

Music and Citizenship

Using Siddi and Sheedi Musical Practices to Expand On Concepts of Belonging

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Notwithstanding their intentional exclusion by society from concepts of belonging and systemic neglect by their respective governments regarding resource allocation, Afro-Indians and Afro-Pakistanis use the very thing that sets them apart from the rest to come together in shared experiences: their ethnocultural histories. Experiences like that of Juje Jacki Harnodkar Siddi—a native Indian of African ancestral origin, in which he described being grabbed by the collar and told, “you are a guest in this country, so don’t overstep your boundaries”—while at first conjuring emotions such as fear, anger, and anxiety, can ultimately lead to the use of cultural characteristics to create one’s own community (101 India 2016, 2:00). Although being Siddi, an Indian of southeastern African ancestral origin, in India is often equated with being a foreigner or a tourist, this does not stop many Siddi communities from using their unique musical traditions to combat societal attempts to exclude them. This chapter discusses Siddis’ as well as Sheedis’, Pakistanis of southeastern African ancestral origin, experiences of racism and xenophobia, and how such experiences relate to the use of musical traditions to reconstruct concepts of belonging. Focusing on the African-descended populations of western India and southern Pakistan, though inclusive of African-descended populations throughout India, in this chapter I use historiographies, documentaries, oral interviews, and ethnographies to expand on understandings of Afro–South Asian musical practices. Such practices, being rooted in historical immigrations, serve as a challenge to existing citizen versus “other” social dichotomies and represent relationships between African-descended minority populations in the region and their respective nations. Through the study of musical

instruments like the *malunga* and the *dhol* as well as dances such as the *amba* and *laywa*, I will provide examples of how dance and musical traditions reflect histories of maritime movement and can be used to contribute to improved understandings of South Asian identities. Additionally, Sheedi and Siddi festivals such as the Sheedi Mela and festival for Bava Gor will be expanded on in their efforts to call for the increased government recognition of Siddi and Sheedi communities.

Despite a lesser amount of scholarship regarding Afro-descendant populations throughout the Indian subcontinent compared to such populations throughout the Atlantic, new scholarship regarding these marginalized groups and their contributions to national concepts of identity and belonging is quickly growing. Academics such as Purnima Bhatt and K. N. Chaudhuri have written books detailing the immigrations of East African populations to South Asia as enslaved peoples, soldiers, traders, and merchants as far back as the first century CE, touching on the vast and lasting effects such populations have had on South Asian demographics and history (see Bhatt 2017 and Chaudhuri 1985). As one investigates current musical traditions of the Sheedi communities of Pakistan and the Siddi communities of India, particularly Gujarat, it becomes apparent that while their ancestries are significantly rooted in migrations across the Indian Ocean from Africa to South Asia, current Siddi and Sheedi identities are largely influenced by centuries-long adaptations to new social, political, and economic environments. In a global society where race frequently overshadows national and regional forms of identification, scholars often use dated histories of long-distance migration, both involuntary and voluntary, as a means to locate specific populations in a particular time, place, and experience. While part of my goal is to use migration histories to connect particular Indian Ocean populations and their musical traditions with geographic histories that acknowledge African pasts—something important in understanding these cultural traditions and communal experiences—we as scholars must be careful not to impose these pasts on contemporary concepts of identity. Though I recognize that while African-descended peoples in South Asia fully assert that they are now South Asian, one of my challenges in this chapter is to use musicology to identify cultural connections with regions in Africa through historical Indian Ocean relationships and networks (Jayasuriya 2008, 136). Hence, through the current musical traditions of Siddis and Sheedis, I assert that musicological traditions not only tell us about African pasts but can also be used to lobby for the recognition of South Asian presents. Focusing on the annual Sheedi Mela Festival in Karachi, musical practices of the Siddis in Gujarat, and historical accounts of maritime migrations and their effects on Indian and Pakistani societies, I will construct a narrative that asserts Siddi and Sheedi populations as members of everyday Indian and Pakistani societies.

