

**The Psalms, Sufis and Peacemaking:
Creative and Critical Contextualized Musical Approach in Pakistan**

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Abstract

Sufi Islam is a powerful reality in all Muslim cultures and Sufi shrines are common to all and the one common ground in all these shrines is music. Apart from the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, geographical, political, theological and sectarian division in the Islamic world, there is a bonding factor of religious musical culture that brings people together for spiritual nourishment and interfaith relationships in the Islamic contexts.

Pakistan is a melting pot for its famous Sufi shrines and known for its *Qawalli* genre. This paper is based on the exploration of relational approach to Pakistan's famous *Sindhi* Sufi Shrine of *Bhit Sha*. It arises out of my ministry and missional engagement through biblical Psalms demonstrating how God is at work among Muslims, and particularly at Sufi shrines in Pakistan. In this paper I discuss the Psalms and Sufi music project as a bridge to the Sufi singers and musicians to create a respectful space for interfaith relationships through shared musical heritage and emerging networks of religiously-engaged music initiatives. I explore the concept of music culture, theoretical framework of musicking, musical pathways, and transformative music communication as bridges to Muslim-Christian sustainable relations. In this paper I present creative contextual musical expressions and related poetic content of the Psalms as bridges in the peacemaking processes in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

In the last century there have been numerous meetings emphasizing the need for interreligious dialogue and cross-cultural engagement between Christians and Muslims.¹ David Bosch considered dialogue as “a meeting of hearts rather than of minds,” he called it a “mystery” and proposed a “theology of religions characterized by creative tension” (2014, 495). Today Christian mission is being challenged to meet the adherents of other faiths in vulnerability and humility to openly restore relationships as a human being in this world.

In 1978 the Glen Eyrie Congress on Muslim Evangelism (Colorado Springs, CO) addressed the question of how to reach out to Muslims. Missiologists proposed various models such as dialogue in bold humility, witness in humility and suffering, cooperation with Islam by avoiding denunciation, allegations of false prophecy, and by acceptance of common words around each one.² Modern scholars are calling for missional praxis above and beyond Interfaith dialogue events between Muslims and Christians through various models.³ These approaches guide and educate us to engage with the larger Islamic world. Western scholars are struggling to research and find common ground to talk with Islam.

During the past several decades Christian witness toward the Muslim world have changed dramatically and mission approaches have taken a passive stance compared to historical engagements through polemic, debate, crusades, and as a colonial counterpart to other religions. Bosch stated; “In the field of religion, a paradigm shift always means both continuity and change, both faithfulness to the past and boldness to engage the future, both constancy and contingency, both tradition and transformation” (2011, 375).

The nexus of *missio-musico*⁴ is applicable in the backdrop of Muslim music culture of Islam. The spirituality of Islam is a gateway to develop relationships with the Muslim world.

¹ Cairo (1906), Edinburgh (1910), Lucknow (1911), Tambaran (1938), New Delhi (1961), WCC and Vatican Council II (1965), Berlin (1966), and Lausanne (1974, 1989, 2011) (Sunquist 2013).

² Bosch 2011; Walls 2004; Sunquist; 2013; Bevans and Shroeder 2004; Woodberry 1989, Shenk 2003,

³ Woodberry 2005; 2006; 2011, Reisacher, 2012; Shenk 2003; 2011.

⁴ With the combination of mission and music I am using a new term for the intersection of musicology and missiology.

In 2012 I had an opportunity to engage with the famous Sufi shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai in Hala, Sindh via Psalms. Such a watershed missional approach opened the doors for me to explore the role of Psalms to engage with the larger Muslim community particularly Sunni and Shia in Pakistan. That given background nurtures my interest to explore theories and extend the creative bridge building to peacebuilding processes. Therefore, I personally want to discover how the cultural musical tunes embedded in the text of Psalms can promote the peacemaking process in Pakistan.

My Background

Being a fourth generation Christian, musician and a pastor from Pakistan the cultural music and Psalms are close to my heart and represent my identity. I was raised and reared in the midst of religious and social animosity against Christians in Pakistan. The blasphemy law and religious extremism fanned the fire of hatred and geared the unceasing attacks on Christian churches, colonies, and individuals in the name of religion.

