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Paralinguistic Ramification of Language Performance in Islamic Ritual

Michael Frishkopf

Ritual practice is a powerful social force molding psychological, sociocultural, and spiritual realities, capable of adapting to dynamic environments to maintain its multiple functions. As ritual practices trace paths across social space and time, changes are induced—intentionally or not—in response to different environments: the personnel and social context of performance, language, ideology, and other cultural factors. The result is a branching structure—what I call “ramification”—as ritual practices subdivide and localize, though, due to similar environmental conditions, as well as the impact of globalization, branches may converge or diffuse widely as well.

That structure therefore maps those environments, both reflectively and formatively, as a model of and model for living in the world.¹ Analyzing and comparing rituals, we deepen our understanding of their environments while illuminating the ritual process itself, in the tradition of ritual studies.²

What is the distribution of ritual practices, and how can it be interpreted in relation to individuals, performance contexts, societies, and cultures? How does ritual achieve its psycho-

logical, sociocultural, and spiritual impact? In order to answer such questions, we require, first of all, a holistic, integrative understanding of the ritual phenomena under consideration.

For Islam,³ that means comprehending the nature of the vocal performance lying at the core of every ritual. While such performance appears to exhibit features of both “speech” and “song,” it should not be classified according to these categories—not even along the putatively liminal continuum between them. Rather, such performance should primarily be understood as comprising the performance of language, fusing a linguistic-referential and a paralinguistic-expressive component.

³ In this article I use the singular “Islam” (with “Islamic”) in a generalized sense, while underscoring its encompassed diversity, fully cognizant of the oft-observed dangers of reifying a concept covering such a vast scope of varied beliefs and practices. As an anthropologist engaged in local ethnography, I might refrain from doing so, or even affirm that there is no singular “Islam.” But from the perspective of religious studies, and especially when engaging the present topic, such usage cannot be avoided: I am attempting to understand patterns and connections across a coherent yet wide, even contradictory, range of related ritual phenomena. A concise name is required precisely because such a connected diversity cannot otherwise be discussed or even recognized. In my view, these connections—structural, semantic, and historical, which *are* recognized by a global community of Muslims, as well as contemporary discourse (of Muslims and non-Muslims alike)—support its use. As Shahab Ahmed has noted, coherence does not presuppose essence, and proponents of the anti-reification “Islams” position have not explained how a plural can exist without a singular; see Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 136.

¹ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 93.

² See, for example, Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The logic behind this imperative does not stem from a familiar argument (frequently invoked by ethnomusicologists) that “song” should never be used to describe Islamic ritual simply because Muslims reject the concept as a descriptor of Islamic practice, as is well known from the literature.⁴ For the most part (English-speaking Muslims excepted, a category that until relatively recently comprised virtually nobody), it is not the English word *song* that is rejected, but rather its (ostensible) synonyms in the many languages of the Muslim world. Arabic-speaking Muslims do not describe ritual vocal performance as *ghināʾ* (approximately, “song”); to do so would be taken as not merely a linguistic error but a moral one as well.

One might, however, set out to use “song” in a purely “etic” sense, according to a “scientific” definition, as a technical term to be shared across cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries, presumably without contradicting local classificatory schemata.⁵ A similar etic definition could be formulated for “speech.”

Thus “song” could be taken to represent instances of vocality displaying a *minimal* degree of tonal and temporal consistency (lest “song” become “speech”), whereas speech would display *maximal* degrees of consistency (lest “speech” become “song”). We would thereby lose sight of the cognitive schema implied by a local taxonomy of concepts, but we would also gain analytical and comparative power. What could be the objection to that?

But application of the “speech-song” model to Islamic ritual practice remains problematic even when conceived etically. For this model distorts understanding by dividing a deeply interconnected network of vocal-linguistic-ritual phenomena through imposition of two categories whose boundaries—however defined—are largely irrelevant to the sonic ritual phenomena under investigation, while mis/underrepresenting the intervening “liminal” zone (reduced to a hyphen), as a one-dimensional, uncharted negative space of secondary importance between the *terra cognita* of the two poles. Such a model artificially separates related phenomena, while obscuring the coherent category centered on the hyphenated middle, whose scope is marked by performed language, and which is central to Islamic ritual as well.

Widening the observational lens to its maximal aperture, one observes the ritual centrality of that category, what I call “language performance,”⁶ deriving from the theological centrality of sacred texts and their referential meanings. Language performance spans all ritual genres, each one combining linguistic (mainly referential, symbolic, discursive, cognitive) and paralinguistic (mainly non-referential, continuous, affective, expressive, performative) aspects. Each genre exhibits instances scattered throughout the “liminal” space between “speech” and “song.” All are inextricably linked to Islam’s originary sources, primarily Qur’an and Hadith, and thence to each other. Linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of

⁴ See, for example, Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001), chap. 3: “The Samā’ Polemic.”

⁵ Cf. Alan Lomax, *Cantometrics: An Approach to the Anthropology of Music* (Berkeley: Distributed by University of California, Extension Media Center, 1976).

⁶ See Michael Frishkopf, “Against Ethnomusicology: Language Performance and the Social Impact of Ritual Performance in Islam,” *Performing Islam* 2/1: 11–43; and “Sufism, Ritual, and Modernity in Egypt: Language Performance as an Adaptive Strategy” (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 1999).

each ramified at some point in Islamic history. But whereas linguistic aspects—discretely encoding discursive principles of Muslim belief—tended to rigidify, paralinguistic aspects remained comparatively fluid, adapting to environmental change without contradicting the verbal foundations of faith.

Focusing on the contrast between linguistic and paralinguistic aspects, rather than between speech and song, is thus of crucial importance in understanding Islamic ritual. Yet Islamic studies has devoted insufficient attention to the distinction between the two, and especially to the latter.

Ritual in Islam

Despite several excellent synopses⁷ and focused monographs, articles, and encyclopedia entries,⁸

⁷ E.g., Frederick M. Denny, *Islamic Ritual: Perspectives, Theories*, ed. Richard C. Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985); Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); the overview essays by Toorawa and Steinfels in Jamal J. Elias, *Key Themes for the Study of Islam* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014); and G. R. Hawting, *The Development of Islamic Ritual* (Aldershot, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 2006).

⁸ E.g., Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Richard T. Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*; Th. W. Juynboll, "Adhan," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam: Brill Online*, ed. Th. Bianquis and P. Bearman (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Hussein M. Fahim, "Ritual of Salat Al-Jum'a in Old Nubia and in Kanuba Today," in *Nubian Ceremonial Life: Studies in Islamic Syncretism and Cultural Change*, ed. John G. Kennedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Saba Mahmood, "Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Ṣalāt," *AMET American Ethnologist* 28/4 (2001): 827–53; A. J. Wensinck, "Ṣalāt," in *Shorter Encyclopedia of*

Islamic studies has, on the whole, neglected ritual as compared to scholarship on history, law, literature, philosophy, mysticism, theology, art, and architecture—despite the frequent observation that Islam is a religion of orthopraxy more than orthodoxy.⁹

More critically, even when the scholarly focus, ritual appears primarily as a linguistic form, neglecting paralinguistic features transcending textual formulations. Scant attention has been paid to the situated ethnography of ritual performance, though performance is absolutely central to Muslim experience and to the social significance of Islamic ritual as an adaptive phenomenon.

Unsurprisingly, exceptions tend to occur in ethnomusicology,¹⁰ if not exclusively so,¹¹

Islam, ed. H. A. R. Gibb and H. J. Kramers (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 493–95; and J. R. Bowen, "Salat in Indonesia—the Social Meanings of an Islamic Ritual," *Man* 24/4 (1989): 600–619.

⁹ John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 140; and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 85.

¹⁰ See Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*; Anne K. Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Earle H. Waugh, *Memory, Music, and Religion: Morocco's Mystical Chanters* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005); Earle H. Waugh, *The Munshidin of Egypt: Their World and Their Song*, *Studies in Comparative Religion* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Regula Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context, and Meaning in Qawwali* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Michael Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (London: Ashgate, 2009).

