemporary culture and vernaculars of place. The new and emergent knowledge can serve as a counter hegemonic stand.

6.8.1 New dimensions and enduring harmony

I asked Jenna about how one would capture that feeling of zikr by singing harmony rather than in unison as it usually is done in khane.

I think dimensions, like, how we have things that are two-dimensional versus three- dimensional. Now we're going into such things as 4D and 8D jumping out of the screen. All of that stuff is like adding layers. For me musically, when layers are added you can create a whole world within that, like those layers of harmony. It's also miraculous to me that human voices can do that and produce that *level of beauty that I can't even describe to you using the English language right now, because it's so . . . I can't, I can't find the words that I'm looking for . . . it creates, like, a feeling, and intensifies.*

These awe-inspiring sonic utterances and musical moments demonstrated to Jenna how music is a "completely different way of communicating" multiple dimensions, and "so many different

nuances and levels" beyond what the ear can capture. The ear captures the layers of vocal harmonies and importantly, beyond what the ear captures, depths of dimensions are inhered.

Jenna emphasized the miracle of human voices producing deep levels of beauty and experience. She acknowledged the agency of a collective of "more voices" who, by adding layers, can *create* a "whole world within that." A group of people singing, a collective musical group in which she can also participate, contribute to, and vocalize with became a source of musical harmonization that invoked and evoked simultaneously a multidimensional, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual "whole world within" that Jenna valued and sought out. The collective action of adding different voices in musical layers towards a common goal of creating beauty acts as a catalyst for coming to know and hear a world beyond what the human ear can capture. The individual contributes their voice to a collective whole. The whole benefits and the individual benefits. Jenna's desire to contribute to a greater whole revealed an integrative, spiritual-ethical-aesthetic-social sensibility wherein she came to understand how her individual contribution could benefit the whole, and within that whole, how she could also benefit. By harmonizing her voice with others, Jenna discovered a whole world that enabled her to know an enduring inner harmony.

[Harmony is] a thing. [It] has been there over time and space and changed in its external expression; it has always been there pretty much. Like when this planet was created and humans were created, it took energy for everything to be created so that it works in a synergistic way.

Jenna spoke about harmony as a quality of creation that synergistically consolidates the "different frequencies and different energies" that "we're all reverberating at" —a cosmic kind of big H Harmony and primordial, eternal sonic condition that Jenna linked to the initial conditions of creation. This harmony endures "over time and space," and changes "in its external expression." Harmony dwells in "a whole realm of sound that the human ear can't capture." Singing in harmony to evoke cosmic Harmony can be a powerful way to access the world within. One might describe this world within as an emergent world, but it seems like what Jenna described is a world that exists already that becomes amplified, a kind of internal aural emergence and coming to know—something being "*activated* inside the individual." The inner world is not a destination different or separated from the outer musical world. It is not a world that one chooses to enter or not, or that is merely an object of contemplation. The inner world is transcendent and liminal, yet present, immanent, and ineffably palpable. It is a world that exists

and comes to be known—a hidden yet cosmically present world inextricably tangled in material expression and activated inside the individual. Music provides the conditions to invoke, bring forward, create, and evoke multidimensional inner-outer coherence. Music also fulfills its promise as a motivational source for human connection, collective effort towards a common goal of intimate beauty, and moral inspiration that animates one's desire to contribute to a whole for the benefit of all. Having such profound experiences also becomes a source of musical inquiry because it opens "me up to say, you know what, yeah, I do have a skill set that can be improved." Improving skills, honing the voice, strengthening musical capacity and sensitivity, and growing competencies to harmonize voices all became critical factors in Jenna's ability to connect with this multidimensional musical world within.

In terms of considering zikr (and other traditional spiritual expressions) as compositions, Jenna wondered whether hearing beyond enabled the writers to "be channels of the composed music that [is] exacting in the other realm." Composing in this sense was not limited to the art of composing as typically understood but was extended as an act of expression, a state of being, receiving and drawing out an already cosmically composed "music." The role of composer in this sense was to engage in an act of humble submission to the harmony and energy of different dimensions—to grasp, receive, audition, and hear a cosmic music. Is there a different kind of hearing that relates to an energetic attunement that Jenna seemed to highlight? Is this the same kind of energetic attunement she sensed when someone treated her as a full human being? Does the energetic attunement connect to other people? For Jenna, singing zikr in harmony (opposed to singing the zikr in unison in khane) and creating the harmonies opened up the possibility for her to capture energy beyond what the human ear could hear.

6.8.2 Love and unity: Hearing and feeling didar

The love of God, unutterable and perfect,
Flows into a pure soul the way that light
Rushes into a transparent object.
The more love that it finds, the more it gives itself;
So that, as we grow clear and open,
The more complete the joy of heaven is.
And the more souls who resonate together
The greater the intensity of their love
And, mirror-like, each soul reflects the other.

(Dante, 1472, “The Love of God”)

Jenna continued to punctuate different levels of profound experience singing the zikr in harmony. She explained that coming to know an essence of the zikr happened because "there's like this feeling of like love just welling up, you know, in my chest." One of the places she felt this love was during the didar (here, referred to as a religious setting).

Didar was really powerful. For me, it's like the Imam's people. Like the fact that there were thousands in a single room coming together and singing that or feeling, you could feel like the . . . absolute love, the absolute . . . because it's there, it's in that room.

When she sang the zikr in harmony, even with a few people, she knew profound experiences as if “there were thousands in a single room coming together and singing that [the zikr]” in a didar. The feeling of love came to be known in a palpable way, “because it's in the room.” She could feel this love as present.

Akin to the Sufi path within Islam, Ismailis encourage contemplative searching for and understanding the mystical dimensions of life. The ineffable aim of the Sufi, like that of other mystics in global ways of being, is oneness—with God, with each other, and with the core of love that binds humanity. Through a closer relationship with God and spiritual union with the divine Beloved the seeker (lover) grows through love and abandons the ego. “Only the wisdom of the heart, *gnosis*, may give insight into some of its aspects” (Schimmel, 1975, p. 4). The

seeker sets forth upon a spiritual quest, led by an inner light, to acquire a greater capacity for love. Closeness to love inspires deeper service to the whole of creation, without discrimination.

Jenna had no doubt about what she felt. A sense of unified feeling came as everyone recited together in reverence and joint allegiance to the faith. I have heard this idea before—that the feeling evoked from zikr in harmony is related to didar. A young Afghan Ismaili whose family came to Canada as refugees reported that when he did zikr in harmony at one of the youth workshops I facilitated, it reminded him of didar. He told me that even with the 80 people who were there, it felt like he was in a didar setting with tens of thousands of other Ismailis reciting zikr. A young Iranian Ismaili living in Iran who collaborated with me in a Global Ismaili Ensemble also described the feeling of hearing a ginan in harmony as a feeling of being in didar. The didar experience is an ultimate aspiration of Ismaili piety and connection. Therefore, to hear Jenna and other diverse young Ismailis describe singing zikr in harmony as a feeling of didar brought me a sense of gratitude and awe. I recall that the didar experience held particularly internalized levels of connection and affirmation of faith amongst the congregation. The didar as an opportunity to reaffirm bayah provides a pious space where emotions are intensified and intentions are aligned. Reaffirmed allegiance to the Imam-of-the-Time is also a recommitment to spiritual-ethical principles of faith. The zikr and its fervent recitation in this context is entangled in a spiritual-ethical commitment and pledge, one that I believe creates feelings of unity and love.

Jenna's reference to didar points to her own personal connection with the faith and the Imam-of-the-time. She acknowledged that singing zikr in harmony evoked feelings of being one of the "Imam's people." The depth of profundity acquired through singing zikr in harmony engendered a deep feeling of allegiance. What she once challenged because bayah occurred on her behalf without her knowledge, she organically reaffirmed. The musical experience became a reminder and a source of "re-cognized" allegiance. Being able to tap into these profound feelings offered Jenna the opportunity to feel an authenticity about her spiritual commitments. This made me think about how a spiritual, felt commitment to foundations of faith might be translated to elders and other community leaders. How does a young person who acknowledges identity with the larger Ismaili way of life demonstrate an always- already commitment? How is that commitment expressed, and in what ways can that expression support the young person's coherence with the contemporary life in which they live?

Jenna expanded her conception of didar through a story about hearing a choir in concert. She equated the absolute love she feels during a didar to the feeling experienced when hearing a beautiful choir sing. Jenna heard in the sound of a Christian spiritual tradition a felt resonance that evoked an understanding of didar:

> Jenna: We went to a choir concert together in a church, and they were singing from all four ends of the room.
>
> Hussein: What choir was that? You and I went together?
>
> Jenna: Yeah. We went together. I remember everyone knew you also.
>
> Hussein: Maybe the Elmer Iseler Singers? I'm not sure.
>
> Jenna: Maybe? Yeah, but I remember as soon as they all started singing, I remember telling you, "How is it that a group of so many people could sound like one individual singing?" Like, how is it that they're all breathing as one human being? Even though there's like a good thirty of them.
>
> Hussein: Right. Right.
>
> Jenna: Like how do they do that? I find that it's most commonly the things that really, like, have me be really emotional. [This] is the closest I get to the feeling of total unity.
>
> Hussein: Right. Wow.
>
> Jenna: Like the beauty of all those voices . . . Absolutely stunning. The unity of all those thousands of people in that room singing devotion and love and hope for their future, and also absolutely like other worldly. It's that feeling of becoming one, sharing something in common. Whether that's sharing a common emotion of like heartbreak, for example [when someone sings] . . . it's one. We have that in common. We're united on that front.

I think this metaphoric resonance between two cultural elements is important to highlight. It brings out a question about how a young Ismaili growing up in a Western context can express a fundamental aspect of her being in the world. She heard a conception of unity in didar reflected in the pursuit of singing in a choir. The unity of the singers "breathing as one human being" reminded Jenna of the unity of "all those thousands of people in that room singing devotion and love and hope for their future." She emphasized the collective labour of "becoming one" and "sharing something in common." Whether it is a common emotion or other feeling, there is a

unity. This profound sense of unity and feeling of love through singing in choir is one that Jenna associated with a feeling of profound unity and love in didar. I propose that the values of commitment to each other, working together for a common goal of unity and harmony, expressing love, devotion, and hope in choir amplify similar spiritual-ethical disposition held in Ismaili and other esoteric orientations. Thus, coming to know these feelings of love, unity, and hope through a zikr (by singing them in harmony) can be a powerful tool for someone like Jenna to retranslate and interpret the heart of the traditions.

Jenna said she does not feel this level of experience reciting zikr in unison at khane or when saying du'a at her grandparents' house. The zikr in those contexts is a point of tension, a barrier for Jenna to access this profound love. In strict religious settings Jenna was expected to perform piety by imitating rituals. This expectation denied her creativity, musicality, and expression and created barriers to love for the faith she holds. The normative closed the door to what her elders wished so dearly for her to demonstrate. Zikr in harmony with others provided a "very different" experience of "singing devotion" that created an opening for access to profound love, musical innovation, knowledge of the essence of traditions, and the feeling of didar. Here, zikr is a recitation of a profound feeling that comes about through musical experience. The zikr transforms beyond definitions, beyond being simply a musical object of religious performance to become a sound world, a portal, a way of being, an ethical way of doing, and an experience of love, profound energy, and devotion. The reciter and singer of the zikr become translational carriers of hearing love, harmony, and devotion beyond the sonic object itself. The zikr thus fulfills its purpose as a reminder of love and devotion; that recognition of love and devotion in turns infuses reinvigorated energy into the recitation and singing of the zikr. The zikr comes alive, as does the spiritual-ethical commitments of the one reciting them. Singing zikr in harmony becomes a revitalizing condition for retranslation on the levels of music and of being. Both are inextricably linked.

Singing zikr in harmony created the opportunity for a spiritual taking up of zikr that affirmed Jenna's faith and piety. In this way, the zikr became affective reminders of love and sincere affirmation of faith. In turn, her positive experience of this sonic expression of zikr created a curiosity and openness to know more. On the other hand, singing zikr in harmony provides avenues for creativity, musicality, and expression to flourish. The process allowed Jenna to perform new and different forms of piety (in a way that felt genuine to her) that enabled access to

feelings of love and connection to faith. The possibility of evoking a didar feeling, then, could take place in religious settings or non-religious daily life where heightened musical experiences take place. Doing zikr in this way on a regular basis in a variety of settings offers opportunities to experience a sense of didar more often and as part of everyday life.

6.8.2.1 Enduring love and devotion

While singing the zikr in harmony, Jenna felt love "welling up" that made her think:

There's, like, this real feeling of, like, love, just welling up, you know, in my chest, that I think: who is this, like, person who wrote this at the time, or what were they feeling that carried through this same love and devotion and message, all the way through until this day? So, this is what is behind that. This is how I experience it [zikr in harmony] in my lived experiences of [it]. It's that.

First, the loving energy she felt enlivened curiosity about the people of the past who may have written the ginan or the first expression of zikr. Jenna displayed a deep sensitivity to know the devotional feeling ancestors had that inspired their expression. She suggested that the feeling of devotion that is behind the expression of the ancestors endures and is passed down from generation to generation—a feeling that is enduring over time and space, a feeling that "carries through . . . all the way . . . until this day." Singing the zikr and ginan in harmony created a feeling of love and profundity that enabled her to feel "what they [the ancestors] were feeling" when they wrote their ginan. Jenna pointed to the idea that the ginan and zikr were manifest expressions of interiorized spiritual energy, love, and connection, like that which welled up in her chest when she sang zikr in harmony. Unlocking the potential of inherited funds of identity like zikr and ginan to reveal empathic ancestral connection added to Jenna's understanding and translation. The doing, singing, creating, and experimenting of zikr in several harmonies with others (material action) and the feeling, knowing, welling up, and accessing of profound love and devotion, spiritual-emotional evocation (spiritual knowing) contributed to Jenna's experience. Her musical ear and sensitivity to hearing sonic, energetic, and loving presence mediated the experiences. That love that came forward further inspired loving contributions and created stronger connections of love with others. The material and spiritual love were inextricably entangled with a consolidating sonic energy at the core. The apparent and outward (*zahir)* and, the inward and hidden (*batin*) aspects of life become vitally harmonized.

From love, music arises. Music is not created to generate love; it comes from knowing love. Love transforms the being, and the musical expression that occurs as a result is love itself. In this conception, the musical expression is the maker. The maker does not possess the music. They cannot say, “This is my music that I created.” In that moment and time, the music perfectly carried an experience of love and devotion. The spiritual expressions are extensions and intrinsic parts of the self that become animated through spiritual knowing. The self, and the music from self, all are reconciled in love. Hildegard von Bingen, as cited by Boyce-Tillman (2011) spoke of music’s reconciliatory capacity:

> Musical harmony softens hard hearts. It brings in them the moisture of reconciliation, and it invokes the Holy Spirit. When different voices sing in unity, they symbolise the simple tenderness of mutual love. When different voices blend in song, they symbolise the blending of thoughts and feelings, which is the highest pleasure human beings can know. Let the sweet sound of music enter your breast, and let it speak to your heart, it will drive out all darkness, and spread spiritual light to every part of you (p. 138).

The sonically new texture opens to love and reveals love. The harmonic texture softens the boundaries of the forms and becomes a porous medium through which one reaches to draw out love, and when drawn out, is felt emotionally. Love is always there. Human beings do not have to find love “out there” in the world; rather, we must reveal the love that already exists. It is present but forgotten by our human nature. Our material cultures and dissonant socio-political discourses may hide love but love never left. Love endures and is present. Our work is to find a way to create conditions for that love to swell. Our work is to chip away at the hard edges of identity, forms, and structures to create enabling environments that reveal the love. Additive layers and textures in vocal harmony can reveal overtones and sonic “in-betweens” that give dimension to otherwise fossilized structures. In those utterances, the bordered identities are suspended, and essence can be known. It is important to consider how a return to knowledge of this essential state can inspire music that threads through a pluralistic tapestry of our contemporary lives. What kinds of skills and knowledge need to be nurtured to support the process of hearing a universal love and translate it through collaborative, integrative and pluralistic music production? How we sustain respect, regard, and care in those efforts is important to consider.

Jenna added that a "real feeling of love" welled up in her chest and gave birth to layers of curiosity. This feeling of love grew and sparked empathic curiosity about "who is this, like, person who wrote this at the time?" She wondered what *they* were feeling, the love and energy they felt that she believes still carries through today. Jenna wondered what was behind the feeling of love or devotion that the ancestors had and translated into a musical form (i.e., zikr or ginan). What one inherits are the knowledge funds, stories that could be connected to those funds, their musical structures and patterns, and the creative processes that Jenna felt were missing in normative ways the knowledge funds are passed down. Jenna and I talked about how the funds of knowledge also carry value systems and ethical orientations that can be passed down. Jenna added another, subtler dimension. She spoke about ancestral love and energy that the knowledge funds carry. She pointed to the idea that this love and energy was eternal—something that ancestors felt and expressed—something that she can feel today. She felt a sense of belonging to an energy and love that sustained over time, space, and conditions of lived experience. In that energy and love, she knew a harmonized self, a connection with the Divine and with others. That knowing became a reference point to seek out in the world and to create in her life.

This kind of profound experience kindled an intellectual quest to know more about, to discover, to understand the mysteries of the metaphysical, of love, of energy, of empathy, as well as the mysteries of creative process, ancestral knowing, and access to them. The new and exciting experience of singing zikr in harmony also affirmed Jenna's quest to learn more about the technologies of singing in harmony, improving her craft, skill, and techniques to better contribute to the communal whole. The questions she asked are sociological, psychological, and metaphysical. She cared about the person, their feelings, and the quality of energy and love that they felt, captured in her heart-mind in this time and place. She made a connection to a feeling of love to those who came before, like a memory. This recollection of the past in the present feeling of love that welled up became a part of the journey to retranslate herself and the traditions in a reconciled whole. Beyond being a strict religious object of contemplation and narrowly transmitted ritual practice, zik*r* became a lived sonic energy, intimately related to ancestral connections, memories, emotions and knowledge of self. The zikr became a listening experience, a *sama* that opened to a world of social, musical, and mystical inquiry. The zikr experience transcended the vernacular specificities of being human, while it also demanded a participatory

human effort to uphold. Loving safe, participatory everyday learning conditions, using a combination of musical materials from one's entire cultural archive—traditionally generated and that have arisen from knowing love in whatever vernacular—enlivened through communal musical labour, gives rise to and evokes more love: a felt love that energizes loving behaviour and action.

I recall a relationship between the words, "belief" and "credo" in the Christian tradition. The etymology of the word credo comes from a possible root *kerd-dhe:*"to believe," literally "to put one's heart." (Other possible sources include Old Irish cretim, Irish creidim, Welsh credo, "I believe," Sanskrit *śrad-dh:* "faith, confidence, devotion"), from a possible root kerd: "heart." I am particularly drawn to the Sanskrit etymology referring to faith, confidence, and devotion. Is there, thus, a correlation between what Jenna felt as her chest welled up with love and belief—a belief not only in the material traditions of religious ritual and piety but in the energy of love grown in the heart (and heart-mind) that became a focal point of faith, confidence, and devotion; the heart of bayah, the spiritual, ethical, intellectual pledge to which one is devoted and makes a covenant to labour towards in life? I also invoke the word "belief," whose potential root origins mean "care, desire, love." Other possible European root origins and particularly the Sanskrit *lubhyati*: "desires," lobhaya: "to make crazy" seem to correlate to the longing and desire that love creates to chase after more in life, and the desire love creates to learn new tools, skills, and approaches to bring love about for oneself, one's family, community, and society at large.

