

The Kalimah in the Kaleidophone: Ranges of Multivocality in Bangladeshi Muslim's Discourses

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ABSTRACT *Bengali Muslims have long debated the place of religion, ideology, literary heritage, ethnicity, and various nationalisms in their identity. Contemporary identity ferment is exemplified in each of five examples of discourse explored herein. Replaying these voices “kaleidophonically” uncovers the vital, resistant, “fundamentally liberating” character of multivocality in Bengali Muslims’ discourse, particularly in codeswitching, reported speech, and pronoun play. Although each of the voices acknowledges the kalimah of Islam, their multivocality belies simple formulations of identity. The translinguistics of Bakhtin informs the analysis of how linguistic play works to reconstitute what it is to be Bengali and Muslim.*

Communities arise out of the diversity of interacting voices. Yet widely distributed representations of Muslims reduce their diverse voices to a monologue. Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), I approach the theme of multivocality and identity ferment among Muslims in Bangladesh through several recent discursive examples, some of which involve switching or mixing codes (Bengali, English, and Arabic as filtered through Persian or Urdu in the sociolinguistic history of Bengal) and others, switching styles. The examples are: an interview with a possession medium, a letter to the editor of an English newspaper, the controversial writings of physician and author Taslima Nasrin, a lament by a rural woman, and a meeting between a businessman/*pir* (Sufi preceptor) (Ewing 1990a) and his cosmopolitan friends/disciples. My intent in replaying their voices “kaleidophonically” here is to uncover the vital, resistant, “fundamentally liberating” character (Hill and

Hill 1986:399) of multivocality in Bengali Muslims' discourse. Each voice is complexly refracted like light through prisms, but given its orientation to their vocal performances, my analysis is "kaleidophonic" rather than kaleidoscopic.¹

The voices that I cite all affirm, in some sense, the *kalimah* ("word," or creed) of Islam, bearing witness to faith.² If the *kalimah* offers itself as a metonym of shared Muslim identity, 19th-century Bengali Tantric poet and mystic Lalan Fakir—whose esoteric songs are still sung by the wandering ascetic Bauls of Bengal but are also sometimes coopted by the Bangladeshi government in the service of its production of culture and history (Salomon 1991)—exemplifies the plurality of voices beneath displays of a "single" Bangladeshi Islamic heritage.³ Lalan's disciples, the Bauls, even now reserve the "true" meanings of their songs for the initiated. Lalan represents voices distributed across Bangladeshi society, as well as the multiple voices heard even within a given act of speaking or writing. Those voices bear witness to the complexity balancing the centripetal pull the *kalimah* exerts on Muslim discourses. Lalan's songs epitomize discourse best analyzed translinguistically. In this article I use the translinguistics of Bakhtin and Vološinov to analyze the way linguistic acts, as creative indexes (Silverstein 1976) of identity, borrow meaning from a variety of Others and contribute to new kaleidophonic transformations of the meaning of being Bengali and Muslim. In this article, *pronoun tropes, reported speech, and style and codeswitching* decenter voices and provide methodological keys for my analysis, opening up "possibilities for re-negotiating meanings and social relations beyond the parameters of the performance itself" (Bauman and Briggs 1990:70).

Soviet literary critics Mikhail Bakhtin and V. N. Vološinov developed a "translinguistics" around the notion of "heteroglossia," which posits the "multivocality" of every word or utterance. Bakhtin uncovered the heteroglossic ways that novelistic discourse plays with speech styles and the "sociological types" associated with them,⁴ treating such typical styles as more or less distinct voices. He was not content, however, to recognize plurality among voices stereotypically associated with persona. Dialogism characterizes every utterance. Multivocality characterizes not only the literal interplay of voices of multiple parties on paper or in speech, but (and this is the unique contribution of translinguistics) also multiple utterances of a single narrator switching "voices" (as in the performance of verbal art) and even single utterances that "look over their shoulder" or echo another voice to engage it somehow. Bakhtin and Vološinov recognized that multivocality characterizes everyday discourse (and particularly our conversational propensity to cite and recycle others' words) at least as much as does novelistic discourse. Speakers inhabit identities with respect to their conversational partners, just as novelistic characters' identities are

evident in their speech style, as well as in the narrative surrounding them. Moreover, just as the novelistic genius is displayed in “double voicing,” in which the voices of narrator and narrated character interact and impact each other stylistically, the fact that even seemingly isolated words are responses or take their place in extended dialogical sequences becomes evident in double voicing in everyday discourse, for example, in irony. It is this playful multivocality in the utterances of individual speakers, rather than a putatively neat sociological distribution of voices (e.g., peasants speaking like peasants, clerics like clerics), that is uncovered by translinguistic analysis of Bangladeshi voices.⁵

Ethnographies of South Asia have moved away from the monolithic structuralism of Dumont (1970) toward representing multivocality, or at least multiple voices contesting dominant notions like “hierarchy” or “*pardā*” (gender segregation). Dumont swept diversity, for example, in regard to the acceptance of Brahmanical hegemony, under the rug with a notion of “encompassing.” (The principle of Brahmanical purity “encompasses” that of secular rule or kingship.) He argued that Muslim and Christian principles of social organization were similarly encompassed or swallowed up by the principles of purity and pollution informing caste hierarchy, at least in areas of South Asia where they were isolated minorities. Counterevidence to Dumont’s claim of the ontological nonreality of the individual in contrast with the social whole in “traditional India” (1965) has been presented in this journal and elsewhere by Derné (1992), Ewing (1991), McHugh (1989), and Mines (1988), among others. Recent representations of Indian social reality have stressed conflict (Haynes and Prakash 1992), even placing ambiguity and conflict at the heart of the processes producing culture (Trawick 1990a) and the self (Ewing 1990b). The songs of untouchable Paraiyar women, in Trawick’s analysis (1988, 1990b), deconstruct not only hierarchy but also the boundaries of “voices” and “selves” (cf. Ewing 1997). Such poststructural analyses of discourse and the social order need to be replicated in further studies of Muslim communities in South Asia and elsewhere.

This study does just that, treating multivocality in discourse as both axiomatic and heuristic. If for reasons political or academic we embrace the goal of exploring complexity and resisting reductionism in the description of Muslims’ lives, multivocality is a particularly useful frame for our study. Bengal has long heard discussions of the relative priority of religion, ideology, ethnicity, literary heritage, and various forms of nationalism in “Bengali” (or, more recently, “Bangladeshi”) identity. Rather than taking “Bengali” or “Muslim” identities as given, this article explores Bangladeshis’ own construction and invocation of multiple identities. These plural identities have at times been played out as harmonious, at other times as competing and conflicting. The thriving market in identities

crosscuts Bangladeshi society; more interestingly, it crosscuts individual utterances.

It is that stress on the interactivity or cross-semiotization of various identities within a given text or discursive act that sets a Bakhtinian analysis apart from, say, correlational sociolinguistics. Bakhtinian dialogicality is subtler than either variationist analysis of dialects or most work on code-switching, treating the codes as discrete and the switching as artful only so long as it maintains tight code boundaries. The “double vision” in effect in certain forms of codeswitching becomes clear when we see it in terms of simultaneous double-voicing (Woolard 1996). Such a translinguistic treatment of codeswitching penetrates far deeper into language than the mere alternation of speakers across conversational turns or across the pages of a novel, or the linear shifting of codes.

The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of *any* discourse. . . . Only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogical inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object. . . . The internal dialogism of the word finds expression in a series of peculiar features in semantics, syntax and stylistics. [Bakhtin 1981:279, emphasis in original]

Clearly Bakhtin is describing the dialogical orientation, evident in particular linguistic features, of “individual utterances” and not just features that are obviously interactional, such as turn taking. It is precisely that sort of dialogicality in the discourse of selected speakers and writers (multivocality incorporating “alien” voices into that of the author) which this analysis uncovers.⁶

Whereas American correlational sociolinguistics typically envisions a homogeneous evaluative norm upon which even behavioral “violators” agree (e.g., “It is good to say one’s postvocalic *rs*”), translinguistics takes plural norms and competing ideologies of language as fundamental to discourse in society. Rather than portraying diverse features as subsumed under a single grammatical and phonological system, translinguistics assumes that more or less intact features of many systems echo through any given utterance. From a translinguistic perspective, even “the Bengali language” is an abstraction that covers a multiplicity of synchronic strands reflecting various waves of diachronic influence, from pre-Aryan to Sanskritizing to Arabo-Persianizing (Ahmed 1981). One way that Bengali speakers and poets have shifted “voice” over the last several centuries is by altering the balance of “Sanskritic” and “Perso-Arabic” lexemes in their discourse (Ilaq 1957; Mannan 1966). Bengali Muslims once even experimented with a Perso-Arabic orthography for Bengali (Chatterji 1934:211). Although there is no primal, authentic “Islamic” voice or a pure “Sanskritic/Hindu” voice to be recovered in medieval Bengali history and literature, ideologies have created facsimiles of ethnolinguistic purity and

brought their voices into play at least since the onset of British hegemony (Wilce 1996).