¹¹ See Frederick M. Denny, *Islamic Ritual: Perspectives, Theories*, ed. Richard C. Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985); and William A. Graham, "Islam in the Mirror of Ritual," in *Islamic*

though this literature is comparatively small, and music studies has tended to neglect phenomena for which an aesthetic dimension is not primary. The language performance phenomenon thus falls between disciplinary cracks. Equally important, most studies do not take up the role of language performance in Islamic ritual as a *whole*.

What is “ritual” in Islam? This English word, like “song” a foreign one for most Muslims, corresponds to multiple terms in Arabic, Islam’s sacred language, all rough equivalents or subtypes but none identical in semantic scope. Some identify specific ritual phenomena by text, theme, purpose, occasion, or mode of performance, while others are broader; some are complete rituals, others ritual elements.

Thus: *ibāda* (worship); *ṭuqūs* (rite, ritual); *dhikr* (remembrance of God generally, including short phrases [*adhkār*] used in prayer as well as daily life); *ṣalāh* (canonical prayer—often *namāz* outside the Arab world—comprising movement sequences [*raka‘āt*] accompanied by Qur’anic recitations and *adhkār*), daily supererogatory prayers of the same type (e.g., sunna prayers preceding or following the canonical ones; *tahajjud* at night), and special prayers (e.g., *tarāwīḥ* in Ramadan, Eid prayers, funeral prayers); *adhān* and *iqāma* (calls to prayer); *tilāwa*, *qirā’a*, *tajwīd*, *tartīl* (Qur’anic recitation); *khuṭba* (Friday sermon, typically incorporating *adhkār* and *tilāwa*); *du‘ā* (plural, *ad‘iyya*), *tawassul*, *ibtihāl* (supplication); *istighfār* (request for forgiveness); *ṣalawāt* (requests for blessings on the Prophet); hajj and *‘umra* (pilgrimage to Mecca); *manāsik* (ceremonies, rituals, especially for pilgrimage); *takbīr*, *tasbīḥ*, *taḥmīd* (praise of

God); *madīḥ*, *na‘t* (praise of the Prophet or saints); *inshād dīnī* or *anāshīd dīniyya* (poetic religious hymnody); *mawlid* (celebration of Prophet’s or saints’ birthdays); *ḥaḍra*, *dhikr*, *wird*, *ḥizb*, *manzūma* (components of Sufi ritual).¹²

These named ritual practices themselves exhibit a certain degree of intersection, ambiguity, and inclusion (thus *ṣalāh* contains *du‘ā*, *tartīl*, and *adhkār*; *du‘ā* includes the more specific supplications’ *ṣalawāt* and *istighfār*); their names, unruly overlaps, intertextual connections, and ambiguous definitions condense multiple factors of history, language, region, use, meaning, and function, rather than presenting a logical framework for analysis. Each culturally specific constellation reflects an emic ontology of inherent interest, yet without precluding use of the broader, if etic, term “ritual” as a means of illuminating relationships among multiple types, highlighting what they share, and how they differ.

Islamic Ritual Centers on Sacred Language: Performance of an Intertext

Each of the aforementioned ritual types centers on language performance, featuring wide paralinguistic variation. Certainly Islamic ritual includes more than language. There are sacred movements (*rukū‘* and *sujūd*, bowing and prostrating of ordinary prayer; *ṭawāf* or circumambulation of the Ka‘ba); there are sacred times (daily prayers, weekly *jum‘a* (Friday) prayer, midmonthly “white days” (*ayyām al-bayḍ*), the annual hajj, the two Eids, birthdays of Prophet and saints), and sites (the

and *Comparative Religious Studies: Selected Writings* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 87–103.

¹² For an exhaustive enumeration and explication of these forms, see Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer-Manuals in Common Use* (London: SPCK, 1961).

mosques at Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem), and a sacred direction (toward the Ka‘ba).

But accompanying every such action, at the spiritual core of every ritual, is the vocalized word (*kalima*)—a performed text and a hearing, a means of remembrance through *dhikr*—a word itself significantly combining dual meanings of “remembrance” and “mention”—affirming and restoring one’s connection to God. In particular, every ritual act is validated by a verbal *niyya* (intention), and even ostensibly nonlinguistic rituals (fasting, circumambulating) are accompanied by *ad‘iyya*, *adhkār*, *ṣalāh*, and other verbalizations.

Islam is relatively flexible in its ritual conditions. Generally, one can pray anywhere and anytime; anyone may serve as prayer leader (imam); no special paraphernalia are required. While ornate mosques, beautiful prayer rugs, exquisite prayer beads, professional reciters and imams may be deployed, they are unnecessary; Islamic prayer requires no special architecture, equipment, or clergy. Even the sequence of body postures (*rak‘a*)—standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting—comprising the *ṣalāh* prayer cycle is not absolutely required; movements can be reduced to gestures or “intentions of gestures,”¹³ as circumstances require. The traveling, aged, or infirm are permitted to sit in a chair or even to lie down. But vocalized language is indispensable, the unified core of ritual.

Why? Because Islam itself centers on language. Theologically prior to all other ritual is a “word,” *kalimat al-tawhīd*, or “word of unity”: *la ilāha illā Allāh*—nothing is to be worshipped except God, often reduced, for the Sufi, to a single syllable of pure aspiration, *hu* (He).

¹³ Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman Altamira, 2003), 400.

The uttered word is so central in Islam that it defines a relation to God in both directions—Divine revelation of the Word mundanely repeated by humankind in prayer, echoing word from Word. And Word is transmitted through vocalization and hearing more than seeing. Indeed, throughout the Qur’an (literally, “recitation”), God is *al-Samī‘*—the All-Hearing, a name nearly always followed by *al-‘Alīm*—the All-Knowing, for knowledge is through hearing, expressed in word:

The word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice. No one can change His words: He is the All Hearing, the All Knowing. (Q6:115)¹⁴

As Abraham and Ishmael built up the foundations of the House¹⁵ [they prayed], ‘Our Lord, accept [this] from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing.’ (Q2:127)¹⁶

Every bodily action of Islamic ritual constitutes a form whose meaning is expressed in sanctified linguistic utterances. Two of the most frequent ritual acts—supplicatory prayer (*du‘ā*) and Qur’anic recitation (*tilāwa*)—are entirely verbal. Furthermore, ritual texts are all intertextually connected via quotation, inclusion, or theme, forming a single coherent intertext.

The centrality of language performance is not surprising considering that the entire religion

¹⁴ In this article, references to the Qur’an are marked QX:Y, where X is the chapter (sura) and Y is the verse (*āya*). Translations are from M. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ The Ka‘ba at Mecca.

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that God is named “All-Hearing” in the Qur’an 41 times; of these, 31 deploy the combination *al-Samī‘* and *al-‘Alīm* (All-Hearing, All-Knowing). He is named as All-Seeing (*al-Baṣīr*) 12 times; the word is often coupled with *al-Samī‘* but never with *al-‘Alīm* (Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur’an* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983]). Perhaps Qur’anic knowledge inheres in hearing more than seeing (contrast, in English: “I see that” vs. “I hear that”).

is founded on two key sacred compilations of utterance, emanating from Islam's two central figures, God (Allah) and His messenger (*rasūluh*), Prophet Muhammad.¹⁷ Respectively, these are: (1) the Qur'an ("recitation"), God's Speech (*kalām Allāh*), delivered through the archangel Jabril (Gabriel) to Muhammad, beginning with the command "recite!" (*iqra'*; Q96:1); and (2) Hadith ("conversation"), précis of the Prophet's speech and action as recounted by companions and passed down, the basis for sunna (prophetic custom) shaping all ritual practices. Further, these utterances are so closely identified with their utterers that they stand for the sacred figures themselves.