6.8.2.2 Memories, ancestors, womb

We rise again
In the faces of our children,
We rise again,
In the voices of our song,
We rise again,
In the waves out on the ocean,
And then, we rise again.

(Dubinsky, 1984, "We Rise Again" lyrics)

Jenna interpreted the felt experience in relation to memories of the past, connection with the ancestors, and memories of the womb.

So, I think it's like the emotion that gets transmitted and that's the experience of the past that I have. But maybe even if not the experience of like just the past, the experience of what it once was at inception and creation, and then all of the years that has travelled through the hands and ears and the interpretations of all sorts of people. It carries as many memories as it does emotions, I think. But it's memories and things you don't know. That's right. Which is why it can trigger all sorts of different sensory experiences. Somehow, like there's knowing inside my body that I <u>*am*</u> *like my ancestors, also, that I come from a very, very long line of people who came before me, and it will be long line of people who come after me; but, it's like my body remembers, but my consciousness . . . doesn't. That's what there is to reconcile.*

Jenna has had an embodied experience that holds memories of things she did not know consciously.

It's like there's this memory that comes from somewhere; I don't know. If you ask like Jenna's brain where that [memory] came from, I could not tell you, but there was just this innate . . . like . . .[pause]. I feel like we may have discovered this before and we're now returning.

Jenna highlighted the idea of a return to something discovered and known before. What is remembered again comes from somewhere but cannot be explained. Jenna suggested that what she comes to know might be an unconsciously embodied intergenerational knowledge passed down from "inception and creation." She wondered whether the ancestors tapped into and expressed sounds that were "already created in another dimension that's not this one." She acknowledged the evolution of sound from the moment they were first "heard one way," brought forward, "and passed down . . . also changed and modified by all the people and communities" over time.

6.8.2.3 Cellular memory of the womb

The recognition that Jenna experienced speaks to memory, a cellular embodied memory of the womb. She stated:

I don't have vivid memories of being in the womb. However, my body just remembers. I was safe, protected, nourished, and calm. And that's why, if I lie down on my mom's chest and hear her heartbeat, I'll fall asleep. Like without fail. So, like if you tell me can you remember [that]? Of course I cannot. I can't tell you that. But on a cellular level, I do.

Jenna talked about an embodied cellular memory of a sound, feeling, energy, environmental condition—conditions of being that bring safety, protection, nourishment, and calm. Her mom's voice, directly attached to these feelings, affectively carried an amplifying resonance that seemed to trigger and activate these feelings of being in the womb, a place of safety. When Jenna sang the zikr in harmony with her mom and sister in the comfort of her bedroom, a similar activation of feelings of safety, protection, nourishment and calm, together with excitement, agency and curiosity occurred. Singing zikr in harmony empowered Jenna to be part of a layered, vocal texture with her mom that amplified cellular memories. Her voice interacted harmoniously with her mom's. What Jenna heard was voice and her mom's, both singing in harmony. Her embodied memory of the womb found sonic expression in her environment. At the same time, the sound created a container, like a womb, into which Jenna also entered.

Jenna 's voice in harmony with her mom created womb-like harmonic conditions, sonic conditions that triggered positive feelings. Her mom’s voice grounded layers to which Jenna added. This collective vocal condition with her mom became a creative expansion of felt remembrance of the womb. The internal womb world and external musical world found a kind of sympathetic resonance that augmented feelings of calm and safety. Amplifying the cellular memory of the womb became a reference point and condition for Jenna to seek out (and create) in the world. She came to see such a possibility from a young age. Jenna benefitted from her mother’s initiative to nurture Jenna's musical ability and sensitivity in ways that helped her to hear and remember an embodied felt condition of being.

Jenna wondered about the mystery of music's capacity to communicate an empathic human connection beyond words when hearing someone sing. This kind of hearing is “closely linked to the essence of that emotion . . . and somehow, I have a deeper understanding of that person, even if I don't ever say a word to them and they're just on stage.” In asking further, “what it is that has been activated inside of this individual” that enabled this connection, Jenna demonstrated her interest in metaphysical, ontological, and phenomenological aspects of experience. Profound experience in musical hearing, communication, and performance enabled her to feel, know, and grasp subtle knowledge that sparked esoteric, empathic understanding as much as it did curiosity and inquiry about collective musical skills, techniques, and knowledge. Jenna implied a sensitivity required to receive and grasp communication that exists beyond words—a sensitivity that grew through musical experiences like singing in harmony, a sensitivity that allowed her to

sense when “someone is interacting with you as a whole human,” a sensitivity to disabling environments, and a sensitivity to hear profound connection that evoked emotions. This sensitivity is always already listening, hearing out into the environment: passively, like picking up a ginan without being taught, actively by discovering, hearing, and vocalizing “tried and true and safe” harmonies, and sensitively hearing for open and safe spaces where she could be her whole self. These utterances became sources of “uninhibited” freedom, opportunities for authentic participation and revitalized funds of identity.

6.9 Oneness and common humanity

Jenna recalled a similar experience of unity when an Ismaili choir I conducted was preparing to sing at the opening of the Aga Khan Park in Toronto. The choir comprised ten Ismaili youth singers with a range of choral experience. Knowing her musical capacity, I invited Jenna to be part of the choir. We were preparing the Canadian National Anthem and a song by Lil’wat singer and writer, Russell Wallace. Often, individual singers with choral training led warm ups and rehearsals. On this day, we were at Trinity St. Paul's United Church in downtown Toronto, located kitty corner to the downtown Toronto Ismaili jamatkhana. The rehearsal room had wooden flooring. A musty odour filled the air. The room was acoustically live, and windows lined one side of the room. An old, out of tune upright piano sat along another wall. Hanif, one of our experienced choral singers, led the rehearsal. I sang with the choir. He asked us to join in a circle and listen. The goal was to sound as one individual voice. He had us singing one note on the “ooh” vowel. He asked us to listen for the overtones, particularly the fifth. Hearing the overtones was a sure indicator of our singing in tune as one. Jenna remembered:

When we would like [sing], the note would kind of fluctuate almost. We would get it and then we would lose it, and we'd get it, then we'd lose it. [When we got it], then I would hear those overtones. I was like blown away. Because it was as close as I heard this group of like 10 humans sing as one person. It felt like . . . that was so cool. It's like an auditory representation of our shared humanity, or that we come from a single soul.

Jenna talked about a collective effort to know unity by singing the *same* note. We sometimes found unity and sometimes lost it. Singing perfectly in tune was never easy or guaranteed. But in those awe filled moments audible overtones, she “*heard* this group of like ten humans sing as one person.” The overtones that emerged had a dimensionality of sound that “was so cool.” The

interplay of listening deeply to one note perfectly in tune, balanced with an emergent hearing of multiple overtones, impacted Jenna profoundly. Jenna experienced in collectively singing only one note a feeling like singing in harmony with others. In singing one note with others and working with a deliberate unifying musical intent, Jenna, accessed this experience. She gained awareness of oneness that she heard and described as didar. In attuning to each other and singing one perfectly tuned note, Jenna came to know "an auditory representation of our shared humanity, or that we come from a single soul." This evocation of unity reminded Jenna of didar, an elemental feature of Ismaili tradition. At the same time, the evocation reminded her of a shared humanity. Singing zikr in harmony allowed for a consolidated knowing of being uniquely Ismaili and of being human.

Jenna brought out an essential philosophical foundation and first principle of oneness (*tawhid)*: unity of God, creation, and common humanity. The fact that Jenna brought this up tells me that she sincerely cherishes this ethic of oneness, a foundational first principle in Islam. Her language demonstrates that she has internalized this first principle and now uses it as a fund of identity.

Yeah, so like imagine a world, Hussein, where we would not be living with like tension between racial communities, or where it was equal and balanced and everyone was able to live a very happy and joyful life, [with] like enough resources that can be perfectly balanced out amongst people; and the, like if you can imagine that kind of a world, and you're united in our causes and all of that, what like is next? That's the thought. What would the world look like then? What are we facing then as a human race?

Knowing unity through multiple voices together (in unison or harmony) elicited further curiosity about "what other dimensions can we unlock of this human experience." In these unitive spaces, Jenna felt peace, a resonance with one soul, an empathic connection, and the essence of traditions. In these spaces of collective unity, she recognized other dimensions of human experience that inspired an imagined and hopeful aspiration for equity, balance, happiness, and joy for all people. The integrative musical and religious, cultural, and devotional utterances become differentiated yet conciliatory spaces for bringing out profound connection to a common humanity. The musical processes, approaches, and outcomes offered Jenna pathways for such unity that they became powerful funds of identity, and sources of spiritual awareness, connection, moral inspiration—an already present sensitivity that Jenna held. She associated the

feeling of hearing a group of people singing as one in unison (unity) metaphysically as an auditory representation of a shared humanity, one soul. Having that experience allowed Jenna "for the first time in 22 years of my life . . . [to] actually see that possibility [of balance and equity] coming through." The musical experience, the multi-layered textures, and creative engagement enabled her to discover deep feelings of oneness that she could define and express in her own terms.

Njoki Wane (2011) articulated how spirituality was integral to her everyday experience of African indigeneity, feminism, and activism. "Like many indigenous peoples of the world," she wrote, "spirituality is part and parcel of people of African ancestry. Spiritual teaching informs African peoples of their past, present, and future" (p. 163). Wane explained that it was in this integrative spiritual-social environment that she cultivated her sense of feminism and activism. Hanohano (1999) maintained that Native epistemologies—ways of acquiring and constructing knowledge—constitute spirituality as integral.

> Spirituality is the fundamental principle that Natives have been searching for . . . It is the search from within that will help give Aboriginal and other students the harmony and balance that is needed to meet the demands and rigors of university study and lead them to discover their true selves. And it is this search for truth that leads us to consider Native education. (p. 210).

Hanohano added that restoring spiritual traditions within Indigenous societies can restore balance and harmony for Indigenous peoples and the larger societies in which they live (p. 206). Hanohano suggested that the nature and attainment of knowledge in Native culture has spirituality (not to be confused with religion) as a distinguishing feature, "an aspect of Native culture that is often missing, neglected or dismissed in Western . . . models" (p. 211). Hanohano contended that weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into education systems that make void and negate spirituality could potentially restore harmony and balance, not only for Native students, but also for the broader community. The Aga Khan (2015) called for a cosmopolitan ethic "that will honour both our common humanity and our distinctive identities —each reinforcing the other as part of the same high moral calling" (para. 72). Snauwaert (2009) furthered this notion: "Cosmopolitans assert the existence of a duty of moral consideration to all human beings. They

argue that if the fundamental moral value of a shared humanity is acknowledged, then a universal duty of moral consideration follows" (p. 14).

Snauwaert explained that the more self-aware one is, the more one can be aware of the subjectivity of others and thus, become more empathetic and compassionate. This self-awareness requires that "we undergo an internal self-transformation that moves us from egoic centricity toward unity" (p. 19). It is through self-transformation, an inner condition of love, which Ghandi also believed was necessary to frame one's relationship with humanity. This feeling of love is a private affair. It begins in the heart and melts away a sense of self that is individuated and separate from one another. The Bhagavad Gita affirms, "They are forever free who have broken out of the ego-cage of 'I,' 'me,' and mine to be united with the Lord of Love" (Easwaran, 1975/2020, p. 161).

For Jenna, the musical experience that relied on singing, attunement, and hearing others evoked humanistic empathic insight. She stated that she "can also come out of it [an experience of vocal unity] thinking, wow this is what unity sounds like. Where in my life is unity not present." In this way, "art imitates life." The musical art represented for Jenna a "shared humanity" that represented a condition of life. The recognition of unity sparked a two-fold reflection for Jenna: on one hand, an internal recalibration towards hope and unity in human experience; on the other hand, the experience generated a sonic representation of sought-after peace and unity that compelled her to ask, "where in my life is unity not present." The musical experience, thus, amplified a metaphysical, spiritual reality of oneness, and facilitated a way for Jenna to bring out her social conscience as she wondered about the lack of unity in the world. Knowing of Jenna's interest in social justice, it is interesting to me that this particular musical experience holds potential for an authentically enacted social conscience concerned about where unity does not exist. This concern is another foundational principle for enacting an equally Muslim and humanistic social conscience. She gained knowledge of such profundity and human connection and seeks to create that with others in creative ways for mutual benefit. That knowledge sparked curiosity and interest to learn more on many levels and became a reference point for profound unity that she recognized may not exist in other parts of her life. She indicated a spiritual-ethical orientation of critical inquiry to figure out where in her life unity does not exist. She also pointed to the need for authentic participation to bring unity where it is not. She demonstrated a profound Islamic and humanistic social conscience that was awakened through musical experiences,

particularly with the zikr. Jenna tapped into her innate sensitivity and musical ear that heard not only the musical but also something beyond the music, a moral and ethical conscience. She demonstrated a heightened empathic awareness and recognized the role of sound and music to facilitate an experience of unity and love that she clearly valued. Important for Jenna as an Ismaili youth in evoking this social conscience was coming to know unity through communal effort and particularly through cultivating consolidated relationships with religious aspects of life. The musical process became a mirror for life.

In the conversation about unity, I was curious about the value of diversity. Jenna queried:

But unity, does that mean that your identity is changed because in the moment you're not consciously aware of what makes you you? What I was referring to is not that it all just goes away as if you give up your identity to be part of this collective; but it's not top of mind for me when I'm singing in a group. I'm not thinking when I'm holding the note, oh this is beautiful that this diversity of people could come together and sing this note such that we have overtones. When I'm connected like that it's just not top of mind, but that doesn't change the fact of who I am and my identity. When I actually walk out of that experience is, wow look at how many people of different musical backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, gender backgrounds, socioeconomic backgrounds could all get together and make that happen.

Importantly, Jenna expressed that she did not "equate unity with loss of self. It's like harmonizing with oneself." In the profound experience of unity, Jenna heard and felt the humanity of other people, and "in the humanity of the other people, I see myself reflected as well." She came to know her own humanity as she came to know the humanity of others, a harmonized self—harmonized within herself but also with the Divine, in love, with others, and in a deeply profound empathic belonging to identity beyond subjectivity. She understood a kind of harmony with a subtle, invisible realm that helps her thrive.

6.10 A lost art

Jenna believed that the capacity and aspiration to recall ancestral memories was "a lost art":

I feel somehow that this is a lost art, and that like our ancestors were already exploring the road back to the human brain, sounds and music and all of that. And just somehow it [the pursuit of profundity?] went out of existence at some point.

Jenna stated that “something really special that may be . . . untapped in the Ismaili community” was the sharing of musical and sonic facets of devotion that could inform her in profound ways. She questioned how music and zikr as a musical object were taken up without consideration of the “real why”; their essential purpose, she believes, is about devotion and connection and access to spiritual realms. It is interesting to me that what she suggested was lost in transmission is not the tradition as a cultural artefact of religion, but the capacity to tap into energetic frequencies as part of creative spiritual expression and resonance with common humanity. This suggestion led us to think about the need for making a deeper link between piety, human experience, spiritual search, creative expression, and participation for societal betterment. Jenna took her curiosity beyond the translation of text, cultural context, and creative process. She oriented her inquiry of religious, normative cultural funds of knowledge towards the metaphysical, spiritual, and intellectual alongside the cultural, creative, and musical. She oriented our gaze towards not only translating the formal cultural products but also translating spiritual worlds and profound experience, a necessary element in the journey of self in the world. Nasir Khusraw, an 11th century Persian poet, traveller, and philosopher (as cited in Hunsberger, 2003), captured a beautiful metaphor in the spiritual quest, “the price of each jewel is determined not by its external qualities, but by its inner qualities’ (pp. 72–73). From this metaphor, Hunsberger explained how Khusraw saw that “everything manifest has a hidden quality which is not only the essence of the thing, but which indeed carries the explanation, the meaning, the true significance of the thing” (p. 73).

Jenna demonstrated an interest to know these hidden esoteric and exoteric manifest qualities. She was curious about frequencies that energize life and how ancestors accessed them. She sought to know how the awareness of those frequencies, combined with the refinement, and crafting of sonic objects in their cultural content, supported expression and responsive human experience. Jenna demonstrated curiosity about the musical aspects, the moments of conception, the cultural contexts, the atmospheres, and energies that led to expression, the link between spiritual feeling and creative expression, the purpose and intentions of ancestors who put forward the zikr in certain sonic ways, and the creative process. She craved a holistic understanding and experience of the zikr that could inspire her interpretations of inextricably linked spiritual and material aspects of faith.

> One element of each pair is apparent to the senses, while the other is hidden. But each does not, and cannot, exist without the other. Like the two sides of a coin, one may seem to be solely in evidence at any time but the other still necessarily exists (Khusraw as cited in Hunsberger, 2003, p. 75)

This reminds me of “two-eyed seeing.” In Khusraw’s conception, one eye sees that which is “hidden” beyond the senses. The other eye sees that which is “apparent” to the senses. Developing the capacity for hearing and consolidating both the hidden (batin) and apparent (zahir) was also vital to Jenna’s narrative and phenomenological conception.

Jenna wanted to know more about these coexisting, connected dimensions of life. The normatively passed down zikr and ginan did not fully serve Jenna’s purpose. She craved integrative knowledge on a cultural level (the material) *and* a metaphysical level (the spiritual). Knowing, understanding, and comprehending both could enable a rich translation of the knowledge funds otherwise transmitted without question through normative communal settings. I argue that she demonstrated in her inquiry an intellectual resonance with the Ismaili esoteric traditions and mystic philosophies in other cultures that value the connection between inquiry, curiosity, creativity, music, and spirit. While Jenna stated that she does not know if she can wholeheartedly connect with the Ismaili community identity, she demonstrated an inherent spiritual-ethical orientation that is at the heart of an Ismaili humanistic vision. She may not have adhered completely to the rote transmission of ritual structures and cultural funds of knowledge but *wanted* to have a new relationship with them. She wanted to reconcile her understanding and interpretation of Ismaili ways of knowing and being with her own of sense of humanity. Jenna is called to bring forth knowledge from the depths of her intellect that she can reinterpret to experience faith afresh. Khusraw reminded his readers: “Whether in private acts, personal prayer, or public displays of faith such as the pilgrimage, Nasir maintains, the believer must look deep within his or her soul to fathom the esoteric meanings of such acts” (Hunsberger, 2003, p. 223), as Jenna has done.

Knowledge of the hidden is not an ineffable abstraction for Jenna. It is felt, embodied, immanent. She described it as “otherworldly,” and I have described it as “spiritual.” These descriptions are consistent with the language of the spiritual, transcendent, and liminal. However, I wonder if the problem with that language is that it positions that which is “hidden” as another world or place to

travel to. It is conceived as a pursuit outside of the "apparent" world, a goal of the musical experience. Whatever one may call it, this world is one that is separate from the material world. It is a place one goes to, a destination. It is somewhere we choose to go to or not. It becomes an object of consumption rather than an always already present hidden to the senses and waiting to be known again. Language of search of this hidden quality as somewhere other than the apparent world also becomes entangled in a politics of the sacred and secular, wherein if one does not choose, then one does not have to pursue. Such a separation of the hidden from the apparent, I believe, fragments our true human nature, and can lead to dis-ease, fragmentation of identity, and mental health challenges.