The dominant trope of Islamic unity notwithstanding, one hears a diversity of voices in Muslim societies like Bangladesh, for instance, in the dozens of *tariqah* (sects representing a variety of Sufi spiritual “paths,” the literal meaning of *tariqah*). The voices that I will highlight all affirm the *ṣahādah* (kalimah of Islam), with the possible exception of Taslima Nasrin. Still, close attention to these utterances of Bangladeshi Muslims renders even their individual voices veritable aural rainbows. And a careful reading of the extant literature on contemporary Muslim societies (including the other contributions to this issue) suggests that, in many of them, several channels exist for the communication of multiple identities. (See the introduction to this issue.)

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL MOTIVATIONS

No large sociolinguistic database of Bengali speech has been published, but my corpus of naturally occurring speech of or interviews with 200 some speakers provides convincing evidence that Bangladeshis linguistically perform a broad repertoire of identities. For this article I have selected a few examples from my corpus according to my sense of what was generally in the air in 1991–92 and also to my sense of an untold story. Among the Bangladeshis whose speech I recorded and transcribed, I was drawn to those (fairly common) voices that defy reduction of the sort American media typically impose on Muslims. Each voice is itself polyphonous, like that of a Tibetan monk who sings along with himself, so to speak, by manipulating acoustic overtones.

Codeswitching (CS) entails “alternations of linguistic varieties within the same conversation” (Myers-Scotton 1993). My analysis of the CS evident in my recordings draws on Myers-Scotton’s “markedness model” of CS and John Gumperz’s notion of “metaphorical CS,” as well as Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia.⁷ Myers-Scotton proposes that to choose a given linguistic code (language or dialect) from a set available in a multilingual speech community indexes a set of “rights and obligations” linked to membership in the groups associated with that code. In a given context, to use an unexpected code would, by definition, be a highly *marked* choice. But in South Asian societies, as well as in Myers-Scotton’s own African research contexts, CS itself becomes the *unmarked* choice in certain types of conversation. In such conversations, she argues, bilinguals must balance at least two sorts of identities: cosmopolitan and local. She cites Kachru approvingly:

Code-mixing with English is pan-South Asian. In attitudinal and functional terms it ranks highest and cuts across language boundaries, religious boundaries, and the caste

barriers. It is a marker of modernization, socioeconomic position, and membership in an elite group. . . . It continues to be used in those contexts where one would like to demonstrate authority, power, and identity with the establishment. [Kachru 1978:113 f., quoted in Myers-Scotton 1993:63]

Here Kachru addresses only the prestige function of switching to English. But if such value accrues to the use of English, why not speak “pure English” rather than codeswitch? That would risk so formalizing the situation as to sacrifice the sense of solidarity invoked by speaking Bengali in many of the speech situations relevant here. Thus CS becomes a “strategy of neutrality” in which speakers refuse to commit themselves to a single set of rights and obligations normally indexed by a single code. “Unmarked CS is the ultimate middle avenue. By definition it invokes dual identities” (Myers-Scotton 1993:147). In a similar vein, Southworth describes Indian CS as a “result of a speaker’s need to balance several different role relationships simultaneously” (1980:132).⁸

John Gumperz’s work on CS laid the foundation for Myers-Scotton’s markedness model, and his work continues to inform recent studies of CS such as Kroskrity’s analysis of Arizona Tewa (1993) and Rampton’s mapping of multiethnic friendship networks (including those of South Asian descent) in England (1995). Gumperz differentiated “metaphorical” from “situational” CS. Metaphorical switches are linked with topic and invoke different identities within a single situation (Blom and Gumperz 1972).⁹ In both the Norwegian and Tewa cases, the subjects studied were unaware of switching codes until they heard the audiotapes of their own speech. Quite apart from speakers’ conscious awareness, the data persuasively demonstrate that alternate codes cue alternate identities. For example, Tewa speakers may switch to Ilopi to evoke the spirituality stereotypically associated with the Tewa’s hosts and kin on the Ilopi reservation. More or less discrete though richly interactive “voices” can, likewise, be invoked by Bengali speakers exploiting the connotations of various codes and styles.

To Hill and Hill (1986), as well as to Ben Rampton, CS exemplifies Bakhtinian multivocality. Rampton’s work on hybrid identities among middle school students near Stoneford, England, who learn bits of several of each others’ subaltern languages, is of particular interest here. Rampton builds a model combining metaphorical CS and Bakhtin’s notion of “double-voicing/double-languaging” (1981:360). For Rampton, metaphorical or “figurative” CS operates like most examples of figurative speech, providing an adjunct frame through which to view a primary frame (Rampton 1995:278). Rampton contends that metaphorical CS is the equivalent of Bakhtin’s “double-voicing,” which he defines as “the way in which different internally persuasive alien voices act upon [or within?] the utterance” (Rampton 1995:222). Bakhtin claimed that the “ambiguity of double-voiced discourse is internally dialogized, fraught with dialogue, and may in

fact even give birth to dialogues comprised of truly separate voices” (Bakhtin 1981:330).

The novelistic hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented (as in rhetoric) but is also double-linguaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are two socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs that, true, are not here unconsciously mixed (as in an organic hybrid), but that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance. . . . In an intentional novelistic hybrid, moreover, the important activity is not only (in fact not so much) the mixing of linguistic forms—the markers of two languages and styles—as it is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms. Therefore an intentional artistic hybrid is a *semantic* hybrid. [Bakhtin 1981:360, emphasis in original]

Multivocality is a groundspring, collecting place, and sanctuary for diverse elements of identity at the social and personal levels. In fact, not even the discourse of avowed enemies of “diversity,” say, in American political discourse today, is as monological as one might think. Shoaps (1997) argues that levels of heteroglossia within the discourse of even someone like Rush Limbaugh has the potential to open ideological vistas that Limbaugh neither intends nor even imagines. Echoing Bakhtin’s high regard for the democratizing potential of heteroglossia in their interpretation of CS in *Mexicano* (Nahuatl), Hill and Hill affirm that linguistic mixing “may carry a special resonance of resistance to official order. . . . Many authors have proposed that the order of speaking is an important site at which the struggle for human freedom takes place. . . . For Bakhtin, heteroglossia in multilingual popular usage amplifies and opens the possibilities for meaning and freedom. . . . Thus Bakhtin sees syncretic speech as fundamentally liberating” (1986:399). Bauman and Briggs explain that liberating potential thus: “Code-switching can heighten attention to competing languages and varieties to such an extent that identities, social relations, and the constitution of the community itself become open to negotiation” (1990:63). Motivated by this hopeful working assumption, I offer the following “sound clips” of interacting identities in a particular Muslim society as affirmations of its vitality and complexity that vigorously resist reduction.