According to the dominant Ash'ari theology, the Qur'an is not a book of God's creation, a mere message (*risāla*) to Muhammad. Rather, the Qur'an is an uncreated Attribute of God Himself, His Speech and Knowledge, after its "heavenly archetype" (*al-lahw al-mahfūz*, the Preserved Tablet).¹⁸ God is the Word, identified with the Qur'an's 99 Names (*asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*) referencing His attributes and by which the Qur'an asks that He be called (Q7:180; Sufis use several of these Names—particularly: *hu*, *ḥayy*, *qayyūm*, *quddūs*—to remember, name, and evoke Him in *dhikr*).

¹⁷ These are further affirmed in the *shahāda*, verbal testimony of Faith. The illocutionary *shahāda*, recited to newborn infants and at every prayer (*ṣalāh*), also suffices for conversion: "*ashhadu an lā ilāha illā Allāh wa ashhadu an Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasūluh* (I testify that only God is to be worshipped, and I testify that Muhammad is his servant and messenger). On "illocutionary," see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹⁸ A. T. Welch, R. Paret, and J. D. Pearson, "al-Kur'ān," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, <http://dx.doi.org/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0543> (accessed March 25, 2018).

God is infinite Spoken Word, that is, Language performed, which can never be written down in its entirety, a message the Qur'an instructs the Prophet to deliver to mankind:

Say [Prophet], "If the whole ocean were ink for writing the words of my Lord, it would run dry before those words were exhausted"—even if We were to add another ocean to it. (Q18:109)

God's power of creation inheres in His spoken word, the simple imperative "Be!":

He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only, "Be," and it is. (Q2:117)

Likewise, the Prophet is analogized to sacred language performed, a messenger (*rasūl*) receiving and carrying a revelatory message (*risāla*), orally impressed not only on his memory but on his very being. He thereby becomes, for many Muslims, a living Qur'an.¹⁹

Mystical interpretations of Revelation uphold the Prophet's illiteracy as a touchstone of Qur'anic authenticity, a metaphorical "virginity" whose miraculous relation to the Qur'an revealed into him is analogous to the virgin birth of Jesus through Mary. The illiterate Prophet was like a blank tablet upon which the oral Qur'an could be impressed—via recitation—without distortion, a pure matrix for the Divine Word that shaped him.²⁰ In a famous hadith, Sayyida Aisha (one of the Prophet's wives), asked about the Prophet's character, replied: "his

¹⁹ Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*, 11.

²⁰ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 218; and Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 84.

character was the Qur'an" (*kāna khuluquh al-Qur'ān*).²¹

Likewise, the Qur'an absorbs the Prophet, frequently addressing him in the second person (e.g., Q47:16), praising him (Q33:21), and calling for his blessing (Q33:56).

The Qur'an is an essentially oral, intangible text—language performed—its writing subsidiary. This status is underscored by its name (Qur'an, "recitation"), by the distinction between Qur'an and *mushaf* (its written representation), and by Hadith. According to the latter, Jabril taught the Prophet to recite Qur'an; God loves to hear the Prophet recite it; the Prophet loved to hear it recited; he praised those who recite with beautiful voices; he called for all to recite and receive spiritual rewards;²² indeed, the Qur'an calls for its own recitation (Q73:4).

But the embodiment of performed language is not limited to the Prophet, since his sunna is commended to all. The *hāfiẓ* (memorizer) has committed the recitational Book to memory, a stupendous feat not infrequently achieved in childhood. To perform ordinary prayer (*ṣalāh*), one must internalize language, including requisite *adhkār* (e.g., *takbīr*, *tasmī'*, *tashahhud*, *shahāda*) and at least two Qur'anic verses (the *Fātiḥa* and another). Many *ad'iyya*, as well as other prayers (e.g., Sufi *ḥizb*), are composed of elements extracted primarily from the Qur'an, some of whose verses are themselves often recited as *ad'iyya* (e.g., Q2:127, itself referencing recitation, partially quoted above, and

Q2:286: "Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes . . .").

Beyond content, language also serves to prescribe performance through discursive specifications of structure, timing, sequencing, and pronunciation. Prescriptions appear in the Qur'an as exhortations (e.g., Q33:41: *Ya ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū udhkurū Allāha dhikran kathīran*, "Believers, remember God often" to perform *dhikr*; Q33:56: *inna Allāha wa malā'ikatahu yuṣallūna 'alā al-nabī, ya ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū ṣallū 'alayhi wa sallimū taslīma*, "God and His angels bless the Prophet—oh you who believe, bless him and give him greetings of peace" to perform *ṣalawāt*; Q73:4: *rattal al-Qur'ān tartīlan* to recite Qur'an). The Qur'an recommends *du'ā'* as the principal form of worship (Q40:60).

Then there is that other great compendium of utterances, Hadith ("narrative," "talk," "conversation"), describing the Prophet's words and deeds, each introduced by a validating chain (*isnād*) of quoted speech, itself a form of language performance (e.g.: "X said that 'I heard Y say that 'I heard Z say that the Prophet said . . .'""). Thus filtered through the Community (Umma), Hadith is crucial to Qur'anic interpretation, and constitutive of religious ritual. Both the call to prayer—*adhān* ("announcement," cf. Qur'an 9:3)—and prayer itself are linked thematically, textually, and prescriptively to the Qur'an, but details come from Hadith (Bukhari's *Sahīh* contains whole sections devoted to each type of *'ibādāt*.²³ The Prophet lives through Hadith: a corpus by which all Muslims have come to know and love him, one that is incessantly quoted aloud, which assumes his stature and becomes his presence.

²¹ Ibid., 57–58.

²² Bukhari, and Muslim, *English Translation Hadith of Sahih Bukhari and Muslim: English–Arabic* (Birmingham, UK: Dar as-Sunnah, 2016): Bukhari 4991, 4998, 5023, 5049; Muslim 1845, 1851, 1856, 1862, 1867, 1872, 1874.

²³ Ibid.: *ṣalāh* in chaps. 8, 9, 10; *adhān* in chap. 11.

Ritual practices traced to the Qur'an and Hadith are often interpreted and represented through specialized books, for instance as formulated in explanations of *ṣalāh*,²⁴ *aḥkām al-tajwīd*, rules of reciting the Qur'an,²⁵ and *manāsik al-ḥajj* (hajj rituals).²⁶ There are collections of *ṣalawāt* (blessings for the Prophet), most famously the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* of Muhammad Jazuli,²⁷ for recitation. There are poems of wide currency—perhaps the “Burda” of Busiri²⁸ is most celebrated, and texts to be chanted for the *Mawlid al-Nabi* (especially Barzanji)²⁹—varying in usage from regional to global. There are likewise extensive recitational traditions for each Sufi order (*ṭarīqa*)—especially the group litany (*ḥizb* or *wird*), rhymed blessings for the Prophet (*ṣalawāt*), and special poetry collections (*dawāwīn*), often composed by a founder.³⁰

²⁴ Sa'īd Qahtani, *Salat Al-Mu'min: Mafhum, wa-Fada'il, wa-Adab, wa-Anwa', wa-Ahkam, wa-Kayfiyah fi Daw' al-Kitab wa-l-Sunna*. ([Riyadh]: Mu'assasat al-Juraysi li-l-Tawzi' wa-l-I'lan, 2003).

²⁵ Su'ad Husayn al-Qala'i, *Tabsit Ahkam Tilawat al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Cairo: Dar Gharib li-l-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', 2002); Muhammad Mahmud 'Abd Allah, *Kayfa Taqra' al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktabat Ma'ruf, n.d.); and Abu Idris Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Fattah, *Ilm al-Tilawa* (Cairo: Dar al-'Aqida, 2001).

²⁶ Muhammad Albani, *Manasik al-Hajj wal-'Umrah fi al-Kitab wa-l-Sunna wa Athar al-Salaf*, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 1995).

