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Globalisation, the practice of devotional songs and poems and the linguistic repertoires of young British Muslims

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ABSTRACT
This article provides empirical data from transnational religious contexts which highlight the complexity, fluidity and indexicality of language and religious practices in globalising settings. Through an examination of the role of devotional song and poetry in the Islamic world, and in particular, among young multilingual and multivarietal British Muslims, an attempt is made to show how globalising processes of the present age contribute to, on the one hand, novel forms of language resources and innovative religious practices and, on the other, coexisting traditional approaches to faith and language practices. It also shows how young people deploy their linguistic repertoires and language resources in order to re-construct their religious and linguistic identities. A conclusion is presented that such practices, whilst drawing on old and traditional roots, become transformed when enacted in these newer settings, both linguistically and religiously.

Introduction

This article explores the interface between religious practice and linguistic performance within globalising contexts. Drawing on the emerging body of work arising from the sociology of language and religion (Fishman and Omoniyi 2006; Omoniyi 2010; Rosowsky 2017), Blommaert's call (2010; and, earlier, 2003) for attention to language resources rather than languages per se, the verbal arts performance theory of Bauman (1974; Bauman 2000; Bauman and Briggs 1990) and the globalisation terminology of Robertson (1992) and Beyer (1994), I focus on the religious and language practices of young British Muslims within the South Asian diaspora who, as part of their re-construction of religious and linguistic practices and identities, regularly perform devotional songs and poetry in public and private spaces. These young people deploy their linguistic repertoires

and language resources in order to partake in both traditional and contemporary forms of music, recitation and performance inspired by both role models from their language heartlands[1] and by sources and resources closer to home. Transnational processes bring role models and repertoires of key performers (the *naat khawan* – see later) from the heartlands of the language and religion in question to new locations in the diaspora in the Western world which are then fused with closer-to-home influences and sources from contemporary musical forms, European languages and other performance practices. This convergence and variation is typical of the simultaneous homogenisation (or 'the universal') and heterogenisation (or 'the particular') characterising globalised settings (Beyer 1994, 51).

'Truncated repertoires' and faith practices

In his description of a sociolinguistics of globalisation (2010), Blommaert argues that one of the primary units of sociolinguistic analysis should be mobile language resources rather than 'languages' per se. Noting how communication in a globalised world often employs 'bits and pieces' of language, genre and register, communities, particularly those in minority societal settings in super-diverse (Vertovec 2007) contexts, consist of individuals possessing linguistic repertoires characterised by a fragmented blend of language resources from a range of languages, language varieties, genres and registers. These 'truncated repertoires', in a religious context, are, however, less unfamiliar and not necessarily something arising out of the globalising processes of the present moment. Members of different faith communities are, and probably always have been, familiar with the experience of knowing enough of a particular liturgical language to 'get by' in their faith practice. These liturgical languages may be either a different language to the spoken languages of the congregation; a different, specialised variety of the standard language; or merely a different register of the same. Regardless, they all become part of the linguistic repertoires of the faith community. Because of the carefully compartmentalised domain religious practice often provides, some (Ferguson 1982; Fishman 1989; Rosowsky 2008) would assign greater resilience to such language resources than to their secular equivalents in minority contexts where language shift prevails.

The traditional sociolinguistic triad of domain, speech community and function, however, is made problematic by the fluid and mobile processes evinced by globalisation. The linguistic repertoires that arise can appear 'unfinished' when evaluated by those who might revert to a deficit interpretation of language competence.[2] However, in faith contexts, this 'unfinished' nature of language practice is often one of its main linguistic characteristics. After all, no one expects worshippers to leave their places of worship conversing to one another in Classical Arabic, Sanskrit, Latin or Biblical Hebrew. Yet, globalisation brings its influence to bear on even these well-rooted language practices, offering novel

contextualisations of textual practices in different global settings. The 'chequered competence' (Blommaert 2010, 108) displayed by many in both liturgical and in faith-related language practices such as devotional singing and poetry, as featured in this article, leads to complexes of resources characterising communities and individuals in a globalised environment. This complexity of language, variety, genre and register resources requires a layered analysis which incorporates a diachronic perspective capable of explaining the present moment through recognition of the historical and biographical trajectories that have led there. It is also plain to see that this complexity carries within it that tension, or contradiction, that globalisation, in its drive towards apparent homogenisation or universalisation, results in ever-increasing diversity and particularisation (Beyer 1994; Robertson 1992).

Repertoire and sanctified varieties

Fishman's (2006, 14) first precept in his 2006 *Decalogue* for a sociology of language and religion states that any 'language or variety of religion always functions within a larger multilingual/multivarietal repertoire'. Recognising that no society on earth has had a uniquely religious language variety as its sole language of communication, it is an observation that 'expects diversity'. His second precept is that such language variation exists both 'intra-societally' and 'inter-societally'. The language resources of the religious variety will differ differently from other language resources within the same community. On occasion it will be a different language as in Latin-rite Catholic churches or non-Arabic-speaking Muslim settings, and on others it might be a specialised variety of the same language as in Arabic-speaking Muslim settings or Greek Orthodox churches using Ecclesiastical Greek. Within the religious varieties themselves, there will be variation with greater or lesser use of the liturgical variety and compartmentalised use of other languages (in the UK, a Pakistani heritage mosque will use Arabic for its liturgy, Urdu for its invocations, supplications and devotional poetry and possibly English or a spoken variety of Punjabi for other functions related to the domain of the mosque). In globalising contexts linked to mobile biographies of migration, accompanying societal marginalisation and recent electronic forms of communication, the languages, varieties, genres and registers available, particularly to younger generations of believers, result in ever-increasing complexes of resources. One particular aspect of this complexity relates to Fishman's *Decalogue* in another way. As in the example above regarding Urdu in Pakistani heritage mosques, once 'other' languages or registers, not originally directly related to the languages of the liturgy, begin to adopt 'religious' functions, a degree of 'sanctification' can take place that renders that repertoire even more complex than before. In this article, we are able to illustrate such a complexity through the transnational processes of cultural globalisation which