VOCAL IDENTITIES FROM THE BANGLADESHI KALEIDOPHONE

Shifting Pronouns and Perspectives in a Possession Medium’s Speech

In the fall of 1991, I was sitting in the village home of Shefali, getting to know her as my two field assistants, Faisal and Lopa, asked her questions in a loosely structured interview. We had come because of rumors that she “drove a female spirit” (*a part*) every Thursday night and that, while in trance, “she” offered curative advice. Naively, we expected to hear a narrative history of the weekly ritual renewal of her relationship with this spirit,

a narrative whose form, at least, would be easily comprehended. It was the narrative's content that I had expected to be exotic, forgetting my academic mentors' dictum that form and function are often inseparable. Given our expectations, Shefali lost us (my Bangladeshi assistants and myself) all too quickly in an intricate web of pronouns and identities. When we heard her speaking about someone as "my patient" (*rogi*), we assumed she was referring to one of her kin and neighbors who came to hear from the *pari*/spirit some healing words or advice while Shefali was "absent." The porosity of Shefali's identity/identities, however, extended to her use of pronouns in unmarked speech during "normal consciousness." In fact, when Shefali spoke with us of "my patient" (i.e., herself), she was in a sense echoing and reanimating the voice of the spirit who gave her this new identity not only every Thursday night but, in some sense, throughout her everyday life. Perhaps, on some unconscious level, we might also have expected that Shefali would manifest some awareness that her spiritual involvement was somehow resistant to orthodox Islam. Instead, during the interview, and again when we heard her spirit speak on Thursday night, we felt the worlds of spirits and mosques blurring even as linguistic "form and content" blurred. In trance on another night, she (or her *pari*) gleefully described to those present (her husband and adult daughter, as well as the ethnographer and Faisal) how the *pari* had been in the rice fields with her husband and had pushed him over. Ah, that explained his "falling over"! Why had the *pari* done that? The poor man had forgotten to perform one of the obligatory five daily prayers. The *pari*/newly assertive woman turned out to be an enforcer of the pillars of Islam. (For excerpts from this transcript, see the appendix.)

What shall we call Shefali? Is she a cryptofundamentalist or cryptofeminist? A modern Bangladeshi whose identity is increasingly caught up with Middle Eastern Islamist reform, or a Bengali woman engaged in a form of spirit-mediumship that predates not only the advent of Islam in Bengal but also that of Hinduism and Buddhism?¹⁰ Such dichotomies do not claim us so completely in an anthropological era whose practitioners are sensitive to the rich possibilities of "hybridity" (Bhaba 1994).¹¹ What does claim our attention is the matter of how Shefali's many *Is* coexist and in what sense they are a microcosm of "Muslims' identities" in general.

On one occasion, Shefali denied that she practiced any form of mediumship or healing, that she had any relationship with the spirit. Why would she deny what all of her neighbors and relatives "knew"? As we talked about her life, it became clear that her husband had tried to end her relationship with the *pari* from the outset of the spirit's visits some seven years before we met Shefali. The *pari* prompted Shefali to act in ways he found unacceptable. It was natural, therefore, that Shefali be circumspect, at times, even about describing her trance possessions. Keeping in mind the

somewhat dangerous religiocultural environments in which they spoke, we see parallels between Lalan Fakir's esotericism and Shefali's pronoun play as two cases of multivocal "indirection" (Brenneis 1988; Searle 1975) under duress.

"What Is Our Culture?" A Letter Published in a Year of Religiopolitical Conflict

Ibn Hanjala's letter to the editor, presented below, raises questions about the future of Bangladesh's majority and minority populations, perhaps betokening the increasingly familiar scenario of the dissolution of a nation-state (Simons 1994). Such a scenario, explored by Taslima Nasrin in her novel *Lajjā* (next case, see below), typifies our new world disorder.

The question of cultural identity is no mere academic topic in contemporary Bangladesh. Public discourses imagine competing communities into reality, or, more accurately, into clashing material/symbolic realities. Twenty-five years after Bangladesh asserted its independence in a war fought against West Pakistani soldiers who invoked a pan-Muslim identity as the ideology behind their suppression of Bengalis and all things Bengali, new political shifts stir up old identity questions and resurgent violence. Whether ethnicity (and language) or religion should define the national identity of Bangladesh is a question that the bloody struggle for independence did not settle, as has recently become apparent. The presence of the Jamati Islami (an Islamist party) in a parliamentary coalition with the ruling BNP party of Begum Khaleda Zia (from 1992 until the collapse of her government in spring 1996) ensured ongoing controversy over what the opposition (including the Awami League, back in government as of 1996) considered the Jamat's complicity in war crimes. In 1992 the Jamat's student organization destroyed at least one memorial to the 1952 Bengali language *shahid* ("martyrs"). The Perso-Arabic term carries sacred overtones; hence its use, and not simply the act of honoring the 1952 movement for Bengali language rights (Umar 1970), is resented by the Jamat and its sympathizers. The government-funded Islamic Foundation refused to condemn the statement of a Jamat party speaker at Chittagong University that "no son born to Muslim parents could observe Ekushey ["the 21st" of February: Shahid/Language Martyrs' Day, a national holiday since the founding of secular Bangladeshi in 1972], because that is counter to Islamic ideals" (*Daily Star* 1992:11). Representing Bangladesh's ethnic and religious pluralism as an example of "communal harmony," a BNP cabinet member nevertheless attributed threats to that harmony to "provocation, instigation, and machination from within" Bangladesh (*New Nation* 1992:8). Soon afterward, the government quelled rioting between Jamat supporters and those opposition activists who were calling for Jamat leaders to stand trial as war criminals (Hiasnath and Habib 1996; Nabi and

Imam 1996). Police entered the press club building and beat up reporters covering the factional violence.

It was at that moment in history that Ibn Hanjala, a citizen of Bangladesh's second largest city (Chittagong), wrote his 1992 letter to the editor of the *Bangladesh Observer*, posing the question, "What is our culture?" The editors used the question as the letter's headline. I have italicized portions of his letter that directly address the dilemma of unity and diversity within "Bangladeshi culture" and underlined all tokens of first-person plural pronouns:

Whither are we headed culturally? . . . I have noted with special interest Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's *warning against the infiltration of foreign culture into ours* and to guard against any distortion caused by it. I also remember with great respect late President Ziaur Rahman whose attitude to national culture was one of preserving it in all its purity and its historical character. Bangladesh is a twelve-crore population country, including one crore [10 million] Hindus. *The two communities have each a distinct history and culture of its [sic] own*. Needless to say each culture is principally based on and coloured by the two different religions. What is more notable is the peaceful co-existence of these two distinct cultures and community [sic]. . . . [But now] *this fundamental distinction between the two culture[s] appears to be disappearing and the Islamic culture looks like [it is] deviating from its historic nucleus* and is allowing itself to be oriented increasingly to what is alien to itself and its life-philosophy and life-style. This is *creating an unnecessary confusion* for a whole generation of children and youth being left unsure about their culture and identity. Certainly it is a very relevant question to ask for a Muslim citizen in Bangladesh: *What is our culture and what is the foundation of our culture?* What is and should be its colour? [Hanjala 1992:12, emphasis added]

Identity questions typically hinge on "the trope of 'we'-ness" (Silverstein in press): imaginations, projections, and manipulations of solidarity creatively indexed by first-person plural pronouns. In the first two and last two lines of his letter, Ibn Hanjala uses pronouns to project that sense of "we"-ness. Hindu readers, we assume, are somehow to know that this "we" excludes them. In fact "we"-ness is projected through that very exclusion. Ibn Hanjala's invocation of "two cultures" echoes the "two-nation" argument that led to the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. But this exclusion raises troubling questions that haunt the letter's periphery: how can "peaceful coexistence" continue if the "two" are not included in some salient, shared oneness or "we"-ness? Thus the author gives voice to the contradictions of his society: first affirming one state and one national culture, and then two; first positing separate identities, then fearing confusion and mixture. Caught up in the contradictions of "local" and translocal identities of several sorts, he grasps at a purist reenvisioning of history of a pristine Islamic identity transplanted in the rice fields of Bengal. His perplexity is reflected metacommunicatively: despite his avowed fear of foreign influence, he writes an English letter to an English newspaper. At another level, the English *we* indexes not perplexity but another sort of exclusion; Ibn Hanjala's tokens of the English pronoun project a "we"-ness of that part of

the English-educated elite. For them, modernist Islam excludes allegiance to local saints and ritual traditions that, from their perspective, smack of Hindu or transcommunal ethnic culture (Wilce 1998, in press).¹²

“Shame” as the Master Trope of Taslima Nasrin’s Novella

Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi gynecologist, poet, and novelist who is now a refugee in Europe. Before she fled Bangladesh, friends had been hiding her since a *fatwa* ([claiming to represent] “an Islamic judgment”) was issued against her in 1993 for her writings. Like the one targeting Rushdie, this fatwa called for her death.

Mary Anne Weaver interviewed Taslima Nasrin for a September 12, 1994, article in *The New Yorker*. In Weaver’s words, Nasrin is “a Marxist by conviction, a self-proclaimed atheist who often reflects on God” (Weaver 1994:48). Weaver asked Nasrin about her statement, published in a leading Calcutta newspaper, to the effect that the Qur’an should be revised:

W: Did you say that the Koran should be revised?