²⁷ Muhammad ibn Sulayman Jazuli, J. B. Pearson, and Alexander George Ellis, *Guide to Happiness: A Manual of Prayer* (Oxford: privately printed, 1907).

²⁸ Sharaf al-Din Muhammad ibn Sa'id Busiri, *The Mantle Adorned: Imam Al-Būshirī's Burda* (London: Quilliam Press, 2009).

²⁹ Barzanji, *Mawlid al-Barzanji*. Damascus: Matbu'at Maktabat Muhammad al-Mahayini.

³⁰ E.g., Shaykh Salih al-Ja'fari, for the *ṭarīqa* that bears his name: Salih Ja'fari, *Kanz al-Nafahat al-Ja'fariyya*. (Cairo: Dar Jawami' al-Kalim; 1993). Salih Ja'fari, *Diwan Al-Ja'fari* (Cairo: Dar Jawami' al-Kalim, 1996).

Some genres exhibit more linguistic flexibility than others. Thus, the private *du'ā'* is a potentially free-form “intimate conversation” (*munājāh*) with God. In public the *du'ā'* is performed by an imam who permutes standard verbal formulae but may also add his own; famous *dā'īs* (public supplicators) thereby fashion a highly emotive personal style, enhanced by use of melodic sequences and emotive expressions; when performed congregationally, these engage a large number of people through collective responses, such as *āmīn*.

But even the relatively rule-bound congregational obligatory prayer (*ṣalāh*) exhibits some linguistic flexibility, since selection of Qur'an verses following the opening *al-Fātiha* is at the imam's discretion.

All the many forms of Islamic worship and devotion are linked through these texts—whether serving to direct ritual, supply its textual content, or underscore its authority and legitimacy—themselves linked in a larger intertextual network. To appreciate the breadth and scope of that intertext, however, requires a broad view of Islamic ritual as centered on language performance.

Language and Ramification: Sound over Text

If Islamic ritual centers on language performance, how are its processes to be studied ethnographically? What makes such study rewarding is a deeper understanding of adaptive ramification, and the sociocultural meanings thereby disseminated through ritual performance.

Textual sanctity means that linguistic aspects are relatively fixed, while non-referential para-

linguistic aspects are relatively free. The possibility of fixity also rests on semiotics. The underlying language of ritual—spiritually charged chains of discrete signifiers and signifieds paired in semantic reference—can be disseminated over space and transmitted over time with comparatively little modification. Even in oral tradition, variation is constrained by this linkage of form and meaning, and by material inscriptions: discrete graphemes, inked on paper or chiseled in wood and stone.

While paradigmatic linguistic sequences admit a degree of permutational flexibility in performance, it is in their freer paralinguistic aspects—continuous, temporal, resisting linguistic specification, and nonreferential—that primary adaptive processes operate. Here is where one can analyze ritual dynamism as it unfolds in relation to culture at large, and where one can read the signs of localization most clearly.

In the case of the originary texts, ramification is most limited and has long since halted. At one extreme is the Qur'an itself, a chain of signifiers, transmitted unchanged. The Qur'an was revealed in seven *ahruf*. Muslim scholars understand the purpose of this Divine ramification as addressing the multiple dialects of Arabic then current.³¹ The Qur'an was then compiled as a single written text, the Uthmanic *mushaf*, after a standardization entailing the summary pruning of an increasingly ramified text.³² Supplemented with diacritical marks, the *mushaf* evolved into representations of the ten

basic *qirā'āt* (readings).³³ These are absolutely fixed today.

Likewise, multiple collections of hadith were compiled, standardized, and written in the centuries after the life of the Prophet, mainly the seven canonical (*ṣaḥīḥ*) collections. Traditions of Islamic law also ramified early on as they were compiled, written, and transmitted, resulting, for instance, in the four “schools” (*madhāhib*) of Sunni law, and one predominant school (*Ja'fari*) for the Shi'a, but again the ramification process has halted today.

The language of the call to prayer (*adhān*) evolved slightly differently in Sunni and Shi'a contexts, but change has likewise ceased.³⁴ More flexible are *du'ā* and *khuṭba*, exemplifying recombinant elements, and new Sufi orders continue to develop textual materials (*hizb*, *wird*) out of such elements as well. At the other extreme of textual ramification are the myriad poetic expressions, faithfully replicating core themes (love for the Prophet, for instance),³⁵ but everywhere formulated in locally meaningful language and metaphor.

Supported by a perception of sacrality, alongside writing, oral texts can even migrate beyond the borders of comprehension without change; the Qur'an—always in Arabic and never translated as a sacred text—is the preeminent example, but poems like the “Burda” are also performed, verbatim, throughout the Muslim world in the original Arabic by those who do not understand the language.

Thus the linguistic content of Islamic ritual exhibits a limited degree of ramification, less responsive to the shifting sociocultural environ-

³¹ “Sahih Tirmidhi,” in *Hadith Encyclopedia* (CD-ROM) (Cairo: Harf, 2000), #2867; Labib al-Sa'id, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1975), 22.

³² al-Sa'id, *The Recited Koran*, 24–25.

³³ Ibid., 53.

³⁴ Juynboll, “Adhan.” A telling exception was republican Turkey's adaptation of Islamic ritual to Turkish nationalism; see below.

³⁵ See Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*.

ments of its users, less readable by the scholar as indicative or transformative of local conditions, mainly completed early in Islamic history. The reverse is the case for paralinguistic features of ritual performance, which remain open to adaptive ramification to the present day.

Paralinguistic Performance

Vocal performance—rendering in sound, especially paralinguistic sound beyond basic phonetic articulations—is as important as the text itself. What is the underlying text, in any case? Not the fixity of words on the page (especially for oral traditions), and not their rendering as evanescent sounds, but something metaphysical (captured in Islamic cosmology by the notion of the *Lawh al-Mahfūz*, the Preserved Tablet), perceptible only through inscription in the visual field, or recitation in the aural.

But whereas inscription is a largely technical act performed by small numbers of skilled, literate Muslims, vocal performance is a ritual act performed by all, as well as a social act of communication and transmission. To perform the text is to perform the ritual, to share and teach, to pass down. Instances of language performance are acts of worship, and they lie at the core of ritual, whether the *talbiya* or *ad'iyya* recited during hajj, the *dhikr* chanting of the Sufi *ḥadra*, the call to prayer, or recitation of the Qur'an itself. Language performance, then, is the text's primary mode of being, and accounts for its efficacy in ritual.

While some textual variation—more often, selection—is often possible, the centrality and authority of Islamic ritual language imply that scope for variation lies primarily in paralinguistic features only vaguely and incompletely regulated by texts providing linguistic content (e.g., Qur'an) or performative rules (e.g., *aḥkām al-tajwīd*). Texts under-

determine performance, resulting in “free variables” shaped by the ritual environment.³⁶ The gap between “language” and “performance” is filled with sound. And it is paralinguistic sound, exceeding the bare phonetic requirements of linguistic communication, that exhibits the greatest degree of variability.

Generally, *discrete* texts are incapable of precisely specifying the myriad *continuous* variables of paralinguistic variation, including parameters of timbre (vocal sound quality), temporality (speed, pulse, accent), tonality (pitch sets, pitch functions, and melodic tendencies), ornament (tonal microstructure), melody (pitch sequence rules), and texture (the ways multiple voices combine). Textual specification of pitch and rhythm is especially difficult in Islamic ritual, which features ornamented, melismatic nonmetric vocalizations. But in Islamic practice, textual underspecification is also functional, reflecting the discursive centrality of textual content, alongside the spiritual importance of individual emotional engagement enabled through paralinguistic localization. Socially, such affective localization has facilitated Islam's globalization, as language performance, carrying similar texts, adapts and develops affective power in each locale.