My interaction with Muslim educationalists as a music teacher for ten years (2002-2012) in Karachi's largest Muslim girl school, working with Muslim artists in the entertainment industry, producing Psalms and Christian gospel song albums, short term music classes in juvenile prison, and later at the Karachi central jail intrigued me to explore more about cultural music and religious commonalities to engage with Muslim neighbors to promote peace and religious harmony. Initiating annual Psalm competition in 2004 at Karachi that later turned to festivals helped me to realize that the book of Psalms is a common heritage of sacred songs that could be used as a bridge for peacemaking between Muslims and Christians in Pakistan.

Music Culture

The cultural music practices have shared a bond to bring people together and music is an intrinsic element of virtually every religious system (Nettl 2001:9). Religion is a universal

part of human culture and also has the power to transform the community, solve conflicts, and foster transformative peacemaking (King 2014, 29). The book of Psalms contains various common themes with Qur'anic doctrines that could be explored in cultural music for sustainable peacemaking in Pakistan (Abu Murad 2014; Said 2014). Sufism and its relation to Islam are deeply rooted in Muslim cultures in Pakistan (Ernst 1997; Ewing 1980; Wolf 2014).

Muslim Music Culture

The first and basic Islamic practice that relates to the sacred soundscape is the *adhan* from the *masjid* and *qirat* of the Qur'an in Arabic. The *tadwid* and the *adhan* are two forms of cantillation that constitute the only compulsory *masjid* (mosque) music in Muslim culture (Shiloah 1995,39; Michon 1991, 485). The chanting of the Qur'an, therefore, has become the most important example of "pitched sound-art in the whole of the Muslim world" (al Faruqi, 1984, 176). While scholarly consensus admits that music may enhance recitation spiritually, melodic practice is not included in the disciplines surrounding Qur'anic recitation (Davies 2002, 158).

Music is considered as a spiritual discipline in folk Islam. To understand about music in Islam two issues need to be addressed: (1) the controversy over the legitimate use of music in Islamic society and (2) the use of the terminology of the word music. The main problem of terminology involves the question of what is and what is not "music in Muslim culture" (al-Faruqi 1985, 3-6). The three main sources to deal with this issue are: the Qur'an, *ahadiths* and the Jurists stance. Jurists argue against music and are concerned with the moral health of the community. The schools of jurists are applying different methods of investigation into the use of music in Islamic thoughts (Michon 1991, 472). According to the musical *adab* (rules) in Sufism and juristic opinions the social situation, state of mind, text, *niya* (intent) of the artist, culture, and purpose of a song determine the validity of music in Muslim context (Aidi 2014).

Lois Ibsen al-Faruqi's sound art hierarchy (*handasah al-sawt*) gathers and organizes all possible auditory sounds in Muslim culture (*dhikr, takbirat, hamd, madih, and dua* (Baig, 2008, 255; al-Faruqi 1980, 58; Qureshi 2006). Following the ruling of Ibn- Taymiyyah (1966:11, 318) for *sama* (listening), al-Faruqi provides various categorizations of musical activities: "some of which are *harram* (forbidden), (while others are) *makruh* (unflavored), *mubah* (indifferent), *wajib* (recommended), and *mustahabb* (commendable)" (al-Faruqi 1985, 7; Syeed 1997). Because there is no specific legal sanction against music the 'ulama', religious scholars have themselves had differences over the centuries as to "whether music is acceptable, that is, legitimate, licit (*halal*), or illicit (*haram*) according to the Shari'ah, the Divine Law of Islam" (Syeed, 1997, 220). Modernized Muslims think that the great music of the Muslim world developed even despite Islam (1997, 221-28). The cultural force of sonic sounds and strong voices are unstoppable in the Pakistani Muslim context. All the Qur'anic verses, *hadiths* and jurists' rulings cannot stop the flow of music in the Muslim culture. The *adhan* of masjid minarets, Qur'anic *qirat*, Sunni Milad, Shi'a Majlis and Sufi Sama' are evidence that Muslim music culture is flourishing.

