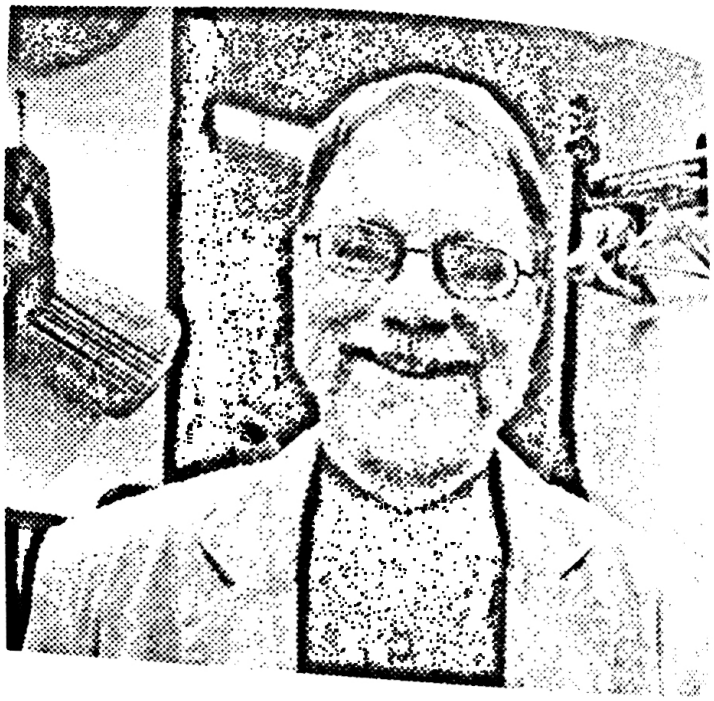
Prof. Richard K. Wolf



Richard K. Wolf has taught at Harvard University since 1999, where he is currently Professor of Music and South Asian Studies. His publications concern classical, folk and tribal musical traditions, and music in Islamic practices in India and Pakistan. Based on nine years of fieldwork in South and Central Asia since 1982, his writings address issues of language, emotion, poetics, and rhythm. Wolf's first book, The Black Cow's Footprint: Time, Space, and Music in the Lives of the Kotas of South India (2005), examined musical activity among members of a tribal community in South India in terms of broader spatio-temporal patterns of behavior and thought. It received the Edward Cameron Dimock, Jr. Prize in the Humanities. His forthcoming second book, The Voice in the Drum, is an experimental work combining a broad comparative study of drumming and rhythmic practices in South Asia with creative writing in the a form of a novel. He is also the editor of Theorizing the Local: Music, Practice, and Experience in South Asia and Beyond (2009) and forthcoming volumes on indigeneity in India and the cross cultural study of rhythm. A musician himself, Wolf performs professionally on the South Indian vina. Wolf has been the recipient of numerous grants and fellowships, including those from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, the American Council of Learned Societies, and The National Endowment for the Humanities, The American Institute of Indian Studies, The American Institute of Pakistan Studies, and Fulbright-Hays. In 2012 he was honored with the Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. He is currently in Tajikistan as a Fulbright South and Central Asia Regional Researcher affiliated with the University of Central Asia, where he is conducting research on the relationship of performers' singing to their self-accompaniment on rubob and other long necked lutes.