How does this happen? Sound is powerful because it is social and affective; that power is intensified through feedback. During performance, participants may vocally express internal affective states to principal performers, who respond by adjusting paralinguistic variables so as to intensify impact, a cybernetic loop culmin-

³⁶ See Michael Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt,” in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (London: Ashgate, 2009).

ating in what I have termed “resonance.”³⁷ Over time, resonant feedback leads to the emergence of local performative styles, each characterized by particular configurations of paralinguistic variables, adapted to their ritual environment, but without affecting discursive meaning. Throughout a range of paralinguistic recitational styles, the call to prayer (*adhān*), a Qur’anic verse (*āya*), or a supplication (*du‘ā*) each expresses the same referential meanings.

Thus paralinguistic variables adapt and ramify for at least three reasons. *First*, because they are unconstrained by requirements of reference (whether of truth or request); *second*, because texts underdetermine them; *third*, because they powerfully express, shape, and unify emotion, amplifying collective ritual power through resonance.

Both linguistic and paralinguistic variation is evident, for instance, in congregational *du‘ā*. The leader (*dā‘ī*) may select from a wide range of possible texts or even compose his own in response to the performative situation.

Meanwhile, paralinguistic sound may be both highly melodic and strongly affective via emotional modulation of vocal timbre. During Ramadan, the month commemorating Revelation and marked by extensive Qur’anic recitations, a long call-response *du‘ā*—known as *qunūt*³⁸—marking the final *rak‘a* (the so-called *witr*, “odd”) of supererogatory night prayer (*tarāwīḥ*) generates tremendous emotion, especially during the Night of Power (*Laylat al-*

Qadr)³⁹ when the Qur’an was first revealed. At this time the *dā‘ī*’s voice cracks as he is overcome with emotion, which quickly spreads, amplified by feedback loops. At times the ritual pauses in mass weeping as all face the reality of death, resurrection, and judgment.

While oral tradition may guide and constrain the paralinguistic domain—for example, the use of Arabic *maqāmāt* (heptatonic melodic modes) for many recitations—this is a matter of convention, not doctrine, and pentatonic modes also appear in Africa, or Indonesia. Provided comprehension is unaffected, manipulation of these free variables does not directly impact denotative meaning but only its affective halo (though connotative ideological meanings may also accrue). Such variables thus adapt to concentric circles of performance, social, and ideological context, particularly when performance enables formation of feedback loops (e.g., in responsorial settings).

Indeed, it is precisely via its non-discursive power that such paralinguistic sound, flying under the radar of reference, is emotionally empowered by its very unintelligibility, enjoying a freedom the text itself does not possess, and thereby encoding powerful, if inarticulate, meanings through expression or general association with ideological positions.

This freedom is even supported by Islamic doctrines affirming authentic expression, on the one hand, and the stature of the word, especially the Word of God in the Qur’an, on the other. Recitation should directly express the reciter’s true feeling in response to the Word; to set such a word to a fixed melody would be to challenge the Word’s sanctity. Thus improvisation is en-

³⁷ See Michael Frishkopf, “Venerating Cairo’s Saints through Monument and Ritual: Islamic Reform and the Rise of the Architext,” in *Music, Sound, and Architecture in Islam*, ed. Michael Frishkopf and Federico Spinetti (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 111–45.

³⁸ Literally meaning “standing in obedience to God,” the *qunūt* may extend to an hour or more.

³⁹ *Laylat al-Qadr*, traditionally thought to be an odd-numbered night in the last third of Ramadan, is conventionally celebrated on the 27th of that month.

shrined as the ideal mode of delivery.⁴⁰ Indeed, whereas Western church music is characterized by the development of increasingly accurate melodic specifications, such specifications are almost entirely absent in the Islamic tradition.

All these factors meant that each performance could adapt to its circumstances, so long as intelligibility of the word was maintained. Over time, with ramification, entirely distinct traditions could arise and even acquire meaning in juxtaposition. For example, while the Qur'an is one, its recitations are many, varying not just by individual reciter or occasion, but more broadly by culture area, social class, or religious ideology. These differences may begin as random fluctuations or absorptions of local culture leading to ramification. History has not recorded the process, but one can imagine, for instance, Islam entering West Africa via Arabic-speaking traders; they would have recited Qur'an, and local residents would have repeated, modulated by local sonic sensibilities. The Qur'an would have been learned verbatim, while poetic texts could be translated into Hausa or Wolof or imitated in those languages without altering their essential meanings, but deploying local musical aesthetics. Gradually there evolved a West African "sound" without altering the core Islamic message: worship of One God. In Niger today local sonic models are anhemitonic pentatonic (see below).

Likewise, the Qur'an as well as *adhān* have been recited using hemitonic pentatonic Javanese melodies in Java. In Saudi Arabia public recitation occurs in prayer, and not as an independent listening practice (as in Egypt), and a simpler recitational style thus prevails, reinforced also by ideology.

⁴⁰ See Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an*, 179, 187.

Travel and globalization have led to new sonic configurations and meanings, and sonic differences may align with religious ideology as well. In Egypt, Saudi Arabia's less melodic style now signals a growing suspicion that traditional Egyptian recitations are excessively musical, thus marking and disseminating a more conservative Islam.⁴¹ In Java today reciters follow Egyptian sonic models due to Egypt's long-standing global religious and (more recent) media centrality, as traditional Javanese melodies recede; a hadith has been cited to justify this practice: "recite using melodies of the Arabs."⁴²

In past centuries, the absence of paralinguistic specification, far from a lack, turned out to be an enormous strength of the Islamic ritual tradition, enabling the affective empowerment of essential discursive messaging—carried by texts' linguistic aspects—through the adaptation of paralinguistic parameters to local sonic performance traditions, thereby generating affective significance and social solidarity around texts' discursive meanings.

In this way, Islam globalized through—not despite—localization, generating a ramified structure. In every locale, newly converted Muslims could absorb paradigmatic linguistic traditions into familiar sonic milieus through paralinguistic adaptations, without disturbing the linguistic texts or meanings themselves, blending seamlessly with the "sound world" located at the core of social life.

⁴¹ See Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt."

⁴² Mahmud Khalil al-Husari, *Ahkam Qira'at al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Turath al-Islami, 1965), 114–15; Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 75–78, 85, 87, 112; and Hajjah Maria Ulfah, personal communication, SEM 2016.

But today globalization and conservative or reformist Islamic ideologies, diffusing particular performance styles as more legitimate and demanding conformity, are altering this calculus, enabling ideologies to sediment more readily atop paralinguistic styles, and intersecting flows may induce conflict between different ramified ritual practices.⁴³

The Range of Adaptive Ramification: *Adhān*, *Tilāwa*, *Du‘ā*

I turn now to consider ramification in three genres of Islamic language performance. I begin with the genre probably most familiar to non-Muslims and Muslims alike: the call to prayer or *adhān* (azan), recited prior to each of the five daily prayers.

As usual, the form as well as its name are linked to sound. The word *adhān*, cognate with “ear” (*udhn*), “to listen” (*adhina*), and “to exhort, call, or announce” (*a’dhana*), also links to an architectural cognate, the *mi’dhana* or minaret, and linguistic embodiment in the *mu’adhdhin* (muezzin) or caller to prayer. All of these meanings point centrally to the process of listening to an exhortation: the call to come and pray, at home or in the mosque (implicitly that from which the call originates).

The text combines fundamental affirmations of Islam and being Muslim with the literal call to come and pray. The former centers on the *shahāda* or proclamation of faith, most centrally *tawhīd* (monotheism): “God is greater [than anything]; I testify that there is nothing to be

worshipped but God; I testify that Muhammad is His messenger.” The remainder is the actual call—“come to pray, come to salvation.” The *adhān* is quietly responsorial and thus binds the community together through sound: Muslims who hear it should respond by repeating each line, except that after “come to pray, come to salvation” they respond with the *hawqala* (*lā hawla walā quwwata illā billāh*: “there is no might or power except in God”).