bring languages, language genres and registers together in religious contexts in ways that are both novel and affirmingly traditional.

The performance of song and poetry in faith settings is a sociolinguistic, artistic and religious practice that is engaging large numbers of young people in both the heartlands and the diaspora of the Muslim world (Rasmussen 2010; van Nieuwkerk 2011; Rosowsky 2011, 2016b; Morris 2015) and, as such, is encouraged by those transnational and translocal processes often associated with globalising forces. These processes, only to a degree, remind us of Robertson's (1992, 173) notion of 'glocalisation'– the simultaneous and co-present forces of homogenisation and heterogenisation. Drawing on Robertson, Beyer (1994) writes of how religious practices partake of those cultural processes leading to the 'particularisation of the universal' and the 'universalisation of the particular'. There is a diversity in practice created by particular languages and musical traditions in the local settings and there is a universality in the performance practices – here, devotional song and poetry – and faith traditions. In the examples that will be shared later, there is a complexity of practice that defies any straightforward rendering of these practices into hetero or homogenisation. It is perhaps this social complexity (Vertovec's 'superdiversity' 2007) which gives the present age its qualitative difference when compared to previous large-scale social, political and cultural change. In postmodern defiance of modernity's search for compartmentalisation in all aspects of human and social life, the sheer complexity and mobility evinced by the contact of so many diverse languages, their varieties and resources, musical modes, literary genres and performance practices, together with the variegated settings of their contextualisations and entextualisations, challenges any attempt to categorise and define.

Language study and artistic practices

Intimately linked to the faith and identities of these young people, therefore, are the practices in which they participate. Many of these are ritualised (prayer, recitation, ceremonial) but many also reach into the rich cultural and linguistic store of the community. In particular, there is a youth revival of interest in songs and poetry with a devotional message. Much of this repertoire is originally composed in Urdu or H-Punjabi[3] with other languages such as Arabic and English also featuring in the performance practices of the young people involved. Choices about which performance language, which genre and which register to adopt or transform play an important role in the re-construction of religion for these young people.

This study therefore touches on globalising processes relating to music, language, literature, faith and performance. It also has something important to say about the study of language. As the language resources explored in this article derive, in the main, from 'full' (Bauman 1974) and 'high' (Coupland 2011) performance of poetry and song, this article also contributes to the argument

that such practices are not, in Austin's (1962, 22) words, 'etiolated' or 'parasitical' modes of communication or language but integral elements of complex and rich language repertoires. Notwithstanding Labov's claim that only language 'as it is used by native speakers communicating with each other in everyday life' (Labov 1972, 184) is worth studying (e.g. the pre-eminence of 'speech' as in 'speech community'), other sociolinguistic research has latterly begun to admit other modes of communication into its remit. Lillis (2013) and others (Coulmas 2002), for example, have brought writing forward as a once again respectable topic for consideration in sociolinguistics. Hymes (1977, 8), in his foundational volume, recognised the importance of the poetic to comprehensive studies of language as a social practice, '[s]uch aspects of communication are less likely to receive full due in studies whose concern with communication is not so much with an activity of people, but with fodder for models [of language]'. The verbal arts on show in the performance of this community's devotional songs and poems are intimately and necessarily linked to their communication activity in general.

Performance and the language arts

Any discussion of performance and language draws inevitably on Bauman's framework for identifying and classifying language arts performance (Bauman 1974; Bauman and Briggs 1990). Elsewhere, I have shown how performance practice in religious contexts can be accounted for using Bauman's theoretical frame of performance (Rosowsky 2013). His twin defining characteristics of performance – heightened experience of language and accountability to an audience – are very much in evidence in the examples below. For example, Bauman suggests a performance continuum for the language arts where one pole represents verbatim, unchanging, recitation of texts and scripts often fossilised in form, inflexibly tied to age-old norms regarding text (invariably sacred) and mode of performance. The opposite pole, an entextualisation of genre rather than form, reflects improvised, flexible, open to modification and change, and even, at the extreme, language-free performance. This contrast can, for example, be exemplified by various binaries such as 'intoning' versus singing', 'voice' versus 'instrumentation', 'sacred' text versus 'secular' texts and so on, which take up different but equally contrasting positions on the continuum. What is linguistically most interesting, however, are the hybrid forms and practices, prompted by globalising processes, which operate somewhere in the middle. The performance practices of the young people in this study can be found at all points of the Bauman continuum, with performers choosing to recite verbatim and heritage language verse in traditional ways whilst others make full use of Western practices such as pop, rock, folk and hip hop. In between, however, many performers slide up and down this continuum in their hybrid performances which mix language, musical mode and literary genres.