Islamic music culture in Pakistan is not monolithic rather it is heterogeneous. In oral culture the memory and embodiment of cardiac participation stays whole life. I apply the theory of musicking for exploring the Pakistani context in backdrop of contemporary social hate and religious animosity between Muslims and Christians. Pakistanis are basically a musical nation and religious music is a powerful lens through which to view the identities and movements emerging in music culture. Despite the licit and illicit status of music in Islam its permissibility and purposes are paramount in Pakistani culture.

I am using the lens of religious music culture of Pakistan, divided in two major parts: Canonical and non-canonical music culture. Adhan and Qur'anic *qirat* or cantillation fall in the canonical category. The non-canonical religious-spiritual music activities of the Pakistan are outside the *masjid* (mosque) in social spaces such as: Ramadan nights, the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*), birthdays of Sufi imams (*urs*), wedding, and condolences. The *adhan* from Masjid, Qur'anic *qirat*, Sunni *Milad*, Shi'a *Majlis-e-Marsya*; and Sufi Sama' are the five mainstreams of Muslim music culture in Pakistan.

Musicking

Musicologist Christopher Small introduced the theory of “*musicking*” as a collective action of a whole community that is present. He holds that “the meaning of a song, or indeed a piece of music, is not just that of the text on the page;” additionally, he contends, “Only when a song is performed will its multiple layers of meaning reveal themselves” (Small 1998, ix). Small realized that music is “a form of human encounter in which everyone who is present taking part (intentionally or unintentionally), and for whose success or failure as an event everybody who is present (performers, audience, event planner) has some responsibility” (1998, x). It is an active verb because “to make music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance” (1998, x). He expresses the propensity: “The fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works at all, but in action, in what people do” (1998:8). He further described musicking as “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small 2011, 9). Thus, music is reflected as an ‘activity’ of particular culture, space, and time that understand the significance by engaging each other (Small 1998:2). Pakistani context is an oral culture and according to musicking theory its application is beyond the page.

How does musicking help us understand Pakistani music culture relations? In light of the contemporary conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Pakistan, music-making peacebuilding and interreligious dialogues are necessary. King’s musical pathways advances the emerging field of ethnomusicology into missiology (King 2004, 304). Interreligious peacemaking demands manifold streams of collegial investigation within broader disciplinary arenas. Musical pathways communicate the biblical message (King 2014) and promote peace and reconciliation through soft missiology. Even the Qur’an declares that the three Abrahamic religions are the “people of book” (*ahl al-kitab*) and Muslims accept the Torah (Pentateuch), the Zabor (Psalms) and the Injil (Gospel) as divine revelation. (Quran. 3:18-20, 64-71; 4:171; 5:77-80). Musical pathways of communication theory (King 2004) seeks to build a sustainable peacemaking process/model with Muslims in Pakistan. Ultimately, they identify the collaborating dynamics of five key musical strategies (King/Tan 2014, 43, 69).

Musical Pathways

King proposes musical pathways toward peace and reconciliation through interfaith dialogue by using the Finnegan metaphor of musical pathways, Small's concept of musicking, and her own lens of communication theory that addresses many of the "dimensions inherent in the multivalent nature of music, pushing beyond the restriction of musical analysis alone" (King 2014, 269). She finds a striking similarity of sacred texts as a convergent point in the three Abrahamic faiths. She offers "musical interfaith dialogues: from cantillation to instrumental 'dialogue of silence' and finds a link of music and religion that provides resource to understand the belief systems of people and their influences on society and daily living" (2014, 5-6, 13). The three Abrahamic faiths put great importance on authorized holy texts, including the Bible, the Quran, and the Hadith "as well as poetry, sacred texts embedded in hymns, and the performative practice of cantillation" (2014, 19).