N: No. How many times do I have to say it? I’ve said it over and over again. I said that Shariat law should be revised. I want a modern, civilized law, where women are given equal rights. I want no religious law that discriminates, none, period—no Hindu law, no Christian law, no Islamic law. . . . Should I be killed for saying this? . . . I will never repent. [Weaver 1994:58]

When the future hangs on how a public, a readership, or an authority receives one’s words, speakers/authors often become more cautious. In Taslima’s case, slips of the tongue (saying “Qur’an” in the Calcutta interview alluded to above when she “meant Shari’a”) compromised caution. Yet Bakhtin’s theory and practice of heteroglossia arose in just such a context (Trawick 1988:195).

Bakhtin originally located heteroglossia in the discourse of the novel, not in poetry. It is noteworthy that Nasrin had been publishing poems and a syndicated column and arousing only a low level of animosity, until the publication of her novella *Lajjā* (Shame).¹³ It was *Lajjā* that provoked the fatwa against her, when it appeared in 1993. Bakhtin defined the novel as “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (1981:262). Discourse in *Lajjā* preserves that diversity of voices in a multivocal play of perspectives. The author, the child of a Muslim family, takes the perspective of the beleaguered Bangladeshi Hindu minority. After the December 1992 razing of the mosque at Ayodhya by Indian Hindu militants, the Bangladeshi Hindu minority became a metonym for “the Hindu menace” in the perception of some Islamist elements.¹⁴ It was one thing for a gynecologist to publish poems or even a syndicated column about local abuses of women, as Nasrin did. It was another for a Muslim in the charged Bangladeshi political climate to write in the voices of Hindus, to let their voices

stand, as they must in a realist novel, alongside of and intertwined with others, namely, those of “unmarked” Bangladeshis: Muslims.

Lajjā is an impassioned argument for cultural pluralism.¹⁵ It praises a well-known Muslim Bangladeshi performer who sings *Hari Om Tatsat* (Praise kṛṣṇa, He Is Truth)¹⁶ and even dances as he sings them, while noting that these performances are prevented from reaching mass audiences of Hindus or Muslims (Nasrin 1994:164).¹⁷ The most powerful forms of playful multivocality in *Lajjā* are metalevel features: several interrelated facets of the book’s master trope. First, Nasrin’s narrative traces a rapid unraveling of a Hindu family and its secure stance, from anticomunalist patriotic Bangladeshi nationalism to a resigned Hindu communalism. The novel draws to a close as the family decides it must flee to predominantly Hindu Calcutta. The author thus uses the trope of a fall from grace—together with a play of perspectives in which the heroic initial anticomunalist stance is ascribed to the minority Other within Bangladesh—to present her readers with an outcome abhorrent to her, one that the reader is invited to blame on zealots in India, if they so choose, but definitely on zealots in Bangladesh.

The book’s master trope hinges on its title, *Shame*, shifting subject and object of “shame” across the communal divide (1993:31, 150). Kironmoyee, the mother of protagonist Siranjan, explains to her ailing husband Sudhamoy why she no longer sings *kirtan* (Hindu devotional songs) publicly as she once did, saying, “But those [Muslims] who . . . applauded me also said, ‘It is only because Hindu women are *shameless* that they learn how to sing; that is why they sit in public in front of unknown men and sing for everyone’ ” (1994:37, emphasis added).

Shame is again invoked on the novel’s last page, where frail old Sudhamoy announces that the family will do as his son Siranjan had urged them to do: flee to India.

Sudhamoy said, “Come, let us go away.”

Suranjan could not conceal his surprise. “Where will we go, Bābā [Father]?” he asked. Sudhamoy said, “India.” And his voice cracked as the *shame* swept over him. [1994:216, emphasis added]¹⁸

Nasrin thus frames the novel’s action between two moments of shame, both experienced by Hindus. The first introduces an anonymous voice calling Hindu women shameless (1994:37); the second undercuts that first, “Muslim,” voicing. Through her manipulation of the book’s title and theme, Nasrin problematizes the “ownership” or voicing of “shame” and accusations pertaining thereto. That is, the title links these two key passages at the book’s beginning and end to turn the accusation of shame away from this Hindu family and toward the Muslim rioters who drove them from Dhaka. Preachy though this may be, it is no less ludic and multivocal.¹⁹

Latifa's Performance of Abjection: Narrative Sounds Passing through "Fire"

Latifa, a rural woman of about 25, was married briefly in 1990. She began to complain about some mistreatment by her in-laws. (I learned in 1996 that the mistreatment began when Latifa's brothers failed to send with Latifa all of "her" dowry.²⁰) Six months after her wedding, her brothers intervened to force a divorce and claim for themselves the *kābin*, a cash settlement typically agreed to prenuptially. Latifa then regretted having complained, vowing that she intended nothing like the sort of intervention her brothers initiated. Their mother agreed with Latifa that her brothers had done it in hopes of pocketing the *kābin*. At any rate, Latifa was still grieving the loss of her husband as I met her in March 1992 when she walked from her brothers' home ten miles to visit her mother's brothers' compound (my field home) for two weeks. She tried to persuade her kin, especially a great-aunt to whom she sang her laments, addressing her as "sister," to help her reunite with her beloved ex-husband, against her brothers' will. Her rhetorical tool was tuneful texted weeping. Much of the conflict that arose over her weeping was due to the fact that she wept beyond the confines of her brothers' home and that, when, as was often the case, she was confined there, she sometimes wept loudly enough that the neighbors could hear. As I explain in more detail elsewhere (Wilce in press), the suppression of her weeping owes as much to the needs of the kin group to maintain enough symbolic capital ("They are a good family; they keep their women under control") to finalize marriage negotiations foreseeable in the immediate future as it does to Islamist reform. Still, the rationalism of reformist Islam was obvious in the interviews I conducted in 1996 regarding lament and women's voices.

Latifa's wept words include the name of God: various invocations of Allah and Mabud (Lord), both Arabic terms for the divine, in widespread use among Bangladeshi Muslims. Yet Latifa seeks support from several authorities. In her performances of poetically texted, tuneful weeping, Latifa's voice resonates with the distilled registers of those supporting as well as accusing voices.

The transcript excerpt below represents Latifa's wept speech on one March 1992 night when I happened to be nearby with cassette recorder handy.²¹ Sitting in her great-aunt's house with a few relatives inside and about eight more outside with myself and Faisal, Latifa quotes her school-teachers, saying they do not recognize her grief-stricken form. In the transcript below, L indicates a line spoken by Latifa and B, a line spoken by Latifa's *bun/buji* ("big sister," her mother's father's sister).

8L iskulero sārera kay •hh
bun go o o bun •hh

*The teachers at the school say,
sister, o sister,*

- 9L "he māyāre kemte heman khuno go karlo" •hh *"How they have killed that girl!",*
 bun go bun /o o •hh/ *sister, /o o/.*
- 10B *//(era) kaibo jai (ga OR ba) (onera)/* *//They will say (whatever [they say])//*
- 11L je šunete hay hirbā diyā uthe go •hh *Whoever hears of it, perhaps, shivers,*
 bun go o o²² bun •hh *sister, o sister.*
- 12L je šunete hay to go •hh *Whoever hears, perhaps,*
 saler pasam kādā kādā diyā go jāy gā •hh *their body's skin crawls with gooseflesh,*
 bun go bun •hh *sister, o sister.*
- 13L āmi e āgun kemte sahyo go karbo •hh *How can I bear this fire,*
 bun go a: a: bun •hh *sister, o sister?*

The words that Latifa puts in the mouth of her teachers in lines 8–9 imply that her abuse by her brothers, or her grief itself, is destroying her health, causing her body to shrivel up (a local idiom for the somatic sign of severe distress or illness).