On the other hand, Jenna's narrative outlined an almost tangible felt, yet hidden, "otherworldly" resonance that is part of life, or music, of creative expression, devotion, and spiritual expression. The hidden offers a vision of unity, harmony, truth, essence, and harmonized self. The hidden offers a capacity for empathic relationship, connection, and unity with others. The hidden world also offers feeling of love that resonate connection with felt divine and other humans. This hidden world offers a counterpoint of unity worth investing in and chasing after in life, especially in a world in which division and dis-belonging seem amplified. My narrative relates the challenges of inclusion in larger society as a Muslim person of colour person in a predominantly Western context. Jenna's narrative highlights challenges of feeling included within the Ismaili context as an interracial person and one who critically questions normative experiences. She and I both value our participation in the larger society and in Ismaili communities. We both participate in the larger societal fabric acknowledging values of peace, unity, kinship and service shared with Ismaili thought. The shared feelings of unity and love that Jenna and I have had in both religious and musical settings separately, and settings where the devotional and musical were linked, revealed the possibility for integrative connection beyond boundaries of difference. The more we could experience those unifying moments throughout life, the more, I submit, we could come to know transforming energetic frequencies through which to enact our lives. The tools and ways of being we learn in those transformative settings (and in life) could help us to co-create enabling conditions that would amplify unifying energy. In turn, our efforts to intentionally create such empowering conditions with others, could, I believe, make room for love to flourish. It is not a purely musical effort but a social-ethical effort as well. The unifying effort is linked to the search for a hidden yet apparent presence, and the desire to craft cultural

materials to create environments that have the potential to reveal profound moments of unity. That sense of unity for me implies harmony and order, equity, reconciliation, and felt experiences of being loved and supported. Within the world and its systems, leaders have a duty to improve the sonic, built, and institutional environments to enable quality of life so that individuals can thrive and live authentically.

6.11 Returning to truth

> H: What is the connection between experiencing that unity that we can find in music and singing together, in particular in terms of understanding and facing the problems of the world?
>
> A: Hmm. Right. Is there a bridge there? It's definitely not a one-size-fits-all answer. Only I can answer from my own perspective. It's actually not something that you can just paint with a broad brush of how it applies to all of us at once. Maybe for me in my privileged life, it will apply to me one way, but for others where music isn't something to sing to sound good [it will be different.]

I came into this question with a limited view that if music did not serve to connect with larger goals of social justice, so much a part of the music education scholarly environment, that there was a problem: that doing music only for its own sake is a point of tension, and that everyone *should* be asking these questions of contribution to larger societal goals. I was surprised to hear Jenna ask, “Is there a bridge there?” I realize I came into the question and into this research with an almost dogmatic certainty that there was a bridge and that there must be a bridge. Jenna explained that the connection between music and social justice is not something that one can just assume. She emphasized that this connection is “not a one size fits all answer” and that it will not apply to everyone at once. She explained how the function of music beyond intentions to "sound good" differs:

In several First Nations communities that I studied in school, music was used predominantly as a healing tool. If someone in their community got sick, they would form a healing circle and sing healing sound frequencies. That was the use— not to perform a concert, hit the right note—none of that [giggles.]

I include this statement to highlight the possibility and practices of music in a variety of settings beyond concert performance and displays of virtuosity. Using music to heal, for example, appears in a variety of philosophical texts from many cultures and include Muslim thinkers like the Ikhwan al-Safa. Using music and applying musical tools with specific non-musical functions, connecting to human needs and realities, forms part of a larger condition of how music may be utilized. What Jenna suggested is that the function is different for each person, group, or situation:

Singing all together and being connected to that otherness helps me return to myself in my truth so that I can be more socially active from an authentic place versus being influenced by outside voices or the media. That feeling of other-worldliness helps me return to a truth.

This profound statement speaks to a condition of being that sparks social action. How each person enacts social action and in what situation is different according to the time, place, people, and situations. Jenna did not prescribe where and how to be socially active. She spoke about "returning to myself in my truth." The connection to other-worldliness that transpires through singing together in unity helped Jenna return to a truth from which she "can be more socially active from an authentic place." I remember that all I could say to Jenna at that point in the conversation was, "Wow. That's profound. Wow." I felt that in our research conversation, we returned to some feeling of truth, also. Picking up on what Jenna has said before, connecting with an interlinked essence of traditions, essence of self, and essence of humanity through musical harmony (in this case with zikr) all contributed to returning to her truth. The connection to profound depths of truth and essence represents a source of empathic hearing of another's humanity, and in that humanity, she also hears her own. That connection is essential being socially active "from an authentic place," not because it was ordered, prescribed, pushed, insisted, imposed, or coerced. It is a social action that flourishes from truth.

Recognizing one's truth in sonic otherness gave Jenna the human knowledge and spark of love to enact socially. At the heart of it, returning to truth awakened sincere and authentic participation in the world. What one becomes devoted to, then, is not a specific reified structure, way of doing things, dogma, or practice. Devotion, commitment, and allegiance, then, might not be to structures and inherited traditions or practices, but to amplifying and participating—contributing tools and practices that amplify the possibility for otherworldly connections to take place, so that

one might find a return to their truth. In a pluralistic environment, those tools, ways of being, doing, constructing, shaping, and animating enabling environments for otherworldly connection and return to truth of necessity form a tapestry. A return to truth of oneself enables an empathic hearing of others and the environments in which one lives. In that empathic hearing, given tools and knowledge, sincere social action can be brought forward, recited into the world. Jenna added that in this way "art imitates life." Blending voices, tones, and energies as part of a collective creates a feeling of unity with the group. For Jenna, that feeling of profound unity was something she reflected on afterward and that she related to a heart of social action. She explained that "she can also come out of it thinking, wow this is what unity sounds like." If this is what unity sounds like, then "where in my life is unity not present. It goes beyond like just the sound of notes." Jenna beautifully articulated a two-fold relationship (a two-eared hearing of a socially engaged life). On one hand, she highlighted the importance to return to her truth. Singing in harmony with others enabled her to hear and reach inward to a truth of self. At the same time, Jenna highlighted the importance of reflecting on that unity (and truth) that she valued so much. She acknowledged that access to these states of being in music are a privilege, and that she has been fortunate to receive those experiences from an early age. There was a sense of gratitude in her voice as she spoke.

The gift of knowledge of unity was not in vain; it inspired her to ask how she could harness that knowledge, reflect it against the realities of the world, and then work towards creating environments of what I call ambient or acoustic justice. She demonstrated the heart of an Islamic vision to seek knowledge about the mysteries of creation and life and used that knowledge in the service of humanity. The musical experience, particularly with the zikr, animated the connection to a foundational spiritual-ethical condition and orientation that affirmed her allegiance to an esoteric Ismaili vision and a socially humanistic vision. The Ismaili and the human became one. The dichotomies of religion and life started to melt away. The dogmatic definitions of religion, self, life, and social justice also became porous and started to melt away. The musical experiences offered new horizons of faith while also providing mirrors that reflected her inner understanding of self, faith, and humanity.

Merging into the depths of truth, essence, energetic frequencies that superimpose past, present, and future allows for a reimagining and consolidation of otherwise divisive realities. From this place of knowing, one can authentically thrive and through collective effort towards beautiful

ends, can create conditions for all to thrive. When all thrive, the individual can also. A dynamic relationship exists between cultivating knowledge of an inner world that suspends difference and cultivating a relationship with the outer world that demands difference. At the nexus is the awakening of an empathic capacity of hearing and feeling depths of humanity, from which all else can flow.

The search for nearness to God through zikr is considered a healing balm that can soften and purify the heart, spark the intellect, and cause an individual to bend towards the good. Cultivating the seeker's attention to contemplate through their inner ear the audition of an ineffable divine Presence helps to orient one's charity, love, and service to humanity. As the Gregorian text “Ubi caritas et amor deus ibi est” (Where charity and love are, God is there) intones, where there is charity and love, God is there. The seeker is called to wake from a human forgetful slumber to recognize one's true nature. The zikr provides one medium for such remembrance. Within these Sufi contexts, the zikr is a form unto itself, repeated and recited, congregationally or through personal reflection.

Sager (2006) summarized John Blacking’s framework of “self” and “other,” which offers a unique perspective on how shared humanity is felt through ecstatic musical experiences. Blacking’s theory suggested that musical events in which individuals are collectively working towards a common musical goal could invoke “virtual time” in which transcendence can occur. This transcendent musical event provides a motivational force to link the self to other, and to other self (p. 143). Blacking proposed that social wellbeing and human development rely on experiences of the “other self”—a “transcendent state of self” (Blacking, 1985 as cited in Sager, 2006, p. 143).

An individual contributes and acts on the collective, and at the same time, the collective acts on the individual. When the collective acts on the individual, the sense of self and personhood can be immersed in the sense of the collective. The intersubjective interaction results in blurred boundaries, where differentiated dimensions of self and other dissolve to merge as one. At the same time, when the individual acts on the collective, a similar state occurs and boundaries blur in a transcendent space where the self and other merges. Blacking went on to explain that in this moment of transcendence, the self can also merge with other self, or what I propose equates with the idea of “one soul” or the “beloved” that is the aim of the Sufi. The merging of self in a

transcendent state invokes awareness of other self that is vital to social construction and renewed commitments to the community. Through the recognition of shared humanity and merging of self and other, individuals become more empowered in the duty of collective moral consideration and therefore invest more deeply in the community. In a musical sense, an individual's sensitivity to "hearing" increases, as does their willingness to contribute to a total musical experience.

Jenna reminded me that how people may or may not connect their musical experiences to social realities and problems of the world is individual and cannot be applied to everyone all the time. I appreciated that perspective because my experience of artistic transformation is one that I feel is so powerful that I want to share it with everyone. I feel that if social justice is important, then *everyone* needs to address it and make connections to it. Certainly, in an Ismaili philosophy, social justice is part of lived faith and animates spiritual-ethical orientations to which Ismailis are called. However, how, and what that looks like, Jenna reminded me, is individual. Each person or group of people will uniquely connect (or not) to musical experience in relation to facing problems of the world. I wonder whether the question might be about how musical environments animate a social justice ethic. In their inherent process and ways of being, practices, and structures, what aspects amplify intentions and actions for justice? How can those be harnessed, amplified, and expanded to grow and evolve? Maybe it is not only about bridging the social realities with the musical sanctuaries but asking how the musical sanctuary animates aspects of social justice and if so, which aspects? How can they be amplified?

6.12 Not one-size-fits-all

Jenna emphatically reminded me that her experience may not be true for others and cannot be generalized for all young people. The affect of the musical experience "could be anything, for a wide spectrum of people." Jenna stated, "Some people still have the view that music is an unattainable thing only made for people who are naturally gifted." Imposing music as the only thing that can activate such profound feelings for all young people is limiting, especially for those who do not see or hear themselves in music. The application of a choral sound and vocal harmony as a formalized communal pathway cannot be applied to all people, as Jenna articulated:

It's worth noting that there are people that I have come across and like who would tell me that having those experiences are of no value to them in a musical sense . . . That's why I think it's

different for every person; like, every person in the community is not going to be all engaged in this one particular aspect of it [singing zikr in harmony] as the one true source of what will connect to their emotions—if even they want to be connected like that. Right? It's a very individual thing, process, and experience to have. For some people, it's what they've been longing for; I'm just putting words to it, but for others, it represents absolutely no value, and there is something else lying [there] and waiting for them to discover similar access and pathways, if that's there for them to do that.

A musical experience Jenna held so dear was one that others may have no value for. Each person is individual in what they seek out, whether they are conscious of it, talk about it, or are open to or have access to experiences that bring that out. As Jenna noted, "for the people who are willing, open and see this [way of singing zikr] as a path forward, or something that they would be interested in if they feel called," they have an opportunity to be exposed to it. She and I agreed that it is important for those who wish to experience something profound in the traditions and more generally that they have access to opportunities, musical or not, to help them connect to profound depths of knowing essence and intergenerational empathic memories. In our conversation, I also shared my curiosity about whether people knew that they were missing these experiences in their lives, or if they knew consciously whether their embodied memories sought to be called out, or whether they even wanted to experience those things.

I suggested to Jenna that while I hear the issue in generalizing an experience to a whole group, I could not deny the feelings of ambient uplift that I feel when I lead a group of 80 young Ismailis in singing a zikr in harmony. Am I noticing something real happening in the faces of those gathered? She explained:

And that's the thing, right; that you're there but [as] the catalyst for that new thing, like the new opening; and then what people choose to do with that after is entirely their choice. Some will choose to explore it and come and talk to you about it and share their experience, and they'll say please come back do that again, but some people will just leave the room and go, okay I feel something but there's something I just don't want to . . . I don't want to do anything with this right now, and then it just ends there as soon as I walk out of the room.

Jenna conveyed the importance of offering new communal experiences like singing zikr in vocal harmony. She also emphasized how critical it is not to control or impose a generalized, expected

catalytic outcome. She stressed the importance of choice and personal agency as each person takes in the experience or not. Once the offer is made, the invitation is given, and it is the choice and personal agency of the participants to take it forward, explore it further, examine their feelings, and pursue the craft further, or not. The invitation to enter a new kind of experience is given without expectation of further exploration. The facilitator's job is to make a hospitable offer and to create a safe space for creative participation. What occurs as a result is not something one controls or imposes on any of the participants. I realize that this would be akin to imposing a dogmatic normative interpretation and narrow meaning of traditions that Jenna found problematic. By imposing, what might be received as new and possibly exciting may be read as a fossilized transmission of ideology and source of conflict. A practitioner like myself must be very aware of this danger. Thus, while introducing new, communal musical experiences like these can inspire positive feelings, it is imperative to allow for choice and personal agency in taking the experience as each person needs.

Chapter 7

7 Insights and discussion

7.1 Narrative differences and Similarities

I will first share key differences, and then key similarities in my and Jenna's narratives that surfaced from the research (see Figure 34).

Hussein	**Jenna**
Explores tensions within larger society	Explores tensions within Ismaili culture
Focuses on Ismaili identity in relation to Western identity	Focuses on humanity in relation to and Ismaili cultural identity
Juxtaposes choral music with Ismaili devotional literature	Juxtaposes normative transmission with creative transmission
Genesis, conception, creation and dissemination of "choral zikr"	Reception, participation and creation in/of "choral zikr"

Figure 34. Discovering narrative differences

Firstly, my stories explore cultural tensions in larger society, whereas Jenna's stories bring light to cultural tensions within Ismaili culture. Jenna states, "I say I'm Ismaili, but am I actually identified with that…it's just lots of questions in my mind about . . . how it all came to be." Secondly, my story focuses on South Asian Ismaili identity in relation to Western identity, emphasizing experiences of racism and being negatively represented. I recall:

It is a few weeks after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, in New York. I cannot help but feel conflicted, anxious, annoyed, and worried. Is this how Islam is going to be seen? I know Islam to be a faith of peace. How can I accept the conflicting news that Islam is a source of hatred and violence? What could I do?

While I acknowledge my own multiple identities, I consider the Ismaili identity to be a core or umbrella identity that I delimited, for the purpose of this study. Jenna's story focuses on her humanity in relation to Ismaili cultural identity.

Next, I juxtapose choral music with Ismaili devotional music experiences to explore the tensions and possibilities of bridging. Jenna juxtaposes normative processes of transmission with creative forms of transmission to explore the tensions and possibilities. Jenna relates that in strict normative spaces, she was not heard and seen for all that she is, "differences and all." She felt that she was not seen as being "fully Ismaili." This tension was lessened when singing and creating zikr in harmony. Profound feelings of emerging otherworldliness, helped Jenna to "return to myself in my truth….[it was a] safe space for me to be 100% who I am, differences and all included." Lastly, my story highlights the genesis, conception, creation and dissemination of an integrated choral zikr form; and, Jenna's story illustrates lived experience—receiving, participating in, and creating choral zikr.

Together, our narratives illustrate that as Muslims in Canada we are constantly negotiating delicate relationships of belonging within our own traditions, families and lives, *and* within the broader communities and larger societies in which we live.

I will now highlight key narrative similarities Jenna and I shared (see Figure 35).

Hussein and Jenna
Embodied impact of living in pluralistic societies and environments.
Early childhood felt experiences.
Participatory creation and presentation with community contributing to belonging.
Need for translation and interpretation of traditions and the role of music and sound.
Transcendence and otherworldliness

Figure 35. Discovering narrative similarities

For both of us, an integrative Ismaili culture was embodied living within pluralistic societies and environments. Growing up in a Swahili environment under colonial rule, I heard the world through an integrative cultural landscape. My parents, family and community adopted and adapted various aspects of the Western and Swahili cultures to interweave with our own to retranslate our ethics, values and spiritual commitments. Jenna grew up in Canada. Her home and Ismaili cultural life included a variety of music including Hindustani classical, Tunisian, and a variety of Western music. Indic Ismaili devotional literature, ginan and zikr, were part of our lived experience, be it at jamatkhana or at home.

Both Jenna and I were fortunate to have powerful artistic experiences as children. For me, the aesthetic qualities I felt walking down the grand Nairobi Dharkhana hallway, or being immersed in the fervent sounds of women reciting a ginan at Parklands jamatkhana left a lasting impression on my heart and mind. Jenna describes early childhood experiences where she and her family would recite zikr during bedtime routines, and sometimes sung with vocal harmony. These kinds of childhood felt experiences became powerful interpellating sparks (and reference points) for our ongoing spiritual and cultural inquiry. We sought to look out for any opportunities around us that would amplify those feelings, or animate them in new ways.

Participatory creation, immersion and presentation in the community and with elders and family were important to cultivate faith and embody Ismaili culture. My parents were inspiring creative leaders in our community, teaching us, showing us, and including us in meaningful artistic opportunities. They were always part of the process with us, in community.

Preparations are being made for the young ones to present their invocation to formally welcome the gathered guests and to initiate, with the permission of elders, the feasting that is about to happen. We have been rehearsing for some weeks now, the singing of the Nashid al-Imamah, a commemorative song to honour the office of the Imamat held by the Aga Khan. Singing this tune was customary on such occasions.

As I got older, I had opportunities to create new arrangements, lead community creative engagements, and disseminate what we create, thereby contributing the community's wellbeing. Jenna's mom and family were also instrumental in Jenna's life. When Jenna would sing zikr with vocal harmonies, it was often with her mom and sister, with me, or with community members. She would be invited to create, add harmonies, and contribute to the musical and devotional

atmosphere. Throughout her youth, such occasions were safe spaces for her to discover new (and fun) ways of interpreting and translating devotional traditions with community and also contributing to collective wellbeing.

We both acknowledged a need for retranslation and interpretation. Jenna emphasized, "The goal is not to draw . . . out from the past, but rather to give today's generation a chance to interpret it [in] the way they see it, through their own eyes, and living human experience." For Jenna retranslation of zikr by singing them in harmony helped her to relate more authentically to the Ismaili culture, while for me, as much as it helped me to relate to my own traditions in a new way, it helped me reconcile blend the best of two disparate Western and Ismaili experiences I loved into one consolidated whole. Music and sound were directly associated with feelings of belonging, amplified or negated in different social conditions. Retranslating musical experiences enabled us both to form new relationships with aspects of culture that we grappled with.

Emergent feelings of otherworldliness and transcendence were key features of our experiences. It was in the spiritual atmosphere created through communal artistic endeavour where I felt belonging. For me, feeling this spiritual belonging in choir as I had felt in jamatkhana was vital for me to hear across differences the possibility for blending traditions. For Jenna, otherworldly, transcendent experiences enabled her to access what she felt was the essence of the traditions that could only be communicated beyond words.