Sirat-al Mustaqim (Straight or Middle Path)

A devout Muslim prays five times a day to God to lead him to *sirat-al mustaqim*. The concept of *aṣ-Ṣ irāṭ al-mustaqīm* (straight/right path or middle way) has been interpreted as that which pleases God. Living peacefully with their neighbor is also fulfilling God's will and walking a straight path in this world. In a famous Pakistani film *Khuda Key Leay* (In the Path of God) a dialogue has been framed between a Muslim scholar and an attorney in a court room on the issue that music is *halal* (licit) or *haram* (illicit) in Islam. In response to the attorney The *alim* (scholar) describes that *mousiqi* (music) is a divine gift and elaborate his point:

How many prophets came into this world? 124,000. How many have Books? Only four—this means that these four prophets are more important than the rest of the 123,996. God has given gifts of miracles to his prophets. Prophet Muhammad's miracle is the Qur'an, Moses had a miracle of separating water. Essa has a power of raising dead? What has been given to Daud? *Mousiqi*, a beautiful voice, knowledge of instruments and ragas. The whole creation is attracted to his voice. In *zabor* (Psalms) Daud (David) praised in ragas. Is it possible that God almighty grant a *haram* thing to his beloved prophet for his praise? Chose a *haram* for his praise, and gave *haram* gift

as a miracle to his prophet? Abu Moosa Ashari cantillation: “It seems that you have an instrument of Daud in your neck.”

King’s musical pathway is resonate with the Islamic concept of right path that invites people to observe and practice what is balanced in society. King proposes a “four arena approach to missiology, ethnomusicology, the study of music and culture, directly address the missional context in relation to music” (1999b, 327-28). She concludes that it is important to learn to make sense of people’s music found in a particular local context (King 2004, 296). In regards to finding local resources, Mustafa Said’s model of “*tawshih* for cooperation and acceptance” in Egypt provides the “mystical and sacred atmosphere of *inshad* which take us beyond religious differences, which have nothing to do with the divinity of music” (Said 2014, 191). From Lebanon, Marcel Akiki’s model of a “Spiritual-Musicological Approach and Anthropological Musicological Approach” (2014, 199-202) fosters the “common theme and values in the Sacred Books, Common Spirituality, Common beliefs” in the Muslim and Christian faiths. Rithaony Hutajulu proposes an Indonesian Islamic perspective of “Socioreligious Gatherings, process of music-making, and Music Performance” for peacebuilding (2014, 226). These Muslim contextual approaches are evidence that music has been in these communities to serve for peace and reconciliation. Music also communicates methods of peace and reconciliation. Cultural and sacred sound scapes provide a commonality and build bridge for people of global religions.

Why Psalms?

For the last fourteen centuries a gap has existed between Christians and Muslims despite attempts of engagements theologically, apologetically, polemically, and militarily (Crusades). The book of Psalms (*zabor*) is a common heritage of divine revelation in Islam and Christianity and can build a bridge to peacemaking. Their religions and shared spiritual heritage in forms of cultural music and scriptural commonality will permit researchers to find ways to live in peace and harmony with our local and global Muslim neighbors.

Muslim and Christian scriptures have a great tradition of poetry and sacred texts rooted in hymns and in the performative practice of cantillation. Given the similarity of the

performance alternation of sacred texts in Abrahamic religion, the Psalms as sacred text presents a common ground for musical interfaith dialogue and the transformative peacemaking process, which remains unexplored in missiological praxis.

In the Western academic fields Psalms has never been explored as a tool for missiology and as a bridge for peacemaking among Abrahamic faiths. Most resources address the inner need of the church (Tyler 2016; Goldingay2016; Erikson 2016). All of these categories are applicable to the Christian life that need to extend to the cross cultural missional praxis as well.⁵ But the door of the Psalms is only moving in the frame of Christian worship not for witness. This door has never opened for interreligious dialogue within monotheistic religions

Music and Peacebuilding through Sacred Texts

Ethnomusicologists believe that song texts play a vital role in understanding human behavior and their link to contemporary culture (King 2004, 2008, 121; Nettl 1983). “Songs have the capacity to condense huge realms of meaning in an economical form through layered indexical meanings as well as the juxtaposition of varied ideas as indexical cluster without the requirements of rational ordering or arrangement”⁶. The affective theory in ethnomusicology creates a bond between participants, musicians and audiences together. Making music together and musicking (Small 1998) trigger the deepest part of the human soul. It influences physical, spiritual, emotional, (non-cognitive) aspects of humanity. Muslim music culture is hidden in cultural tracts that need to be explored and missiological praxis can engage through the traits of musicking and music cultures.