For Latifa to quote schoolteachers' voices is telling, and not only because she liked school and did well there. Schooling also represents partial liberation from domesticity in rural South Asian villages. It is possible that she takes up this particular voice to support her refusal to perform domestic work in her uncles' home during her visit, or to support her assertive stance in negotiating a future, hopefully with her former husband. But for a young woman to invoke the voice of secular education is controversial. So she also borrows the voice of Islam, but does so selectively such that we never lose touch with the fact that Latifa, and not "monolithic Islam," is speaking. She compares the fire of her suffering (line 13 above) with the "fire" of judgment day:

- 42 hāsarero māther matan kairā go •hh *They've brought the fire of judgment day*
 ānlo gun bun •hh *down, sister, sister, o sister.*
 bun go bun •hh
- 43 hāsarero māther matan kairā go bun o go •hh *It's like the day of judgment, sister, oh.*

Latifa's introduction of the image of hellfire must indirectly threaten perceptive listeners, in case they felt content to let stand her brothers' abusive control (as she saw it). Her use of the "fire" image for pain might also evoke the theme of *'ishq* (Arabic for *love*) portrayed as a painful fire in Muslim laments composed centuries earlier, where love-as-fire stands polysemously for the pain of separation from the human *or* divine beloved (Vaudeville 1986:38).

The methods of conversation analysis have enabled some anthropologists to uncover the structures of everyday social interaction (Goodwin and Heritage 1990; Trix 1993). I have taken pains to deny that Bakhtin found the dialogicality of conversation only in the sequential structure of turn taking emphasized by conversation analysis. In their treatment of how persons in naturally occurring interaction take up one another's words in contiguous turns, the two traditions overlap.²³ To pretend that performances of verbal art such as Latifa's take place in a social vacuum,

that the audience plays no role in shaping such performance in general and Latifa's in particular, is viewed by both schools as a serious methodological failure. Latifa's audience spoke during her performance, sometimes timing their utterances to coincide with her nonlinguistic sobs and breaths but often overlapping her sung-wept speech. Latifa, though caught up in a highly charged performance, interacted with her audience. God's name was not far from Latifa's lips; she invoked Mabud ("the Lord") in other performances that were less interactive (or less interrupted, depending on one's perspective) than the nighttime performance transcribed here. On that particular night, however, Latifa took up God's name from the speech of a woman sitting near her on the bed inside the house.

35B?	<u>Āllāhi to/(bharaśā)/</u>	<u>God is [one's only reliable] hope.</u>
36L	/āmār kaljāt/ kemte ghāi o go dilo •hh bun go o o bun •hh	<i>How they have hurt my liver, sister, o sister!</i>
37L	Āllāh ta-i āmār laigā nāi o go •hh nāy o o o go •hh	<i>God is not with me, no sister.</i>
38L	Āllāh ta-i āmār laigā nāi o go •hh	<i>God is not with me,</i>
39-40L	nāi o o o go •hh	<i>no sister.</i>
41L	āmāre nā ki o karlo •hh bun o go •hh	<i>What they have done to me, sister, o sister!</i>

In her line 37, Latifa takes up the name of God from a woman on tape who urged her to do so with the proverbial expression "God is our only hope" (probably being the "sister"/great-aunt to whom Latifa addressed the lament). But Latifa calls on Allah with none of the optimism projected by her "sister" in line 35. It is Latifa's tropic reanimation of the other's voice which I wish to emphasize. Her recontextualization of the name of God disturbs her listeners' discourse (as do the New Kabyle Songs analyzed by Goodman in this issue). As in Elaine Scarry's (1985) account of the Hebrew experience of God, Latifa verbalizes her experience of God vis-à-vis pain. Attending to her declaration that she has been abandoned by the divine leads us to consider this expression of abjection (Kristeva 1982) an act of angry resistance to their Panglossian response to her laments, resistance to the hegemony of a certain form of theology that leaves no room for laments and lamenters. The fact that another singer's similarly constructed lament provokes suppression at least motivates further investigation into the element of resistance in Bangladeshi laments. An excerpt of one old man's lament is displayed below:

Old Man	āmār bhāgye	<i>In my fate . . .</i>
<u>Young Relative</u>	<u>(sunen. ey rakam karen nā.)</u>	<u>(Listen—don't do like that!)</u>
Old Man	ey::::: nāi je Āllāh.	. . . there is no God [for me]. ²⁴

Yet, resistant though these words may be, Latifa and the old man manage to frame their heteroglossic play within a discourse recognizable as Bangladeshi Muslim.

Latifa's juggling of these several voices—letting neither the voice of secularity nor that of piety triumph—is among the more brilliant features of her laments. That she failed to persuade her audience to restore her to her husband is part of a story told elsewhere (Wilce in press). Although Latifa's performances of lament were part of a deadly serious game in which her future (and, in microcosm, the future of rural Bangladeshi women and that of the national identity as a whole) is at stake, they were nonetheless creative in their juxtaposition of the voices of authorities (secular and religious) and resistant elements. In Latifa's recourse to heteroglossia, we can again see parallels to Lalan Fakir's songs.

“GOING OVER TO EINSTEIN” AND THE “VOLLEYBALL” OF WORDS AND IDENTITIES

The final stretch of discourse occurs at a prosperous business place; the participants lead major Bangladeshi enterprises involved in international trade (import or local manufacture of internationally licensed goods). One of these wealthy men acts as *pir* (Sufi preceptor) to the others. Karim, who brought me there, is Bangladesh board chairman of a major multinational corporation. He was once a better example of the secularity that has been associated with the Awami League, in which his own cousins have held high positions. With the support of many Hindus and Christians as well as Muslims, the Awami League won the all-Pakistan elections in 1971 and founded the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1972. My host rededicated himself to Islamic practice when he fell under the *pir*'s influence some 25 years ago. He recommenced the prayers, fasting, and other pillars of Muslim obedience. Thus to his cosmopolitan and Bengali identities was added a new spiritual identity defined in relation to a *pir*, whom his disciples call *Bābā* (Father). *Bābā* is not a Bengali but an immigrant from the place of a well-known Muslim saint's shrine in India. *Bābā* is considered a sort of Sufi foreign “missionary” to his spiritually needy group of worldly men, as well as to the poor urban mosque congregation to which he regularly preaches. The multiple identities brought to the table by these men potentiate the rich multivocality of their discourse. To paraphrase Bakhtin (1981:360), there is a kind of “double-code-ism” in the speech event transcribed here: two or more sociolinguistic consciousnesses meet and grapple before creating a semantic hybrid.

Except for myself, all in the room are Muslims. The *pir* calls periodic attention to our respective American and Bangladeshi identities. Yet, through “the trope of ‘we’-ness” (line 29 in the transcript below) and the invocation of many voices via codeswitching (CS), our identities undergo several kaleidophonic transformations. “We” variously includes and excludes myself. Often, as in line 29, “we” refers to Muslims and thus unites

the “Indian” pir with his “Bangladeshi” disciples, excluding me. This speech act of exclusion is accomplished in Bengali. Bābā is not very comfortable in English, nor is English full of the Islamic resonances that he prefers to keep in the air. Bābā’s use of the term *jāti* (line 24, in which it signifies “caste” in the sense of a [worldwide] “religious community”) preframes line 29’s communal-religious definition of the reference “we” group. At other moments in the warm banter between Pir and disciples, Bābā uses the term *Bongoj* (a term by which Pakistanis once demeaned Bengalis) to render them ethnically different and highlight his claim to more direct kinship with the Prophet based, at least, on his origin closer to the sacred heartlands of Islam.

In the following transcript, “Pir” is Bābā, president of the import company in whose offices we sat. “Friend” is Karim, who calls himself a “friend” (not disciple) of Bābā and who is the board chairman of another corporation; Karim brought me to the meeting. “E” denotes an English-dominant turn, “B,” a Bengali-dominant turn, and “B/E” or “E/B,” a code-mixed turn in which isolated words from one code are mixed with the other code, though the syntactic matrix reflects one or the other code’s structures. And “T” denotes *tumi*, informal/solidarity-invoking “T” form of the Bengali second-person pronoun, contrasting with an even more intimate form (*tui*) and the respectful/distant “V” form, *āpni*.²⁵

Code	Line	Bengali	Gloss
B	24Pir	jey kono jāti (.8) JEY kono jāti (.8)	Any people (jati) at all. ANY people at all (.8)
	25	khāli musalman nā (.8)	not only Muslims! (.8)
	26	pratyek jātir madhye	Amongst every people
	27	[turns and points to ethnographer, who had earlier mentioned the practice he’s about to mention]	[turns and points to ethnographer, who had earlier mentioned the practice he’s about to mention]
B/E	28	ey ge ey je āche (.4) <i>meditation</i> .	[there] is this, is this <i>meditation</i> .
	29	[right index finger up and down to stress āmāder] āmaDER āche <i>meditation</i> . (1)	[right index finger up and down to stress we] We have <i>meditation</i> . ²⁶
	30	ey <i>meditation</i> ·tā ki? (2)	What is this “meditation”?
	31	[looking at ethnographer again]	[looking at ethnographer again]
...			
B	47Friend	[hesitatingly] t tomāder	Y· your [T]
	48	ey ey ey ey je	this, this, this, the—that
	49	tomāder cintā (dhyāner) madhye	in your thought/meditation [T]
	50	āmār mane ektā <i>basic</i> jinis āche	I think there is one <i>basic</i> thing.
	51	setā halo (1)—	That is—
B/E	52	tumi I <i>think</i> BALle majhkhāne du ek bār (.8)	I <i>think</i> you [yourself] SAID it in [T] passing a couple of times—
E	53	<i>that</i> (.4) <i>everything has a face</i> .	<i>that</i> (.4) <i>everything has a face</i> .
B	54Pir	ha HA!	Yes!
E	55Friend	(.5) <i>So even time</i> (.5) <i>also has a face</i>	<i>So even time</i> (.5) <i>time also has a face</i> .