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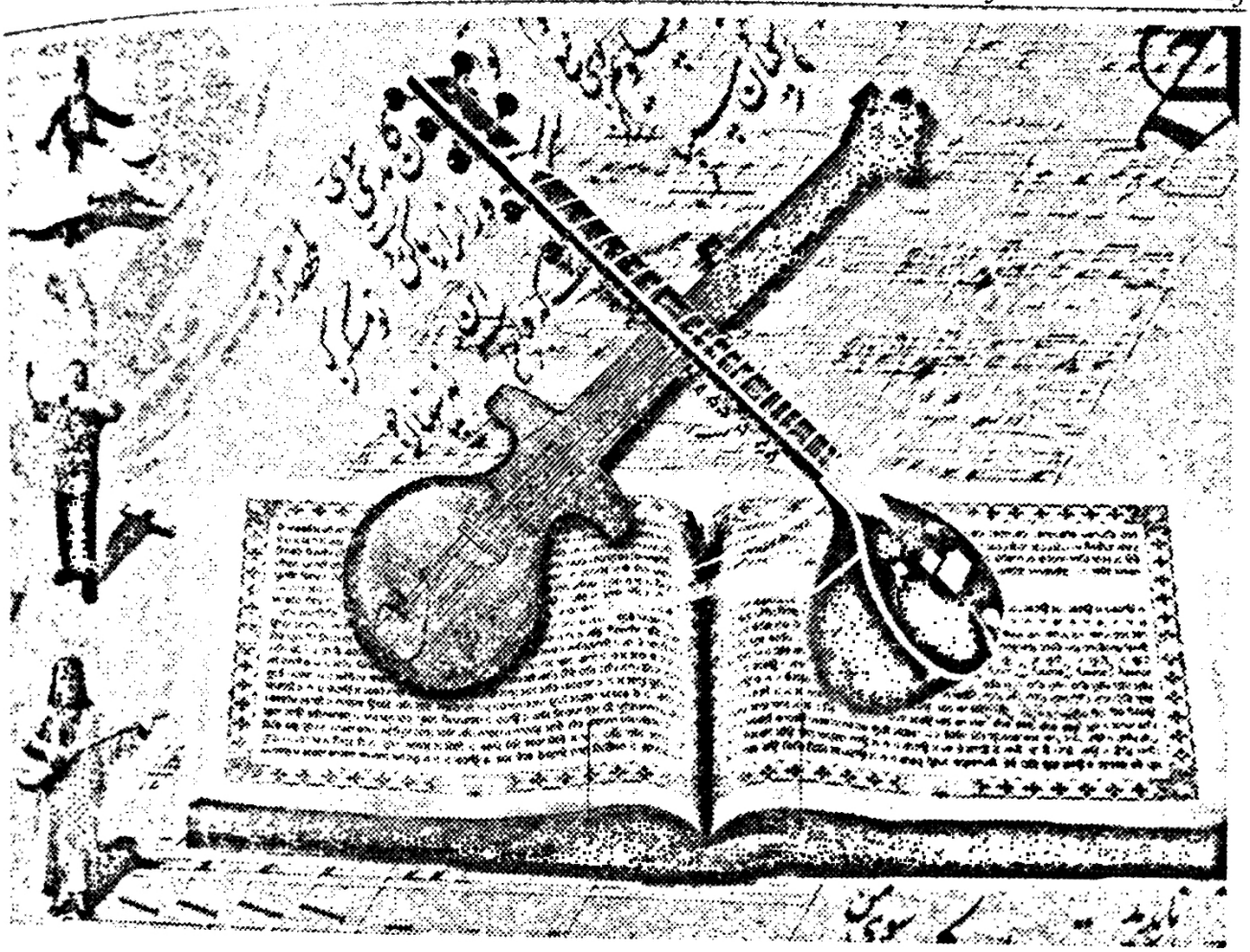

Music and the Emotions: Perspectives from 30 years in South and Central Asia

The topic of music and the emotions is ideally suited for cross-disciplinary treatment in this Aga Khan Humanities Project forum, one aim of which is to promote scholarship that bridges the Sciences and Humanities. Approaching this topic ethnographically and historically, I will draw from eight years of fieldwork in South and Central Asia to offer frameworks for studying music and the emotions and to comment on the challenges we face in studying the emotions generally.

Many scholars in psychology, history, anthropology, and music theorize and debate about emotion. Field researchers tend to view emotions as socially constructed, arguing members of society learn how they are supposed to feel in a given context by their upbringing. Whether such members conform in their inner lives to the patterns of behavior society teaches them remains an open question. Laboratory scientists—mainly psychologists—tend, by contrast, to assume "human

nature" remains a constant across cultures. Such psychologists hold that emotions are hard-wired in the brain, perhaps tied to primitive instincts once needed for survival. For more than 130 years psychologists have posited that all complex emotions, on the analogy of secondary colors, can be reduced to combinations of more basic ones, like rage, terror, anxiety and joy. Psychologists Ortony and Turner convincingly contradicted this line of thinking in an article published in 1990 in the *Psychological Review*, but the hypothesis persists.[11] My own view is that people often experience, with potential inner conflict, more than one emotion at the same time.

Cultural anthropologists argue that it is impossible to enter another's inner subjective world. Instead, they study concrete forms of behavior and the ways local actors interpret these behaviors. Many focus on emotion words and how they are employed, thereby discerning how members of different cultures represent emotions to themselves and to one another. I'd like to suggest that music and musical behavior provide even richer points of departure for studying emotion in culture.