Ethnomusicology and missiology are two wings that help the Church reach to the next level of creative mission in the 21st century. These investigations need to move onto the complex topic of the social dynamics present in music culture in order to promote sustainable peace efforts between the Abrahamic faiths (King/Tan 5; O’Connell 2010, 112-117; King 2013, 20; 16-19)

⁵ Goldingay 2016. <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/john-goldingay-lament/>

⁶ Turino 2008:218 quoted by Holton in a class lecture on Feb15, 2016 at Fuller Theological Seminary.

In relation to this Abu Nimer states that the sacredness of the divine Word is very important in Abrahamic religions, even in its utterance. The practice of cantillation is bound to divine Word, protecting the utterance of the divine *Logos*; consequently, the aim of cantillation is to contribute to the anchoring of prayer, preaching, and teaching (Abu Murad 2014). It is obvious that Quranic recitation is a development of heightened speech of the Arabic language and has a long history of the system of Arabic *tajwid*. Two things are common in the three monotheistic faiths: first is their quest to connect with the divine through musical means; secondly, is their use of their cultural middle-eastern local form of music to express the recitation of sacred text. How can this model work for Muslim–Christian dialogue and interreligious encounter? From the Islamic point of view and the acceptance of both sides the use of Quranic text and Arabic poetry is a powerful medium in promoting peacemaking between Muslim-Christian relationships.

Psalms and Sufis in Pakistan

After working for three years, being a director of Tehillim School of Church Music and Worship I was invited by the famous Sindhi Sufi shrine *Bhit Shah* to visit and bring our music team to the shrine to share Psalms. On March 23, 2012, I entered the “Mouth of the Dragon” by singing Psalms through our mission’s “Psalms and Sufis” project, in which we shared and distributed a book of Psalms and the Gospels in the Sindhi language at a Muslim Sufi shrine in Pakistan.⁷

I first saw Pakistan as a mission field during my MDiv program at Gujranwala Theological Seminary (Pakistan) in 1999. In a class on missions and evangelism, our teacher talked about the 10/40 window. For several decades different organizations—for example, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade for Christ (now known as Cru), and individual local missionaries—attempted to reach out to a majority of people through informal “back doors,” such as distributing Christian print materials. If they were accused of evangelizing,

⁷ Video available at <https://vimeo.com/album/2880961/video/95810655>.

sometimes they were beaten, or arrested by police and jailed. When I began planning to reach out at a Muslim Sufi shrine, I knew that I wanted to enter through the front door and not hide anything. For generations the Christian church in Pakistan was silent and passive toward reaching Sufi shrines. But after working and networking for three years, on Friday, March 23, 2012, colleagues and I were able to proclaim God's name and interact with Sufis at Shah Latif Bhittai's shrine. We did this by singing psalms. This was the first time in Pakistan that anyone had approached Sufis through the book of Psalms. We named this trip "Love, Peace, and Harmony through Music and Spirituality."

My Story with the Psalms

The book of Psalms is much loved and was the first hymnbook in Pakistan. There is a story of a villager in Pakistan. One day his landlord asked this poor, illiterate Christian worker a heavy and deep theological question: "Why do you Christians call Essa [Jesus] a Son of God?" Fearfully, but faithfully, the man responded, "I don't know why we call him that, but one thing I do know..." and he sang a simple, popular psalm, "May his [Christ's] name endure forever" (Psalm 72:17).

The first psalm that I memorized was the 23rd; the other Psalms that I often heard in my hometown of Essa Nagri, Karachi, was Psalm 119:17-24, as it sounded from the loudspeakers of churches every morning and evening. For me, the most memorable psalm is the 51st, which my maternal grandfather Dr. Mohan Lal, a converted Hindu musical guru and my first raga teacher, sang at evening prayer time every day in *raga purvi*, confessing his sins. During theological studies I was fond of singing Psalm 18 at the annual Sialkot Convention. After returning from seminary my first public performance was at the All Karachi Punjabi Zabor Competition, which later became a festival.⁸

⁸ For more information, see <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Annual-Psalm-Festival-Pakistan/587456324631647>.