While the *adhān* is for the most part a fixed text, some minor ramifications have occurred reflecting adaptations to time, place, and ideology. First, at dawn an extra formula is inserted: “prayer is better than sleep” (*tathwīb*). Second, unlike other Sunnis, the Malikites (one of four schools of Sunni law) repeat the first line, *Allāhu akbar*, only twice⁴⁴ (though arguably all repeat it twice—the difference is only that the Malikites have shortened the line to one *Allāhu akbar*), and there are various other minor differences in repeat counts according to school. Third, Shi’a communities have adapted the affirmation of faith to their theology, inserting *‘Ali walī Allāh* (Ali is close to God) and *‘Ali hujjat Allāh* (Ali is proof of God) as well as *hayy ‘alā khayr al-‘amal* (come to the best of works). Public pronouncement of these words stands implicitly as a proclamation of a Shi’a government, and Shi’a typically repeat the final formula twice.

Fourth, though today *adhān* is always performed in Arabic, the Turks experimented—for a relatively brief period (1932 to 1950)—with a Turkish version, responding to local nationalism while maintaining the meaning.⁴⁵ Fifth, many

⁴³ See Michael Frishkopf, “Venerating Cairo’s Saints through Monument and Ritual”; and “Muslims, Music, and Religious Tolerance in Egypt and Ghana: A Comparative Perspective on Difference,” in *Islam and Popular Culture*, ed. Karin van Nieuwkerk, Mark LeVine, and Martin Stokes (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 325–48.

⁴⁴ See Juynboll, “Adhan.” Hear “Maliki Adhan,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCC7s7_58Ac.

⁴⁵ The ban (violators incurred stiff punishments) on the Arabic *adhān* was lifted in 1950. Hear “Adhan at turkish (old times),” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUIGLy1L3x4>.

Muslims, especially those of a more mystical persuasion, consider that after reciting the core text, embellishment with *ṣalawāt* (blessings for the Prophet) is meritorious. Sixth, the *iqāma* (standing), a special abbreviated form (more speechlike, and lacking repeats), responds to context: whereas the initial call is directed externally to the community, the *iqāma* is directed to congregants already gathered inside the mosque, signaling that they should stand for prayer behind the imam. Thus the range of textual ramification is limited, but even this limited scope demonstrates how language adapts to varied environments—political, theological, or practical.

In performance, however, the range is far broader, through paralinguistic variants. Indeed, a closer inspection reveals that even in its textual sequencing the *adhān* is designed for such elaboration, facilitating localization. Each phrase (counting *Allāhu akbar*, *Allāhu akbar* as a single phrase) repeats twice. While not specified, this repetition is almost universally interpreted as a license to elaborate on the second repeat via more extensive melismas.

While it is generally understood that the first *mu'adhdhin*, Bilal, was selected for his beautiful voice, there is of course no record whatsoever of his performance, and the vocal timbres, rhythms, and melodies used to perform the *adhān* are nowhere specified in textual sources. As a result, the *adhān* has adaptively ramified in multiple directions and can be performed in many different ways—by a single performer at different times (responding to personal feeling or circumstance); by different performers in the same culture (reflecting individual aesthetics); or in different places (reflecting local sonic culture or religious ideology).

The *adhān* defines a ritual paradigm; multiple instances should be considered together

as an integral whole in the comparative analysis of performance as a means of understanding Muslim cultures. But the range of instances crisscrosses the line ostensibly separating “song” and “speech,” sometimes even straying into what might be more likely to be described as a “shout.”

I have selected the *adhān*’s final fixed phrase (*Allāhu akbar Allāhu akbar, lā ilāha illā Allāh*) as the basis for paradigmatic comparisons, illustrating individual and cultural variation. Shaykh Muhammad al-Hilbawī, a famous Egyptian *qārī*’ and muezzin, told me he could perform the *adhān* in any *maqām*, according to his mood.⁴⁶ But his most common Egyptian models were in *Hijāz* and *Rāst* (see Figs. 1 and 2).⁴⁷ His traditional Egyptian style, nearly indistinguishable from singing, has prevailed across much of the globe thanks to Egypt’s religious and media centrality. In contrast are localized versions, such as an example from Sudan featuring a pentatonic melody and a wide (notated) vibrato (Fig. 3). In Sanaa (Yemen), the *adhān* is frequently performed as a kind of intoned shout (which cannot be entirely conveyed by the notation of Fig. 4), which some claim as an expression of an injunction against melodic calls.

⁴⁶ Likewise, the celebrated Syrian reciter Sabri al-Moudallal also attributed choice of melodic mode to his mood (Shannon 2006, 188)

⁴⁷ These two examples are drawn from a previously published chapter: Michael Frishkopf, “Music,” in *The Islamic World*, ed. Andrew Rippin (London: Routledge, 2008).

Figure 1: Shaykh Muhammed al-Hilbawi, a famous Egyptian reciter, performs the *adhān* in *maqām Ḥijāz*, probably its most common melodic mode in Egypt and elsewhere.

Figure 2: Shaykh al-Hilbawy performs the *adhān* in *maqām Rāst*, another common mode for *adhān*.

Figure 3: A pentatonic, high-vibrato ornamented *adhān* from Sudan.

Figure 4: *Adhān* from Sanaa, Yemen: an intoned shout.

All is not localization, and mass media generate broader and more unpredictable paths of dissemination, but processes of ramification continue—only now they are not constrained to slowly trace geographical lines as they often did in the past, and sometimes there are convergences. Modern transport and recordings have ensured that Islamic centers—notably Mecca and Cairo—exert global force. Today one hears a call in the Egyptian style in Indonesia or the Meccan style in India because these have been established as powerful sonic models. In fact, it is conceivable that a new form of standardization is emerging with the advent of recordings, but as the *adhān* is nonmetric, it seems likely that a measure of improvisation will continue to prevail.

From a Muslim perspective, the text and sound immediately convey the message: *adhān*, time to pray. From the non-Muslim perspective of someone unaccustomed to the *adhān*, various words might be used to describe these performances: “singing,” “chanting,” “speaking,” even “shouting”; singing might be further subdivided stylistically, “in the Egyptian style,” “Sudanese style,” “Javanese style.” Emic perspectives may take up some of these distinctions and even criticize certain subtypes—“too melodic” or “too Javanese.” But the *adhān* is a unified paradigm of language performance, one that is arbitrarily split by deploying such words, precluding a holistic treatment with the capacity to illuminate Islam’s history, and sociological reality today.

A similar variety appears in *tilāwa*, Qur’anic recitation.⁴⁸ Here I invoke a paradigm generated by a line of text of Surat Yusuf, one verse from the story of Joseph (Q12:4) containing exactly 43 syllables: *idh-qaa-la-yuu-su-fu-li-a-bii-hi-yaa-a-ba-ti-in-ni-ra-ay-tu-a-ḥa-da-‘a-sha-ra-kaw-ka-ban-wash-sham-sa-wal-qa-ma-ra-ra-ay-tu-hum-liy-saa-ji-diin* (Joseph said to his father, “Father, I dreamed of eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them all bow down before me.”)

Certain paralinguistic variables are constrained by *ahkām al-tajwīd* (e.g., pause points), but the majority are free.⁴⁹ Figures 5–7 illustrate three ways of reciting the same text, all appearing in Egypt today via recordings, each representing an entire ramified style. Two are by the famous Egyptian reciter Shaykh Mustafa Isma‘il, renowned for recitations expressing Egyptian musicality. They differ as adapted to distinctive contexts: the *mujawwad* (closer to “song,” slower, modulating through *maqāmāt*) is used for listening sessions in the mosque and funerals (*ma’ātim*), while the *murattal* (closer to “chant,” faster, remaining in just one *maqām* without repeats) is used by the imam in prayer, and for individual study.