E/B	56Pir	<i>Oh fine. time to—</i>	<i>Oh fine! Time indeed—</i>
	57	[hitting the desk lightly with fist]	[hitting the desk lightly with fist]
E	58	— <i>this is (.4) very imPORTant</i>	— <i>this is (.4) very imPORTant</i>
	59	[hitting the desk lightly with fist]	[hitting the desk again]
	60	<i>and important</i> [hits desk again] <i>thing.</i>	<i>and important</i> [hits desk again] <i>thing.</i>
	61Friend	K [holding out hand and rolling it over]	[holding out hand and rolling it over]
	62	<i>And it has a face . . .</i>	<i>And it has a face . . .</i>
	63Pir	<i>Yes of COURSE/it has a face/</i>	<i>Yes, of COURSE it has a face</i>
...			to discover!])
...			
	123Pir	[laughs aloud 2 seconds]	[laughs aloud 2 seconds]
B	124Friend	otā to (nije to) <i>Einstein</i> sāheb ²⁷ balche. = = tuMl ²⁸ kot theke bal(cho)?	That's (just) what <i>Einstein</i> (himself) said= =Where did you get it from? [T]
	125	(1) āmi kot theke balchi	Where I got what I'm talking about,
	126Pir	eṭā to āmi balbo nā,	That I won't say
	127	[laughs, 3 seconds]	[laughs, 3 seconds]
	128	eṭā to āmi balbo nā . . .	That I won't say . . .

In line 29, the first-person plural pronoun glossed “we” (but literally “our”) projects a group membership that is somewhat exclusive. This “trope of ‘we’-ness” projects or imagines a community (Anderson 1991) of Muslims, excluding me, locating me as a member of one of the other peoples (*jātis* as “religious communities”) projected in line 24. But the lines of solidarity cut more than one way. Bābā’s disciples are not always comfortable including themselves with Bābā in a we-projection. So we find Bābā’s “friend” Karim, in line 47, speaking not of “we Muslims” but of “you-[intimate]-plural” (“you pirs”). With pronouns, voices shift, and so the multi-vocal play proceeds.

We must, however, move beyond the level of pronouns to the level of code and conversational structure to uncover the identity plays involved in the talk about Einstein. Like well-coordinated members of a volleyball team (and, indeed, this sort of “attunement” can be expected in a group, particularly one that interacts intimately over a long period of time; see Trix 1993),²³ Karim and Saiful “set one up” for Bābā. Karim initiates the topic of “time” in line 55. Later, Bābā turns to a venerable Islamic “text,” the hadith (traditional sayings attributed primarily to the Prophet). He renders a particular hadith into English as “Don’t trust time, because time is Allah.” Bābā’s disciple Saiful says the equivalent of “space is time” (l. 101), keeping the topical volleyball aloft a little longer. Karim then (l. 105) situates Bābā to get the credit for the “smash,” the intellectual gymnastics, the proposal that space and time are somehow indistinguishable. It is quite possible that disciple Saiful’s particular formulation in line 101 also derived originally from Bābā, in one of the countless interactions they must

have had over the years. Bābā is, after all, the pir! My point is not to deny any sort of authorship to Bābā but to stress the interactive teamwork by which even Bābā's wisdom is constructed or delivered. And further, the lines between individual speakers/authors, between codes (Arabic, Bengali, English), and between cultural traditions (Islamic hadith, European physics) are blurred in discourse such as that between Bābā and his disciples. Identities cannot but be hybridized in such interactions.

The setup, the attribution of credit to Bābā, was accomplished in lines 104–105, when Karim said “Now he is going over to Einstein!” Karim's English phrase “going over” is a metaphor akin to “shifting” (or “crossing” [Rampton 1995]); it involves movement, perhaps implying the sort of transfer of allegiance or ideological footing Bakhtin linked with shifts of voice. The spatial basis of the metaphor is apt, since by “going over to” or invoking Einstein (if that is indeed what Bābā had done), he had shifted the metaphorical geography of the conversation from the Prophet's Arabia to Einstein's Europe. Yet, as Karim later implied that the *source* of Bābā's insight was not Einstein but rather some independent authority, perhaps God/Time Ilim/Itself, Karim's “going over” phrase was by no means an accusation of disloyalty. “Going over to Einstein” shifts ideological locus only temporarily, and Bābā's source of authority transcends locale, Karim would argue. Still, “going over” (“bouncing” or “shifting” between discourses or playing many perspectives off one another) is a constitutive feature of this sort of Sufi confabulation. Discourse between Bābā and his interlocutors not only is free-wheeling but *must* draw on *many* other discourses; that, along with the Pir's charisma (Ewing 1990a), is what keeps these cosmopolitan friends and disciples coming back.

A further word on codes is relevant here. Just as Tewa speakers switch to Ilopi when they invoke the ideas of the stereotypically spiritual Ilopi (among other reasons, Kroskirty 1993), these men switch to English to stake out a place in the scientific world of Einstein, the worldview with which European languages are stereotypically linked (Whorf's [1956] reversal of this link notwithstanding) and to Arabic when they want to invoke the religious tone it lends discourse. Einstein entered, or was explicitly inserted into, the discussion only when Karim pointed out (primarily to me) the links between “Bābā's” ideas on time and ultimate realities and those of the European Jewish physicist. What remained implicit was a new cosmopolitan identity move, a move that made their hot and relatively spare company board room into a world in which Einstein shakes hands with Prophet and pir.

Beyond codeswitching at the sentence level and switching between speakers' turns, there are also lesser moments of code *mixing* (which Myers-Scotton calls intrasentential CS). For instance, Bābā turns to me and tells me, mostly in Bengali, that my quest for truth will never be *hāsil*

(fulfilled) unless I grasp the basics of his teaching (line 82). He uses the Arabic *hasil* instead of a (Sanskrit-derived) Bengali gloss-equivalent such as *purno* (the isolated word *hasil* being embedded in the Bengali matrix clause [Myers-Scotton 1993], not causing a complete shift to Arabic) lending a marked note of sacredness to the quest. The introduction of this Arabic word into the Bengali discourse serves the same function in this conversation that Ilopi can serve in some Tewa conversations (Kroskrity 1993).

What function does CS perform for these men? They codeswitch to do more than merely stake out a position as men of the world. Rather, their alternation between English and Bengali demonstrates a desire to keep many identities “in play” at once, to balance several identities. The switching itself frames the use of English, Bengali, or occasional words from Arabic as choices in a repertoire; through their use of CS, Bābā’s group declares itself above exclusive allegiance to a single linguistically encoded identity. Viewed from a different perspective, each code provides a frame to interpret the use of other codes. In lines 104–105, Karim shifts into English to offer me a piece of metalinguistic framing, a commentary on what was just said (“Now he is going over to Einstein”), that is, on utterances mostly in Bengali. Clearly his shift and the framing he achieved thereby were designed in part for myself as a foreigner; he was reinterpreting the preceding speech acts in a frame oriented to me in particular. Note, however, the shifts back into Bengali that occur later in the conversation. Between lines 117 and 118 Karim shifts rather abruptly into Bengali and in lines 124–125 continues to use Bengali to reframe what he had just said in English. Whereas his English words directed to me were an authoritative declaration that the words resonated with Einstein’s, lines 117–125 put the question of their source to Bābā. And it is in Bengali that Bābā refuses to answer. Could these men be reproducing a kind of “mysterious Orient,” almost self-consciously manipulating those orientalist notions to trump their own use of English and provide an ultimate embedding of their discourse within a Bengali Sufi affirmation-in-denial, a “pointing toward” spiritual mystery that avoids the sort of discursive directness associated with English speakers and English as a code? Such cross-voicing or cross-fertilization among voices within particular utterances is the type of phenomenon to which Bakhtin has sensitized us.