I was personally so blessed and overwhelmed by this book that when I was praying for the direction of my ministry while studying at Gujranwala from 1999 to 2002, I received a vision to start a school of church music and worship in Pakistan. I named the school *Tehillim* (the Hebrew name of the book of Psalms). I remember a month before graduation our Scottish teacher called me into the library and handed me a translated book of Psalms, called *Punjabi Zabor, Desi Ragan Wich*, published in Banaras, India, in 1908. This book contains verse-translations of *Punjabi Zabor* (psalms), with Western music notation for all 150 *Punjabi Zabor*. The translation and melodies were created by Immam Din Shahbaz, and English missionary Anita Coden notated the melodies in Western staff notation, in order to help Western missionaries sing along with local believers.

Background of Creative Approach

My father gave our Psalms CD that we produced with HSI (Heart Sounds International) in 2005 to a Sindhi Sufi music promoter. He was so inspired by listening to the psalms that he asked to meet me. For security reasons, I initially refused, but finally met him a year later at our recording studio in Karachi. During our conversation I expressed my interest in visiting a famous Sufi shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, the great poet-laureate of Sindh. His collection of poetry, *Shah Jo Risalo*, comprises nearly thirty *surs*, or musical compositions, with hundreds of verses. Each chapter has a distinct theme presented by the poet through depiction of characters of famous folk romances. From the 17th century to the present, people of Sind considered this poetry a sacred interpretation of the Qur'an.

Shah Latif's influence on the people of Sindh is immense. He has captivated their minds and souls with his poetic genius, and his verses are known by men and women alike, with no divide between rural and urban or poor and wealthy. The Sindhi language is indebted to Shah Latif, who has enriched its vocabulary through parables and imagery adapted to the

Sindhi environment. A few days after my conversation with him, he gave permission to visit the shrine.

The book of Psalms has been our main bridge to interact with Sufis. So we prepared and translated three songs in Sindhi: Psalms 148 and 145, and a gospel *bhajan Jay Jay Yesu*. Psalms has been translated into lyrical poetry only in Punjabi, it was new and creative experience for the whole team to translate and sing the psalms in Sindhi, set to *kilwara*, the Sindhi 8-beat rhythmic cycle. Our Muslim friends who arranged this trip told us that we would have only a half-hour to interact with Sufi singers, another half-hour to meet Shah Nissar Husain Latif, chief priest of the shrine, and a final half-hour to present psalms at the shrine court yard. On that Friday, our team of ten musicians left Karachi at noon along with our four Muslim Sindhi friends who would be our guides. We drove four hours from Karachi to the Hala district, near Hyderabad, Sindh where we met up with two more Sindhi friends: one a writer, poet, and artist, and the other a singer, composer, and teacher of classical music, leading a music academy in Hyderabad.

Interaction with Sufi Singers

We arrived at Bhit Shah, where one of the lead singers from the Sufi group welcomed us and led us to a small house for rest, and to meet the principal of a Sufi music school there. When the music teacher arrived we discussed the music history, poetry, style, genre, training, raga, and singers. Singers have maintained continual musical performance at the shrine, 24 hours a day, for over 300 years. The teacher and his students played *tambora* (five-stringed instruments created by Shah Abdul Latif) and sang *ragas* composed by Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai. Tradition prohibits anyone from joining them without permission from the head of the shrine, and without training in this style of music and poetry. Like the Levitical families in Solomon's Temple in the Old Testament, these songs also belong to families who have

specific musical duties. The families who performed for us on that evening are considered the most experienced and highly respected among Sufis at the shrine.