While this research spans a vast historical period focused on the nineteenth century to the present but recognizing previous historical phenomena, it is not meant to be an in-depth account but aims to elaborate on the various places that

historiographic knowledge can be obtained and used to better understand current societal interactions in the region of focus. Consequentially, and as Shihan de Silva Jayasuria states, the history of music in many cases “lies outside the boundaries of [traditional] archives,” and “invisibility is a considerable obstacle to recognizing” regional Indian Ocean influences in local populations. Therefore, the recent increase in scholarly focus on these populations can be used to cite contemporary musical traditions that have been facilitated through historical maritime networks as growing evidence that Siddis and Sheedis, while still recognizing their African ancestral origins, are, as Purnima Bhatt states, “first and foremost Indian, [Pakistani and/or Balochi] before African” (Bhatt 2017, 122). In understanding the inclusive and fluid nature of music and musical traditions in the region and before continuing to map out such regional traditions, it is first necessary for me to explain the historical background of these populations.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The term *Siddi* is historically used to refer to Indians of central, southern, and southwestern African origin who immigrated—both voluntarily and involuntarily—to South Asia as far back as the first century CE (Ali 1996, 18–27). Additionally, another influence from the Arab world on Siddi populations is one of religion, with most (but not all) Siddis practicing Islam. While many Siddis did arrive at what is now the subcontinent of India as enslaved persons, this term, Siddi, also broadly refers to those who arrived as merchants and soldiers and quickly rose up the social ladder, ultimately conquering large territories throughout the subcontinent.¹ Having controlled territories including but not limited to Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Karnataka as early as the seventh century AD, they brought with them musical traditions maintained on the decks of dhows and throughout their immigrations, instilling such traditions in their newly created empires and communities, such as communities within Gujarat (Ulaby 2012, 43–62).

In previous scholarship, such as the book *The Swahili* by Thomas Spear and Derek Nurse, as well as the film *Wonders of the African World* by Henry Louis Gates, scholarly discussions and cinematic delivery portray particular Indian Ocean identities as rigid and exclusive. Through various forms of maritime trade, and particularly with increased nineteenth-century trade across the region, musical practices were developed that proved just how fluid these identities were and are (see Gates 1999 and Nurse and Spear 1985). Furthermore, music is becoming a large factor in how historiographic representations of Siddi and Sheedi populations can be modified to describe modern Indian and Pakistani cultural practices. Therefore, it proves helpful in understanding previous immigrations from East Africa to India to explain the fluidity of identity in the region and put current musical traditions into a historical context. It is important to mention this because although Gujarat has come to be known as the “quintessential land of the

immigrant,” according to Samira Sheikh (2012), often little to no recognition is given to African diasporas that contributed to such a characterization.

While Samira Sheikh provides a nuanced account of Gujarati history, challenging authors like Michael Pearson who detail the region through strictly economic and trade vantage points, she nonetheless fails to be fully inclusive of the racial and ethnic makeup of the region. Although Sheikh discusses the role religion, patriotic ballads, poems, and chronicles of genealogy played in the creation of modern Gujarat, nowhere in her representation does she note the presence of Siddis or general Afro-descendant populations. Though I should note that Sheikh’s accounts of Gujarat mostly lie in the seventeenth century, two centuries before the main focus of this paper, Siddi populations had long occupied the region at that point in time. While it is not the goal of this chapter to assert a Siddi presence into Sheikh’s accounts of Gujarat, it is important to assert their presence into larger understandings of the region, especially because such a presence brought with it a unique component of current Indian identities upon the state becoming a part of India. In this sense, I argue that notwithstanding histories that are not inclusive of Siddis, these populations throughout time have used music and dance as a way of re-asserting themselves into conversations and imaginaries of identity and belonging. It is unfortunately common for Siddis and their historical contributions to be continually excluded from working definitions of Gujarati cultural citizenship and regional identity—such as Sheikh’s historical account, which represents a pointed and intentional history Gujarat as an Indian state. However, while discussing re-assertions of Siddi presence in Gujarati history through music is important, also important is providing a bit of context in terms of Siddi groups and people who are still crucial to local histories today.