Religion, language and globalising processes

In respect of religion and globalising processes, Kurtz contrasts ancient and modern processes very well and warns us that not all is new and that a blend of the past and the present, which is always there, is also part of the current age regardless of fears of modern homogenisations.

> The whirlwind of change in our economic, social, political, and personal lives that we are experiencing may change the course of human history, but at the same time we are rooted in ancient faith traditions that both resist and promote social change. (Kurtz 2012, 1)

It is perhaps in that nexus between language and religion where we see more clearly the tension between 'rooted' faith traditions and contemporary 'social change'. Whilst reiterating many of the familiar binary tropes associated with globalising processes such as interconnectedness and interdependence, mobility and fixity, it brings sharply into focus the relationship between the past and the present and makes obvious those indexical features of language resources that any account of language practice needs to include. Languages and religions have been, in the past, often intimately associated, to the extent that even today certain faiths are linked in the public space with certain languages. Arabic with Islam is an obvious example but there are many more, past and present.[4] Sometimes that language is a liturgical one only (Arabic for Muslims in the non-Arabic-speaking world; Ecclesiastical Greek for Greek Orthodox worshippers) but can be the language, or at least a specialised variety of it, of the community more generally (Arabic for Muslims in the Arabic-speaking world; Hebrew in Israel). The existence of these languages with their panoply of ancient scripts and ritualised and formal varieties provides for the past in the present, religiously and linguistically. Young people interested in their faith must engage with the ancient language forms of their respective faiths and negotiate their linguistic repertoires by combining the latter with contemporary vernaculars and language varieties of the modern world (Rosowsky 2012). This makes for a heady mix of linguistic resources but where faith-inflected varieties hold a special place. The localised liturgical practices of these young people, which are exclusively constricted by the requirements of verbatim recitations and accurate memorisations thereof, have been examined extensively (Rosowsky 2008, 2016a) but more creative and artistic practices which complement both their liturgical practices and their everyday communicative ones have had less exposure. As I have discussed elsewhere (Rosowsky 2010), they tend to be unmarked and invisible in the public and mediatised spaces which prefer to discursively position these same young people, because they are serious about their faith, as potential radicals and extremists.

In the literature on religion and globalisation, Beyer's (1994) distinction between the 'universalisation of the particular' and the 'particularisation of the universal', which he uses to characterise the manifestation of transnational

cultural processes, is only partially helpful when trying to account for the complexity and mobility of the performance practices described in this article. The spread of a world religion necessarily entails local contextualisations drawing on local resources including language and other cultural resources. In the present age, when those same localised practices are transported across the globe to new settings which are already, historically, the localised sites of other previously spread world religions, the encounter of language, faith and culture is a complex one which resists any attempt to universalise a particular or particularise a universal. When a young British Muslim male draws on Western modes of music and performance to sing about 'Allah' in English to an audience of Arabic-speakers in one of the Gulf countries, it is hard to even identify what is particular and what is universal. If the performance mode is a Western one which is universalised through homogenising and globalising processes around the world but is then taken to the geographical homeland of a non-Western religion, there is both particularisation and universalisation happening simultaneously in both sites.

Devotional song and poetry practices in South Yorkshire (and further afield)

My examples come from the South Asian diaspora in Western countries and involves, in particular, the Islamic turn (Mondal 2009) being driven by third and later generational descendants of migrants from Pakistan to the UK.

The data come from an ongoing ethnographic study (Rosowsky 2011, 2016b) of the performers and their context, a large northern city in the UK. Visual and audio data come from three performance events, two live and one mediatised. I was a participant observer in one of the events and downloaded the other live performance from YouTube. The same performer is featured in both these events. The third, mediatised, performance is a studio performance created for online presentation. Supplementary data come from interviews carried out with performers and 'fans' of devotional song and poetry.

The primary data are, by its nature, a problem to present in written format as it consists of video and audio material. I have sought to circumvent, to an extent, this issue by including still images of the events in question (still inadequate I know) and by making use of supplementary data in the form of extracts (**1**–**12**) from interviews with participants. In the references I include links to two of the performance events described. This will at least give the reader a visual and audio experience of the performance practices commented upon.

The poetry in question is always religious, in content and in orientation, and is listened to, memorised, transcribed and performed in both physical and virtual spaces. *Naat* is the Urdu/Persian word used as an umbrella term for all poetry of this nature. *Naats*, in this context, are composed principally in Urdu, Punjabi and Farsi. The Punjabi here is the prestigious H-variety strictly compartmentalised mainly to this function and domain for poetry and occasional literary

revivalist movements in Punjabi (Ayres 2009). The poetry is also steeped in the Sufi tradition with themes and literary features suffused with notions of divine and prophetic love and mystical intoxication. It is also invariably sung rather than merely recited. (Rosowsky 2011).

The *nasheed* is a devotional song which can cover a range of themes and topics. Reminiscent of Conquergood's (1993, 26) 'communicative rituals of affirmation with [their] antiphony and phatic communion, and [their] performative rhythms of collective expression' in the context of Pentecostalism, *nasheeds* are sung by individuals or groups with choruses often sung by those in attendance at a performance. The discourse of the *naat* is a sanctified one with the Urdu or H-Punjabi traditionally suffused with Arabic and/or Farsi vocabulary and with a form hallowed by tradition and a discipline associated with poetic style and normative conventions around recitation and performance. *Nasheeds* are more informal and can involve instrumentation. It is perhaps no surprise that it is *nasheed* which admits leakage from other varieties and languages, including from English, whilst the *naat* is more carefully demarcated and restricted allowing only the sanctified varieties of Urdu, H-Punjabi and, occasionally, Farsi.