Reception at the Shrine

That evening, Syed Nisar Hussain Shah, the current head of the shrine, received us at his home—a beautiful hundred-year-old mansion. He welcomed us with open arms and sat with us on the floor. He expressed his happiness with a speech, saying that it was the first time that any church or Christian organization had visited the shrine. The room was full of devotees, as well as journalists who were there to report on this meeting. After we shared our thoughts and purpose—promoting religious tolerance, love, and peace—our host invited us for a return visit for the birthday of Shah Latif, on May 22, 2012, to present psalms at an all-night event, along with Sufi singers. During this meeting I presented him with a gift: a picture of Christ on the cross, and also a copy of the New Testament and Psalms in the Sindhi language, as a token of love, peace, and harmony. His love and openness amazed us, removing our fears. Onlookers understood that this was a special event indeed. After our brief meeting, our host asked his son to lead us into the shrine and visit the tomb. A procession escorted us to the shrine, accompanied by special red-colored linen sheets, and opened the inner door of the grave for us. I saw this as God opening the door for us to engage with Sufis. This door is usually opened only for high officials.

After visiting the grave, we all sat on the floor in the large courtyard and prepared to play and sing psalms. Hundreds of visitors gathered around us, and we distributed the gifts of the image of Christ on the cross and the Sindhi New Testament and Psalms to four key leaders. Then our team was ready to sing; we started with Psalms 145, 139, and 148. In the 300-year history of the shrine, this was the first time psalms had been sung there in the Sindhi language. People heard the word of God, and we believe we planted a seed of faith in the

listeners. Our Sufi friends were so touched by the singing that they asked us to record these Sindhi psalms for broadcast on Radio Pakistan. It was not in our schedule, but what a great opportunity to share the word of God through radio! After the recording session, we attended a tea sponsored by the Bhit Shah Press Club. On our arrival, the president of the Press Club, and other journalists, welcomed us and we shared our thoughts about the trip. We learned that all the major Sindhi newspapers and television channels would be covering this visit.

We arrived back home the next day, thankful to God for this amazing visit. All the team members were so excited and motivated by this experience, inspired afresh to share the Gospel and word of God through singing and artistic interaction with Sufis.

Annual (*urs*) Concert at Bhit Shah

This initial visit removed the fear from our team and gave us continued opportunities to share psalms and other scripture-based songs. A month after our visit, we received an invitation to bring our full musical band and group of singers to participate at the 365th annual *urs* (convention) of the Shah Latif shrine. We accepted this invitation and during this trip we added two more girls in our team. During our first visit we all wore black dresses. We added *ajraks* (a traditional print of Sindh) for girl's head coverings shawls and boys have shirt's neck round with same print. After prayerful consideration, we translated two more Christian gospel songs into Sindhi: "When the Spirit of the Lord is within my heart, I will sing like David sang,"⁹ "Yesu Naam"¹⁰ and Psalm 145.¹¹ Our whole band, with musical instruments and traditional dress, attended that *urs*.

The courtyard of Sufi shrine was full with thousands of Muslim devotees. Our team was warmly welcomed at the stage with clapping and with this encouragement that we will

⁹ When the Spirit of Lord: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0yERmwhliQ>.

¹⁰ Yesu Naam: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqijaWgIiNs>.

¹¹ Psalm 145: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u963HnBGu2U>.

continue our friendship and relationship with Sufi shrine.¹² Performance of Tehillim band was interactive and audience was fully involved through clapping and dancing. At the end of festival the head of the shrine presented a *tambora* instrument to our team as a token of appreciation and reminder of our friendship.¹³

A Proposal

The Psalms provide divine language and sacred text to use in cultural tunes and tones to building bridges for Muslim-Christian relations. It is a prophetic call rather than polemic. Despite the debate of whether music is *halal* (permissible) or *haram* (prohibited) in Muslim society, American prisons are flooded with hip hop music, which is used to convert African-American inmates and propagate Islamic doctrine (Spearlit 2013). Muslim extremists are using poetry and music to inspire and motivate young *mujahidin* for *jihad* (Kendall 2015, 247). Missiology needs to address the challenge of this Islamic musical approach and needs a counter-narrative as an anecdote to this invasion. The ancient poems of Psalms are honest and can become a bridge for bold and beyond dialogue engagement with Abrahamic faith. A cross-cultural and Inter faith approach of the *Zabor* (Psalms) is a missing piece from Christian witness.