I think it's like, absolutely, like an art; and it's something that is profound—that can reach the experience of it [the zikr] and enhance the words and the meaning. Like, it's a new way even for people who may not know what it means to get intimately connected with the essence of what it is also. It's like a really powerful access.

Singing, participating in, and creating musical harmony created inner harmony that brought about emergent feelings of love and truth of self. Regardless of our similarities and differences, we both seek a world in which we can all live in harmonious coexistence. In Jenna's words, "It's like peacemaking. . . . I get excited about the potential of the future . . . [that] the world can coexist on this planet harmoniously, quite literally." Jenna invites us to imagine what it would "look like if we all metaphorically held hands with one another and created this world as a united human race." It is in this kind of world that we would find belonging.

7.2 Ethical soundscape

I draw on the concept of “ethical soundscape” (Hirschkind, 2006) to explore the vital role music and sound in transmitting culture, devotion, love and communal connection. Hirschkind described ethical soundscape as:

> part of the acoustic architecture of a distinct moral vision, animating and sustaining the ethical sensibilities that enable ordinary Muslims to live in accord with what they consider to be God's will . . . vocal performances resonate both within the sensorium of sensitive listeners and outside, around them and between them. In doing so, they create the sensory conditions of an emergent ethical and political lifeworld, with its specific patterns of behavior, sensibility, and practical reasoning. (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 8)

Hirschkind’s perspectives about the role of music and sound are drawn from a Middle Eastern context, particularly Egypt. He explains that from the time of the revelation of the Qur’an, its oral transmission through beautiful vocal recitation provided affective conditions in which believers and non-believers alike were immersed. The Arab culture with which people were already connected and engaged became an ambient container for the message of the Qur’an. The Quranic revelation and oral transmission was, thus, shaped by Arab poetic culture, Arab sensibilities to the spoken word, and musical cultures associated with poetic expression. This cultural milieu served as an ethical soundscape through which hearing, receiving, being, doing, and making of human subjects was intrinsically linked. Text and sound, voice and local vernacular poetry and music, entangled with life itself, all playing an integrative role to infuse the messages of love, human responsibility, social conscience, and righteous thought, action, and word.

Everyday sound, culture and language that crossed the boundaries of public and private spaces became a conduit for an integrative way of living. The sounds of the Qur’an and its social, ethical and devotional messages resonated congruently in the sounds of material life. "Sounded sacred words link the material world to the immaterial realm of God” (Eisenberg, 2013, p. 194). Cultural ecosystems fused horizons of spiritual and material life, providing pathways for constant remembrance of God and reminders of right action in the name of love, service, and God. “In the process of forging this connection, sacred sound creates sacred space” (p. 194).

Thus, the spiritual reception of ways of hearing, being, doing and making of human subjects is intrinsically linked to the aesthetic culture in which the Qur'an was revealed.

I am reminded of what composers outside the Muslim context say about the role of soundscapes. Drever (2002) highlighted the importance of recognizing the inextricable relationship between the peoples and cultures in, through, and from which soundscapes emerge, are received by those who encounter the culture and those who seek to shape soundscapes into composition. Truax (1994) pointed to the importance of considering the inextricable links between the inner and outer relationships in music:

> The traditional notion refers only, or at least mainly, to music's inner relationships, what will serve here as a functional definition of "abstract" music, music whose elements are organized only in relation to each other. The music of a truly "new complexity," I will argue, is based on both its inner and outer relationships and creates a situation where the two sets of relationships are inextricably linked. (Truax, 1994, p. 1)

Truax emphasized the relational dialogue between the inner world and outer worlds in creating musical soundscapes. The inner patterns and structures of music do not exist for their own sake but in inextricable relationship with the cultural life in which the music resonates. Truax added, that the sonic environment and the way it is perceived is dependent on the relationship of the listener in any such environment. Truax (2008) recognized that there is an environmental and psychological context in which a network of meanings is ascribed, that in turn influences the shape of music (composition) at every level. The emergent work "enhances our understanding of the world, and its influence carries over into everyday perceptual habits" (p. 106). Music, culture, and life become inseparable and inextricably connected. Westerkamp (1999) discussed how soundscape work "potentially creates a clearer sense of place and belonging for both composer and listener, since the essence of soundscape composition is the artistic, sonic transmission of meanings about place, time, environment and listening perception" (p. 24). Westerkamp (1999) further explained the possibility for creating "a balance between inner and outer worlds, reality and imagination" reaching beyond the surface of the physical realities of life experience. Norman (1996) maintained that **"**real world-music, like poetry, is impelled by a desire to invoke our internal 'flight' of imagination so that, through an imaginative listening to what is 'immanent in the real', we might discover what is immanent in us" (p. 53). Seeking

balance of the inner and outer resonates well with Ismaili orientations of faith, spirituality, devotional quest, and lived experience.

Aesthetic judgement arising in immersive lived experience is very much a part of human understanding. The experience is not "temporally or culturally distanced" (Conquergood, 1991, 182, as cited in Drever, 2002, p. 24) as a photograph, visual artwork, or recording of music might be perceived. The soundscape is lived. It is not an object of contemplation, a text, a visual or a sonic artefact to be consumed or disposed from outside of oneself. Frith (1996) spoke about aesthetics in relation to musical identity and coming to know social values:

> [It] is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities . . . but that they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them. (p. 111)

Frith argued that identity is constructed as something inward (self) and outward in relation with others (i.e., socially constructed), with music and social space (the larger context), and the transpersonal space. Turino (2008) highlighted the role music plays for personal integration of self and wholeness, socialization and interconnectedness, and to create flow and unity. From a cosmopolitan-minded education perspective, Hansen (2011) noted that the journey is also accented on physical movement and ethical and aesthetic journeying (p. 2). He highlighted the vitality of relationship between lived experience, ethical, and aesthetic reception.

In Kenya, I experienced an integrative continuity of ancestral Indic soundscapes within encompassing Swahili soundscapes. In the fabric of this integrative Kenyan life, spirituality was inseparable (Wane, 2008, p. 190). Integrative soundscapes also intermingled with European traditions in a pluralistic weave to inspire and energize life. What would that continuity sound like in a Canadian context where the dominant ethical soundscape was rooted in European, Christian societies? In this Western environment, the sonic culture and social encounters did not feel like they did in Kenya. In Kenya, the integrative material cultures resonated with pluralistic Ismaili ways of knowing and being. In Canada that was not the case. At home and jamatkhana, we continued and revitalized an Indic-Swahili-English way of being. However, outside the thresholds of our Khoja community and family spaces, the culture felt homogenous. In Canada, a

Judeo-Christian Western environment, the ethical soundscape was different; like the soundscapes of Muslim societies, the Western soundscape in the Canada I knew was an “acoustic architecture of a distinct moral vision, animating and sustaining the ethical sensibilities that enable ordinary [Christians]” (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 8). Coloured by an embodied knowledge and hearing of an integrative Ismaili consciousness, how might I recreate a new ethical soundscape in this virtual colonial reality? M. Said (2010) submitted:

> The spirit of music which . . . is neither a sentimental panacea nor a facile solution for every problem, but rather a practical utopia whose presence and practice in our riven world is sorely needed and, in all sorts of ways, intensely instructive . . . it can at least signal the arrival of a new attitude whose example might soon provide us with many others, many salutary changes, many profound new interpretations of what is now only an appallingly polarized, completely inhuman conflict . . . separation between peoples is not a solution for any of the problems that divide peoples. And certainly, ignorance of the other provides no help whatsoever. Cooperation and co-existence, of the kind that music lived as we have lived, performed, shared and loved together, might be (p. xiii).

Jenna also received knowledge in an integrative, communal ethical soundscape that shaped and resonated with her development of an embodied sense of being Ismaili. Through Jenna’s story, readers witnessed the completed cycle from hearing, listening and receiving to doing, making and expressing. Multiple levels of knowledge were embodied, elegantly and even subconsciously integrated and processed. Jenna herself, through hearing and singing, became a transmitter of an intimacy of knowledge beyond what had previously only been absorbed rationally. I humbly submit that it was through Jenna’s integrative soundscape that she embodied comprehension of Ismaili faith and culture.

The concept of an integrative ethical soundscape balancing inner and outer worlds could be useful for thinking about how music and sound might play a role in shaping human subjects. I propose that this lens may be one that music educators could consider in shaping practices that serve the multiple needs and aspirations of diverse learning communities.

7.3 Aesthetic experience

> In fact, in response to my assertions that Islam emerged as an aesthetic tradition, Asani, a prominent scholar of Islam remarked in an interview: "The arts are the icing on the cake." This statement is ironic as for most Muslims the arts are 'the cake!! (Badruddin, 2018, "Talking about aesthetics," para. 3)

Aesthetic experience is a significant aspect of how both Jenna and I received the traditions, their import, their communal enactment, and their spiritual-ethical orientations.

Some of the great works of visual art, music, and architecture that emerged in various cultures have been inspired by this religious impulse. Every religious tradition has an aesthetic dimension. In his interview with Sahil Badruddin, Dr. Ali Asani discussed the role of the aesthetic in Islam. Asani emphasized that for most Muslims, Islam is "primarily a multisensory experience in which the arts play such a central role" (Badruddin, 2018, "Talking about aesthetics," para. 1). Asani explained that Islam began as "an aesthetic tradition based on the personal spiritual experience of the Prophet Muhammad" (Badruddin, 2018, "What advice you would give," para. 5). The Prophet was inspired with revelations so beautiful that his recitations caused people to weep when he recited them; their unparalleled beauty was acclaimed as proof of their divine origin. Asani emphasized the Qur'an is as much a "book or a source of law or theology" as it is an "aesthetic experience at the heart of Islam" (Badruddin, 2018, "Course on Islam," para. 2):

> In the seventh century, when the Prophet Muhammad began receiving revelations, he recited them aloud, he performed them for his followers, rather than writing them down. Hence the name, the Recitation. People were struck by the beauty of what he recited and were often moved to tears. It was the beauty of this text that actually convinced people that what Prophet Muhammad was reciting was something really unique and different, and its beauty was proof of its divine origin. The form of revelation as sacred sound was shaped by the context of Arab poetic culture and Arab sensibilities to the spoken word. (Badruddin, 2018, "Course on Islam," para 17)

Graham and Kermani (2006) emphasized the importance of the aesthetic power of the Qur'an recitation to move the believer. They reference the Quranic verse 39:23:

> God has sent down the most beautiful word (*ahsan al-hadīth*); a scripture consistent in its repetition, at which the skins of those who fear their lord crawl (*taqsha'irru*); but then their skins and their hearts are softened for the remembrance of God. (p. 124)

The effect of the recitation gives the hearer goose bumps before it softens or calms body and soul. Graham and Kermani add:

> This expresses clearly the idea that religious perception of the Qur'an is the aesthetic experience of a discourse described as the most beautiful (*ahsan al-hadīth*) and communicated in a flesh-tingling auditory experience. Yet this text declares that the final aim of this act of communication is not mere satisfaction, or the "disinterested pleasure" (*interesselose Wohlgefallen*) that Kant mentions in his treatment of aesthetics, but a cathartic process that prepares one "or remembering God" (*ilā zikri llāhi*). (p. 125)

Similarly, the greatest impact of the Ismaili Indic ginans is "on the ear"—an auditory experience (Allana, 1984; Nasr, 1992; Gillani, 2012; Kassam, 2013). In a telling account, venerated poet and Ismaili elder, Ghulam Ali Allana of Pakistan described the affect of *ginan:*

> I see . . . my mother, Sharifabai, start singing a ginan. Her voice was unmatched. Everybody listened to her bewitching voice, singing a ginan . . . The fragrance of that spiritual atmosphere still lingers in my mind. One seemed to live and be so near to the presence of the Omnipotent and Omniscient One. (Allana, 1984, p. 2)

In this conception, the sound and cultural expression is of an interiorized feeling and spiritual-ethical disposition. Shah-Kazemi (2006) referred to the need to nurture an intellectual capacity to hear an ethical soundscape. He described the spirit of the intellect (*al'aql*) as a unifying spirit, one "that surpasses, while comprising, the activities of the rational mind, as well as encompassing domains not nowadays associated with the intellect, domains such as moral comportment and aesthetic sensibility" (p. 22). To comprehend the majesty of the Divine, one must nurture the rational, aesthetic, and ethical selves. Domains of mind (rational), heart (felt aesthetic), and hand (ethical-social) all work together to create conditions for one to be able to receive and comprehend a sense of the divine. This cohesive view of the intellect is directly related to the Quranic conception of the spirit (*al-rūḥ*).

> It may be useful at the outset to clarify our preference for the English word "intellect" rather than "reason" to translate *ʿaql*. What we wish to evoke here is the original meaning of *intellectus* in Latin Christendom, a meaning which is practically identical to that of *nous* in the Patristic Greek tradition: *intellectus/nous* is that which is capable of a direct contemplative vision of transcendent realities, whereas reason—the translation of the Latin *ratio* and the Greek *dianoia*—is of an indirect, discursive nature; it works with logic and arrives at mental concepts, only, of those realities. With the intellect, then, one is able to contemplate or "see" the Absolute; with the reason, one can only think about it. (Shah-Kazemi, 2006, p. 22–23)

Asani suggested that it was "around this aesthetic and experiential core at the heart of the tradition . . . [that] more institutionalized legal, theological, [and] philosophical forms" were crystalized (Badruddin, 2018, "What advice you would give," para. 5). Asani highlighted that sometimes, however, "religious impulse is appropriated by the hegemonic discourse of empire or state to create works of art that are meant to legitimize and symbolize power" (para. 3). This is true for Islam as it is for other religions. Regardless, Asani encouraged us to look at the aesthetic dimensions to discover the animating roots of a tradition.

Asani raised a concern:

> In the academy, generally speaking, the study of religion is predominantly focused on textual, historical, and ethnographic analysis. Though the devotional or experiential aspects of faith as embodied in the arts are acknowledged, they are not often incorporated into the curriculum because they are seen as emotive, personal, and subjective. Therefore, they cannot be rigorously studied with any degree of objectivity. The overwhelmingly secular environment in the academy also impedes an appreciation of the multisensory faith experiences in the classroom. (Badruddin, 2018, "Talking about aesthetics," para. 1)

Asani proposed that educating for religious literacy

> makes us aware of the diverse manifestations of religion from the theological and political to the aesthetic. If there are institutionalized manifestations that we find disconcerting as they seem overly concerned with power, hegemony and enforcing conformity, there are also aesthetic manifestations through the arts which can have deep

> emotional impact and inspire even an atheist. (Badruddin, 2018, “What advice would you give,” para. 6)

Asani lamented that in the case of Islam, the story of tradition is represented by histories of dynasties that “depict the religion as primarily an ideology of power and hegemony. By privileging and highlighting elitist constructions, these narratives show almost no concern for how the majority of Muslims engage with their faith” (Badruddin, 2018, “Talking about aesthetics,” para. 2). It is due to the distancing of the aesthetic in the academy, Asani suggested, that few introductory textbooks or courses utilize this arts and aesthetic approach to religious literacy.

Reclaiming and talking about the role of aesthetics, including sound and music, in everyday Muslim life, thus, will be an important piece of the puzzle to better support Muslim youth. Community and educational leaders will need to work closely with elders, scholars and community members to consider what this multi-sensory aesthetic journey looks like. The process will necessarily be iterative and collaborative, always seeking a balance between sustaining and revitalizing traditions in contemporary contexts.

7.3.1 *Vaas vase edi buddhi ache*: Catching the fragrance

સાહેબજી તું મોરે મન ભાવે	Saahebji tu(n) more man bhaave	O Lord! You please my heart.
અવાર મોરે ચીત ન આવે	Avar more chi(n)t na aave;	No one else occupies my thought and heart.
દુજા મોર મન ન ભાવે	Dujaa more man na bhaave	No one else pleases my heart.
સાહેબજી તું મોરે મન ભાવે	Saahebji tu(n) more man bhaave	O Lord! You please my heart.

(“Sahebji tu(n) more man bhave,” Sayyid Muhammad Shah)

Jenna picked up the emotional fragrance of Ismaili experience and tradition early in her life. Jenna told a poignant story about her ability to receive and learn a ginan (a marker of Ismaili identity) through lived experience. This ginan, “Sahebji tu(n) more man bhave” (O Lord! You

please my heart), is a well-loved ginan that speaks of the profound love of a *murid* for their *Murshid*[34] (see Figure 36).

Figure 36. "Sahebji tu(n) more man bhave" ginan

The composer, Sayyad Mohamed Shah, affirmed that there is none other than the Lord, Imam, for whom his heart-mind (*man*) has come to be filled with love. Wherever in the universe he searched, all he saw was the Lord, Imam. The composer expressed his awe, wonderment, and gratitude, and recognized the ever-flowing mercy of the Lord, Imam to shower him with whatever his heart desired—to grow in love and closeness with the Lord, Imam. This ginan expresses a core Ismaili guiding tenet of faith, love for the Imam—an important point of return in Jenna's story:

[34] Arabic: Follower or devotee. A term used most often by Persian Sufi, or mystical communities to denote followers on a particular path (*tariqa*). Amongst contemporary Ismailis, it is also used to denoted followers of the Imam-of-the-Time with the Imam being designated as the Murshid (or rightly-guided leader).

> Yeah, like the first, um, ginan where I just heard it in khane so many times was Sahebji, and it was in Paris khane, way back when. I was super young. I ran up to the mic after, like, when khane was over,[35] and the mic wasn't turned on but there was someone still there, like kind of watching; and I just started singing at the turned off mic [giggles]. *Mukhi Saheb*[36] who was there, saw me . . . He took a chance on me and turned on the mic. And there I was, like, little Jenna just singing Sahebji, and I remember my mom was like, "Holy, that's my kid. Okaaay." . . . Then she actually listened to it; "but this girl's on pitch though" [laughing]. My grandfather would tell my mom like, you gotta have her stop running around during khane all the time and all of that, but this time, he went to my mom and said, "you know, I told you to control this kid but today she made me very proud."

At the age of two, Jenna had already demonstrated an aural, spiritual, and musical sensitivity that enabled her to receive and know the ginan, and to respond to the situational utterance, expressing the embodied ginan. Her voice was the vehicle.

In Paris khane, Jenna enacted a kind of consolidated being with individual agency and held tradition. She demonstrated an innate capacity for sustaining tradition and creatively expressing its reception. Jenna's organic, reconciling action rippled positively to a moment of reconciliation between her mom and grandfather, who both showed pride. Nana Bapa told Aisha that in the past, he had told her to "control this kid" and "have her stop running around during khan," but "today she made me very proud." Jenna's strict recitation of the ginan aligned with her Nana Bapa's vision and expectations of performing Ismaili identity. Jenna's strict performance of ginan affirmed for her Nana Jenna's connection faith. Her "running" to the mic crossed the boundaries of protocol and yet her demonstration of the ginan brought pride, affirmation, and approval. By singing ginan in a normative yet unexpected way, she blurred the lines between

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[35] After the official jamatkhana ceremonies, the microphones are turned off. The last of the congregants, especially in smaller towns, mingle. Informality fills the air. The presiding elders leave their designated positions and together with the congregants they slowly begin to exit the prayer hall. This threshold, interstitial time is the point in which Jenna jumped to the mic in a transformative moment for her and for the community.