Among music scholars and philosophers in both Europe and Asia, debates about emotion are part of larger arguments regarding the extent to which musical meaning is natural or ascribed. Is emotional meaning inherent in the arrangements of tones and rhythmic patterns, graspable by all humans by virtue of their common biological makeup? And/or, is it tied to sung texts or culturally specific contexts? Ethnomusicologists hold that culture plays a significant part in how listeners respond to music. Many, however, also acknowledge near-universals such as those that might be related to shared experiences of excitement and decay in the human body. Consider the association of slow tempos with mourning, melancholy, or seriousness, and rapid ones with lighter emotions. Ethnographic work, however, often contradicts even such very basic generalizations.

In this article, I will alternate between discussing ideal types and providing concrete examples that both illustrate and complicate the ideal types. The emotional ideal types comprise names of pieces as

well as terms and concepts employed by scholars and philosophers. The concrete examples are drawn from my fieldwork in South and Central Asia. The discussion will cover three topic areas: 1) Musical expressiveness; 2) Emotional states; and 3) Conventional meanings. My earliest research, beginning in 1982 and continuing to the present time, was in South India, where I studied classical instrumental and vocal music. I specialized in the *vīnā*, a long-necked lute, and learned to perform Karnatak compositions and improvise in *rāgas*. Later, beginning in 1990, I conducted research on a minority tribal community called the Kotas. Numbering about 1500 people, the Kotas live in the Nilgiri Hills of South India and have their own language, religion, and music. Beginning in the late 1990s I began to research music in Islamic contexts in various parts of India and Pakistan. Since 2012, I have been studying the relationship of singing to instrumental accompaniment in several musical styles of Tajikistan.

Musical Expressiveness

In considering emotion and music, we may wish to contrast expressiveness, which concerns the manner a musical idea is realized, with convention, which concerns the ways in which human societies assign emotional meanings to entire categories of music, such as keys, tempos, melodies, or, in this case, *rāgas*. After considering the issue of how conventional understandings of *rāgas* relate to subjective understandings of a particular performance as it unfolds, I'll consider three subtopics related to musical expressiveness: Qualities versus Intensities; Metaphor; and Sincerity.

The musical mode, or *rāga*, called *Bēgada* is supposed to arouse feelings of heroism and courage in the listener. The generic term in Indian poetics theory relating to this is rasa, which means not emotion, but "essence or juice." 2000 years of Sanskrit and regional-language writings outline complex theories of emotion and aesthetics with regard to painting, dance, drama, poetry and music. Listening to this *rāga*, one may contemplate the ways one does or does not feel heroism or courage. More importantly, though, the listener may attend to how each musical phrase moves to the next, telling a constantly shifting melodic tale and taking him or her on an emotional journey that is not reducible to words.

Qualities versus Intensities

We often talk about emotion in two ways, one which specifies the emotion—"she felt very angry"; "the man felt tenderly toward the child"— and one which emphasizes the degree of emotion without specifying it, like, "the sound of Akasharif Juraev's voice made me very emotional." Regarding music, it is often easier to talk about degrees of emotional intensity than kinds of emotion—happy, excited, aroused, sad, melancholy. And yet the constantly shifting nature of music as it unfolds bespeaks rich qualitative changes in experience for which words in any language are far too clumsy. Given the rich evocativeness of music, I wonder whether particular songs or melodies might themselves be in fact better than emotion words for capturing special moments and sequences of human experiences. Is there any musical passage the reminds you of a particular, very personal, emotional state more than any word or words possibly could?

Metaphor

The terminology musicians employ to designate songs and techniques often points toward relations between music and more general concepts. The techniques used on the *vīnā* for bending the string and altering pitches are all called gamaka. While South Indians recognize the emotional expressiveness of these techniques, the Sanskrit term *gamaka* actually means "making clear or intelligible." The *gamaka* clarifies the *rāga*; it helps delineate one distinct modal structure from another. In many styles of music in Tajikistan on instruments such as the *tanbur*, the *rubob*, and the *dutor*, performers also deflect the string for expressive purposes. Here the technique is understood purely as a way to beautify a melody; it does not serve to delineate one mode from another. In Tojiki, the general term for such an ornament, *nola*, provides a direct link between musical expressiveness and the manifestation of emotion in crying. Some Iranian ornamentational techniques point in similar directions. Performers of Iranian classical music and religious chanting of *musībat* alike employ an ornament on a single note that they associate with *huzn*, sadness, grief or pathos. Called *takyeh*, meaning "leaning or support," the ornament involves leaning on a note, as it were; decorating it by fluttering briefly toward the note above and back again. A sequence of *takyehs* together is called *tahrīr*. The metaphor

here may relate to calligraphic writing or perhaps to the obsolete Farsi meaning of "setting free."