Gatherings on religious occasions (weekly or annually) often have an element that includes the performance of these devotional songs. They are performed with the voice alone or are sometimes accompanied by instrumentation. This can range from a simple drum (the *daff*) or more elaborate instruments such as the harmonium and multiple drums including the *tabla and dholak*. Handclapping can also play a key role in the percussion particularly if *qawalli* songs are performed. Songs are performed by soloists or invite a chorus from other singers or the audiences themselves.

Data and discussion

Example 1 – the naat khawan in their heartlands

Naat khawan (an Urdu phrase) are poetry reciters, often professional, from Pakistan and elsewhere in South Asia and its diaspora, who perform in public, both informally and often before large audiences numbering in their thousands. In Figure 1, we see an image of a well-known *naat khawan*, Shahid Mahmood, at a recital in Pakistan before an audience of 20,000 (Figure 2). A YouTube recording of this recital version has hits numbering 1,376,724 at the time of writing. Linguistically, he sings in Urdu and in Punjabi. His audience are first language Punjabi speakers (a spoken variety thereof) and know Urdu as a second, prestigious language. However, the Punjabi he recites in is also a prestigious variety of Punjabi which differs to varying degrees from the spoken Punjabi varieties of his audiences. He tours Pakistan performing in such a way, particularly for special events such as the annual celebration of the birth of the Prophet. The trappings of globalised technology, through amplification, video and its appearance, as in Figures 1 and 2, on YouTube are characteristic of this type of performer.

Figure 1. The *naat khawan*, Shahid Mahmood (*Fair Use* screenshot from *YouTube*. Accessed December 5, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5Yedxhw3zg).

Figure 2. Shahid Mahmood at a *mawlid* in Lahore (*Fair Use* screenshot from *YouTube*. Accessed December 5, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMqlKE9lpiA).

As we will see later, such performances provide role models and inspiration for much of the revival in devotional song and poetry taking place in the diaspora among young Muslims. This modelling, encouraged by Appadurai's (1996) twin drivers for cultural mobility, electronic communication and the relative

ease of physical movement, provides linguistic and religious resources for these young performers in the UK.

> **Extract 1:** There has been a massive introduction of especially Pakistani-based, Urdu and Punjabi speaking *naat khawans*. You go into any book shop, you'll see loads of different artists, *naat khawans*, who are promoting their own CDs or *nasheeds* or *naats*, but it's our generation that is interested. It's having an impact on the fourth generation now. You can find *naat khans* of the age of 7 who have a CD.

What Beyer (2007) calls the 'tail wagging the dog' is the process by which linguistic and religious practice authenticity can be situated as much in the diaspora as in the heartlands of the language and the religion. This is a means by which we can avoid in our analyses the assumption that the 'heartland-diaspora' relationship is a one-way process. The diaspora (re)construction of religious and linguistic identities these young people are engaged in can rarely be mere mirrors or copies of heartland practice. In fact, what often happens is that the lens of difference is made more salient in conditions of the diaspora allowing for a re-construction of authenticity which may choose to either accept or reject heartland practices. Rejection can often take place on the grounds of authenticity if practices are seen as too 'culturally' influenced. This has implications for both religious and linguistic practice. On the one hand, these young performers may see in the role models of the Pakistani-based *naat khawan* an authenticity which craves emulation in the diaspora setting. This will strengthen their relationship with the heritage languages and may even impact on lessening the movement towards language shift (Rosowsky 2016b). This can also often manifest itself as a reluctance to consider English, the majority language, as a suitable vehicle for the expression of religious sentiment (**Extracts 2** & **3**). Reminding us of the complexity in Fishman's notion of the co-sanctification of languages (2008), in this instance, there is a reluctance to bestow sanctity on a language used for devotional purposes.

> **Extract 2:** You get the special feelings through the words that you can't get in English. Maybe in 50 years there will be a poet who writes *naat* in English that when people read they will feel that love coming out of the words. But you can't get in English at the moment what you get in Urdu or Arabic.

> **Extract 3:** Our parents don't understand there is such a thing as *naat/nasheed* in English. All their lives they've heard *naat* in Urdu. They've never thought someone could be praising the Prophet in English also.

On the other hand, some may see performance in anything other than Arabic as too culturally oriented for their liking and prefer to perform using the repertoire of Classical Arabic. This is seen as an ultimate authenticity linguistically, and is usually accompanied by a similar search for authenticity in religious practice. This Arabicisation sidesteps heritage languages and reaches back to the sacred language outside of its liturgical function and many young people, freed from their cultural ties of their parents and grandparents, gravitate linguistically, if not to spoken Arabic, then at least to Classical Arabic – the original language of

the faith, for learning prayers, litanies and sayings in their original Arabic form from the early centuries of Islam (**Extracts 4** & **5**). As an example, many young performers will gravitate towards the *qasidah* – the ancient ode par excellence of the Arabs – composed to be recited using the rhythm of a camel's gait – which has now become the default choice of performance for many of these young performers – musically and linguistically.[5]

> **Extract 4:** Recently we have been reciting the *nasheeds* which are Arabic poetry. It's relatively new. We're using the *Mawlid Deba'a* book.[6] The other medium we use is the internet. From YouTube. Which are all traditional. Mainly in Arabic.