[36] In Ismaili usage, the Mukhi is an appointed religious representative in local jurisdictions globally.

expected behaviour, musicality, and interpretive agency. This story of little Jenna beautifully shows the possibility for consolidating all aspects of her belonging, and as she gets older she continues on this quest to forge her own path.

7.3.2 Sensitivity

"Having heard it in khane so many times," the ginan came to dwell in her heart-mind (Sanskrit *man*). Jenna's sensitivity enabled her to feel, perceive, and know ginan. Faculties of perception and senses had picked up various levels of knowledge related to the ginan. She had grasped textual and musical material as well as performance practices. Jenna had received the ginan (as a cultural artefact in itself), its words, and the subtleties of emotion, style, colour, contour, fragrance, and character, and was able to recite the ginan well, and "on pitch." She had grasped knowledge of where to do it (at the microphone on the front podium) and the behaviours (adab) associated with jamati practices. I believe she had also intuitively picked up knowledge of how the ginan positively impacted the community. In that moment, the conditions were perfect for the resonance of that embodied knowledge to come alive (like a tuning fork) and spark her spontaneous responsiveness. Jenna demonstrated that even as a two-year-old, she contained an affective capacity to receive knowledge and know where and when that knowledge can have a positive impact. Not only did her singing have a positive impact in the jamat generally, but also on her grandfather, who expressed a reconciliatory comment to Jenna's mom. Jenna had received the ginan as a material Ismaili cultural object, and more importantly, she had received and was actively transmitting Ismaili ways of communal being, knowing and doing—all having come to dwell in her heart through an affective reception.

Jenna did not *know* [rationally] how she had learned and came to *know* [sensitively embodied] the ginan. She did not recall her mom singing the ginan or teaching it to her. Nor did she remember her grandparents teaching it to her. She indicated that it was likely through hearing the ginan many times in khane that she somehow learned it. I was reminded of a similar story my father told me about learning a ginan through hearing it regularly, absorbing, and feeling its presence around the home and at jamatkhana. Jenna seemed to have picked up the ginan in a similar way, within her intermingling musical, religious, and everyday ethical soundscapes. I wondered whether learning, singing, and hearing Hindustani vocal music and doing khatak dance might have contributed to absorbing the emotional subtleties and colours (raga*s*) of this Indic

ginan, which may be based on "*Raag Yaman*," a raga Jenna heard her mom practice often. This sonic colour was part of Jenna's home environment; it allowed her to pick up the emotional colour and comportment (adab) of the ginan. Additionally, recitals of this and other ginans in khane provided an environment in which the ginan were heard and felt.

Jenna did not speak of a rational choice or preference to positively accept or negatively resist the ginan (and all it awakens) as an object of contemplation seen outside of the locus of self. She did not describe the structure of the ginan, its words, the melodic contour, the raga, or any other aspect outside of herself. This ginan has a wide melodic contour of over an octave and is difficult to sing. Jenna did not mention how hard or easy it was to learn. She did not know what the words mean or whether she rationally aligned with them. She did not judge the quality of recitations, the people who recited them, or how they were done, nor did she speak of an emotional response—happiness or sadness, for example—that created or delimited her attraction to the object of contemplation. There does not seem to be a rational extractive relationship with the ginan. She did not stand next to or in front of the object to see it, contemplate it, think about it, and judge it. Reception of the sonic quality of ginan (within a larger integrative sonic landscape) was felt and absorbed like a fragrance through sensitive perception.

I draw on a teaching my father, Amirali Janmohamed, offered to explain this process. My father shared with me a *Kutchi*[37] idiom, *vaas vase edi buddhi ache* (A. Janmohamed, personal communication, September 4, 2019). This idiom translates as (whatever) fragrance dwells (inhabits or abides), that kind of understanding comes. He shared this phrase with me in the context of Ismaili parents expressing concern about the strength of faith of their children because their children did not attend jamatkhana. Their parents feared they would lose connection with the faith. For these parents, the children's Ismaili identities were partly bound to attendance and participation in Jamatkhana, and participation funds of identity that the parents had internalized. The idiom suggests that regardless of their ritualistic participation, because the children lived with elders and family, the faith, they absorbed the ethical foundations and value systems that are at the heart of the tradition.

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[37] Kutchi is a language spoken in the Kutch region of Gujarat.

I would like to take a little etymological tour to better understand "vaas vase edi buddhi ache*.*" The word "vaas" translates to fragrance and is found in forms of words that translate as habitation. The word "vase" translates to stay, dwell, inhabit or abide. Derivatives of the word "dwell" include origins referring to dust, vapour, and smoke. The word "abide" derives from a root referring to trust, confidence, and persuasion. The word stay derives from a root meaning "to hold—in offering or taking, giving *or* receiving." Vaas and vase appear often in Ismaili poetry and refer to the habitation of the Lord, in the heart. The ginan "Sab ghat sami maro bharapur be*th*aa" (in every being dwells the Lord) reminds believers not to foolishly look further than in their own hearts to know the presence of the One, beloved.

The word "*ache*" translates as "to come." The word "come" derives, interestingly, from a root origin meaning to come *and* to go. The word "*buddhi*" translates as intelligence, true understanding, or wisdom. Intelligence here does not relate only to rational or mental capacities, but to an all-encompassing intelligence, a gnosis. Buddhi refers to an integrated felt, enacted, and thought knowledge that is held with integral wholeness within the being. In this sense, vaas vase edi buddhi ache refers to a receiving and hearing within a cultural, and in this case, a sound world, where multiple levels of knowledge enter and exit, are received and held, given and shared. The environmental conditions and ecosystem hold a fragrance of knowledge that becomes inhered by one who hears it, catches it, and feels its sweet treasures. This fragrance refers to the ineffable subtleties in the cultural, material, ethical, rational, musical, and intellectual in the environment.

R. Murray Schafer (2009) proposed that the sonic environments in which we live are continuous and ever present. "We have no earlids," (p. 1) to delimit and close off the reception of sound that is "active and generative . . . sensations . . . intuitions . . . mysteries" (p. 3). He invited us to sit in the "grandstand of life . . . where the seats are free, and the entertainment is continuous" (p. 1).

> The world orchestra is always playing; we hear it inside and
> outside, from near and far.
> We have no earlids.
> We are condemned to listen.
> I hear with my little ear...
> Sound gets to places where sight cannot.

> Sound plunges below the surface.
> Sound penetrates to the heart of things.
> When I disregard the things to which sounds are attached, the phenomenal world disappears. I become blind. I am swept away sensuously by the vast music of the universe.
> Everything in this world has its sound - even silent objects.
> We get to know silent objects by striking them.
> Visual awareness faces forward. Aural awareness is centred.
> I am always at the heart of the sounding universe.
> With its many tongues it speaks to me.
> With the tongues of gods it speaks to me. (Schafer, 2009, p. 2)

I like to think that the silent sound of ginan, as received through the shape of "Sahebji tu(n) more man bhave" was known, and in the right conditions, Jenna was metaphorically "struck."

The situation at Paris khane was an enabling environment for two-year-old Jenna to run up to the microphone and sing a ginan. Was it her conscious thought to go to the microphone, or was an inner wisdom cultivated through jamati reception of ginan, awakened in that moment, that served as an internal guidance system, leading her to act in this powerfully impactful way? Was it the ginan knowledge that settled in her being in some way and sought to be expressed and known? I submit that in this moment, Jenna was more than her identity. She was the community. She was its historic consciousness. She was knowledge. DeNora (2000) explained that music can be embodied and can redefine behaviour. Embodied music can change the understanding of one's actions and impact identity. Fortunately, for Jenna, she grasped, learned, received, embodied the tools, resources, and musical material through her environment and lived experience that, although latent, guided constantly and was made known in this sacred moment of communal service. She sang perfectly—the way it would have been recited in community, making everyone take notice, amplify her, and making her feel proud. What a service she did as a two-year-old; or rather, was it her ancestral self that was serving in this renewed contemporary reality?

This makes me think about the capacity for deep knowing through the aesthetic environment in early childhood that is not dependent on age or scaffolded knowledge, but that is rooted in an infinitely open intellectual self that receives and gives through sonic and affective communal

knowledge. Also, if we do not have "earlids," this also opens a question of how we create our sonic environments (and ethical soundscapes) that awaken our sacred humanity and innate social consciousness. Schafer (2009) acknowledged that in "an aural society all sounds matter, even when they are only casually overheard" (p. 2). In a pluralistic environment where we engage with globalized, popular, traditional, multicultural, Indigenous, and newly emerging knowledge and sounds "from near and far" (p. 1), how do we create integrative ethical soundscapes that can resonate frequencies and energize the human spirit waiting to speak its truths in the phenomenal world? Does this become part of our social and sonic responsibility?

7.3.3 A coda

Although Jenna discussed tensions with her Nana Bapa, she was grateful for having built a loving relationship with him over the years. There was an abiding love between her and her Nana Bapa, and she spoke of him with deep respect and kindness. While in a particular "religious context" she felt conflicted, over time her relationship with her Nana Bapa strengthened. Over the years, she listened to her grandparents' stories and came to a better understanding of their lives and spiritual journeys. Jenna disclosed that a few days before her grandfather passed away, she called him in Paris. On this, her last conversation with him, she recited "Sahebji tu(n) more man bhave," a ginan he loved and that was a source of pride for him when Jenna recited it at Paris khane. Jenna expressed heartfelt gratitude for his presence in her life and the unique honour she felt to bring this ginan to him at that special time of passage. I was touched by the love, respect, and regard she showed for her grandfather and the traditions he upheld. Her empathy and sensitivity met with humble submission and care by performing the ginan as he may have expected. In that utterance, her Ismaili aesthetic, social, ethical, pious, and musical selves were all unified, amplifying her affirmation and allegiance to the faith.

7.4 Reinvigorating traditions

The Aga Khan (2001) spoke about what "level of significance should be accorded" (para. 18) to "reinvigorate aspects" (para. 18) of historical memory and achievements of Islamic civilizations that some Muslims feel have been lost. He expressed the importance of looking back to look forward in considering the significance of historical memory "for the Ummah in the contemporary world with its many and varied challenges" (para. 18). He acknowledged that for this historical memory to "be meaningful and beneficial for Muslims generally" the wisdom in

this “great resource” should be turned into an “intellectual trampoline to generate ideas for building the future productively and constructively” (Aga Khan, 2001, para. 18).

In this research study, a young Ismaili woman, Jenna, outlines a way forward for reinvigorating the traditions so that they can be meaningful and beneficial for her in her lived experiences today. Jenna’s narratives illuminate a way forward. On one level, the zikr as a material cultural artefact is rejuvenated and enriched. Adding vocal harmony to the zikr as a musical object refreshes and brings the tradition to life. New musical application helps to translate the tradition and pass it down as a meaningful fund of identity for Jenna. On another level, a spiritual-ethical function of the tradition is rejuvenated and enlivened. New musical application helps to translate the function of the tradition. Music as an enabling space (condition, *hal*, environment) and holder for transmitting tangible and intangible knowledge also becomes animated. The tradition is heard afresh in a contemporary resonance that amplifies its capacity as a carrier and vehicle for transmitting knowledge beyond a normatively passed-down musical cultural artefact. The blended musical process also helped Jenna to align with and reconnect with her own sense of humanity. With agency, she collaborated in creating the revitalized musical spaces that benefitted all. Thus, the tradition itself, a way of knowing and being, and a connection with her humanity were all rejuvenated through the integrative musical process. The significance of the zikr as a formulation of a historical past in a certain place and time took on new life for Jenna, who felt that she could, through such a profound musical experience, live and thrive more authentically.

Through Jenna's narrative, readers come to know a reterritorialized and deterritorialized conception of a cultural artefact or fund of knowledge, a way of knowing and being that amplifies an Ismaili way as a resonant humanistic way: of self as other, of interconnection, and a relationship between sound as an imitation of life. The cultural artefact of the zikr is one cultural manifestation, a thread in a larger philosophical foundation and ethical orientation of an esoteric way of being Muslim and a citizen of today. The musical object is part of a broader social conscience that seeks harmony, peace, safety, and reconciliation to improve quality of life. The zikr is not a musical object unto itself, outside of its association with religious systems, social contexts, and spiritual humanistic aspiration. The zikr is a profound vehicle through which one remembers God and comes closer to a kind of love that inspires greater interconnection and love for others. Can we in music education think about the forms that have been amplified, reified,

and exalted as foundational musical knowledge within the discipline as an aspect of culture that is part of a larger cultural system of regard for protecting humanity? In that light, then, could we better assess the barriers of that system to provide safety, as well as the strengths of that system, to then combine with global systems to serve better? If music is seen as a reflection of life, as a condition of society, then might we critically consider how this integrative technology of cultural life can provide its fullest service to humanity?

Jiwa (2020) suggested, in the context of studying history, that it is critical to interrogate historical records: “who is the author; who were they writing for; when were they writing, what was their purpose in writing their work; what sources did they rely on” (04:11). Jiwa posited that this approach helps develop critical thinking, “a discernment, a sharpness of how we view the past” (Jiwa, 2020, 04:31) and how we make sense of the past in our lived experience today. Jiwa highlighted how this historical approach helps us to acknowledge the successes from the past and to learn from its shortcomings. Jiwa suggested that taking lessons and meanings from our history is an important part of building a strong and resilient future. She emphasized the importance Ismaili traditions place on critical thinking to study their histories and gain a deeper understanding of the faith. Jenna demonstrated this kind of critical historical thinking in seeking to know, inquire, and see beyond what was traditionally transmitted. Not only did she want to know about tangible cultural and musical nuances, she also wanted to explore intangible qualities like energy, frequency, and the ineffable in history. Additionally, she wanted to know how these tangible and intangible qualities animated the sounds, melodies, notes, and texts that she has now inherited. Jenna critically interrogated historical documents such as ginan and zikr to view the past. This historic thinking was a step in Jenna’s ongoing quest to connect with traditions in her contemporary lived experiences.

As Ismaili Muslims, Jenna and I are challenged to continue the lived interpretation and making of our traditions. In addition, we think constantly about how those traditions animate themselves in our lived socio-cultural realities. I bring back the question the Aga Khan (2003) asked about “what voice or voices can the Islamic heritage speak to us afresh—a voice true to the historical experience of the Muslim world yet, at the same time, relevant in the technically advanced but morally turbulent and uncertain world of today” (para. 3)? Jenna emphasized that the goal is not “to draw . . . out from the past but rather to give today's generation a chance to interpret it [in] the way they see it, through their own eyes, living human experience today.” In doing so,

"maybe it's not to extract from the past, but rather to trust the inner wisdom of the people who are alive and present today and to create something anew." Belonging then, is from within, making space for one's inherent wisdom to be known and used for communitarian good. Engaging creatively with the heritage in a new way, with elders and mentors in and outside of the normative spaces contributes to feelings of belonging. The Aga Khan (2003) expresses this same aspiration for young people:

> As these young men and women grow into leadership positions in their own societies, including teaching future generations through their schools and universities, it is my hope that it will be these new generations of our intelligentsia, who, driven by their own knowledge and their own inspiration, will change their own societies and will gradually replace many of the external forces who today appear, and indeed sometimes seek, to control our destinies. These young men and women will become leaders in the institutions of civil society in their own countries, in international organisations, and in all those institutions, academic, economic and others, which cause positive change in our world. (para. 11)

Jenna's and my journeys of translation were as much felt and interpreted as they were received through normative transmission or lectures. Embodied feeling and knowing transpired as we immersed ourselves as listening subjects, interpreting and co-making to create atmospheres of harmony in which belonging could be realized. Aesthetic experience and its occurrence in pluralistic conditions of (and encounters in) society were important to our labour.

For Jenna, singing zikr in harmony helped her to form new relationships with religious aspects of life. She was exposed to a new and different way of doing something familiar. What she heard and sang excited her inspiring her to learn more about the traditions, music, vocal skills and techniques, composition, how to harmonize with others, and how to forge her own interpretive path. What she *felt* also excited her and as a result inspired her to know more about metaphysical realms—qualities that one cannot describe, ancestral connections, energy, frequencies of sound, and empathic evocation. Discovering anew the religious aspects with which she was at odds inspired her to question, critically inquire, and explore more deeply. Creatively engaging the zikr with other people (elders, mentors, and singers of multiple backgrounds) provided safe spaces for her to challenge, question, create anew, and interpret ways forward that amplify her strengths,

and love for communitarian effort. What she cared about in relation to the zikr was what she cared about in relation to music generally and to life. Through the revitalized zikr, her allegiance expanded beyond performative acceptance and repetition of expected rituals. The revitalized zikr helped her to authentically commit to a spiritual-ethical disposition that she would continue to express anew in response to her lived realities.

Jenna's fitting into and identifying with religious aspects was mediated and understood through "singing" the zikr in a new, exciting and energizing way. The zikr became portals through which she heard "powerful access" to an essence of both the zikr and to herself. Repeating the zikr as normatively became a site of tension, but "singing" zikr in harmony enabled Jenna to feel "uninhibited and freer" to express and explore. Whether it was zikr or "any other song" sung in harmony, she had "absolutely . . . , incredible experiences." Adding harmony to the zikr provided a musical openness and creative space for her to engage and discover new relationships of belonging with the zikr (a religious aspect) and thus to the Ismaili community as well. She belongs to it, and it belongs to her.

The new musical experience provided respite and opportunity to reaffirm a connection to the faith in a hands-on, creative way that she enjoyed. She *felt* the faith and the spirit behind it that could cross boundaries of difference. On one hand, she questioned the bayah and her choice to pledge allegiance to "Hazar Imam and all of that." On the other hand, the feelings of profundity, and love that she came to know through doing zikr in harmony provided a renewed hierophanic feeling of allegiance.

Both Jenna and I came to know zikr as living creative energy, as possibilities for integrative belonging, and as dwelling spaces "that interact with culture, custom, and conviction" (DeNora, 2007 as cited in Matsunobu, 2011, p. 283). Zikr, music, spirituality and life were no longer separated. Spirit and life became one again, boundaries of outer and inner melted, and gratefully, we found a harmonizing pathway for cohered spiritual, social and material belonging.

7.5 Rehearing the Muslim Western dichotomy

I entered this research with the idea that Ismaili and "Western" were in opposition. Certainly, my lived experiences suggested that "minoritisation as an affective and ethical process is a moment in the identification with 'otherness' which is faced with a paradoxical sense of representational

'being-in-difference'" (Bhabha, 1998, p. 124). However, I realize now that the dichotomy does not make sense. My use of this binary in the world of binaries *affirms* the division that I seek to resist, while I also seek to represent difference and then fight the binary. If I name the binary but then reemphasize it through my work, practice, and life by resisting it, I make less room for the possibility of something new. I essentialize the binary to make the division real, needing something to fight, to define myself by who I am not. In so doing, I can see it, talk about, relay it, and live it. The problem is that I live out a default future of fighting and creating the duality. That becomes my *modus operandi*, not only fighting the duality, but perpetuating and making it stronger. By fighting the duality, intellectualizing it, theorizing it, I emphasize the duality. At the same time, looking for sameness in only the material culture (same rhythm, same spice, similar instrument, similar ritual), I walk towards unity, but remain outside the threshold of unitive being, waiting to be invited in. In this conception, I see and hear the world through separation. That becomes my always already listening self. I have learned it and now promote it, advocate for it, fight it, reinscribe it. That binary becomes familiar. It is my home. The binary is one I end up creating in the world. Without it, who would I be?