The expressive techniques of *gamaka*, *nola*, and *tahrir*, when rendered effectively, may lead the listener to bond subjectively with the performer. The listener may have the sensation that the singer or instrumentalist is playing directly from the heart; that the music is a medium conveying the musician's or composer's emotion to the listener.[12]

Sincerity

The impression of an effective performance upon a listener implicates the issue of *sincerity*. What does it take for a performer to move the hearts of listeners? Many would argue it is not merely a manner of technique. After all, virtuosity may convey emotional intensity, but it may also come across as superficial. In America, we have a saying. "you gotta pay your dues to sing the blues." That is, you have to have experienced true hardship in your own life to be capable of singing the African-American-born Blues style effectively.

One of the genres in Tajikistan about which performers I interviewed expressed a similar sentiment is *bulbulik*. Bulbulik is a three line poem in the Wakhi language in which women give voice to their hardships and/or thoughts of loved ones who have died or are living far away. Thematically, the *bulbulik* has been likened to the Tajik and Afghan *falak*, the Iranian *ġaribī*,[13] and the Baluchi *zahirok*, but the *bulbulik's* poetic form, vocal melody, and performance style render it distinct. Although any musician, male or female, may sing the text of someone else's *bulbulik*, the life of this genre depends on ever new generations of women pouring their experiences into singing their own fresh poetry. Young girls may join their mothers and grandmothers sitting on the hillside and mimick their performance styles, pick up key phrases and tropes, but the girls can become full bearers of the tradition only later in life after they've experienced serious personal losses.

"Sincerity" here, then, concerns the way in which musical

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12 cf. Schutz. Alfred. 1951. Making music together: a study in social relationships. Social Research 18: 76-97.

13 Blum, Stephen. 1974. Persian folksong in Meshed, Iran (1969). Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council, 6: 86-114.

expressiveness is connected with the performer's perceived storehouse of challenging life experiences. A few other situations in which sincerity plays a part, either positively or negatively, include the following: in South India, as in many other parts of the world, professional lamenters are hired for funerals. Everyone knows that they are performing work for hire, but their laments act as catalysts for others to cry and create an appropriate atmosphere of mourning. At Sufi shrines in Pakistan, professional drummers stimulate dancing mystics, called *dhamālīs*, to enter into into a state of *mastī*, in which they commune with the spirit of the shrine's saint, and via the appropriate *silsilah*, with Ali, the Prophet, and God. Unlike professional lamenters in South India, who may have had no personal relationship with the deceased, drummers at Sufi shrines are themselves often devotees who wish to honor a saint. They must generally refrain from entering into *mastī* themselves and focus on helping their clients, the dancers.

Summary

We may distinguish between understanding emotionality in terms of qualities and intensities; it is easier to represent musical effects on listeners in terms of intensities, for emotional qualities produced are perhaps as diverse as are the musical sounds themselves. Musical expressiveness is achieved by various means, one of which is ornamentation. Terms for such expressive devices are often metaphoric for emotion. Finally, the possibility of a musician expressing emotion is sometimes tied to his or her ability to convince the audience that he or she is actually feeling those emotions, or has the credentials to do so.

Emotional States of Performers and Listeners

In considering the issue of emotional states, I'll touch on three subtopics: the ethical position of the listener; the responsibilities of the performer; and the transmission of a message.