The Prophet of Islam permitted the *shaery* (poetry) and promoted the *shaura* (poets). The poetical/musical cantillation of sacred text can foster interfaith harmony in conflict and also promote peacemaking (Aidi 2014; Abu Nimer 2014). Thus, the missiological aspect of the Psalms has been overlooked in Pakistan and broader Christian engagement with the Muslim world. With these thoughts in mind this paper presents Pakistan's extraordinarily rich

¹² Welcome to team: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4EvbIt0KPg>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85kURiBMHs0>.

¹³ See Photos at: https://www.facebook.com/tehillim.pakistan/media_set?set=a.355998394453189.95036.100001290952736&type=3. Watch Video links: Welcome to team: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4EvbIt0KPg>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85kURiBMHs0>
Rejection of extremism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IgdVThBUV8>

cultural and artistic diversity, showing how sacred soundscape and religious music culture build bridges to subtleties and humanity of Islamic religious experience. It also demonstrates how Islam should not conceive of as being monolithic or mono cultural, how there is a significant disagreement within Islam as to how music and performance should be approached— such disagreements being closely related to debates about orthodoxy, secularism, and moderate and fundamental Islam—and how important cultural activities have been, and continue to be, for the formation of Muslim identity and its relationship to local Christians in Pakistan.

For more than a century the *zabor* (Psalms) have been part of religious music culture for Christians in Pakistan. For my research the study of the religious music culture in Muslim and Christian narrative is imperative. The events of music for peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue provide space to transform and be transformed by the sacred texts and cultural music as well. *Musicking* helps to move beyond sound and text and to enter in the social realm “surrounding music making and musical performance” (King /Tan 2014, 25).

Pakistan is a unique country where famous gospel singers are Muslim artists. The sacred text of the Psalms and the cantillation of Qur’anic verses affect the adherents of these scriptures. Through emotional affectation these scriptures can touch the human soul. It can also be utilized in the peacemaking process in such a way to reshape understanding and create cooperation in community. In particular, their shared cantillation as texts of sacred music serves as a point of the musical convergence between Islam and Christianity. Various models such as *Tehillim* (Psalms), *Taraweeh* (reciting the whole Qur’an during Ramadan nights), *Ta’zyah* (Shia’ mourning during month of Muharram) are the proposed models for Muslim–Christians engagement approaches. Selective Psalms of lament to engage with Shia for their annual commemoration of *majlis-soz*, Psalms of ascents for pilgrimage and to relate with annual *haj* to Mecca and spiritual aspects of the Psalms. There is also a possibility of

Royal Psalms to declare the theocracy of the kingdom of God on his creation. These contextualized and compatible engagements need further investigations for future research.

Conclusion

Based on the experiment of Psalms and Sufi event at Shah Latif Bhittai's shrine in Sindh, the Psalms may also work with other Sufi shrines, Sunni-and Shia Muslims in Pakistan and any Islamic context. The common sacred text of Psalms and creative cultural musical tunes have potential to build bridges for religious peacebuilding. Such study needs further research to explore the sweetness of Psalms to share with our Muslim neighbors.

The concepts of music culture, *musicicking*, and musical pathways apply to the current study of Pakistani cultural music and will help to engage and foster Muslim-Christian relationships. Music serves as a tool and shapes the audience's behavior, particularly those who understand the language that is embedded in cultural music. Use of cultural music in peacebuilding keeps a balance in human behavior and sustains the peaceful relationship in society.

In summary, an interdisciplinary project promises , to approach the challenge of meeting the adherents of other faiths in vulnerability and humility to openly restore relationships as human beings in this world, to advance understanding of Christian and Muslim practices, to suggest future ministry goals for faithful Christian witness in local and global Christian-Muslim relations, using the book of Psalms in an Islamic cultural context for peace building, witness, and peacemaking process between two historical faiths. The Psalms and Sufi music project as a bridge to the Sufi singers and musicians to create a respectful space for interfaith relationships through shared musical heritage and emerging networks of religiously-engaged music initiatives.

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