This binary disenfranchises humans from remembering the already always listening of our true selves, our soul self, our unitive being seeking to be known, amplified, and drawn forth through our interconnected co-making in the world. Dividing my Ismaili identity and Canadian identity as two separate experiences is a Western conception. In this conception I end up seeing both Ismaili and Canadian identities as single stories, making both a monolith. I make Islam and Ismailism a monolith myself. A binary narrative gets inscribed in so many ways. In this binary, what is Ismaili is separate from life. To be Ismaili is not to be Canadian. To be Canadian is not to be Ismaili. I am never one or the other. However, I am both in integrative superposition. The fragrance and aspirational ethical foundation of one resonates with the essence and aspirational foundation of the other. The forms, practices, and approaches rooted in different epistemologies and cultural milieus can now mingle again cohesively in a living heart of unity that holds it. The merging is a natural condition of rehearing oneself and one's funds of identity in multiple contact zones. The binary rejects a shared humanistic ethos that animates as Ismaili and Canadian. The integrative merging opens the possibility for reclaiming our human interconnectedness while celebrating unique identities.

In my quest for belonging, if I essentialize and see myself as a dichotomous self with others, have I also forgotten my true nature that seeks to be known? Have I spent so much currency on the dichotomy that I have forgotten how to grow a unitive spirit? When I encounter the choral, I remember that I am a spiritually amplified hybrid being living in a hybrid culture, hearing inward and outward in a hybrid, ever changing way. The choral is part of me. Bhabha (1998) pointed to James Baldwin's essay "Encounter on the Seine: Black meets Brown" to make this point:

> He is in Paris, in the midst of a triangulation of gazes, between an African, and a White American. The emergence of his minority identity, as a form of agency, as grasping the drift of freedom, is manifested when it is no longer possible to draw a clear and unambiguous line: in his own self definition or identification with the "other" as himself there is ambivalence, anxiety, extimié (Lacan 1992), but there is also proximity: "The Negro [recognizes] that he is a hybrid . . . In white Americans he finds reflected— repeated as it were in a higher key— his tensions, his terrors, his tenderness . . . Now he is bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh . . . Therefore, he cannot deny them, nor can they ever be divorced" (1985:39). It is this agonistic hybridisation, in the elusive, yet agential midstness of minority identification, that takes us beyond the multicultural politics of mutual recognition which, for all its seductive reasonableness too readily assumes a temporal co-evality at the point at which difference or discrimination is being adjudicated, and cultural judgment passed. (Bhabha, 1998, p. 124)

When I sing in a choir in harmony, my self-determination and identification (i.e., brown and Muslim) encounters and sometimes limits my hybrid multidimensional self from resonating a shared sacred unity with others. The "in-betweenness" becomes a reminder of the pre-existing coalescent and hybrid self that bordered identities have negated. It is not because of the fusion that I become free. It is in the interstices where I find the courage to bend towards freedom, hope, and love that are very much part of how I understand being human, Ismaili, and Canadian. The new integrative material culture that I am a part of making in this Western environment will become the symbol of a unitive Ismaili and Canadian belonging. "The hybridity of the proximate encounter, figured through the time-lag of belatedness or afterwardsness, refuses to position cultural or political antagonism in a dualistic or binary encounter" (Bhabha, 1998, p. 125). Being human in this conception is a quest for remembering and then re-*membering* our true nature. Guiding love and unity are called forth, pushing me to seek out knowledge of the world so that

love and unity can be known. My actions, in turn, become the remembrance itself. Choral encounters that centre zikr or ginan as the foundational material for revitalized creative engagement from the perspective of the Ismaili subject in whose cultural archive the devotional forms cohabit, can allow for expansive in-between fluid oceans of remembrance, revealing the pearls of wisdom within. The zikr is life. Life is zikr.

Through zikr sung in vocal harmony, I began to know an inside world that sounds like my outside world, at least a choral outside world that I love. It helps me to "hear the angels" in khane, a setting where, musically, I do not often hear them. It allows me to know myself as a person with creative agency and a communitarian spirit ready to serve. It helps me to hear the core of my spiritual self in the Western materials of culture as I audiate within. Music and zikr combined become inextricable foundations of love, sparking the flame of faith even in the secular environments where we live. The zikr and ginan are at the centre of the inquiry; coming to know the zikr as renewed knowledge funds of identity can inspire "the individual to personally reflect upon and conceptualize the balance between" (Williams & Snively, 2016, p. 35) embodied creative knowing and the views presented in normative religious and secular systems of cultural transmission.

Merging zikr and ginan with vocal harmony also helped me to energize an embodied communal way of being Ismaili. Singing in harmony required "attuning" to one another and listening profoundly in a balanced way with others. Attunement is a "felt embodied experience that can be individualistic as well as communal, that includes a psychological, emotional, and somatic state of consciousness. Attunement can also be thought of as 'bringing into harmony' or a feeling of 'being at one with another being" (Kossak, 2009, p. 14). Kossak explains that attunement can result in a feeling of being lifted out of oneself with an increased connectivity to self, others, and the world. Listening and tuning to one another requires a generosity of spirit to be willing to recalibrate one's sound to adapt to others without losing the integrity of one's voice. Listening involves attending to another with care and sensitivity, with openness to be able to resonate at positively. Listening involves hearing with the ear and with the heart.

The Chinese traditional symbol for listening (Figure 37) depicts how the ear, the heart, the mind, and the eyes all work holistically in a listening encounter.

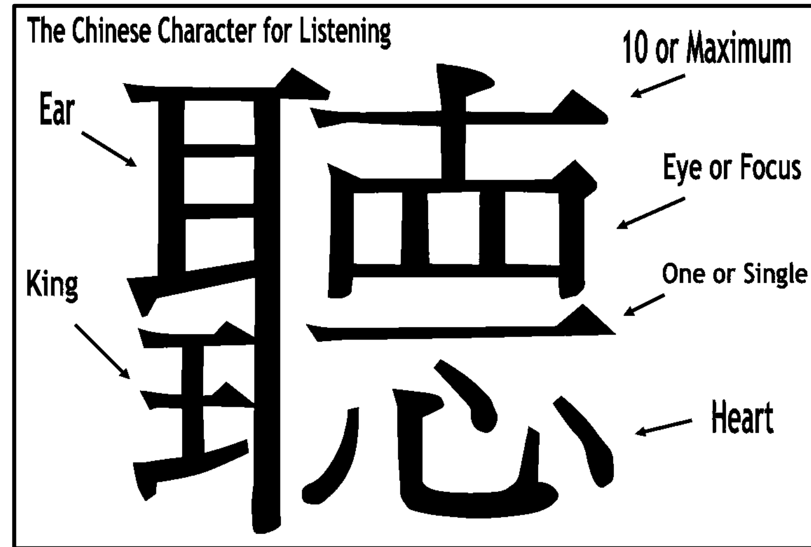

Figure 37. Chinese symbol for listening

Another value cultivated in the musical process for me was a social value. To create beautiful harmony, each person genuinely cared about adding voice in the best way possible towards a common musical and sonic goal. The creation of harmony by all for all enables the individual to have an experience that they can contemplate and feel in their own way. The individual's experience is bound to the communitarian. Without a communal harmony that one contributes to creating, one has to rely on oneself to find those spaces of communion within themselves. Singing in vocal harmony with a goal of beauty for all, especially with the zikr and ginan, shows the value of a participatory citizenship that reflects how one's personal experience can thrive through their contribution to creating spaces for all to benefit. These communal values are very much part of the Ismaili worldview. Contribution, service, and cooperation with others towards betterment are important values. These values are not limited to Muslim experience but are humanistic values that resonate in a variety of ways of knowing from religious, philosophical, academic, and lived knowledge around the world.

7.5.1 Your music is too religious

Interactions with some choral practitioners demonstrate that they see also see my work as too religious. Do they also see me in that delimited way? Have they inadvertently translated me through their conception of what a Muslim is or what they want a Muslim to be? Musically, some ask for folk or other repertoire that limits the view of the rich polyvalent hidden and apparent cultural archives and teachings that sustain me. I am troubled by this notion because in

the same breath, choral practitioners program masterworks rooted in Judeo-Christian liturgies and epistemologies. My music (and who I am) is read as “religious” while choral masterworks are read as “art music” and their creators as master composers. One of my compositions that used the word “Allah” for example, an Arabic word for God, has been considered too religious by some choral singers, and because “Allah” did not represent their own personal associations, they chose not to sing my music. Yet, I am expected to sing texts like “Agnus Dei” or “Dominus Deum” in choral “art music” if I choose to participate. This religious-musical dualism positions my work as *haram* (forbidden), while the Christian European choral music is *halal* (permissible). It seems that the musical canon (including sacred music) that was part of an ethical soundscape of Christian society is now part of educational culture. When considering music of the Muslim world that is part of an Islamic ethical soundscape, however, that music is labelled as religious. The music is not seen in an integrative way as part of the larger societal culture. Furthermore, Islam is positioned as a religious monolith creating more division. Thus, there is a need for more thinking and collective labour about how music educator can cultivate a more nuanced view of music from diverse cultures—including Western—not as objects of contemplation or fossilized cultural artefacts, but as integrative cultural architextures and ethical soundscapes that enable shared human aspirations for peace, harmony, and unity.

Sometimes, my music that integrates Ismaili devotional expression with choral sound is seen as “too Christian.” On one hand, I am too Muslim, and on the other hand, I am too Christian. The polyvalent spiritual-ethical influences and life experiences that make me who I am are also delimited in religious terms. Being translated in these negating and divisive ways forces (and inspires) me to tell a different story, one told from the perspective of how *I* see and interpret life. Robert C. Young (2006) proposed that negated and negatively translated peoples gain agency through retranslating themselves as subjects of their own story and additionally retranslating the negating systems. The process of musical bridging and creation enables me to know and hear myself in binaries of religious and choral, or Muslim and Western (Christian). I hear myself as both and beyond both. I harness what I see as the strength of choral sound with what I see as the strength of Muslim expression. I bring them together in a new texture by which I can belong to both. My belonging is not bound by fixed, binary identities. My belonging is held in the spiritual-ethical space between, nurtured by a barrier-transcending unity, and expressed through colourful threads of multiple identities woven into tapestries of love.

Bringing the two cultures together creates a “sliding door” (Sims Bishop, 1990) and a translational portal through which I can find fulfillment and unity without denying my alterity. The newness of the emergent sound provides new horizons of knowing while the familiarity of the traditions provides necessary mirrors to traditional ways of knowing. My heart, mind, soul, body become the nexus point, the sliding door, and the threshold where culture is negotiated. I, myself, become a third space, not fragmented, or pulled from one side to another. I become a fully realized human being, open, grounded, and curious, inspiring my ongoing cultural translation. The agency-filled translation does not only involve translating the material forms, tools, skills, or processes but also translating sacred unity and enduring feelings of love, uplift, and creative hearing across frontiers of difference.

Retranslating myself in this way helps me to share a sonic and affective story of being Muslim that stands up in counterpoint and in integrative relationship with the systems (within and outside of Muslim societies) that negate me. My music and approach to animating choral sound through Muslim tradition helps me to “tell the story back, different but the same” (Maracle, 2015, p. 135). The process is ongoing. A new assembly of sounds emerges through “conscientization” (Freire, 1970/1992) in every new delimiting moment. If this is perceived as my attempt to validate who I am and what I do, may it be so. The way I see it, as the subject and researcher of my own story, I am retelling and reclaiming a human story animated through an integrative musical story tapping into the wide spectrum of cultural encounters in a pluralistic society. Blending musical and devotional traditions is my way of taking transformative action, creating new situations, and harnessing this knowledge to pursue a fuller humanity (p. 29). Indeed, as Maracle (2015) emphasizes, “For those of us who refuse to come to the Imperial table empty handed, our literatures are a beginning point to understanding and seeing the world through different sets of eyes.” (p. 136). The new combined musical texture is the way I continue knowing the world through pluralistic ears. I can no longer hear myself in one or the other sonic texture separately. I need a reconciling sonic space, where I bring the materials that matter to me most into conversation. Through that conversation, I can find abiding presence and hopefully over time, produce musical knowledge such that the “oppressors could know the capacity of the oppressed to create, transform and contribute to the betterment of society . . . then perhaps they would act differently (Freire, 1992, p. 91).

I understand that some readers may view this study reads as a validation of my practice. I have reflected on that idea, and perhaps there is a truth there. The more I think about it, the more I recognize that perhaps validation does not have to be seen as an act of self-interest and proof of practice. I am inspired by Maracle's (2015) statement that "in order to learn, children must see themselves in the stories they read or the films they watch; they must hear themselves in the songs they listen to" (p. 132). She speaks from an Indigenous perspective about the significance of Indigenous story as a "crucial element in the wellness of our children's lives" (p. 135) that bands need to see. Sims Bishop (1990) also explains how children from marginalized groups need to see their own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience mirrored in literature. "Reading then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, of reaffirming our place in the world and our society" (p. 3). I humbly submit this research story is one that speaks from my cultural perspective about the significance of Muslim cultural knowledge, as well as about the importance of music in which Muslim youth like Jenna may see themselves mirrored.

7.6 Integrative journeys

Both my narrative and Jenna's illustrate the possibility for parallel and respectful integrative interpretation alongside and creatively within, with, and outside normative practices. I am reminded of the metaphor of the two-rowed Wampum belt (*Gä•sweñta'*) where settlers and Indigenous people, with their different ways, "travel down the river of life side by side," addressing each other as 'brothers' (*Two Row Wampum* [*Gä•sweñta'*], 2014). In both of our cases, the Ismaili and Western imaginaries coexist as part of a larger pluralistic soundscape and dynamic relational braid. Together they form a third space" a creative and emergent space. It is Islamic and Western at the same time, depending on one's perspective. Adding harmony to zikr generates a consolidating third space of possibility in which neither is dominant, yet both are fully present. In those creative sonic spaces, the interpretive quest took new "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) that sparked curiosity, oriented our spiritual-social dispositions, and brought out the sacred truths of our selves. We materially "deterritorialized" the normatively transmitted object of musical and religious contemplation (the zikr, ginan and choral forms) and reterritorialized a new integrative space in which we resonantly received and created knowledge. We came to feel and know energetic hidden matters otherwise made latent over time in political and social relations. The normative attributions and substantive signifying totalities loosened and allowed us to go beyond who and how we currently are, allowing for new movements and

shifting relations to propel our labours. The journey to come to know hidden realities of existence, inner meanings, and harmony was achieved by "an inter-play of human and more-than-human consciousness" (Williams & Snively, 2016, p. 35). In a similar way, Williams and Snively (2016), citing Ermine (1995) relate an Aboriginal epistemology:

> In their quest to find meaning in the outer space, Aboriginal people turned to the inner space. This inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self or the being. (p. 103)

There is a danger in reifying our new attributions and interpreting "this anti-dogmatic procedure dogmatically" (Esmail, 1998, 52). Interpretations of feelings and experience are just that, unique human interpretations. Our reinterpretation also must become flexible and porous, otherwise it becomes a "withered metaphor" (p. 52). We cannot transmit that anti-dogmatic approach dogmatically. Esmail (1998) has written, "What is ultimately significant is not *what* meanings are found to lie 'behind' specific passages, but *that* they are understood in this manner" (p. 52, emphasis added). What is important in the process of bridging cultural experiences is to understand cultural symbols and funds of knowledge as containing a plenitude of meanings. Esmail (1998) stated that the very notion of symbolism (that inherently carries a plenitude of meanings) is as important as what the symbols are thought to symbolize. What meaning Jenna or I may have attributed to the choral utterance is important for us, but it may not be important for others.

Jenna and I both were lucky to have had musical, creative, and aesthetic opportunities that enabled us to receive, explore, reconcile, and interpret Ismaili experience. Active co-creation, singing, and making of harmony and musical textures became an enlivening conduit and mode of inquiry that shaped our quest and was shaped by it. Jenna reminded me that our job as facilitators is to offer the jamat and its youth opportunities to experience something. Those experiences must also be critically and sensitively designed so that the jamat can take in the experience, rather than to fearfully identify against it. Jenna also said that we must keep the door open to how each person may or may not attribute that experience. Jenna suggested that my job as a musical leader is to make an offering, lead the jamat through a musical process, and make space for the jamat to creatively interpret and make meaning as they wish (or not). As Jenna says, it is "not a one size fits all for everyone."

These creative encounters with the devotional music (and texts) enabled Jenna and I to "write back," "sound back," sound *with* and afresh, through an integrative vision and community music practice. The creative and experimental offered a counterpoint to the Ismaili and Western educational normative that we both can choose to receive or not. The two traditions in political binary opposition were no longer ones to abandon or to blindly accept; rather, their merging became whole worlds of knowing and inspiration revealing creative practices that we can choose or not in how we contribute to the world.

From the earliest days, Islam defined itself in relation to other religious practices and cultural milieus of the time, reminding followers that this was true also "of the history of Judaism and Christianity, shared Abrahamic traditions with which Islam has both similarities and differences" (Waugh, 2011, p, 21). Waugh suggested that at the time of the Prophet, one might assume that discussion about proper practice was common, vitally informing the making of "tradition." In the pluralist environment in which Islam was born, religious markers became "a vital aspect of the way identify was formed" (p. 22). Designating practices as normative or proper in the time of early Islam was a way to mark and construct religious identity in relation to other traditions. However, in those contexts, Islam was not a religious truth imposed on the diverse community. Islam acknowledged the continuity of revealed messages of previous religions. Thus, Islam had a continuing place in society with an ethical vision shared across traditions. Waugh emphasizes, however, that "both the *Qur'an* and the emerging tradition held that culture was not a neutral force in religious life" and that the culture "had to be transformed in light of the new ethical standards" (p. 21). Within these environments, then, the believer is faced with adhering to or deviating from what is proper. All practices within the Muslim religious environment were rooted in the Qur'an or the *Sunna*.[38] Practices not spelled out that needed theological support also referenced these primary sources for justification. There was plenty of room for debate in these matters, often taking a long journey towards legitimization, and a Muslim legal system became a mediator in matters of practice. Waugh also wrote that when it came to culture, tribal and popular influences resisted more "universal" tendencies; resistance continues to this day. Cultural dynamism emerged as a result in Muslims societies across the globe. Rather than a

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[38] Tradition. A system of behaviour and comportment based on the sayings and actions modelled by and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.

uniform set of beliefs and practices, Islam was a dynamically evolving rich cultural tapestry held by shared humanistic spiritual-ethical foundations that benefitted Muslims and the communities in which they lived. Informed by ethics of brotherhood, kinship, intellectual search, knowledge exchange, openness, curiosity, generosity, charity, and love, the faith and its culturally bound funds of knowledge evolved, shaping life and being shaped by life. In the same way, in a Canadian pluralistic society built on Judeo-Christian epistemologies, intermingled with poorly adhered to treaties and agreements to recognize and weave Indigenous knowledge into the fabric of society, traditions can evolve. Building on our shared ethical and human aspirations, we can learn to honour and include rich and diverse knowledge systems giving us the opportunity to co-make and discover a cultural dynamism needed respond to the realities of society.