The Ethical Position of the Listener

The enormously influential 11th century philosopher Abu Hamid al Ghazzali, who hailed from Tus, Khorasan, near Mashad, wrote extensively on the ethical position of the listener in *Ihyā 'ulūm ad-dīn*, and other treatises defending the use of certain kinds of singing and music for spiritual ends. The focus of this treatise is on *wajd*, ecstasy, rapture, or joy, which is seen here as a desired state in which the ideal

Sufi subject, the *wali*, the friend of God, is immersed in thoughts of the beloved. All sights and sounds remind the *wali* of God. How does one reach this state? According to Al Ghazzali, "listening comes first; it bears as fruit a state in the heart that is called ecstasy; and ecstasy bears as a fruit a moving of the extremities of the body."[14]

The initial part of this treatise deflected criticisms of music by theologians of the time. Al Ghazzali argued that listening to music could not be forbidden merely on the grounds of its pleasurableness, otherwise many other pleasurable things would also have to be forbidden. He described a border zone or sacred precinct (*himà*) surrounding acts that were *harām*. Music and other activities were often forbidden because they drew careless souls from the territory of the unlawful into the realm of the harām itself. He described analogies in which pleasures would be fully realized only through unlawful acts: the pleasure of drinking a small amount of wine would incite a man to drunkenness, or of seeing the thigh of a woman would lead him to seek complete pleasure in sexual intercourse. Like the tempted wine drinker, it was the responsibility of music listeners to avoid being drawn from the *himà* into the *harām*. Al Ghazzali quoted Abu Sulayman in saying "Music and singing do not produce in the heart that which is not in it, but they stir up what is in it."[15] The permissibility of music, Al Ghazzali concluded, depends entirely on the circumstances and on the *tariqa* to which the individual belongs. Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists in recent years have developed a renewed focus on the ethics of listening, partly in response to Charles Hirschkind's influential ethnography of listening to cassette sermons in Cairo.[16]

14 Macdonald, D.B. 1901-2a. «Emotional religion in Islam, part 1.» Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 195-252. (A translation of Al Ghazzali's Ihyā 'ulūm ad-dīn).

15 Macdonald, D.B. 1901-2a. «Emotional religion in Islam, part 1.» Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 195-252. (A translation of Al Ghazzali's Ihyā 'ulūm ad-dīn), p. 220.

16 Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics. New York: Columbia University Press.

The Responsibilities of the Performer

Al Ghazzali also had a great deal to say about the making of lawful music—sung poetry, perhaps accompanied by the *daff*. Al Ghazzali listed seven reasons why sung poetry could, more effectively than the Qur'an, arouse ecstasy in men.[17] 1) All verses of the Qur'an do not fit the state of the listener and hence the listener may not be ready to hear the message. 2) For those who have committed the Qur'an to heart, they may be less struck by hearing these familiar words than by hearing the singing of freshly composed poetry 3) "Measure in language has a power, through poetic taste, of making an impression on the soul." Although the Qur'an contains metrical passages, it is not, on the whole, metrical in the manner of classical poetry. Singers with good voices, Al Ghazzali argued, can make an impression on the hearts of listeners by reinforcing the meter of the poetry. 4) Singers can apply different melodies to poetry and vary the proportions of long and short in order to move the heart of the listener. In the Qur'an, these proportions can't be changed. 5) Musicians can strengthen the rhythms of poetry with their voices and musical instruments. 6) A singer can judge the state of his audience and choose a song appropriately. This is not possible for chanting the Quran, which Al Ghazzali likened to medicine. There is a risk that some listening to the Quran might not like this "medicine" and in that way inadvertently reject the word of God. 7) The Quran is "uncreated" and cannot be fully understand by "created" beings. Poetry is more human, being created, and thereby resonates with what Al Ghazzali called the "fanciful desires" (*huzūz*) of humans.

Al Ghazzali's ideas have general significance and ought to be taken into consideration in any study of how emotionality is communicated, shared, and manipulated among different kinds of performers and listeners. They are particularly relevant to the Sufi genre of Qawwāli in India and Pakistan. Here, musicians sing poetry in Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Panjabi, Braj, and other languages to the accompaniment of harmonium, tabla, and powerful handclapping. The most important contexts for these performances are death-day celebrations of sufi saints,

17 Macdonald, D. B. 1901-2b. «Emotional religion in Islam, part 2.» Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 705-48. p, 738.

called 'urses, and weekly gatherings at shrines, usually on Thursdays. It is the job of the *qawwāl*, or singer, to choose verses, melodies, and rhythms that will create a state of ecstasy in the listener. Listeners will show their appreciation by passing wads of bills, often through an intermediary Sheikh, to the *qawwāls*, and the singers will observe the effect of their words on the dancing of serious listeners. The *qawwālī* group is responsible to conduct and control the *hāl* of the enraptured spiritual listener, both to bring the listener into a raised spiritual state and to control his or her return to a state of quiescence.[18]

The Transmission of a Message

The 9th-10th c. central Asian scientist, philosopher and musician, Al Farabi, wrote extensively on the relationship of music and poetry and was one the most important writers through whom Europeans became familiar with Aristotle in the Middle Ages. What Al Farabi called "human melody" seems to encompass many expressive capabilities of the human voice. Al Farabi argued that pleasing aspects of human melodies and musical instruments are not necessarily related to the content of the discourse they convey, rather they are useful in stimulating the hearer to listen attentively to the text. And yet Al Farabi also wrote that poetic discourse bestows meanings on music. Melodies invented without text, in his view, lack meaning.