Mujawwad recitation, featuring repetitions responding to listener feedback, has clearly been shaped by informal listening sessions, in which assembled listeners call out their appreciation of each phrase, driving the recitation style toward

⁴⁸ The first three Qur’an examples are drawn from a previously published paper: Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt.”

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 77–80.

resonance. This process has been insightfully explored by Kristina Nelson.⁵⁰

The third is by the Saudi reciter Shaykh Ahmad al-‘Ajmi in a Saudi style resembling *murattal* in some respects, but more rapid, in an ethos of sorrowful chanting (the weeping vocal timbre is impossible to represent in the notation) far from the musical dimensions of Egyptian chant, which instantiates the central musical aesthetic of *tarab* (ecstasy). Nothing could be farther from the Saudi sound. This ideological disconnection from music is made explicit in one of his public statements:

If you recite for anything other than God—for impermanent worldly things, reputation, or fame—then God will hold you accountable and will ask you: for what did you recite? And you answer: I recited it for you. And He responds: you recited so that it might be said that you are a reciter, and indeed it was said. And then He throws you into the Fire. And you will be among the first to burn in the Fire.⁵¹

What al-‘Ajmi’s words show is that this style, which the reciter uses when leading prayer in Mecca, takes on meanings of “Wahhabi Islam” when transported to Egypt.

Yet another style requires no transcription: the recitation of the Qur’an when praying by oneself, in which case the selected passage is recited in a form of heightened speech (*jahrī*) or silently to oneself (*sirrī*); the latter is used for noon and afternoon prayers.

Whereas the latter three styles resist the label “music,” and the last one particularly, it is important to consider them together in order to properly understand the relative position of each within the Muslim world and why they have differentiated in particular ways.

A completely different paralinguistic style comes from Shaykh al Rama Mouhamadou Sanoussi of Niger; his recitation comprises two pentatonic scales, one minor and used in ascent, the other major and used in descent, set a whole step apart (see Fig. 8). What cannot be represented here is also the difference in vocal timbre. Note that these two formulae, the *ta‘awwudh* and *basmala*, precede all recitations and comprise another standard paradigm. As for the *adhān*, a traditional Javanese recitation deploys hemitonic pentatonic scales.⁵²

⁵⁰ In *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an*.

⁵¹ Shaykh Ahmad al-‘Ajmi (2006), www.alajmy.com; translation by the author. The website also contains a diatribe against singing.

⁵² “Al Qur’an Langgam Jawa,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nEMZTp4ZO4>.

Figure 5: Shaykh Mustafa Isma‘il: *Mujawwad*. Segment from recitation of Qur’an 12:4 by Shaykh Mustafa Isma‘il in the *mujawwad* style.⁵³ The *maqām* is *Bayyatī* on D4 (E4, second line from bottom, is half flat); absolute pitch is *Bayyatī* on D3 (an octave below); the horizontal axis indicates seconds. The text runs as follows (syllables are separated by one or more dashes and asterisks; the latter indicate melismatic tones on the preceding syllable): *idh-qaa-*la-yuu-su-fu-li-a-bii-*-*hi-yaa-*a-ba-ti-*in-*ni-ra-ay-*tu-a-ḥa-da-‘a-sha-*ra kaw-*-*ka-*ban-*-*wash-*-*sham-*-*sa-wal-*qa-*ma-*ra-*ra-ay-*tu-hum-*-*liy-*saa-*-*ji-*-*diin-*-*-*-**.

Figure 6: Recitation of Qur’an 12:4 by Shaykh Mustafa Isma‘il in the *murattal* style.⁵⁴ The *maqām* shown is again *Bayyatī* on D4; absolute pitch is *Bayyatī* on G3. Again, dashes separate syllables and asterisks denote melismas. Text: *idh-qaa-la-yuu-su-fu-li-a-bii-hi-yaa-a-ba-ti-in-ni-ra-ay-*tu-a-ḥa-da-‘a-sha-ra-kaw-ka-ban-wash-sham-sa-wal-*qa-ma-ra-ra-ay-tuhum- liy-saa-ji-diin*.

⁵³ Mustafa Isma‘il, *Al-Shaykh Mustafa Isma‘il (Qari’ Misr al-Awwal): Ma Tayassar Min Suratay Yusuf wa-l-Haqa [Mujawwad]* (Cairo: SonoCairo, 1978).

⁵⁴ Mustafa Isma‘il, *Suratay Yusuf wa-l-‘Ankabut [Murattal]* (Cairo: SonoCairo, 1999).

Figure 7: Recitation of Qur'an 12:4 by the Saudi Shaykh Ahmad al-‘Ajmi.⁵⁵ The *maqām* is *Rāst* on C4 (E4, second line from the bottom, is half-flat); absolute pitch is *Rāst* on A3 (a minor third below); the horizontal axis indicates seconds. Dashes separate syllables and asterisks denote melismas. Text: *idh-qaa-la-yuu-su-fu-li-a-bii-hi-yaa-*-*-*
--*-*a-ba-ti-*in-*-*-*-*ni-ra-ay-tu-a-ḥa-da-‘a-sha-ra-kaw-*ka-ban-wash-sham-sa-wal-qa-ma-ra-ra-
ay-tu-hum-*liy-saa-ji-diin.*

Figure 8: The *ta‘awwudh* and *basmala* of Shaykh al Rama Mouhamadou Sanoussi, from Niger.

⁵⁵ Ahmad al-‘Ajmi, *Al-Mushaf al-Murattal*, vols. 10 and 11 (from Hud:13 through al-Hijr) (Cairo: Ushun, 1996).

These examples show the diversity of sonic ramification, which leads to a wide and multi-dimensional array of language performance instances displaying diverse clusters of paralinguistic features generally not classifiable as “song” or “speech.”

Other forms of Islamic language performance tend not to be examined by ethnomusicologists because—unlike Qur’an and *adhān*—they do not approach the domain of “song.” Their consideration requires too much technical apparatus to be of much interest to those who study “speech” in Islamic studies, and too much knowledge of Islam for those based in linguistics. As a result, their paralinguistic aspects go largely unstudied, though their ramified diversity is highly revealing, particularly in the case of the call-and-response congregational *du‘ā’*, in which feedback processes are immediately audible.

I thus conclude with an analysis of paralinguistic variation in two examples of the congregational *du‘ā’*.

Naively, an outside observer would undoubtedly categorize the first instance as a kind of “speech,” because there is no consistent tonal content. Yet its paralinguistic dimension is crucial to its emotional force through an intensifying upwards progression of pitch, tempo, congregational involvement, and emotional expression, resembling the corporate ecstasy typical of Sufi *ḥaḍras*. Such a progression requires paralinguistic analysis to be properly understood as a means of answering key questions in ritual studies: When, where, and why is this style deployed? How has it changed over time? What is its social-spiritual impact?

I have selected three short excerpts from this performance to illustrate the phases of its development (Table 1). The C/R ratio is the length of the call divided by the length of the

response. Note how this ratio decreases (indicating increasing congregational involvement) as the pitch level rises. The call/response line length shortens from 3 to 1.6 seconds, quickening the pace, then extends again as the congregation enters more actively and forcefully, progressively more involved.

Meanwhile the words shift from (1) standard supplication to (2) a supplication directed to the performing group, requesting group unity, then (3) shifting from supplication to a general testimony of faith; here the response echoes the call instead of punctuating with the usual *āmīn* (Amen), and emotional unity is maximized.

The second example is a *qunūt*, closing the *witr* of *ṣalāt al-tarāwīḥ* (Ramadan supererogatory night prayers), video-recorded at the Grand Mosque of Mecca during the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*). During this most sacred of all Ramadan nights, connections between Heaven and Earth are believed to be most open to supplicatory petitions and sacred reality (*al-ḥaqīqa*) most immediately present, a fortiori at the Ka‘ba, sacred center of Islam. (“On that night the angels and the Spirit [Jabril] descend again and again with their Lord’s permission on every task; [there is] peace that night until the break of dawn”: Q97.) Thus the context is especially conducive to emotional resonance.