This study outlines one pathway for revitalizing Ismaili culture through resonant forms of knowledge from the larger musical and educational culture. For me, taking up singing in harmony, a key feature in choral learning in Canada became a revitalizing practice through which I renegotiated how I heard an Ismaili spiritual-ethical disposition in a broader way. For Jenna also, this mode of vocalizing zikr in a new way offered portals, pathways, scaffolds, and containers for her self-discovery and renewed relationship with the traditions. In addition, the experience of singing zikr in harmony brought forward creative ways to realize and come to know ways of knowing and being that resonated in the larger society. The pursuit of musical conditions that inspired spiritual search, social cohesion, and moral inspiration through singing zikr in harmony resonated with an Islamic value system and shared spiritual-ethical foundations for living. For Jenna and me, these experiences enabled a deeper investment in the faith, not so much as a religion but as a way of being that could be animated diversely in a pluralistic musical expression and in the labour of our hands, heart, and head. To be Ismaili in this conception is more than an identity marker. It is a way of being enacted in life and culture in which music is part of a knowledge weave.

7.7 Harmonious coexistence

When every heart joins every heart and together yearns for liberty,
That's when we'll be free.
When every hand joins every hand and together moulds our destiny,
That's when we'll be free.
Any hour any day, the time soon will come when men will live in dignity,
That's when we'll be free, we will be
When every man joins in our song and together singing harmony,
That's when we'll be free.

(Harriet Hamilton, “Hymn to Freedom” (lyrics), music, Oscar Peterson, 1962)

I ask myself if harmony in a choral way is so powerful regardless of my own spiritual-cultural heritage, then why is it important for me to do zikr? If Jenna and I could access aspects of devotion through an art form outside our tradition, was that not enough for us as Ismailis? If the zikr and ginan do not carry musical and intellectual gravitas and depth of experience to call forth the spirit, then does one simply drop their tradition and disassociate from them? Does one un-name oneself from the tradition? If one has grown up in a “fragrance” where ethical-aesthetic-relational-intellectual foundations instilled by living in that ecosystem (vaas vase) then can de-identifying with the Ismaili identity remove that learning? How does one access and create environments where embodied knowing can find affective resonance in lived realities? Jenna (unlike others her age) did not choose to completely abandon her association with the religious traditions. She also chooses not to blindly accept them. I asked Jenna, if singing in vocal harmony had such a profound unifying and bridging effect, then why “shouldn't we just encourage all Muslim kids to sing in choirs in schools” and then keep doing the zikr the way it is normatively done. Jenna responded, “Because we have heard what happens when they merge.” Laughing, I asked, “Have we?” Jenna responded with laughter, “We have.”

It's like peacemaking; and then I get excited about the potential of the future of that. Like . . . to . . . create your world and my world, and I really want [that] the world can coexist on this planet harmoniously, quite literally.

Jenna and I share a value for peace and harmonious coexistence. We embodied knowledge of that love early in our lives through our community and family cultural lives. I have come to

realize that racism as a child, and Islamophobia as an adult were not reasons to make peace; rather, the feeling of seeking peace embodied since childhood came alive in the negating conditions. Those negating experiences generated a spark of determination to make peace in the world. Early childhood experiences of safety in loving lullabies, fervent communal recitations of devotion, and group singing in school provided the possibility for that harmony to be realized. Such formative felt experiences became sounding boards and reference points for a lifelong vocation and quest. When I came to choral music, that vocational spark came alive. What I could create through choral music became a reflection of those ambient formative moments. I naturally started harmonizing the zikr in khane. I see now that merging the two was important, in that it allowed me to amicably reconcile teachings about building bridges, fostering kinship, and fostering peaceful relations amongst peoples. The values we were taught came even more alive in the merging. The Islamic and the Christian, the unique and the universal, could coexist. The merging of zikr with vocal harmony took on a metaphoric mirror for life. The integrative merging also showed Jenna a harmonizing potential for the future.

Yeah, like when we take like zikr tasbih and we layer it with all these harmonies, then we have Muslims and non-Muslims alike singing it and finding beauty in it . . . No matter the training and all of that, these worlds are coexisting; not just like coexisting on a base level but actually harmoniously. Like, it just brings out the potential of once again, going back to my point of what would this world look like if we all metaphorically like held hands with one another and created this world as a united human race.

What unity sounded like for Jenna suggests a potential for holding hands with one another in harmonious coexistence. That musical experience of vocalizing zikr in harmony was a simultaneous mirror and window for her to see inwards to a reality of herself, harnessing the strength of a unified, authentic, harmonized self; she was also able to see inwards to a reality of society held in “one soul” harnessing the potential of a unified, harmonious human race. The experience was a window for her to see beyond a world of division. Where the world through its dogmatic and reified, canonized practices and systems reflects division and is a mirror for division, this musical experience merging worlds offered a window into a new possibility and perspective of unity. The negation of the self and the fragmentation of society that she felt in everyday life can be transcended, and she can reach into new realities and possibilities. Her agency, authenticity, empathy, and care to use knowledge towards betterment became a “sliding

door" (Sims Bishop, 1990) that she could traverse. She may choose either to bring the division into the inner world or bring the unity of the inner world out. She chooses the latter.

I am not trained in Indic music, or Arabic music, or Qur'an recitation. I am trained in Western choral music. I learned Ismaili ginan and zikr through oral transmission, family, and communal listening. I encountered sound and music in pluralistic cultures that also shaped me. Thus, I heard and saw myself as connected within and as something beyond bordered musical identities. Choral music was a new horizon that spiritually mirrored pluralistic Ismaili musical horizons. My heart, mind, body, and soul became a mediating space through which I could reassemble a sonic vision that fit as I encountered difference in the world. From this thinking, feeling place, I naturally and organically began to shape an integrative vocal arts practice. As time went by, it became more deliberate and rational. Devotional musical forms are part of the tapestry of life important to me. The creative space may invite openness, and it may also create a rub, but I hope that the rub of familiar and unfamiliar will create curiosity about an abstract way of hearing, something that sparks inquiry and intrigue. The work is about holding abiding space for reflection, harmony, and the potential of peace. That is how I navigate my cultural experiences. Sound is hope and life. Hope is resilience.

Hearing Jenna's narrative, I recognized that the unity I felt in singing in harmony with others, especially with zikr and ginan, is a reconsolidated space of hearing something I otherwise attributed to religiosity and ceremony. In choral music, I felt a similar unity that came from a socialized idea of music as a musical and social sonic endeavour. At the same time, the choral music that truly inspired me was sourced from religious historical contexts. I heard in it a common resonance that I have called spiritual. After reflection on Jenna's narrative, I think of this shared common feeling as an awareness of a hidden world that holds knowledge beyond divisive, socio-political realities. It is at heart. a condition of awareness that whether I acknowledge materially or not, inspires my life's work, piety, musical labour, and human thriving.

Beyond definitive texts and identities, the shared intention of seeking unity in the Ismaili tradition—unity with the God and unity amongst a shared brotherhood—and the intention of seeking unity in the choral musical tradition—unity with transcendence amongst shared human musical labour—opens windows of possibility for a coherent sense of self. These otherwise

dichotomous traditions, when combined, offer a more integrative condition and composite of tools that allow for a greater belonging in myself. I come to discover an integrative two-eyed seeing and sounding wherein I hear the possibility for belonging with difference and beyond difference. The question is, then, how do I harness, grow, and translate that integrative knowledge and capacity with others for the benefit of all? I feel the strength of my own traditions and spiritual-ethical values informing them beyond the culturally distanced knowledge funds. I know the strength of another tradition and spiritual-ethical values informing them through culturally distanced knowledge funds as well. However, the tools and intentions for social and musical harmony this way of knowing offers add to the tools I already must cultivate: a feeling of hidden unity with material life understood as part of an esoteric Ismaili interpretation of life and faith. Ismaili teachings remind me that the goal of musical transcendence, peace, and liminal unity are not ends in themselves. Ismaili teachings remind me that musical labour integrates and amplifies a coherent musical, social, ethical, spiritual orientation, and empathic knowing that I must use in making the world better. I believe that choral sound carries these same values and orientations. Social justice initiatives in choral music also resonate and activate these values towards equity, justice, access, diversity, and inclusion. Texts, programming, governance practices, and artistic direction all demonstrate externalized justice in response to contemporary contexts.

There is both sonic ministry and social activation in choral education. What would it take for the music education community to animate new practices that nurture a two-eyed seeing, hearing, and sounding whereby the musical and social, hidden, and apparent, the religious and worldly, felt and socially activated can co-exist? What would it take to see choral music and sound as a pathway to grow the capacity to hear an orientation that resonates in other traditions as well? What would it take to evolve practices such that choral approaches combined with sonic practices from diverse traditions also nurtured shared humanistic hidden and apparent orientations to enable a way of being in the world that is integrative: a world where one belongs in difference and in unity, where the religious and the social are porous? Would the music and life we live become an expression and quest beyond social justice and beyond the musical liminal? Could reaching beyond the senses and animating them through that which appeals to the senses become a superhuman power that can help us towards a more cohesive and interesting tapestry of service and thriving? I believe it can, and I believe that we are on our way. I also

know that we have a lot of work yet to do. The possibilities to know possibilities that we cannot fathom are here. The calls are being made. Will we listen?

There seems to be a connection between a-musicalization of traditions like zikr or ginan and being able to connect with and interpret profound depths of emotion in their performance. A-musical dogmatic systems of transmission that pass down Indic traditions as imitative recitations of religious knowledge lose the capacity for the traditions to speak. In secular contexts where musical identities are entangled with dichotomies of difference and systems of oppression, and music is part of the soundscape of modern life, then how can a young person whose belonging is tied to a religious culture and identity hear themselves afresh in the world? I believe they will be served well if they can understand their traditions as musical and as safe spaces for interpretive creativity. Since there is a debate about what constitutes music or not in Islam and its permissibility, I propose that building into programming an education that amplifies the musical aspects and elements of spiritual expression as part of a dynamic and creative sonic culture will serve well.

Chapter 8

8 Final reflections

In this thesis, I illustrated how music could provide two Ismaili Muslims pathways to negotiate difference and belonging in Canada. I centred Ismaili experience to explore how aspects of choral music, “a colonial vestige,” might be harnessed in processes of retranslation. Post-colonial theories of translation and cultural counterpoint were used as a starting point for constructing an “enlightened encounters” theoretical framework. The framework was braided with diverse indigenous and educational social justice perspectives. I interwove foundations of Ismaili ways of knowing that centre this study. Using this “enlightened encounters” theoretical framework, I examined processes of musical retranslation for a first- and second-generation Ismaili living in Canada. I used methods of autoethnography and narrative inquiry to analyze and share Ismaili centred stories. The study revealed: 1) the essential role of hearing, participating in, creating and interpreting music plays in processes of Ismaili identity formation; 2) the impact and vitality of living within a pluralistic sound world; 3) the significance of merging traditions as a necessary process of retranslation; 4) how and why the process of merging worked. This research is not generalizable to all Muslims. However, as music educators seek to shift colonial practices and better serve Muslim youth, I hope that this research provides some insight on how music, especially choral music, might play to support Muslim belonging in Canada.

Our stories shed light on different yet interconnected experiences. I foregrounded what struggles with difference I had within the larger society. My conversant discussed how she contended with difference within the Ismaili community context. This delineation did not mean that I faced no difficulties within Ismaili community settings or that my conversant encountered no challenges within the larger society. One perspective without the other would present an incomplete picture of Ismaili subjectivity in Canada today. Therefore, both stories were necessary. My stories communicated how I began singing zikr and ginan with vocal harmony and subsequently how I began to share the practice of “choral zikr” with the Ismaili community. My conversant articulated how participating in choral zikr impacted her. Choral zikr became the medium through which our stories became interconnected.

Through autobiographical accounts and narratives of experience, my conversant and I sought to uncover the implicit rich understandings of how musical experience might help us to cultivate, be in relation with, and interpret our traditions in a Canadian context. The singing or reciting of zikr, a familiar unison or solo recitation re-imagined as poly vocal “choral zikr,” provided the centrepiece of musical encounter and interpretive inquiry. The communitarian singing

experience that merged zikr with choral practices served as form, content, process, and space for knowing, being, doing, and being. While choral sound was the interpretive and dialogic medium of discourse, this study was not so much about advocating for choral music as an imperative musical form for communities to adopt, but about one application of singing in harmony that provided a pathway for belonging. This study was as much about processes of translation and interpretation of living tradition as it was about navigating difference, plurality, and contestable relationships internal to faith traditions and externally across traditions. This study does not situate the study of faith as distinct from the study of music and life.

The study revealed that within our lived experiences of modern secular realities, both my conversant and I were always already listening and making our worlds in, through and Ismaili imaginary. This imaginary was formed early in life within environments where we both experienced pluralistic musical sound worlds. This quest sits amidst the divisive realities of culture, dissolving the perceived dichotomies while infusing into lived experience an embodied feeling of unity of being in faith and life that allowed for more authentic thriving and integrative being. In this chapter, I summarize the research in response to those questions and outline implications for practice and further research.

8.1 Answering the research questions

To guide the research process, I posed the following research questions:

Main Question: How might music play a role in fostering belonging for first and second-generation Ismaili Muslims living in Canada?

Sub Questions:

1. How does the experience of Ismaili devotional music play a role in fostering belonging?
2. How does the experience of choral music play a role in fostering belonging?
3. How does the experience of merging traditions play a role in fostering belonging?

I will answer the questions in reverse order. Answering the third question about merging of traditions first sets a tone of hope and possibility for belonging. The next two questions then address the impact of experiences with Ismaili devotional and choral music separately. These

responses then lead me to the final question where I again take up the role of culturally integrative music as a possible pathway for belonging.

The questions are answered from experiential perspectives. While these experiences may resonate more universally, I chose to answer the questions in relation to my conversant and myself. Thus, answers to the questions are not presented in a generalizable way.

8.1.1 Sub-question three

How does the experience of merging traditions play a role in fostering belonging?

Merging traditions fostered belonging for me, and my conversant in different ways.

Singing the zikr in harmony—merging two traditions—provided my conversant with belonging on many levels. Firstly, she *created* harmonies. Even at a young age, she contributed to adding harmonies to zikr and creating beautiful textures. The zik*r* served as foundation, a *cantus firmus*, on which my conversant added harmonies. As a result, the zikr became a revitalized multilayered musical space in which my conversant received their affective power. Singing and experimenting with finding harmonies amplified her already innate musical talent and sensitivity. In those creative spaces she felt valued, despite her young age. Together, these experiences helped my conversant feel safe and to belong simultaneously to a consolidated musical and spiritual community. As a young person exploring her relationship with religious aspects of life, creating harmonies with the zikr provided a way for her interpret the traditions in her own way—traditions with which she had long been at odds. This merging allowed her to maintain the sacredness she felt and embodied as a child, while also interpreting them afresh.

The merging of traditions offered my conversant an opportunity to come to know again feelings of a harmonized self. The musical experience enabled her to experience a coherent inward and outward hearing of self. The new merged musical encounter gave her tools through which she could interpret her embodied understanding of Ismaili Muslim culture beyond strict and narrow dogmatic definitions, interpretations, and modes of transmission. These musical encounters fostered openness and inspired interest to want to know more about the traditions and their genesis. The revitalized traditions acquired renewed historical significance for belonging to a reconciled past, present, and future. The making of beautiful harmonious and "whole worlds" in which my conversant could dwell allowed for the traditions to move beyond objects of canonized

transmission to living interpretive ways of doing, knowing, being, and making. The tradition became a living entity and pathway for active participation in knowledge transmission; my conversant became a living holder, interpreter, and transmitter of knowledge. She became the voice and the ear, receiving sonic love and using her voice creatively to express that feeling. The musical merging turned a cherished communal resource and cultural knowledge fund into an "intellectual trampoline" from which she could productively construct an Ismaili imaginary in terms that were meaningful and beneficial to her.

Experimenting with adding harmonies to zikr became a powerful metaphor for me. The process enabled me to hear, see, feel, make, and interpret my understanding of Ismaili culture. I had a strong relationship with Ismaili devotional traditions from childhood. Expressing those relationships through a new choral form enabled me to bring together my otherwise disparate experiences of music and culture—the Ismaili and the Western choral. The emergent musical outcomes became enhanced metaphors for my understanding of Ismaili experience. The merging of traditions allowed me to harness and celebrate the active energy of spiritual unity I felt in both. Adding choral harmony to zikr became a spiritually inspired pathway and a medium for me to make a world, a musical world, where a vision for harmonious communitarian coexistence and coherence could be possible. Practices of choral sound participating in an integrative conversation with my traditions provided the scaffolding for me to undertake a generative interpretive quest and to exercise creative agency in cultivating a sense of belonging.

The emergent spiritual-ethical acoustic amplified a *feeling* of faith embodied through communal experiences in childhood. Creating the layers of harmony resulted in a borderland sonic space in which the Ismaili cultural artefact (e.g., zikr) and choral structures could be fully present. They both enriched and enhanced the other. Each layer of harmony became a polyvalent horizontal enrichment of the original zikr. A reconciling integrative presence came to be known, enabling emergence of a newly constituted and consolidated expression of belonging. The process created a newly harmonized poetics of coexistence and a reconciled sense of a spiritual belonging that could be animated in both Ismaili and choral spaces. In that consolidated cultural space, the possibility of peace and safety that inspired authentic thriving could be known. For me, belonging was found in this hope and confidence.

8.1.2 Sub-question two

How does the experience of choral music play a role in fostering belonging?

To answer this question, I draw only on my experiences. While my conversant did speak about choral experiences they were in the context of merging traditions, not in the context of choral experiences outside of the Ismaili context.

In my experiences, choral music in school and youth choirs provided harmonious antidotes to racism. Choir was a place of belonging, a level playing field of hope. I learned to discover a new way of creating community within a piece of music; I felt part of something bigger, something sacred. I valued the embodied feelings of an aesthetic sacred from Ismaili community activities and in the discovery of a similar quality in choral music enabling a sense of belonging. Singing in choirs was a sanctuary of friendship, spiritual fulfillment, and musical growth. The spiritual power of singing in harmony, hearing the "angels" sing, and communitarian musical effort cultivated wholeness through which I found belonging. While the repertoire was grounded in Western and Judeo-Christian epistemic foundations, the liturgical choral music reflected Ismaili spiritual teachings about an all merciful and forgiving God. In a strange way, I found that an Ismaili ethos that was so much part of how I listened out in the world was manifest in choir. I was able to cross the sliding doors and thresholds between worlds with more ease and spiritual consistency that helped me to feel a sense of belonging. I could feel faith in a variety of spaces and that brought me peace.

In receiving choral music, I found an aesthetic ambience that resonated a spiritual-ethical conscience of Ismaili living traditions. In the choral dwelling place, I found a deeper connection to others spirituality through music. The process allowed me to grow musical capacities as a contributing member of a larger community. In creating harmonies by singing with others, I came to know how I could participate in creating harmony and peace for others and myself. The individual and community worked together for a common goal of musical harmony resulting in affirming value and further amplified my spirit. The musical encounter became a medium for my understanding of an Ismaili Muslim self in spirit. It also became a medium for a multi-dimensional, consolidated spiritual and material self. The layered and imitative textures became metaphors for hearing my world as a tapestry and weave of voices and ideas that could evoke feelings of deep connection, human awareness, and love. The musical effect began to dissolve

dichotomies of normativity and difference, providing a healing energy in which I could feel the "authentic me." Choir was remembrance; the experience was zikr—a communitarian interpretive vision and creative poiesis that enabled a fuller humanity in an ethical soundscape ripe with potential, opportunity, and hope.