Music's emotive capacity plays into what Al Farabi called "imaginative representation," the image a reader or listener creates in his or her mind when making sense of any form of art including poetic discourse. While sharing key features of the discourse itself, the relationship of imaginative representation to reality is necessarily false, like one's image in a mirror. Music may play a role in deflecting an imaginative representation in a direction more positive or beautiful, or in one that is negative, ugly, or base. Al Farabi combined philosophies of Aristotle and Plato to arrive at his own theory of "ultimate happiness." Poetic discourses, combined with their human melodies, could stimulate ethical values and temperament and thereby lead the hearer to ultimate happiness. Two points from this terse review of Al Farabi's theories are

worth emphasizing: 1) music of certain kinds is born from and supports the emotional and ethical content of texts, and 2) music can also be an element unconnected with the moral or emotional content of a text. But it can nevertheless, through its aesthetic appeal, help the listener understand the text, and in the process realize "ultimate happiness." Dramatic recitation of *marsiyah* poetry in South Asia, with evocative descriptions of scenes from the battle of Karbala in 680 CE, stretches the boundaries of what many people would regard as song or music, but I would argue it fits well within the broader category of Al Farabi's human melody. It excites a tragic sensibility in the listener owing to the content of the text and, if done well, it also produces a kind of moral pleasure or satisfaction among Shī'ī listeners.

Summary

Interchanges between musicians and listeners provide useful data for analyzing emotionality. Al Ghazzali, among other theologians, have historically laid emphasis both on ethical listeners and on responsible performers in transactions that could result in desirable spiritual/ emotional outcomes. This interplay continues today in shrine Sufism of South Asia. Al Farabi's broader notion of human melody stimulates a variety of emotions in listeners as they engage in "imaginative representation" of a text.

Conventional meanings

I'll approach the discussion of conventional meanings via two subtopics, "Forums for exploration" and "Guideposts."

Forums for Exploration

I've already alluded to the issue of whether some of music's emotional meanings are universally perceivable, or whether all such meanings must arise from shared conventions or association with sung texts. A number of systems pair emotions with musical modes; these include the "doctrine of the affections," (Affektenlehre) of 17th century Europe; the *rāga* systems of India and Pakistan; and, to a lesser extent, the system of *dastgāhs* and their subsidiaries in Iran. One Iranian modal entity named *dashti* is associated strongly with lamentation and gets used extensively in *ta'ziyeh* passion plays. As mentioned earlier, the broad conventional meanings of modes cannot capture the flux of feeling individuals experience

over time. The labels are merely suggestions—perhaps serving as guides when creative artists tell a story in narrative, drama, and dance. *Rāgas*, *dastgāhs*, and *maqāms* are in this sense "forums for exploration" of emotion.

Guideposts

Guideposts, by contrast, are focused musical moments with specific, contextually defined qualities and or intensities. In both Iranian and Tajik music the *awj*, for instance, is an emotional peak of a performance marked by activity in the upper range of a singer's voice. High frequency pitch, a natural form of salience, is useful for signaling importance, particularly in cultures where both pitch and social hierarchy are represented in vertical space. In the annual ten-day God Ceremony of the Kota tribe of South India, musicians incorporate a subtle use of register shift to signal a moment of importance. As a modern substitute for the age-old process of reconstructing temples from forest materials, the priests now ritually toss thatch onto the roof of each of three permanent temples. At the moment the priests throw the thatch upward, musicians abandon the special melody they'd been playing on their double reeds and begin to trill on a high note.

A qualitative guidepost could be a short piece that comes to carry the specific emotional associations of the ritual with which it is associated. In many parts of South India, if a married woman's husband dies, she must undergo the emotionally wrenching jewelry-removing ritual. Among the Kotas, a special musical tune contributes to the emotional import of this funerary ritual.