The Nawabs of Sachin, a city in southern Gujarat, were a major force behind the decree of succession of Sachin into India, signed August 16, 1947, by Haidar Khan, son of the Siddi ruler His Highness Ibrahim Khan III (Robbins and McLeod 2012, 69–228). The fact of the matter is that throughout Indian history Siddis and Habshis² played large roles in shaping the subcontinent’s histories and cultures in their favor. Hence, relating this to K. N. Chaudhuri and Michael Pearson’s understanding of the *longue durée*, instead of it being the relationship between humans and their maritime environments through historic immigrations, the *longue durée* in this case can be noted as the relationship between humans and the social environments in which they exploited sociopolitical environments to create nuanced and diverse histories, cultures, and social interactions. Similarly, Savita Nair in her doctoral dissertation recognizes the connections between western India and East Africa as “circular and dynamic” and acknowledges “identities [that are] actively constituted” to underscore the porous nature of borders (Nair 2001, 277).

At present, Siddis largely speak the common language of the region they inhabit, such as Gujarati for Siddis of Gujarat, Kannada for Siddis of Karnataka, and so

on. The name Siddi is used overarchingly to refer to “all sections of the Indian population who, though considered native to India by virtue of their long history in the subcontinent, ultimately have their origins in Africa” (Cardoso 2010, 102). This term should not be confused with the related term *Habshi*, which in many parts of India denotes an Indian of Ethiopian or general Red Sea origin, and when used as *Habshi-Kafir* often possesses a derogatory and racist connotation historically used to refer to African-descended peoples in India. Discrimination against Siddis and Habshis continues today in many popular sayings, such as the Gujarati phrase “*siddi bhaiyo saw man sabuey nhay, to pan kala ne kala*”—“that even if they bathe with hundreds of soaps, they can never wash off their black color” (Bhatt 2017, 113–22). Siddis and Habshis are politically and socially disenfranchised, with many living in poverty as well as social and geographic isolation. While there is no map to illustrate areas largely populated by Siddis, in the states of Gujarat and Karnataka, this corresponds to western regions separated from the rest of the state by dense forests and unpaved roads (See 101 India 2016 and Poindexter 2013). Despite etymological distinctions, it is not uncommon for Siddis to refer to themselves as Habshi, often in attempts to distance themselves from the negative connotation that many non-Afro-Indians give the term Siddi (Poindexter 2013, 6:10).

Relatedly, the term *Sheedi* refers to Pakistanis of African descent, though unlike in India, Pakistan does not seem to have terms that differentiate geographic ancestral origins in the continent of Africa. While Sheedis in Pakistan, like Siddis in Gujarat, continue to commemorate their African ancestry through festivals such as the Sheedi Mela—a commemoration of the Sheedi ancestor Hoshi Sheedi as a brave patriot and a fighter against the British—even now in recent integrations into Pakistani society the term is beginning to lose its hold to broader and more inclusive terms such as *Balochi*, *Qambrani*, and *Bilali*, the last term denoting the Prophet Mohammed’s formerly enslaved companion Bilal (Feroz 1989, 25). It should be noted that the terms Sheedi and Afro-Balochi, while at times mixed up by Pakistanis, do not always refer to the same people. While Sheedi can often refer to any Pakistani of African ancestry, the term Afro-Balochi particularly refers to ethnic Balochis of African ancestry. Furthermore, the lack of social integration of Siddi and Sheedi populations in India and Pakistan, as well the strong maritime connections facilitated through trade between South Asia and East Africa, have contributed to the intentional and strategic use of musical traditions throughout these populations to both keep African traditions alive and strong and to unite Siddi and Sheedi communities in their South Asian identities. As Sabir Badalkhan notes in his chapter “On the Presence of African Musical Culture in Baluchistan,” “to dissolve the burden of discrimination, these people retained their musical traditions,” and nowadays this can be seen through their festivals and celebrations (Basu 2008, 278).

MUSIC AND FESTIVALS AS FORMS OF SURVIVAL

Annual musical processions among Siddi and Sheedi populations over time have not only served to preserve African ancestry but to also reinforce religious, socio-cultural, and even musical traditions. For example, the weeklong Sheedi Mela festival, which takes place ten miles from Karachi at the shrine of the saint Manghopir, once meant to reinforce Sheedi history for future generations as well as predict whether the coming year would be auspicious or not, now has an additional purpose in uniting the Sheedis of Pakistan and calling for increased government support of Sheedi cultural practices. Similar to the practice of commemorating past ancestors, Siddis of Gujarat also partake in an annual procession for the ancestor Bava Gor, believed to be the first Siddi to arrive in the region (Poindexter 2013, 4:10). What makes these festivities, and particularly the musical traditions that are practiced during the festivals, unique is not only the intentional connections made to African pasts but also the assertion of South Asian identity and lobbying for government support.