I learned to hear choral sound, a Western, European epistemic, "colonial vestige" through the ears of an esoteric Ismaili spiritual-ethical-social musical disposition. The aural bridging also allowed me to hear zikr and ginan through the ears of a spiritually inspired Christian choral music disposition. Singing in choirs, and eventually bridging traditions helped me to experience zikr and ginan as dynamic living traditions, expanding their horizons to speak universally afresh in a secular modern society.

8.1.3 Sub-question one

How does the experience of Ismaili devotional music play a role in fostering belonging?

In and of them selves, Ismaili devotional "music" did not play an active role in fostering belonging for my conversant or myself. Their impact was most felt where they were part of larger communal activities that sought to cultivate a flame of faith. Devotional music had an impact on me because they were always tied to Ismaili cultural activities in service of building community, inspiring spiritual search, creating an affective ambience, amplifying ceremonial feeling, and cultivating love for God, our spiritual leader and one another. Devotional music represented religion, art, and culture. Though I did not know their meaning or what they were about, I trusted them and received them without question. They were part of life.

I divided Ismaili devotional music into two categories—"music" done in the jamatkhana, and "music" done in the social spaces connected to the jamatkhana. Music done in jamatkhana included ginan and zikr, and music done outside the jamatkhana included the "Ismaili anthem," stuti, and other songs of praise and affirmation of faith. Music done in jamatkhana had the most impact on my sense of belonging when led by reciters who beautifully recited them, and when the entire congregation would sing them with fervour together. Additionally, I felt the embracing power of unity on special religious occasions when my family and other communities dressed up, when special fragrances were infused in the space, and when there was special attention giving to amplifying the aesthetic ambience of the space. Music and songs done outside the

jamatkhana created a sense of belonging when they were done in chorus as children. When all the children in the community would participate in the chorus and when the community members led by my parents would help with uniforms and preparations, I felt like I was part of something bigger than myself. As children we got to prepare music that was dear to the community and perform it for them. We as children got to use our communal voices to create a similar kind of aesthetic ambience that I felt in jamatkhana on special occasions. The ability to contribute to the communities feeling of faith gave me a greater sense of belonging. Listening, doing, and making with community in a variety of ways created more opportunities for participation and belonging.

Growing up in Kenya, I also came to know the *fragrance* of faith in a Swahili cultural context. The Swahili cultural context also carried reminders of devotion and communal life across the thresholds of private and public spaces. Influences of interconnected African, Indic, and Western cultures infused our Ismaili spaces, music, food, cultural activities, language, and ways of knowing and being. While the ginan and zikr were presented as more essentialized South Asian cultural products, the music and culture of all the social spaces connected with the jamatkhana matched the integrative Swahili cultures outside the threshold of the Ismaili private structures. The Ismaili devotional spirit was thus carried across thresholds in everyday life. There was a consistent ethical soundscape that reminded me of a fragrance of faith.

Through this study, I came to know that what was devotional was not limited to specific religious content, but to a soundscape, a cultural ambience, through which the spiritual ethos could be amplified. The texts of religious affirmation and texts of popular music may have served different functions, but the cultural materials, sounds, structures, and affective qualities were similar across the thresholds. I could hear the *spirit* of a ginan or zikr in the world even outside jamatkhana, offering me a dependable ecosystem of remembrance. I belonged to an orientation, a raga, an emotional colour, and a spiritual ethos that was manifest in culture and life. This congruent spiritual ambience across thresholds was vital in embodying faith and feeling a sense of belonging.

For my conversant, devotional music in and of themselves did not provide a sense of belonging. Devotional music was in old languages that needed translation on many levels. Devotional music also was passed down in normative ways that came with certain expectations of performing Ismaili identity. The devotional expressions became delimited texts (though imitative recitation)

that had lost their capacity for symbolic and affective plenitude. Combined with negating social environments, these conditions created a sense of dis-belonging and being at odds with the religious aspects of the traditions. Unlike me, my conversant did not have opportunities to be to be part of creative communal activities like I did. She felt there was something sacred about devotional music, but she had not experienced that within the communal setting. She subconsciously felt a sense of belonging to the sacred purpose of devotional traditions but her lived experience resulted in her not feeling a sense of belonging. Sense of belonging came with devotional music when they were done in harmony with her mom and sister during bedtime rituals. When she was able to creatively interpret the devotional music that is when she felt a greater sense of reconciled belonging.

8.1.4 Main question

How does music play a role in creating belonging for first and second-generation Ismaili Muslims living in Canada?

Music, sound, recitation and singing can play a role in creating belonging for first- and second-generation Ismailis living in Canada when the music is part of communal activities that engage creativity, foster social cohesion, and inspire spiritual search and love. Music can play an integral role in fostering belonging when Muslim subjects can feel their personal and spiritual allegiances come alive in the sounds, textures, and processes. Music can also create belonging when it serves to amplify a spiritual-ethical social conscience that resonates across boundaries of sacred and secular space. When music is seen more as an ethical soundscape rather than an exclusive musical activity alone, music can have a more powerful affective influence on feelings of belonging.

Music can play a transformative role in belonging when sounds of internal or private cultural life match the sounds of external or public cultural life. When the soundscape of micro-cultures reflects the soundscape of macro-cultures there is a better chance for Ismaili subjects to hear and feel a greater sense of connection across the spaces in which they live and work. When music is presented as activities isolated from the larger culture in which that music is taking place, there is a danger that it can cause tension. If an Ismaili Muslim subject cannot experience that music as a cultural medium that can be transported back into their home or community micro-cultures, then that dissonance could create a lack of belonging. In a pluralistic environment such as Canada,

engaging only in music unique to specific cultural spaces may not provide the necessary fertile ground for a young Ismaili who hears their world in a culturally integrative way. They would need to experience and hear integrative music and sound and they would need opportunities to create new culturally integrative music. I submit that the hearing and making of culturally integrative musical textures would provide a consistency of hearing, being and doing across thresholds of private and public space, not bound by binary religious or secular identities.

My research subjects demonstrate that when music is experienced in normative ways as objects of contemplation, be it in Ismaili or choral contexts, the music can cease to have the transformative power of belonging. The music had to become alive, textured, and spiritually evocative to reclaim its agency as a force for belonging. In this study, seeing devotional sound as musical texture (not as a canonized form of tradition) and seeing choral sound as artistic processes beyond fixed works of art created opportunities for both traditions to transform. For Jenna and me using music in ways that amplify a spiritually inspired social conscience resonant with reflexive needs of coping with social realities also provided a greater sense of belonging. An Ismaili subject would need to be able to use music, in this case devotional or choral, in integrative ways, like artistic mixed media through which they can express ideas, piety, and hopes for the future. In this way, culture, arts, music, creativity, devotion and religious aspects of life can coexist creating an integrative ethical soundscape that can better foster belonging.

For Jenna and me, music also had the power to create belonging for when the Ismaili traditions were centred in creative experimentation. If one acknowledges the importance of lighting the flame of faith for an Ismaili subject, then it would be important to explore ways that the Ismaili ethos is centred in any creative activity. It was also important that culturally led artistic exploration was balanced with artistic responsibility. New expression and interpretation had to sustain traditional values and community aspirations. It was important that whatever was created should speak resonantly back to the community. Until musical experiences could integrate and include community members in a meaningful way, in ways that helped fuel spiritual connection and search, and in ways that helped bring out foundational teachings, music would not reach its fullest potential to create belonging.

8.2 Implications for community education

8.2.1 Community-based music education design

I propose the development of a communitarian, socially responsive, pedagogical musical creative design that becomes part and parcel transmission of traditions. I humbly submit that this kind of "design" thinking within (and alongside) faith-based settings could increase a *feeling* of faith that enables sensitive interpretation, intellectual and spiritual curiosity, strengthening of spiritual-ethical orientations, and community cohesion. There seems to be a call for consistent, regular, ongoing, hands-on creative engagement that is mentored in safe spaces through educational partnerships with artistic elders, knowledge bearers, change makers, thinkers, and artists. This study also points to the importance of providing creative and pluralistic early childhood experiences that can shape how young people hear and seek to create their worlds. At the heart, this kind of educational initiative would offer young people safe spaces to experiment with cultural knowledge funds and sonic heritage through listening, making, doing, thinking, singing, creating, participating, and reflecting. If inherited traditions can become sources of exciting reflexive engagement, not just reified and conflicted objects of repetition that divide a religious self from a culturally alive human self, then I can only imagine what might emerge. In order to facilitate such a vision, it will be important for cultural, religious and educational communities to recognize the multifaceted role of arts, culture, and sound beyond entertainment, and as part of a vital ethical soundscape to amplify shared human creative aspiration. I humbly submit the following suggestions:

- Mentoring and developing artistic and musical leadership of community members
- Offering financially supported collaborative opportunities for Ismaili artists to explore their own relationships with the traditions, to create and showcase work, and to engage participatory approaches with community.
- Supporting community-based artistic residencies that preserve and revitalize traditions in contemporary, dynamic, changing socio-political contexts.
- Pairing artists, creative elders, and practitioners with educators in the classroom.

- Providing hands-on artistic training streams for community education teachers at all levels.

- Bringing artists (and students, the beneficiaries of the learning) into the development of curriculum and pedagogical design.

- Engaging communitarian, participatory, and collaborative musical (and artistic) activities that centre local knowledge while opening horizons to global and status quo Western knowledge.

- Implementing musical inquiry and interpretative pedagogies for teaching of devotional literature and integrative curricular studies.

- Developing and implementing a new community-generated curriculum of musical transmission. Topics may include:
    1. How to teach texts and melodies in an open interpretive manner
    2. How to present translations of the texts in a creatively engaged manner
    3. How to provide youth opportunities to interpret texts and music in relation to their lived experiences
    4. How to offer musical experiences that foster interconnection
    5. How to encourage and facilitate participatory co-creation
    6. How to sing together in vocal layers
    7. How to provide opportunities for youth to sing with a diversity of peoples (Muslim and non-Muslim) in a variety of venues
    8. How to connect with ancestral musical knowledge, stories, processes, thinking and teachings
    9. How to amplify aesthetic experience and felt (embodied) knowledge
    10. How to translate felt knowledge into new musical expression
    11. How to integrate musical teaching approaches from global vernacular traditions, popular music, and classical music teaching
    12. How to compose and create music individually and collectively
    13. How to learn with and from elders

14. How to develop new ways to present music for formal ceremonial and informal social spaces.

Inviting youth to interpret traditions in their own way is an important part of relating to the traditions, trusting their inner wisdom, combining historic and contemporary knowledge, and creating new knowledge to respond to life's challenges. Youth need to be able to question and revitalize what traditions mean to them. Weaving creatively designed musical activities into these conversations can be a powerful medium of understanding, inquiry, and integrative understanding. Youth need to discover new connections to fundamental religious aspects of life that they can interpret and amplify in their contemporary secular and globalized conditions. They need to be able to understand "the why" and "the essence" of devotional traditions so they can relate to and interpret them in ways that are meaningful for them. Feeling and interpreting multi-dimensional aspects of the traditions is important for authentically living and animating spiritual-ethical foundations that can be then aligned with shared humanistic foundations in the broader society. While Jenna stressed that "it will be an individual journey," the educational and community-based organizations have a responsibility to provide the conditions for learning to enable such transformational individual journeys.

8.3 Future research

1. Collaborative research about musical experience from broader Ismaili perspectives:

    a. How would Muslim youth from Afghanistan, Iran, or Syria, for example, living in Canada describe their relationships with devotional and cultural traditions and how would they experience singing them in vocal harmony.

    b. How would an Ismaili youth living in Tajikistan, Northern Pakistan, Mozambique or elsewhere describe their relationship with devotional traditions and culture, and how would they receive and describe their experiences of singing traditional music in harmony.

2. Learn about musical experience from broader Muslim perspectives:

    a. How would Muslim youth associated with a variety of interpretations of Muslim faith, in different parts of the world including Canada, describe their relationship

with devotional traditions and culture, and how would they receive and describe their experiences of singing those traditions in vocal harmony?

3. Explore how Muslim communities facilitate creativity, experimentation, and interpretation of traditions.

4. Extend the research beyond choral music to popular and other hybrid musical encounters

5. Document stories of Ismaili community artists and musical elders about their experiences, aspirations and processes of translation and interpretations.

6. Mapping of larger Canadian educational and community music practices where Muslim youth do feel belonging. How can we share best practices?

7. Collaborative community-based research to assess possibilities for the development of integrative vocal arts practices and curricula that could be piloted areas such as Northern Pakistan or rural areas of Central Asia.

8. Map what role music education plays in Muslim schools and community educational settings.

9. How might Muslim youth who participate in choir critically examine their experiences and take back from choral experience what is useful to their Muslim identity formation, individually and communally? What are the creative, musical, traditional processes they utilize; how do they share what they bring with their families and communities; what is the impact; what are the challenges and opportunities?

10. What role can community-school partnerships play in music education to support belonging, identity formation, and creative agency?

8.4 Conclusion

As music educators ask how to better include and serve Muslim students, I offer this study as a portal into Muslim experiences that may otherwise not be presented. To address needs of Muslim youth, there is a paucity of research about how music and sound play a vital role in interpreting Islam as a living tradition. I am concerned that educational perspectives and scholarship highlight Muslim experiences that do not acknowledge the essential role music, sound, listening, and creating have in the lives of Muslims globally. I am concerned that these educational perspectives create an orientation towards Islam that may inadvertently positions Islam as an enemy to musical participation. Media discourses amplifying Islam, a faith of peace, as an enemy to progress does not help. Islam is not and never has been a static faith. Islam is a spiritually inspired living tradition that asks followers to seek, use and create knowledge to better the world. The Qur'an reminds followers of a sacred trust and responsibility to care for creation, foster kinship, and improve the quality of life for all. The faith shapes and is shaped dynamically by the diverse cultural contexts in which it comes to life.

The shock, wonderment, and curiosity of teachers who have asked me about how to serve Muslim students whose families do not permit active participation in music classes tells me that teachers do care. Educators want to serve all students and we want to sensitively work towards musical inclusion. Fantastic Canadian resources do exist such as the Toronto District School Board Islamic Heritage Month Resource Guidebook for Educators" and the "Ontario Music Educators Association Aga Khan Museum Music Initiative." Educational scholars have also provided useful information to better understand some perspectives about interpretations of Muslim traditions that uniquely define what is considered music and its permissibility. However, as an Ismaili Muslim coming from cultural experiences where music has been essential to forming my identity and participation in society, I cannot speak for all Muslims. Teachers may encounter many other Muslim students who do participate in music, but their stories are not told or highlighted. What is problematized are experiences of Muslim students who do not participate. What I can do, and is my academic responsibility to do, is to illustrate stories of Muslim experience in Canada where music, sound, vocal arts, listening and creating are integral to interpreting living Muslim traditions. I hope that these stories will offer new perspectives to spark different conversations about how we can better serve Muslim students. Rather than focussing on the "problem of music and Islam" I seek to tell stories of how music and sound do

serve an integral role for Muslims to map their identity and belonging. The more of these stories that can be told, the more we as educators can learn about how music and sound continue to be pathways for lived Muslim experience. Stories of success and best practice need to be shared so that we can widen our research horizon to possibilities rather than limitations. I also believe that it is important for Muslims to share their best practices of negotiating and shaping relationships with culture, as to create a rich tapestry of knowledge that, together, educators and community members can respectfully analyze, debate, critically examine to generate new pathways for the sonic education of Muslim youth.

This study is a story of a making of an Ismaili imaginary. It is about identity and belonging. It is about discovering what is common, while harnessing and bringing together the strengths and practices of unique traditions to sustain communal ways of being, doing, knowing, and making. This study illustrates how an Ismaili led musical or sonic retranslation was not simply an act of post-colonial writing back. Retranslation in new cultural contexts is part of Ismaili lived experience. Retranslation was necessary for my participant and me to revitalize relationships with faith, express creative agency, and renew a sense of communal belonging. An integrative cultural listening was vital in embodying spiritually inspired cultural knowledge and infusing a fragrance of faith. At the same time, integrative thinking, being, doing and making was essential to bring about that embodied knowledge into lived experience. Sung with vocal harmony, the zikr became revitalized culturally blended acts of remembrance. The harmonized zikr provided new pathways for the Ismaili subjects to know again feelings of spiritual unity that enabled bridging across diverse traditions. The unitive power of blending Ismaili devotional recitations with vocal harmony made possible a reconciled sense of belonging and return to a fuller humanity for both subjects—indeed essential for human thriving.

The Aga Khan (2008) proposed a concept of pluralism as a process of consolidating knowledge:

> The spirit of pluralism, at its base, is a response to the realities of diversity—a way of reconciling difference on the one hand with cooperation and common purpose on the other. It is an attitude, a way of thinking, which regards our differences not as threats but as gifts—as occasions for learning, stretching, growing—and at the same time, as occasions for appreciating anew the beauties of one's own identity. (para. 16)

The integrative process requires a critical openness to recognize unique strengths that can be brought together on a foundation of working towards common goals and collective benefit. What is universal and what is unique are, thus, able to be consolidated in an enriching conversation. The capacity to negotiate the balance in response to lived social realities is what is at stake.

Building bridges also takes a willingness to let go of firm definitions of culture, identity, and tradition to see the possibility of something new and different. As music and community educators learn and work together, we can hopefully discover and revitalize mutually respectful communal practices through which we can co-create emergent, pluralistic spaces of sacred remembrance and honouring. I dream that there will be a day where our sonic, musical, cultural landscapes across public and private thresholds offer a constant reminder of our sacred selves and a shared responsibility towards improving the world. I imagine a world of such dynamic cultural environments, ways of doing, being, knowing, and making, where even as we cross thresholds of private and public space, we will be immersed in a womb of sacred knowing. In that sacred womb, I hope, wherever we turn we shall see the face of God, and be energized to work together towards the common good.

When I started this dissertation process, I was convinced that the research labour would involve exploring how a negated self might respond to, shape, and participate in sensory conditions that reconciled the cultural experiences that divide. While that theorization and process was important and helped me to think through the relationship I had with Western culture, I now recognize that my labour was not purely a response to difference. My labour was one of sustaining, amplifying and translating love for tradition, faith, values, communitarian spirit, and humanistic ethical conscience. My labour was always about hope. It was easy to get caught up in stories of negation. However, I realize now that bringing out stories of hope, and sharing best practices that have reshaped the structures of society and culture to sustain hope, safety and peace may be a better investment.

What I have learned through this research is that the process of hearing across traditions demands learning how to feel and hear an internal kind of harmony, in which and through which, one can assess what to take and what to leave behind in our individual and collective retranslation. How we enable that knowing is important. How we help young people see and hear that internal harmony in their respective traditions as well as in broader horizons is important.

How communities, schools, and public and educational musical organizations work together to ensure an integrative, conciliatory relationship will be important. Leaving the work of community only to community, or leaving the educational effort only to educators, and the work of institutional effort to public institutions, is not enough; this work will require deliberate effort for organizations to work together to create the environmental and sensory conditions for Muslim students (and all students) that can foster conciliatory and integrative human thriving. One cannot be without the other.

It is with this humble offer that I conclude this research labour. I express my gratitude to readers for entering this conversation, and for the love of God that enabled me to do this. I do not have any answers for how this collective effort might happen. In this offering, I hope readers have found somewhere a spark of connection that has amplified some aspect of their human journey and quest. With this, I conclude and give thanks, sealing this literary and musical communion, offering it to the world.

Shukranlillah al-hamdulillah. Shukranlillah al-hamdulillah. Shukranlillah al-hamdulillah.

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