> **Extract 5:** I've started Arabic *nasheeds* now and at this moment I am reciting the most Arabic that I have ever. They're something different. The English, Urdu, Punjabi people are reciting. But Arabic is the more traditional style, more ***authentic*** *nasheeds*. (author's emphasis)

In both the disciplines of religious studies and of language, the modernity categories of 'religion' and 'language' have been questioned. The notion that both these categories are conceptual tools of the WEIRD[7] world has been forcefully deconstructed and articulated (in religious studies see Masuzawa 2005 and in language see Makoni and Pennycook 2006). However, in religion as in language, some of the critique goes too far in suggesting that the deconstruction of such ideas means they are false or illegitimate. This is far from the reality of the lived experiences of followers of 'religions' or speakers of 'languages'. However, where this is relevant to our analysis is in the recognition that an 'innocent' but monolithic notion of religion, or language, is no longer useful in understanding language and religious practices. The mobility of resources in the globalising world means that practices are understood not as the deployment of language and religions per se but as the complex arrangement and negotiation of resources whether they are linguistic or religious. In the modelling processes of heartland *naat khawan,* only discrete elements are incorporated into diaspora performances. These may be linguistic resources such as lyrics in Punjabi and Urdu, orally memorised and perhaps transcribed, with full, partial or little accompanying comprehension. Other linguistic resources include authentic phonologies, accompanying phatic interventions and textual resources in original or, more likely, Roman script. Importantly, the flamboyant nature of many of the performance resources of the *naat khawan* is not adopted into the diaspora setting. The enthusiasm of the audience (in the form of handwaving and gesticulating) is taken on by some but not by others. The throwing of money (notes) at the performer is definitely not something seen at gatherings of young British Muslims though it does occur at more formal gatherings organised by the older generations. The passionate devotion of the *naat khawan* for the Prophet is, however, an aspect of religious practice that is transferred to these young people who perhaps see it as transcending its cultural trappings (the heritage language, the South Asian style of performance) towards an authentic and, what they might call, a 'traditional' practice. This, of course, leaves a door open

for either developing practice in English or in Arabic as some may consider such passion is perhaps better expressed in one's first language or, by way of a homage of authenticity, in the original language of the Prophet.

Example 2 – the naat khawan translocalised

In order to provide a little more contextualisation for what follows in this section, Figure 3 shows a typical terraced house in inner city Sheffield in the north of England, an area which has had a relatively large Pakistani heritage community for about 50 years. This is home to my friend, Shoaib and his family. His father came to Sheffield in the 1960s to work in the steel industry. In December 2014, I was invited to this house for a Mawlid[8] celebration. Figure 4 shows an image from this event. The writer sits to the extreme left of the picture wearing a white turban.

   This part of Sheffield is the traditionally working-class side of the city, though much of the 'work' (steel) which brought people here has disappeared. The young people in the image all speak a variety of Yorkshire English which in certain contexts has one or more ethnolect variations.[9] Many of them have confident proficiency in Standard English spoken with a northern England accent (South Yorkshire variety). In terms of English alone there is already significant complexity here. Moving between these different varieties is fairly standard practice for these youngsters as they navigate their lives through family, community,

Figure 3. Venue for the Sheffield *mawlid* with Shahid Mahmood (photo by author).

Figure 4. Shahid Mahmood performing in Sheffield (photo by author).

education and adulthood. In 'seamless compartmentalisations' (Beyer 2007, 51), these English resources and repertoires are combined with spoken Punjabi (possibly similar to the spoken Punjabi of the audience in Figure 2 – but more likely inflected with a limited, family-oriented, discourse – available fully, partially or vestigially). Some will have an active knowledge of the prestigious variety of Urdu to varying degrees. All will have an awareness of the differences between Urdu and Punjabi – something not always obvious to an outsider. Many will have some degree of passive Urdu understanding. Some may have Urdu literacy. A lot will depend on family and educational trajectories. There will also be different types of Arabic competence ranging from the minimalist knowledge of decoding script and phonology needed to read the Qur'an out loud and memorise selected passages. Others may have some understanding of the words decoded though rarely to the level needed for general comprehension. This is often even beyond the capability of many Qur'anic scholars who make use of commentaries and translations in vernacular languages such as Urdu and English. Many of the young people will be pursuing their interest in poetry and song through the Classical Arabic repertoire. Some may even be learning conversational Arabic. A few will be seriously studying Arabic either online, with a local teacher or in one of the centres for learning Arabic around the world. There will also be varying levels of motivation and interest. To call such complex repertoire 'bilingualism' or even 'multilingualism' seems inadequate.