As mentioned, one of the purposes of the annual Sheedi Mela festival is to reinforce Sheedi traditions for future generations. Throughout the festival, what Pakistani freelance journalist Fahad Desmukh details as “African beats” are played and musical chants are sung in a language “believed to be a mixture of Swahili” and additional indigenous languages (Desmukh 2009, 1:32). The particular use not only of those beats not readily recognized as South Asian, but also a language more so connected with the African continent than South Asia (at least in popular beliefs), is intentional as a way to preserve African pasts for future generations of Sheedis. Using parts of the original African languages of the various types of music can be understood as a way to honor its origin and influence on current populations (Al-Harthy 2012, 114). Additionally, Afro-Balochi dances such as the *dammāl*, *lewa*, and *amba* are performed, indicating the African-influenced cultural heritage unique to Sheedis.³ As Sabir Badalkhan puts it in his discussions of Yemeni Habshis in Hyderabad, these Afro-descended populations’ history and presence in the region “has become embodied in their music [and dance] (Basu 2008, 303).⁴ For example, delving deeper into the dance of *amba*, similar to music where the *malunga* (a bowed instrument) is used (which will be further discussed below) is at times accompanied by the playing of a *dhol*. While the term *dhol* can often generically refer to any large drum, it more frequently refers to a big, double-headed drum. This particular instrument serves as a common manifestation of Afro-Balochi culture and history in their current musical practices. I specifically note that it is a manifestation of Afro-Balochi history because, as Badalkhan notes from his interviews with former sailors regarding Afro-Balochi music, stories of “drums beating” on the decks of dhows and particularly along the coastal areas of Makran⁵ causing Balochi sailors such as Mazar to dance along with them, throughout the history of the Afro-Balochi presence in the region are quite

numerous (Basu 2008, 303). Similarly, the dance of the *lewa*, while not as celebratory as the *Amba*, is also common among Afro-Balochi populations throughout Makran. Additionally, what makes this dance even more interesting is that it is also practiced in Oman, though possessing a slightly different cultural meaning than when practiced among Afro-Balochi populations. As such, these dance traditions and the instruments used in these ways all serve a purpose not only for creating community among Afro-Balochi populations but also retaining African-descended cultures.

However, this should not be misinterpreted as a form of self-exclusion and refusal of Sheedis to integrate into the larger Pakistani society. While journalist Fahad Desmukh suggests that it is normal for Sheedis to come to Karachi from all over Sindh and Balochistan to commemorate this festival (the most important event on the group's calendar), increasingly more Sheedis and Afro-Balochis are making longer trips to the festival in a "deep sense of brotherhood" and a "devotion to their forefathers" to maintain their cultural practices as Pakistanis of African origin. In an interview with Fahad Desmukh, Sheedi community chief Ghulam Akbar stated that Sheedis are Pakistani and "have rights of Pakistan, but [they] have no strong leader," hinting not only to a desire to be incorporated into social definitions of being Pakistani, but also the need for community representation (Desmukh 2009, 4:27). Hence, the Sheedi Mela festival for Akbar and other Sheedis has become a way to use musical rhythms, chants, songs, and dances to call for increased national support for the Sheedi community. Though, while increased government support is also a goal for Siddis in India and more specifically Gujarat, their festivals, unlike their Pakistani counterparts, do not outwardly include a specific intent of gathering such support.

Despite compromising the eighth generation since arriving in South Asia, consequentially adopting regional sociocultural practices as their own, Siddis of Gujarat maintain a sense of pride as "Habshis," as they refer to themselves using this specific term (Poindexter 2013, 6:10). As a way to maintain such pride, the Gujarati Siddis of Dhrangadhra carry out an annual procession to commemorate their ancestor, Bava Gor, as the first Siddi to arrive in the region (Shroff 2013, 18–25).⁶ This festival, similar to the Sheedi Mela, consists of playing music and chanting in a mixture of local languages and dialects, while proceeding through the town toward the burial site and shrine of Bava Gor. Most Siddis and Habshis are Muslim, and they practice a form of Sufism that includes the worshiping of the burial site of local saints, such as that of Bava Gor. Additionally, during this procession, specific musical instruments with African origin such as the *malunga* are used, simultaneously demonstrating an African past and a South Asian present. The *malunga* instrument is particularly interesting not only because it complements Siddi narratives of Congolese ancestry but also because of its striking resemblance to Afro-Brazilian instruments such as the berimbau, denoting what some scholars see as a similar African origin (Jayasuria 2008, 145).

While some scholars have noted that both the *malunga* and berimbau have their African origin in the Congo region, a known origin of many enslaved peoples both in Brazil and India, I find it necessary to briefly discuss the sociocultural role of the berimbau to provide context for what seems to be a similar phenomenon growing in Gujarat with the use of the *dhol* and *malunga*. Previously, as a researcher of Afro-Latinidad⁷ and Afro-Brazilian cultures, I conducted research on the Afro-Brazilian presence in national celebratory representations of Brazil, such as the Rio de Janeiro carnival. As such, capoeira, both the dance and martial art, proved to be a great avenue for understanding how Brazil as a country celebrates its cultures on a national level and portrays such cultures to the world. At the center of such portrayals during my research, in addition to samba and soccer, was capoeira. Generally, capoeira as a whole was and is popularly portrayed as a martial art that during the times of slavery was disguised as a dance by enslaved Africans in Brazil and used to revolt against slave masters. In Brazilian attempts to depict capoeira as a national martial art, this description is often connected to national pasts of racial injustice, perceived as not connected to present social phenomena. Though, what Afro-Brazilians frequently assert through the use of capoeira (the songs, and martial art) is that these histories of injustice are still connected to current social experiences of Afro-descendants in the country. Furthermore, because capoeira is so nationally (and internationally) recognized, by default the berimbau instrument is part of the symbolism connected with such recognition. The berimbau instrument not only provides the musical base for capoeira, but it also has a role in the organization of relationships within the Afro-Brazilian community such as *mestre* (master or teacher) and student (Jackson 2015, 12). The teacher uses the berimbau to teach culture to the student of the Afro-Brazilian music and to guide the martial art performance. These relationships in turn contribute to the continued value placed on Afro-Brazilian culture by the youth, having learned of such culture from their elders and also of the role of the berimbau in such culture. Resultingly, a continual relationship between elder and youth is maintained, much like one of the goals of the Jairazbhoy-Catlin Siddi-Malunga project, a documentary on Siddi musical practices and the particular use of the *malunga* instrument in Gujarat.⁸

The *malunga* instrument has special cultural meaning not only because it is quite literally an instrumental reminder of the effect that transoceanic immigrations had on musicological practices—demonstrating how particular musical traditions with African origin have been integrated into South Asian sociocultural traditions—but also because recently it has been losing its cultural value among younger generations. In their documentary, Nazir and Amy Catlin Jairazbhoy emphasize not only how the *malunga* is played in group songs and dances but also how particular costumes are used, all in an attempt to reinforce African ancestry (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 2003, 5:30). The Siddis of Gujarat, through the use of the *malunga*, strive to keep their African ancestral practices alive and well. Hence, why as Jairazbhoy and Catlin state in the documentary, their project goals were

twofold: “locate and record the music of African Indians known as Sidis” and assist in the maintaining of ethnomusicological practices, particularly the use of the *malunga* among the younger generation (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 2003, 25:50). Throughout the documentary, various elders are interviewed regarding their views on the importance of the *malunga* not only in keeping African traditions alive but also in keeping Siddi culture alive. This is particularly important in larger attempts to establish Siddi and Afro-descendant cultures as equally deserving of being considered Indian. In striving to keep Siddi cultural practices alive, further gains can be made to lobby the government to consider Siddis as one of the many uniquely Indian ethnic groups.⁹ To that end, workshops were set up in which mainly young Siddi men were taught to play the *malunga* by Siddi elders as an effort to keep the instrument in use and also to encourage intergenerational bonding and the sharing of cultural knowledge.¹⁰ In this sense, the musicological purpose of the *malunga* becomes more than a means to keep culture alive: it reinforces cross-generational relationships among the Siddi community of Gujarat. The documentary ends with young Siddi men expressing that they appreciate having learned to play the *malunga*, stating, “Our ancestors knew how to play it—so we should learn. . . . Now we’ve learned a few things so we’ll go home to rehearse it and then learn a bit more. We’ll go home to our friends and brothers and teach them all” (Jairazbhoy and Catlin 2003, 0:20). Not only this, but also the success of Siddis in popular Sufi folk music also shows a promising future for Siddi music in South Asian culture. With the published recordings such as *Sidi Sufis: African Indian Mystics of Gujarat* by Jairazbhoy and Catlin, the musical practices of Gujarati Siddis seem to be gaining increasing prominence even outside of local cultural contexts. This is important because it not only creates sociocultural exposure for the Siddi communities of Gujarat but also reinforces historical narratives of Siddis as Indians who possess African ancestry. This in turn facilitates the continued understanding of Indian Ocean historical connections as being relevant even today, so long after such connections are not as easily visible.

FURTHER METHODS FOR GAINING INCREASED NATIONAL SUPPORT

Before ending this chapter, I find it useful to provide further suggestions for how Siddis and Sheedis, in nationally recognized musical contexts, have and might continue to raise awareness of their existence and the diversity of South Asian identities. Jairazbhoy and Catlin published a CD as a result of their ethnographic work and in support of the increased visibility of Siddi musical practices on a national level. However, this should not take away from the fact that Afro-South Asians have been contributing to national cultures of music on their own, and with wide success. As Ahmed Feroz briefly mentions, Bilawal Belgium, a popular and well-known Afro-Balochi musician, has become regionally renowned for being

a skilled benjo player (Feroz 1989, 27). Bilawal Belgium has become popular for playing Sheedi music such as the *dammāl* as well as making it onto international music platforms such as Spotify, Tidal, Pandora, and more. He has popularly come to be known both by M. A. Sheikh as well as his former music label for his 1975 album as “Pakistan’s Most Gifted Instrumentalist,” catapulting not only Sheedi music into a national spotlight, but also exerting the existence of Sheedi culture, music, and dance into Pakistani musical discourses. Although he died in 1977, he has since made it into Pakistan’s larger music history, having been detailed in M. A. Sheikh’s book *Who’s Who: Music in Pakistan*. Sheikh details Belgium as having “infused new life” into the benjo in a Pakistani context and produced “lilting and emotive” music (Sheikh 2012, 79). Hailing from the Makrani community, Belgium and his musical contributions were indeed a factor in the (though still limited) national exposure of Sheedi music and culture. Similarly, Abid Brohi, a now active popular Afro-Balochi rapper, is “changing the face of Sindhi music” as Ushah Kazi puts it (Kazi 2018, 1). Brohi, who mixes soulful notes of the Sindhi music *yore* into his songs, has created a unique style of Pakistani rap that is innovative yet at the same time contains influences from Sufism with musical traditions practiced by many Afro-Balochis across Sindh and Pakistan. Interestingly enough, as Kazi notes, although Brohi cannot read or write, his music and particularly his song *Ama Chahay Thi* (translated as “My Mother Wants”), tackles issues common in the Sheedi, and even the larger Pakistani community, such as lack of education, or even possessing education yet finding it difficult to obtain a job in Pakistan’s current economic climate. While Brohi, much like Bilawal Belgium, does not appear to be outwardly attempting to bring light to Sheedi culture and musical practices, I argue that his mere musical presence as a famous Afro-Balochi musician, and even more so as a Pakistani musical artist who infuses Sheedi musical and dance practices, is actively contributing to the recognition of Sheedis through popular music and dance; much like Tanzeela Qambrani as the first Sheedi lawmaker to be elected to Pakistani office, contributes to the political presence of Sheedis in Pakistan. Furthermore, in the Indian context, Siddi dance practices and performances throughout history have been a part of non-Siddi wedding celebrations and continue to be an integral part of Siddi weddings, showcasing the larger cultural importance of dance to Siddi communities and Indian identities.

While the Siddis of focus in this chapter are largely those of Gujarat, nonetheless important are the Siddis of Hyderabad, and particularly in the context of the nineteenth century. In detailing the importance of Africans in Hyderabad at the time, Sadiq Ali details how Siddis were commonly called on to dance at weddings and unofficial ceremonies, many times performing dances such as *zubu* (Ali 1996, 199). While Ali does not provide much further information on this topic, it is curious that Siddis’ musical and dance practices in this time and context were to some extent valued in celebratory settings among non-African-descended Indians. Although the performance of Siddi dances at non-Siddi weddings and

ceremonies seemingly (yet not confirmed by Ali or other scholars) is no longer a common practice, possibly contributing to their increased social ostracization across India—and also likely a factor in Siddis largely marrying within their own communities and looking down on interethnic marriages—Siddi dance practices at weddings remain important to Siddi identities on a larger cultural level. These dance practices can further be used to gain government support for Siddis through the incorporation of such practices into larger Indian celebratory culture. While I am not suggesting the cultural appropriation of Siddi dance practices, I reference the procession of Bava Gor as a celebration that in this case I relate to the maintenance of Siddi cultural practices as a form of resistance. In a similar way that supports the survival of Siddi cultures in a larger Indian context, Siddi dance practices at weddings can be focused on by the national government to represent cultural practices important to Siddi marriage culture as characteristic of the diversity in general Indian marriage cultures. Through the outlining of Siddi wedding dance practices particularly in celebratory and wedding settings as part of regional (Gujarat or Telangana) Indian wedding culture, much like how the Bindi in northern India and the Mangala Sutra in southern India signify a woman having completed her marriage ceremony, Siddi dance practices have the potential to be recognized as integral to the diversity of Indian marriage and/or larger celebratory cultures.

Therefore, both the use of Sheedi and Siddi musical practices and the innovative ways that these populations have and continue to incorporate such practices into modern contexts serve not only as a form of resistance but can also lead to the increased visibility of Afro-descendant populations in India and Pakistan. Yet, although Siddis have been socially and politically organizing themselves more so recently in order to gain increased government support, the Pakistani and Indian governments are ultimately tasked with recognizing such efforts and supporting Siddis and Sheedis through their musical as well as larger cultural practices.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter has been to use music and dance practices to locate collective identities in historical maritime connections. In other words, while the larger historiography of the Indian Ocean has tended to focus on political and economic facets, largely overlooking music as a point of focus, this chapter is meant to shed light on an alternative viewpoint through the use of immigration history, cultural, and musicological practices. Using music as a way to map out histories, neglected populations, subcultures and their varied significances to larger concepts of the nation and belonging, can be brought to light. In doing so, not only can musical practices throughout the South Asian region continue to survive, but they can ideally be further recognized not just because of their enticing beats and rhythms but

also for their cultural and historical significance. Under this guise, I have shown how Afro-descended populations in South Asia—specifically Pakistan and western India—are connected through their well-established oceanic relations and the effect such relations have had in creating many equally important subidentities.

African influences in local musical traditions of South Asia serve as an indicator of historical maritime relations and the continued influence such relations have on cultural customs and traditions. While I emphasize that we must acknowledge Siddi, Sheedi, Kaffir, and Afro-Balochi populations as native South Asians, it is also important to let them, and their music, speak for themselves in acknowledging historical African connections. The effort of Jairazbhoy and Catlin has been very helpful in attempts to maintain the continued practice of Afro-South Asian musical customs, particularly in Gujarat. Additionally, the Sheedi calls for further government recognition, which I hope will be successful, could serve a similar purpose as that of the Siddi-Malunga documentary in preserving Sheedi and larger Afro-Balochi traditions for future generations. Not to mention the positive role that musicians such as Bilawal Belgium and Abid Brohi continue to play in bringing to light Sheedi musical influences on a national level. Hence, Siddis and Sheedis are already involved in social and political efforts to achieve increased social visibility, and this can be seen through the historical presence of Siddi dance performances at weddings as well as more contemporary Sheedi musical artists and their lasting contributions to the Pakistani music industries.