CONCLUSION

Multivocality takes many forms in the stretches of discourse examined here: from the tightly juxtaposed voices of parī and Shefali-as-narrator that so confused my field assistants and me, to multileveled welters of contradiction seen in Ibn Ilanjala’s letter,³⁰ from the irony in Taslima

Nasrin's writings, to poignant recontextualization in Latifa's use of reported speech in her interactive performance of abjection; from pronoun play in Shefali's discourse, to the different sort of pronominal trope (along with CS) in the multiparty conversation with Bābā.³¹ As Bābā's interaction with his group illustrates, English and Arabic serve as the distinct codes into which contemporary Bangladeshis may switch for their varied purposes.³² Still, this translinguistic study, contrasting with quantitative sociolinguistic studies through its focus on the webs of meaning traceable in a few examples of naturally occurring discourse, uncovers evidence of pervasive playfulness involving multiple styles and voices even when Bengali is used exclusively. All of this points to a perduring feature of discourse on the Bangladesh landscape, one linked with the laminated identities available to Bengali speakers. These laminations, laid down in part by those who brought Islam to Bangladesh (Ahmed 1981, 1983; Eaton 1993), mean that the putatively singular "Bangladeshi Muslim" identity can benefit more from a figurative sort of sound-spectral analysis or kaleidophonic filtration than from telescopic Western media presentations of "the Muslim world."

It is easy for sociolinguists to locate diversity between speakers or between situations. That sort of diversity is also easy for states to suppress by silencing some speakers and banning certain activities. What is more fundamental to the dynamism of communities is the polyvocality evident in a single act of reported speech or CS.³³ I propose that the widespread availability of Arabic alongside of vernaculars in contemporary Muslim societies—albeit primarily in isolated words or formulaic utterances from the Qur'an rather than Arabic as a second or third spoken code—potentiates unique forms of heteroglossia. Many layers of religious history are available to Bengali speakers. The esotericism of Lalan Fakir's songs and the metamessages conveyed by reported speech and CS are elegantly durable homes for that pluralism in which tolerance and dynamism live.

NOTES

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1. Thanks to one of the anonymous *Ethos* reviewers for suggesting the neologism *kaleidophone* in the title in place of my original *kaleidoscope*.

2. The Islamic creed affirms "lā ilāha illallāh wa Muhammad ar-rasul ullāh" (There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger). Bearing witness (*shahadah*) to this creed is one of the five pillars of Islam, along with prayers, fasting, charity, and the pilgrimage.

3. Carol Salomon's presentation of Lalan Fakir as subject and object of discourse is rich in cross-cutting meanings and derives from Bangladesh. There is no better symbol of shifting, ambiguous identities among Bangladeshi Muslims than this 19th-century figure. Salomon's

discussion stresses how, in her ethnographic present (the late 20th century), Lalan's songs are still performed but either reviled or sanitized. Salomon writes that "the prevailing attitude of Muslim Bengali society toward Baul songs in general and Lalan's songs in particular, and toward the fakirs who sing them, can serve as a barometer of where it stands at any given time on the question of regional versus Islamic identity" (1991:268). The attempt by "mainstream" Muslim Bengalis to recreate Lalan, the Tantric and mystic, as a folk hero useful to Islamically fervent Bangladeshi nationalism, partakes of the multivocal or heteroglossic. Although Bangladeshi scholars with Islamicized scruples have changed his name from Lalan *Sāi* (fr. Sanskrit *śwami*, "lord"; Biswas et al. 1984:708) to Lalan *Shah* (Persian "king"), added an interpolation to the original texts to indicate his birth among the *khatnār jāt* ("circumcised caste," i.e., Muslims), and attempted to drive Lalan's modern disciples, the fakirs, from celebrations designed to coopt Lalan for orthodox Bangladesh, the Tantric Islamic message of the songs continues to leak out (Salomon 1991). Those fakirs who brave the government-sponsored "celebrations" of Lalan certainly add layers of complexity and resistance to the (sanitized) discourse of the Tantric poet.

4. My discussion of Bakhtin is indebted to the comments of one of the anonymous *Ethos* reviewers.

5. This discussion of Bakhtin has benefited from the comments of the third anonymous reviewer for *Ethos*.

6. On the surface, this distinguishes translanguistics from conversation analysis (CA) and the interactional sociolinguistics of Gumperz and his students, including Woolard (1996). In fact, however, Goffman acknowledged his indebtedness to Vološinov, and while turns and adjacency pairs are key units of analysis in CA, the tendency to link speakers' voices with their demographic identities in a somewhat simplistic way characterizes variation or correlational sociolinguistics, not CA or interactional sociolinguistics.

7. See Blom and Gumperz 1972. In my opinion, the most exciting new work relating code alternation to identity fusion is Ben Rampton's (1995). But what happens in my transcripts is "in-group" switching, quite distinct from what Rampton calls "crossing," the conscious, marked, and thus metaphorically charged use of "Others'" codes.

8. Thus we should substitute "multiple identities" for Myers-Scotton's "dual identities."

9. "While they [Blom and Gumperz] continue to talk about 'topic' when mentioning metaphorical CS, it is not really the topic which Blom and Gumperz wish to relate to metaphorical CS so much as a 'presentation of self in relation to the topic, or changes in relationship to other participants, I suspect" (Myers-Scotton 1993:52, emphasis in original).

10. Thérèse Blanchet argues that the spirit beliefs prevalent in her study villages represent a pre-Aryan substrate of culture (1984). Although some Bangladeshi Muslims would argue that since Allah created *jinn*s and *parts*, we should not be surprised when they enforce the pillars of Islam, a commonly heard voice argues that "driving spirits" is not orthodox and that needs like healing ought to be met through bona fide Islamic ritual (Wilce 1994:156–158).

11. In recent reflections on transnationalism and "hybridity," one voice has warned against imposing a kind of neo-evolutionism as if the postmodern condition entailed "progress" over premodern social formations that were supposedly homogeneous (Thomas 1996). Although there is some question as to whether Bakhtin's belief in the inherently democratizing force of multivocality is naive, at least it does not pin hope exclusively on a cultural or communicative formation unique to modernism or postmodernism.

12. The author's recurrent use of the trope "colour" probably reflects colorism (by which I mean, here, the association of cultural identity with skin color) and thus, indirectly, the neocolonialist roots of Islamist modernism.

13. The title is evidently an intentional engagement with Salman Rushdie, whose many novels include one of the same name. Nasrin and Rushdie have been linked by history and by the international press, which refers to Taslima as "the Salman Rushdie of Bangladesh"; during and before her current "exile" in Europe, she has corresponded with Rushdie.

14. The destruction of the mosque came six months after the violence in conjunction with the public trial of Jamat party "war criminals" mentioned above and also only shortly after Ibn Hanjala's letter to the editor.

15. Nasrin is not a linguist, nor was she a professional writer, but a physician who wrote after hours. Amateur writers are not unusual in Bangladesh, but the large audience she has attracted is (Carolyn Wright, personal communication, April 1996). Nasrin's literary productions have not always met with enthusiastic reception even among friends. It would be a mistake for us to read *Lajjā* as we might read a novel by a semiotician such as Umberto Eco, that is, to expect to find in her work a linguistically sophisticated and self-conscious presentation of multivocality. If I appear to be apologizing for the quality of the novel, it is only because Nasrin herself says it is not very good. The "quality" is not what justifies our reading and analysis.

16. I am indebted to Bruce M. Sullivan for this gloss of the Sanskrit. He adds that this literal translation falls short of representing how the mantra is produced for its sound as much as for its referential meaning.

17. The English translation by Tutul Gupta appeared in 1994. My references to the novel are drawn from this accessible version and cited as "1994" unless I make specific reference to Bengali, in which case the citation is to the 1993 Bengali edition.