The interplay of language resources, both those used in performance and those used for interpersonal communication, is complex and dynamic. The resources originating in the heartlands combine into complex repertoires with the language resources of the diaspora closer to 'home'. To account for such complexity, we have to recognise Blommaert's (2010) call for a diachronic and

biographical approach to understand the layered and indexical nature of this web of linguistic and here performance resources. To give one example, the complex relationship between H-Punjabi (the Punjabi used in devotional song and poetry), spoken varieties of Punjabi (Pothwari, Pahari[10]) used in the diaspora and Urdu has its origins in the language policies of pre- and post-partition India and Pakistan. It is difficult to understand the reasons for such tensions continuing to exist and playing a role in diaspora settings even with these younger generations without knowledge of these historical trajectories. The preference for singing in Urdu or in Punjabi, or for reciting in Arabic or in English, plays a key role in the reconstruction of both religious and linguistic identities within this generation.

> **Extract 6:** It [understanding of heritage languages] has come through my interest in *naat/nasheed* but also more generally from Islamic teachings. Most *naats* and *nasheeds* are based around well-known events and experiences from Islamic heritage. So if you hear a scholar talking about a certain topic, and a poet has written about that, I put my knowledge into the *naat*.

Blommaert's (2010) notion of layers as a metaphor for describing this complex situation is a useful one which takes in a necessary historical approach to the stratification of languages and varieties coexisting at any particular moment in any particular space. On the one hand, post-imperial diaspora created by migration of labour after the Second World War and into the 1960s in the UK is a biographical explanation here for a basal layer of spoken variety of Punjabi (Pothwari, Pahari or sometimes Hindko – see endnote x) and possibly Urdu literacy (though not guaranteed). This is followed historically by an initial pidgin-like English (of a northern variety) of early settlers which some of the elders, male and female, retain. As generation succeeds generation, the relative depth of these layers adjusts to greater linguistic assimilation to the majority society. Schools play a large part in this. Thus, new generations grow up as fluent speakers of local Englishes and confident users of Standard English. A sacred language is added once the community sets down roots and establishes its own places of worship and associated learning centres and by the time of the Islamic turn towards the end of the twentieth century (Liddle 1996), a religious revival brings in its wake a linguistic response as an interest in devotional song and poetry emerges. Official, national and global language practices end up coexisting with local and transnational varieties.

However, we need to pause to focus on the appearance in this more modest setting of the 'star' *naat khawan* we saw in Figure 1, Shahid Mahmood. As stated earlier, this appearance underlines Appadurai's second twin driver, the relative ease of movement around the globe in the present era. The role modelling referred to above is facilitated by the Internet, as the participants attest (**Extracts 7**–**8**), but it is the physical presence of such models within the diaspora that create dynamic relationships between the personas, the language resources and the performance practices of the heartlands and the younger

generations seeking to reconstruct their religious and linguistic identities. Yet, the performance on this occasion was not exactly the same as one from the heartlands. Most of the repertoire was similar and provided enough modelling for those seeking inspiration but at one point Shahid performed a devotional song in English. There was no other interaction in English involving him during the event and his performance was supported by an aide-mémoire sheet that allowed for a reasonably clear performance. The script on the aide-mémoire was Perso-Arabic used to transcribe the English lyrics. A few observations can be made here. The *naat khawan* was using language resources to perform in English with possibly, on the evidence of no other interaction in English, little accompanying comprehension. This is a complete mirror of what his young fans do when performing in Urdu, in Punjabi or in Arabic. Transcriptions in various scripts are used to facilitate often oral performances, a stage before memorisation. That Shahid was using similar resources in order to engage his young audience, despite the reservations about authenticity quoted above, suggests that the relationship between heartland and diaspora is not straightforward. Authenticity in terms of comprehension rather than linguistic form is sought after in this context. Shahid, despite his expertise in the heritage languages of the diaspora, recognises a need to communicate to his audience who may or may not have access to the language of his Punjabi or Urdu poems. That Shahid himself may not comprehend the English song he performs doesn't seem to matter. The language resources, and religious ones, are, in this sense, independent of the performer who takes on the role of a vehicle for their entextualisation (Rosowsky 2013) from one context to another. This entextualisation, or embedding, makes us realise perhaps in close-up that language resources are mobile, dynamic and often detached from referential meaning in their entextualising. It is only when these entextualisations 'land' in an appropriate linguistic setting that referential meaning becomes significant.

When Shahid, the star turn, departs, the rest of the evening is taken up by the young performers sharing and performing their own repertoires. The use of aide-mémoires in Roman script for Punjabi, Urdu and Arabic is ubiquitous. Much of the repertoire is supported by online resources accessed through mobile phones.

> **Extract 7:** The internet makes a large difference. You can go on whenever you want, listen to whatever *naat*, *qasida* or *nasheed* you want. That helps a lot because if I haven't got the *nasheed*, I can download it or listen to it from there as many times as I like with the script in front of me or write it down.

> **Extract 8:** The forum there is dedicated to Urdu *nasheeds* in Roman Urdu. Hundreds of *naats* that people have been uploaded. Someone has taken the time to listen, type this up and make it benefit others. They're not following a particular method. It could be anyone doing that. So the words are there. I just need to see a basic wording. If I think someone has not spelt it right or the pronunciation has to be changed I can change that myself.

The online dimension of this practice has its own language profile with a complex amalgam of languages, scripts, genres and levels of formality and informality. Languages are often represented by the prestigious H-varieties of Urdu, H-Punjabi and Classical Arabic. Online discussions can take place in spoken Punjabi, or Urdu or in local English – all mediated through Roman script. These discussions are usually very informal with example of local varieties of English used liberally. As these discussion threads operate transnationally as well as translocally, language choices range between Urdu, Punjabi and English. There is ample evidence here of 'grassroots literacy' and 'grassroots English' (Omoniyi and Blommaert 2006, 599–600) as discussants on the fora seek out resources for devotional songs and poetry.

> **Extract 9:** On those forums you end up discussing the meanings of words and phrases. Sometimes someone has a question, 'Does anyone have this or that *nasheed*' and someone will upload it. Or someone will ask what verse number 3 means or what is its meaning? And people discuss about what it means providing totally different meanings. I think it is good for sharing information and checking people's understanding because in Urdu you probably get a word that means three different things.

In this Sheffield celebration – which, in Robertson's terms, is a 'glocalised' event and in Beyer's a 'particularisation of a universal' – the universal being Islamic devotional song and poetry – the reciter sings in Urdu and in Punjabi. The audience sing in Urdu, Punjabi and in Classical Arabic. However, exemplifying the inadequacy of such terms for explaining such complex and fluid processes is the knowledge that devotional songs and poetry in the Islamic world are already particularisations of something universal. Unlike the liturgical language, which is always Classical Arabic and, as such, is the universalisation of a particular (the Arabic language) across the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds, here transnational affordances encouraged by greater global mobility and communication bring the original particularisation to new contexts and settings. The growth of devotional song and poetry in English, a different but obviously related particularisation, adds to this kaleidoscope of sounds, forms, words and modes.

Example 3 – beyond universal/homogenous and the particular/diverse?

My third example involves young Muslims in the diaspora re-constructing their religious identities using a quite different set of language resources. Above it was mentioned how the quest for authenticity can take a number of paths. Firstly, there is the authenticity of the 'heartlands' where devotional song and poetry are learned and performed in the heritage languages of Urdu and Punjabi. Secondly, there is the authenticity of the original sources of the religion where devotional song and poetry is learned and performed in Classical Arabic. In both of these contexts, the place of referential meaning is often problematic with varying levels of comprehension at play. However, rather like for the sacred language of

the liturgy, the language resources deployed by these young people travel from one setting to another, from the heartlands to the diaspora, from one diaspora setting to another, almost independently of the language competences of the young people themselves. The entextualisations of sacred Arabic texts in the liturgy or the co-sanctified texts of the Urdu and Punjabi poems and songs play important roles in these young people's re-construction of their faith. They are both instances of the particularisations of the universal that can only be understood by taking into account an indexical perspective (Blommaert 2010). They point to certain historical processes and events. The performance of Islamic devotional song and poetry in South Asian languages is a historical particularisation of the universal faith in the heartlands and the language combinations described above explain the linguistic tension that exists between prestigious literary languages and spoken varieties. Transposed to the diaspora, it is particularised again as these entextualisations are adopted by younger generations. Due to language shift and educational trajectories (opportunity to study Urdu at secondary school or not, for example), these entextualisations are never exact mirrors of the original. The transposition of the genre, if not the form, of the devotional song or poem is also a form of entextualisation and the appearance of such poems and songs in English partake not only in the genre of devotional literature but also, because of the context, local genres, forms and registers.

Example 3 is a different manifestation of the particularisation of a universal. Young British Muslims often choose to perform devotional song and poetry in English and in performance modes influenced by popular and modern cultural forms. This Anglicisation appears to be transforming and fusing forms, registers and genres from a different heritage.

> **Extract 10:** There are many *Naat Khawan* coming through who recite in English and that's helping the younger generation and closing the gap.

For example, Figure 5 shows one young performer, who on dress and stance alone (the sunglasses, the closely cropped hair, the gaze into the distance perhaps denoting alienation) signals certain Western cultural influences. This image is from a YouTube video promoting a downloadable track of a devotional song that Wajid has authored entitled 'Heal Me', a lamentations-like piece that draws on narratives of personal loss and despair. With the exception of the word 'Allah' however, the piece has no overt Islamic references.

Wajid begins with,

Yeaaaah….

Yeaaaah….

Ooooooh…

O Allah, can you feel me?

O Allah, can you feel me?

O Allah, can you feel me?

Figure 5. Wajid Akhtar Heal Me (*Fair Use* screenshot from *YouTube.* Accessed December 5, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKNwgbeHHtE).

> O Allah can you heal me?
>
> Yeaaaah….

His voice then fades but still provides an acoustic backdrop to what comes next. A young hip hop artist called Rubzee then begins with his verses,

> And let me close my **eyes**
>
> And just rea**lise**
>
> This life is not **cool**
>
> And now I stand my **ground**
>
> And just fight through the **fools** and **goons**
>
> Who are pulling me **down**
>
> And I must spread my **sound**
>
> Like a little dis**ease**
>
> From Sheffield to **London town**
>
> I went and bust my crown like a shining **star**
>
> I was lost but now I'm **found**. (stressed syllables in bold)

Wajid returns with his 'O Allah…' refrain and the voices alternate twice more in the pattern described above.

Returning to Bauman's continuum for performance (see page 4), this is certainly at the improvisation end of the continuum. There is no sacred text, no sanctified language variety, no verbatim rendition – indeed much of the hip hop tradition values 'freestyle'.