It is my hope that this chapter has broadened insights into Indian Ocean historiography and provided evidence for different ways of accessing knowledge and understanding historical immigrations between Africa and South Asia, along with their effects on the populations of the region. Indian Ocean history remains a relatively new field that continues to be expanded on, with new scholars periodically taking up interest in the region. While this is extremely important to understanding the field, we must not let innovative studies be an excuse for the lack of inclusive research. To that end, I found it rather interesting, as noted by Shihan de Silva Jayasuria, that some scholars consider Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion, The Maldives, and other Indian Ocean islands as the “Caribbean of the Indian Ocean.” As a scholar of Indian Ocean history, I hope that the Indian Ocean region would not fall into the same category as the Caribbean in terms of studies of the African diaspora in the region, often neglected in favor of US-centric African American studies. Nonetheless, it proves a great start for continued research on the topic and further understanding not only of how African and South Asian identities are present in and throughout the region, but even how oceanic influences are indicative of centuries-long contact between various populations. In closing, it is my hope that this chapter supports continued discussions of Indian Ocean history and encourages the recognition of the vast diversity within the region, and the identities of the people who occupy it.

NOTES

1. Examples of Siddis who conquered large territories of India include Malik Ambar of Janjira and Abdul Karim Mohammad Yakut Khan I of Sachin, Surat.
2. Habshi, a term often confused with Siddi, denotes Indians of African ancestral origin who can be traced to Ethiopia; from the related term Habesha. Throughout history, most Habshis, like Siddis, are Muslims.
3. *Dammāl* and *lewa* are dances typical of various countries throughout the Indian Ocean region, such as Oman, the UAE, and, of course, Pakistan among others. *Dammāl*, widely typical in the Indian state of Gujarat and southern Pakistan, is characterized by energetic jumps, turns, and head movements, while *Lewa*, characterized by rhythmic arms and feet movement, is more common in Arab Gulf countries such as Oman, the UAE, and even parts of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Through the dispersal of African-descended populations in these regions, the dances were incorporated into the local and regional customs. While historically Afro-Balochis performed *dammāl* to commemorate the return of a king or even of warriors from successful hunting expeditions, more recently it is performed as a cultural representation of the Afro-descended peoples of the region.
4. In Basu's section on Daff Music of Yemeni-Habshis in Hyderabad, this topic makes me question whether there exists any work on Afro-Baluchi populations in Oman (Basu 2008). Furthermore, if there are Yemeni-Habshis in India, and Swahili-Omanis in East Africa, could there be a Afro-Baluchis in Oman?
5. Makran refers to a coastal strip of Balochistan, modern-day Pakistan and Iran, that runs along the Gulf, now Sea of Oman, and possesses a sizeable Afro-Balochi population.
6. Bava Gor, as one of the first ancestors of Siddis to arrive in the region, is described through Siddi folklore as a founder of the Siddi peoples who is revered as a saint along with his sister Mai Mishra, worshiped as assisting those with fertility issues.
7. Afro-Latinidad refers to the state of being Latino/a and of African descent. It is also referred to as Afro-Latineity.
8. In a documentary as part of an ethnomusicological project conducted by Dr. Nazir Jairazbhoy and Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy titled *The Sidi-Malunga Project: Rejuvenating the African Musical Bow in India*, Dr. Jairazbhoy and Dr. Catlin travel to Gujarat to study the use of the *malunga* instrument as important in Siddi musicological practices. Through the increased use of the instrument for the purposes of the documentary, elder-youth relationships were able to improve in elders' teaching youth how to play the *malunga*.
9. While it is not directly related to music, there have been other efforts to establish Siddi ethnic and cultural practice in popular Indian culture. Recently, the Indian government attempted to contract Siddis to participate in national track races in order to compete with East Africans and possibly improve India's international reputation in the sport. However, the program has since been halted for reasons not entirely made clear.
10. In the documentary, Siddi elders discuss the idea that women are allowed to play musical instruments, but it is discouraged. Women were not depicted playing the *malunga* in the documentary.

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