18. "sudhāmayer balte lajjā hay, tar kantha kape" (Nasrin 1993:150) means, literally, "Sudhamoy is ashamed to say it; his voice shakes."

19. Major generic categories such as "novel" and "poetry" ought not be essentialized; Bakhtin was wrong to deny a heteroglossic dimension to poetry. In all of Nasrin's writings, one finds an aggressive and sexual approach to self-construction and a preference for the kind of irony evident in her one novel. Space permits only brief references to Nasrin's poetry, particularly to several examples that provoke readers precisely by ironic recourse to voices other than "the author's." In particular, in the poems "Character" and "The Game in Reverse" (which lends its name to the collection translated by Wright [1995]). Nasrin ironically echoes the voices of prototypically male power figures who challenge women's rights to move about freely, even as they visit and do business (in public) with prostitutes in Dhaka's Ramna Park. In "The Game in Reverse," Nasrin uses male rhetorical techniques against them, saying that she will go to Ramna Park and "buy a man" to abuse. Likewise, in "Character," Nasrin plays with accusers' voices as she does in *Lajjā*. Juxtaposed against echoes of the voice of the Law of the Father (Lacan) saying that women who venture out of the home "lack character," that is, are sexually immoral, the poet's voice accuses those who back away from challenging such strictures of a lack of character, substance, or backbone.

20. Rozario describes the shift from bridewealth to dowry in Bangladesh over the last couple of generations and the paradox that this "dowry" does not remain in the control of the bride but "the rest is usually used for the benefit of the groom's joint family" (1992:132).

21. In the transcript of Latifa's performances, her words are italicized and those of her interlocutors underlined.

Throughout the transcripts, the system of transliteration used is a modification of Bagchi 1996 designed to be faithful to nonstandard rural speech but recognizable to Indologists. The following transcription conventions are used: •hh represents audible in-breath, in this case, a sob. /xxx/ Overlapping speech segments are shown between slashes on both of the lines that overlap. Capitalized segments were louder in the original talk. Words within parentheses are problematic or uncertain hearings of the taped words; individual *sounds* within parentheses were not originally voiced but are represented so that the "standard" Bengali equivalent can be recovered by Indologists and Bengal scholars. Length of pauses is shown in seconds. for example, (1.5). = indicates latching of utterances, the near overlap of two utterances by the same or different speakers. A colon indicates nonphonemic lengthening for emphasis.

22. Pharyngealized phonation; that is, as an icon of crying (Urban 1988), the voice here tightens up.

23. Conversation analysts argue that interactive structure is crucial to understanding even a given turn (Goodwin 1979).

24. Or, "God is not fated to be on my side."

25. Words originally uttered in English are italicized. Uppercase indicates words that are markedly louder. Underlined words are being brought to the readers' attention and were not necessarily given particular stress in the original.

26. Or, "Our [form of] *meditation* exists." The Bengali form, *possessive-pronoun + copula*, is the syntactic means to realize both "existential" and "possessive" semantics, to affirm, for example either that I "have" a father or that he is alive.

27. *Saheb* has colonial resonances, being used to refer to European males. The others present used this to address or refer to me, and "friend" Karim also used it once to refer to another European, Einstein.

28. Note that all second-person pronouns used by the pir and his group are in the intimate-equal *tumi* form, for which Bengali has two alternatives—not only a respectful/distant pronoun like the French *vous* (Bengali *apni*) but also, *tui* which connotes extreme intimacy or, at times, condescension.

29. Trix's fine study of her own dialogic interaction with a pir from Albania who is also her "father," Bābā, introduces the theme of "language attunement" (Trix 1993). Although I was more of an outsider in this interaction than was Trix, who was a disciple, "my" Bābā and I also manifested a degree of language attunement parallel to some examples in Trix's transcripts. Together we coconstruct a sentence. When Bābā's discourse reminded me of statements historians attribute to the mystic al-Hallāj ("anā al-Haqq," "I am Truth"), I asked Bābā whether he had heard this. Of course he had, and it set off a new round of talk. But both of us, I think, were anxious to put some distance between Bābā and al-Hallāj, since al-Hallāj was executed for that saying. Making an excuse for al-Hallāj, I began to say he was operating outside of everyday consciousness (*ṣawbhābik ḡnān*), and Bābā completed the sentence by adding "outside" (-er bāhire). Together, we excused al-Hallāj and built a fence of protection around the present discourse.

30. Such contradictions also pervade the cooptation of events dedicated to the memory of Lalan Fakir (see earlier endnote).

31. In the future, macrosociolinguists might investigate the use of Urdu in Bangladesh before and after the 1971 war. Urdu, the official language of (West) Pakistan, is written in the Persian script and is linguistically affiliated with the western branch of Indo-Aryan, in contrast with the eastern branch (Bengali, Assamese, etc.). Public use of Urdu and Bengali-Urdu codeswitching was probably much more widespread before the war than it is today.

32. That is, English and Arabic (if only the few Arabic words borrowed into some forms of Bengali, or an isolated Qur'anic quote here or there) have taken the place formerly occupied by Urdu in the Bangladeshi sociolinguistic scene.

33. One hears clear echoes of Bakhtin's high regard for the democratizing potential of heteroglossia in Hill and Hill's interpretation of CS in Mexicano (Nahuatl): "Mixing in language may carry a special resonance of resistance to official order" (Hill and Hill 1986:399). In their summary of Hill and Hill's findings, Bauman and Briggs write that "code-switching can heighten attention to competing languages and varieties to such an extent that identities, social relations, and the constitution of the community itself become open to negotiation" (1990:63).

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH SHEFALI

In the following transcript, "S" denotes Shefali (whose words are in italics); "F," Faisal, a male senior field assistant; "L," Lopa, a visiting female assistant; and "A," Apa ("older sister"), a key informant and Shefali's female neighbor. Pronouns crucial to the identity play featured in the text above are underlined. Because Shefali's miniautobiography thematizes being a *rogi* (sick one/patient), that keyword is untranslated and in boldface.

- 7S *Yes, yes. What would the patients do with me, I am . . .*
- 8S *I myself am . . . (? ? I gave and they came not ? ?) [The spirit] tells me . . .*
- 9F *Rogi means . . . Rogi is you, right?*
- 10S *I am a rogi, but within that category there are, of course, differences.*
- 11S *They did not come [into my state]. They are not THAT rogi [like me].*
- 12S *Even so, if they say,*
- 13S *"Hey, won't you look?"*
- 14S *that is, "Hey there, look,*
- 15S *I have this illness, please take a look."*
- 16S *If they beg and talk like that,*
- 17S *It [the spirit] tells all of them [what's wrong] before it leaves.*
- 16F *Uh huh.*
- 17S *[The spirit] gives [the knowledge that it is] this illness. I cannot do that*
[in and of myself].
- . . .
- 58S *[The part says,] "They've come to see my rogi,"*
- 59S *"No touching [or coming] close to my rogi."*
- 60S *"People would speak ill,*
- 61S *[and] you [intimate] could not speak well . . ."*
- 62S *(You couldn't twist around and lie down in their presence.) [See display.]*
- 63S *If you lie down in [their] midst,*
- 64S *people (from then on) will speak ill of her [my rogi; or "of it" or "of him," vis. Shefali's husband].*
- 65S *Whoever heard that I gave out medicine [through] you,*
- 66S *those people would speak ill of my rogi,*
- 67S *[that is,] if people were coming in and out [of her secluded female space] too much.*
- . . .

- | Shefali | Interlocutors |
|--|--|
| 88S <i>I'm not saying whether or not [3rd person] asked.</i> | |
| 89F | Oh, then you can't say anything. |
| 90S <i>I'm not conscious.</i> | |
| 91S <i>If my illness rises¹</i> | |
| 92S <i>and you come to the house (1.0)</i> | |
| 93S <i>and before my consciousness returns, (.5)</i> | |
| 94S <i>if you leave (1.0), I wouldn't be able to say.</i> | |
| 95F | Uh, then you mean it gives rogi's treatment? |
| 96S <i>/Yes/</i> | |
| 97F | By your hand / [the spirit works] /. |
| 98S <i>/By my hand, by my mouth [it] works.</i> | |

¹*Uthe* was originally pronounced "uddi" (rises [increases, is exacerbated]). See the appendix on Matlab Bangla Phonology.