On the one hand, the use of varieties of English and a Western musical genre, the liberal adoption and adaptation of the tropes of musical entertainment (for example, 'Feat.'), the clear statement to the listener about identity – 'this is me and I am here' – with no apologetics indexes through language and music a particular identity and culture. A global faith is here being particularised through its performance in a particular cultural tradition and we are perhaps unused to this combination – it disrupts and de-centres in a powerful form of communication. And to perhaps add even more layers to an already multi-layered performance, we have the mix genre with the local hip hop artist, who died young, contributing the particular lexical variety and rhythms of another text genre and musical genre. The entextualisations that are occurring here are complex and dynamic – both in this translocal and this globalising context. These young people respond in different ways.

> **Extract 11:** The massive revival of *naat khawans* is having an impact on the younger generations, they're coming through. But it's not only the Urdu now. There's a lot of new young *naat khawans* who recite in English. And that's helping the generation. When I was maybe 15 I was learning my Urdu in madrassahs, learning Urdu in school. But Urdu is a very rare option now in today's schools. Because the younger generations, whose fathers were born here, their language is getting diluted, they're not learning or speaking the Arabic, the Urdu, the Punjabi in the home. Their mother tongue is English. So for these people to keep connected to *nasheeds* or to *naat,* English is the language. The tradition is continuing but there is a shift in the language.

In terms of the re-construction of faith, there is an inevitable hybridity involved when diasporic conditions are present. It is no surprise that these hybrid devotional songs admit leakage from other varieties and languages, especially from English, whilst the 'heartland' genres are more carefully demarcated and restricted allowing only the sanctified varieties of Urdu, H-Punjabi and, occasionally, Farsi. This might be considered as something inauthentic and there will be those who hold such a view.

> **Extract 12:** This has originated from the second or third generations within this country. It's an amalgamation of western and eastern cultures. And religious aspects as well. Introducing them all together and fusing them together. I was listening to one scholar the other day. He was saying **nasheeds of today don't have the value of traditional nasheeds**. The traditional, current *nasheeds*, can have the traditional poetry, the traditional wording, but it will be infused with certain instruments or musical backgrounds. (author's emphasis)

What arises in these translocal contexts, therefore, is a concatenation of tongues, words, scripts, melodies genres and performance modes – reaching backwards and forwards in time, using the global space to both renew traditions, efface them or transform them.

Conclusion

We have seen here how helpful Blommaert's call for attention to language resources is when analysing the performance practices of these young people and the re-construction of their religion and identities. A recognition of the truncated saliency of language varieties, registers, modes, scripts, identities goes a long way in capturing the complexity and mobility of these processes.

Such processes re-present and consolidate both extant and emerging layers of complexity. Because of demographic mobility and modern social formations in the globalised context, there are rapid and mobile sociolinguistic consequences. In performance practices involving song and poetry, there is also the accommodation of cultural specificities such as genre, melody, tone, instrumentation and language varieties within diasporic settings as these young performers navigate and perform their multiple religious and linguistic identities.

Finally, the entire process is infused with multiple and multidirectional entextualisations. This effect of disembedding takes place between and across sites in the global diasporas so that, on the one hand, for example, Punjabi *naat* are recited in Yorkshire living rooms not only through the sharing of texts and performance forms but also through the transnational role modelling of the *naat khawans* as they journey out from the centre of *naat* production to the periphery of the diaspora. And on the other, the universality of the Islamic devotional genre is transformed in the diasporic setting through new language forms, musical modes and performance practices.

These examples add to the growing understanding of how language resources and religious practices interact within a globalising world to generate both convergent and divergent practices which represent in their turn the globalising tropes of the 'universal in the particular' and the 'particular in the universal'.

Notes

1. By 'heartland', I follow Beyer (2007) who uses this term to contrast with 'homeland'. The young performers in this article were, in the main, born in the UK and their connection with the homelands of their parents and grandparents is symbolic and emotional though still reflecting core notions of authenticity.
2. For example, much early research into bilingualism used the loaded term 'semilingualism', a term which has been largely discredited (Skutnabb-Kangas 1981).
3. Some of the songs and poems are in literary Punjabi, a Western variety of Punjabi which is not an official language of Pakistan despite spoken Punjabi, and varieties thereof, being the most widely spoken language in the country.
4. Hindi and Sanskrit with Hinduism, Judaism with Hebrew, Latin and Catholic Christianity, Geez and the Orthodox Ethiopian Church are other examples.
5. The Keighley Munshids are an ensemble of singers of Pakistani heritage from Yorkshire who specialise in the repertoire of the classical devotional songs and poetry of the Levant. (The Keighley Munshids n.d.).

6. A traditional anthology of narratives and poetry composed in Classical Arabic celebrating the birthday of the Prophet used through much of the Muslim world.
7. In the Social and Behavioural Sciences, there is growing recognition that what is commonly thought of as the norm is, in fact, the biased and value-laden contexts, agents and research participants symbolised by the acronym Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010).
8. An annual event commemorating the birth of the Prophet celebrated by many (not all) Muslims all over the world.
9. There is, for example, the ethnolect variation of English spoken by young people of South Asian backgrounds identified by Heselwood and McChrystal (2000) and the more widespread and culture-crossing multilingual ethnolects identified by Rampton, among others (2015).
10. These spoken varieties of Punjabi are variously called Pothwari, Pahari, Hindko and even Mirpuri. (Lothers & Lothers 2010).

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