Some of the most interesting guideposts are controversial, or have emotional attributions that change over time. I've described several such guideposts in my publications about the Kotas.[19] I've also written about the more widespread controversy in South Asia surrounding

19 Wolf, Richard K. The Black Cow's Footprint: Time, Space and Music in the Lives of the Kotas of South India (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005; University of Illinois Press, 2006.)

Wolf, Richard K. 2001. "Emotional dimensions of ritual music among the Kotas, a south Indian tribe." Ethnomusicology 45(3): 379–422.

drummingduring Muharram.[20] The emotional dimension of this controversy is worth special attention here.

First, it is important to understand that Muharram in South Asia is observed by both Shiahs and Sunnis—and in India, even Hindus participate in their own ways. In the 19th century it was not uncommon for Sunnis and Shiahs to participate in the same processions. Members of both communities used to drum. This drumming served a number of functions, which included announcing the arrival of a procession and proclaiming the importance of the ruler sponsoring it. Drumming also fitted well with the character of Muharram rituals and poetry more generally, as they were and are largely designed to evoke images of the battle of Karbala. Processions included imitation cenotaphs, blood-stained funeral biers, battle standards, a cradle evoking the murder of Imam Husain's infant son, and many other memorial artifacts. Drumming contributed to this commemoration by recalling the sounds of drummers who would have led the troops.

In more recent times, as tensions between Sunnis and Shiahs escalated, processions of the two communities have usually been separated. Many South Asian Sunnis continue to drum during their rituals, and to consider the drumming a form of respect for Husain and his followers. Meanwhile many Shiahs shun drumming, saying that drumming connotes an inappropriate atmosphere of happiness. They cite the prevalence of drumming at weddings as justification for this. Recall Al Ghazzali's discussion of the sacred precinct—it is as if drumming would lure unwitting listeners into a mood of nuptial celebration. Arguing further, some Shiahs cite *marsiyah* texts that describe Husain's enemies striking the drum each time they slew a member of the other side; hence drumming signals defeat and not victory. These arguments over the emotional appropriateness of drumming have more to do with politics than with aesthetics.

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20 Wolf, Richard K. 2000. "Embodiment and ambivalence: Emotion in south Asian Muharram drumming." Yearbook for Traditional Music 32: 81–116.
The voice in the drum: Music, language and emotion in Islamicate south Asia. University of Illinois Press. 2014

However, some Shiahs and Sunnis also listen carefully to Muharram drumming and, taking account of the tempo and patterns involved, argue that individual drum patterns carry specific emotional meanings appropriate to the occasion. One Shii writer explained to me that faster drumming evokes the heat of battle, while slower drumming connotes the state of affairs at the end of the battle. Husain's male companions had been slain and the women were then marched to Damascus and paraded before Yazid.

Those who follow the Chishti Sufi tradition at the Nizamuddin shrine in Delhi, by contrast, explain that Muharram drumming encodes specific *marsiyah* texts. For example, one of the poems begins, "Today Sughra cries in Medina like this with eyes full of tears" (*āj sughrā yūn madīne men hain rotī bhar ke nain*). This alludes to Husain's daughter Sughra, who was left behind in Madina when Husain went with his small party to fight the Ummayyad forces in Karbala. When processions travel from the Nizamuddin shrine through the neighborhood on the eve of Ashura, the drummers stop in an open area and play this special pattern. Knowledgable participants say that they hear this text in the strokes of the drum. Listeners stand quietly and contemplate this emotional state.

Summary and Conclusion

Two categories of conventional emotional meanings were highlighted. General meanings for overarching entities such as *rāgas* serve as fora for more subtle exploration in performance; specific meanings are tied to smaller scale musical gestures. Performers often use these latter gestures, which serve as emotional guideposts, at key moments in a musical performance or structural points in a ritual. These guideposts are culturally defined, but may also be characterized by naturally salient characteristics such as pitch height and speed. Musical pieces and gestures may serve as guideposts for emotion whether or not the populace reacts to those guideposts in a unified manner. The relationship between the way music is emotionally defined and the way individuals actually react is inherently unstable. In my view, this dynamic remains a ripe subject for ongoing investigation in the many societies of the world. Although I disagree with the psychologists who persist in arguing all emotions are combinations of a small number of

universal, basic emotions, I do agree that, at some level, we do share "human nature." And it is part of our nature to argue about how music makes us feel, and what, if anything, needs to be done about it.

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