On this particular occasion, the imam’s powerful voice, amplified and resonating throughout the massive, packed mosque,⁵⁶ delivering heartfelt, humble petitions transmitted via highly emotional melodic invocations, triggers mass weeping, intensified via feedback cycles that appear to affect the reciter directly.

⁵⁶ The enormous open-air Grand Mosque (*masjid al-ḥarām*) holds as many as two million worshippers.

Table 1: *Du‘ā’* sequences

Part 1: Pitch level C#3; Line length = 3 sec; C/R ratio = 4

Imam's call	Translation	Congregation's Response
<i>Allāhumma lak al-ḥamdu ḥatta tarḍa</i>	Oh God, to you is the praise until your satisfaction	<i>Āmīn</i>
<i>ya rabbina lak al-ḥamdu ḥatta tarḍa</i>	Oh God, to you is the praise until your satisfaction	<i>Āmīn</i>
<i>ḥamdan la yantahi ḥatta tarḍa</i>	Unending praise until your satisfaction	<i>Āmīn</i>
<i>wa laka al-ḥamd idhā raḍāt</i>	To you is the praise if you are pleased	<i>Āmīn</i>
<i>wa lak al-ḥamd ba‘d al-riḍā</i>	To you is the praise after you are pleased	<i>Āmīn</i>

Part 2: Pitch level D3; Line length = 1.6 sec; C/R ratio = 4

Imam's call	Translation	Congregation's Response
<i>Waḥḥid bayna qulūbinā</i>	Unify our hearts	<i>Āmīn</i>
<i>Waḥḥid kalimātinā</i>	Unify our words	<i>Āmīn</i>
<i>Waḥḥid ṣufūfanā</i>	Unify our rows	<i>Āmīn</i>
<i>Waṣurnā ‘alā man a‘dānā</i>	Grant us victory over our enemies	<i>Āmīn</i>

Part 3: Pitch level A3; Line length = 3.2 sec; C/R ratio = 0.9

Imam's call	Translation	Congregation's Response
<i>Lā ilāhun ma‘a Allāh</i>	There is no deity with God	<i>Lā ilāha illā Allāh</i>
<i>Allāhu Akbar</i>	God is greater	<i>Allāhu akbar</i>

Normally the imam is free to select any Qur'anic passages when leading prayer, but for *witr* the sequence is specified by Hadith:

Ibn Abbas narrated that Allah's Messenger used to recite in *witr* the sura *al-A'la*, *al-Kāfirūn* and *al-Ikhlās*, *rak'a* by *rak'a*.⁵⁷ (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi* Book 3, no. 461, 462)

As usual, however, paralinguistic content is relatively free. This freedom may manifest as varying levels of tonality, from "speech" to "song." But it may also manifest in other ways, as we see in this instance.

In the first *rak'a* the imam chants in a clear, strong tone, deploying *maqām Rāst* throughout. But at Q87:12, while reciting "He who will enter and burn in the greatest fire," his voice begins to crack, on the verge of weeping. Then again in the second *rak'a*, his voice reaches the breaking point while reciting Q109. Finally, reciting for the *witr*, his voice weeps during Q112 (*Ikhlās*), said to condense the entire Qur'an and thus standing for Revelation as a whole.

Then he begins his *du'ā*, the *qunūt*. It is a terribly moving performance, textually and melodically skillful, navigating the *maqāmāt* from *Rāst* to related modes (*Sīkā*, *Huzām*, and *Irāq*), building emotion as he develops his petition, the vast congregation responding *āmīn* as his voice occasional cracks, even weeps. Finally he breaks down completely into sobbing, departing tonal expression for more primal vocal emotion, leaving long silences as the entire mosque, brimming with millions of worshippers gathered for 'umra on this sacred night, sobs along with him, with each other, tears streaming forth, his emotion projected to the group, and,

from there, to each other, and back to him in a massive display of affective feedback.

Briefly they are all connected in resonant faith, sonically and emotionally, a single, solid, standing, weeping mass of humanity before God—a foreshadowing of the "Day of Judgment," described precisely thus in Islamic eschatology, everyone contemplating his or her own life, sins, and contrition. But despite unleashing such intensive emotion, the imam remains in control. Always his voice emerges out of the wept pauses, shaky at first, then refocused and calm, returning to the tonal line, reaching upwards to *Rāst* on the fifth degree, then the upper octave. Finally, after about 20 minutes, he concludes the *du'ā* with a sequence of *ṣalawāt* (calls for blessing on the Prophet), and the *witr* ends with the final prostrations and sitting. The *qunūt* is not always like this; its length, intensity, and paralinguistic features have been shaped by its special spatio-temporal-social context.

This brief examination of three genres of Islamic language performance—*adhān*, *tilāwa*, and *du'ā*—shows that ramification operates primarily in the paralinguistic domain, responding to context and feedback. While *adhān* and *tilāwa* examples provide a sense of the nature and scope of ramification, *du'ā* examples offer a glimpse of the feedback processes themselves.

Both *adhān* and *tilāwa* have been conditioned by local vocal and musical styles—from Sudan to Iran to Java. In both cases ideological factors also come to bear, shaping, for instance, the degree of melodicity (lesser in the case of Saudi *tilāwa* or Yemeni *adhān*, greater in Egypt), or—in conjunction with religious legitimacy and the global media economy—patterns of diffusion. Paralinguistic aspects of Egyptian performance have signaled

⁵⁷ The first sura of every *rak'a* is *al-Fātiḥa* (Q1); thus the meaning of the hadith is that the second sura will be *al-A'la* (Q87), *al-Kāfirūn* (Q109), and *al-Ikhlās* (Q112), respectively.

and projected Egypt's religious authority in the Sunni world; more recently, Saudi styles have done the same. The globalization of these sonic styles may sediment new layers, in parallel to local counterparts. Or they may extinguish the latter, as appears to be happening in Indonesia.⁵⁸ As Saudi *tilāwa* styles have infiltrated Egyptian sonic space, they implicitly carry Wahhabi thought in their wake.⁵⁹

Language performance of Islamic ritual adapts through feedback. Some feedback is indirect and slow: for using the “wrong” style, a muezzin may not be retained, a *qāri*’ not invited, a preacher’s television program canceled. But many live genres invite immediate performative feedback, allowing cybernetic processes to cycle far more rapidly.

Mujawwad tilāwa in the mosque enables rapid feedback informally, while the congregational *du‘ā*’ is more explicitly responsorial. The *du‘ā*’ thus provides an ideal setting for micro-analysis of paralinguistic adaptation. Such feedback loops not only move participants; they also appear as the engine of local adaptation itself.

Paralinguistic sound is powerful because it is social and affective, yet nonreferential; that power is multiplied through the feedback process, toward adaptation and resonance. In Islamic ritual, paralinguistics takes on a special significance. Due to the centrality and sanctity of core texts (primarily Qur’an and Hadith), the finality of prophecy with Muhammad, and of revelation with the Qur’an, purely linguistic ramification is quite limited.⁶⁰ By the same

token, the paralinguistic sound of language performance is largely free; there are virtually no universally recognized sacred melodies in Islam. Nonreferential, unmoored by fixed meanings, flying under the radar of reference, paralinguistic features ramify widely in adaptive relation to individual, culture, society, and ideology, providing a shifting sonic map of Islamic history and societies. Their analysis and interpretation can reveal much about the diverse environments of performance, and about the ritual process itself.

⁵⁸ See Rasmussen, *Women, the Recited Qur’an, and Islamic Music in Indonesia*, 85.

⁵⁹ See Frishkopf, “Mediated Qur’anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt.”

⁶⁰ Muhammad is the *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, “seal of the prophets” (Q33:40), while according to Hadith:

“The chain of messengers and prophets has come to an end. There shall be no messenger nor prophet after me” (Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi).