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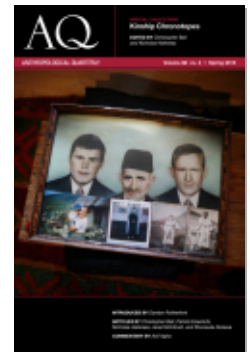
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Mediating Disjunctures of Time: Ancestral Chronotopes in Ritual and Media Practices

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ABSTRACT
In this article, I approach regimes of time as a medial question, examining the interplay of different temporalities in ritual and media practices among Hindus in Mauritius and Twelver Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai. These interactions consist of fluctuations between modernist linear modes of time and suspensions of the distinctions of past, present, and future as the performative outcome of certain ritual practices. Drawing on a broad notion of media and mediality, I trace the links between shifting states in the functioning of media and the oscillation between the different notions of temporality examined. Analyzing their interconnectedness in ancestral politics and religious mobilizations, I show how media practices provide ways to navigate the heterochronies that characterize such politics and activism. [Keywords: Media, time, temporality, Shi'ism, Hindu pilgrimage, Hindi]

In this article, I compare discursive engagements of Mauritian Hindus with their Indian ancestors with uses of contemporary media technology by Indian Shi'ite Muslims that shape their relationships to the family of the Prophet Muhammad and the tragic death of his grandson Hussain at Karbala. I argue that both engagements result in a momentary suspension of the distinctions between present, past, and future that yield a chronotope of "ancestral time" brought about by semiotic practice—a spatiotemporal framework in which religious practitioners and their ancestors are simultaneously present. I suggest that this mode of ancestral time bears resemblance to what Benjamin (1968) has called "messianic time." Such messianic time exists in an unstable tension with more linear notions of time, and the ritual practices I analyze in this essay often feature an oscillation between these two modes of time. As these practices join the fabric of time that is inherent in social life, their double character becomes apparent. They regiment time, but are themselves the complex outcome of particular historical processes and events.[1]

Scholars have recently sought to align current conditions of late capitalism with a specific form of temporality—that is, human experience of time—that promises to have a particular diagnostic quality for the current state of the global political economy. Recent attempts to uncover the dominant temporality inhabiting our economic arrangements include Frederic Jameson's "end of temporality"—characterized by a "dramatic shrinkage of existential time and reduction to the present that hardly qualifies as such any longer given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place" (2003:708). According to Jameson, this new form of time experience is the effect of postmodern capitalism and supersedes what he calls "deep time," where present, past, and future coexisted in a relationship of mutual constitution. While also focusing on the current workings of the global political economy, Jane Guyer has in turn made the contrasting observation of a "symmetrical evacuation of the near past and near future" leading to "both very short and very long sightedness" (2007:410). Also in her account, current neoliberal restructuring of economies and lifeworlds gives rise to a new dominant paradigm of time consciousness. Writing in the early 1980s while drawing on Benjamin's temporalities, Benedict Anderson (1991) had already argued for a wholesale transition from "messianic" to modern, "empty homogenous" time resulting from the rise of modern nationality.[2]

In seeking to identify a single, dominant regime of time as a hallmark of the present historical moment, these analyses tend to sideline the persisting plurality of temporalities that also characterizes life in the current conditions of globalized capitalism. Such multiplicity resists forces working towards normalization of a single dominant mode of time. Other anthropologists, such as Alfred Gell (1992), have long stressed the distinctions between individual time experience, socially circulating forms of time, and nonhuman time that are a persistent challenge to temporal unification across individual and social groups (see also Munn 1992). Gell, in particular, sought to account for articulations between "B-series" time, the objective, "cosmic," and nonhuman dimension of time understood as the objective dating of events in terms of before and after, and "A-series" time that humans experience in terms of past, present, and future (frequently referred to as temporality by philosophers), which has been the subject of phenomenological analysis in philosophy.

Matt Hodges (2008:405) has recently criticized this conceptualization of nonhuman time, arguing that Gell's account of what analytical philosophers have called "B-series" time is suspiciously linear and therefore implicitly cultural and modernist in character. Time would be better imagined along the lines of *la durée* as proposed by Bergson (1944, 1988) and Deleuze (1991, 1994). Bergson and Deleuze conceive of la durée as sheer multiplicity that divides continuously in a non-chronological process of incessant differentiation and individuation that Deleuze has termed "differen*c*iation" (Deleuze 1994:211, Hodges 2008:410). Specifically, human consciousness of time (the "A-series" time of analytical philosophers) with its sense of past, present, and future comes about through characteristics of "differen*c*iation" that articulate through three "syntheses of time" (Deleuze 1994, Hoy 2009:160-161). Hodges suggests that for anthropologists la durée provides the most suitable ontology of time. It is especially Deleuze's account of how temporality—that is, human experiences of time in terms of present, past, and future—is synthesized out of ultimately nonhuman la durée that sets his account of time apart from other theorists who have largely attended to temporality alone. Deleuze's analysis of how temporality emerges from la durée also aligns with his distinction between the virtual (in this case, la durée) and the actual (humanly experienced time as in past, present, and future). Accordingly, Hodges calls on anthropologists to study how social practice emerges as actualizations of the incessant differentiation of multiplicities, and to

analyze how historical and social forms of time emerge out of la durée. This standpoint underlines that time—thus understood in a non-chron-ological and non-directional way—is a kind of wellspring of any social action and is thus always central to its analysis.

Taking seriously such inherent time-boundedness of social action, in this article, I am interested in the social and historical contexts that ac-tualize particular socially circulating forms of time. I highlight the role of linguistic, and more broadly semiotic, practices as they contribute to the emergence of social and historical forms of time and mediate between their multiplicity. As such temporalities come in the plural, my concern here is to examine practices that mediate between different experienced modalities of time. In line with Paul Ricoeur (1988), I argue that of all di-mensions of sociality, linguistic practices play a privileged role in shaping the interplay of individual, social, and historical times, as well as nonhu-man time that is constitutive of socio-cultural worlds. The emphasis is more on language as an embodied and material social practice, and less on the role of language in conceptualizations of time (that is on the pro-ductive and emergent qualities of linguistic practice rather than its mere referential function). While Ricoeur (1988) places particular emphasis on the role of historical and fictional narrative in integrating individual and cosmic times in ever-shifting ways, other forms of linguistic and semiotic practice can accomplish such tasks as well, as has also been demon-strated by linguistic anthropologists (Woolard 2004; Inoue 2004; Eisenlohr 2004, 2006; Lempert 2007; Perrino 2007). Thus, I suggest that for an an-thropological treatment of time to be successful, it needs to take the cru-cial role of language and semiosis into account. Discursive practices have held a prominent place in philosophical accounts of temporality, such as in Heidegger's, Gadamer's, and Ricoeur's analyses focusing on narrative and interpretation. As anthropologists seek to come to terms with the con-crete social practices that shape modalities of time, one might expect the emphasis on discourse perhaps to be even more pronounced. However, beyond the field of linguistic anthropology, anthropological engagements with time have shown a tendency to neglect language and semiosis, de-spite the seminal influence of Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the discursively constituted chronotope in socio-cultural anthropology at large (Munn 1992, see Bear 2014 for a current discussion).

In contrast to the forgetfulness of language that also characterizes Gell's treatment of time and is a striking feature of Jameson's approach

postulating a single overarching temporality for our present historical moment, I trace how semiotic practices, broadly conceived, can regiment senses of being in time, working at the intersection between social practice and phenomenological experience. Here, I am concerned with how semiotic practices achieve this across different domains of mediality—linguistic and media-technological—in similar ways. In particular, I address the way media practices sustain particular regimes of temporalization, paying attention to the relationships between shifting temporalities and the instability that is inherent in the functioning of media. While the oscillation between different senses of time confronts Mauritian Hindus and Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai with recurrent heterochronies, media practices also offer a means to address the tensions and disjunctures that accompany the juxtaposition of divergent temporalities.

In Mauritius, Hindus of north Indian origin have, for more than a century, cultivated modern standard Hindi as "ancestral language." This identification with Hindi occurs in a setting in which Hindus never use "ancestral languages" in everyday contexts, while Mauritian Creole is by far the predominant vernacular language. In government schools (in which Hindi is taught to students of Hindu background), in discourses of Hindu organizations, as well as in Hindu religious contexts, Hindus of north Indian origin cultivate and enregister Hindi as "ancestral language." The use of Hindi in ritual contexts such as pilgrimages indicates the presence of the world of the ancestors, and thus becomes a way to be one with the 19th century indentured migrants from north India (the ancestors of most Hindu Mauritians).

Shifting from the enregisterment of Hindi as an ancestral language whose use in ritual contexts results in a "diasporic calibration" minimizing temporal disjuncture (Eisenlohr 2006) to religious media practices among Shi'ite Muslims in India, I suggest that media ideologies centered on the notion of contemporary audiovisual media as a "vanishing mediator" (Sterne 2003) accomplish a similar collapsing of past, present, and future. That is, the phenomenological disappearance of the technical apparatus that enables the bridging of temporal disjuncture and spatial distance also minimizes the distinctions between these different temporal worlds. The circulation of recordings of devotional genres lamenting the events at Karbala in 680 AD in which Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet, was killed play a key role in this process. The witnessing of these events facilitated by media practices transcending established

ritual contexts draws on a sense of media allowing more "immediate" access to devotional events. The production of emotions of mourning and deep affection for members of the family of the Prophet are central to such events. Such a sense of witnessing contrasts with more linear, "empty, homogenous" temporalities (Benjamin 1968) that are also highly relevant in the lives of Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai. In this discussion of mediatized devotional life, I postulate particular relationships between chronotopes and media genres, some of which are more associated with messianic temporalities, while others appear to promote more linear, progessivist notions of time. However, since media genres always exist in a plural field—in which such genres point at each other, standing in relationships of dialogue, emulation, rejection, and citation—the temporal engagements and assumptions they help to produce are also manifold. The confrontation and interaction of multiple temporalities raises important questions about the practices through which people mediate such divergent temporalities and how they make sense of heterochronies and disjunctures of the social rhythms and institutional arrangements in which they are involved. My suggestion is that linguistic and media practices play a key role in this context.

Moreover, as Benjamin made clear, temporal assumptions and positionings also have implications for questions of political belonging, and power more generally (compare Munn 1992:109). Scholars have postulated relations between regimes of time and inclusion or participation in a body politic. A famous instance is the association of modern nationhood and a linear, "empty, homogenous" time (Anderson 1991). One of my goals in this article is also to trace some of the political consequences of the appropriation of such a modernist positioning of time in contexts where performances of being one with the ancestors are also very important as sources of authority. For example, such appropriations are not unusual among Indian Twelver Shi'ite Muslims, a minority within what is officially described as an overall Muslim minority in India. With the exception of a few numerically small trader communities together with Dalits and tribal populations, Muslims arguably comprise the most disadvantaged and marginalized segment of contemporary Indian society. However, many Twelver Shi'ite Muslims strive to establish respected positions in the city. They tend to view increasingly standardized and orthodox forms of piety as tightly interconnected with the socio-economic aspirations that brought them to Mumbai. The notions of progress closely linked to linear

notions of time play a key role in this complex bundle of aspirations that also manifests itself in contemporary religious media practices. As I will show, the diverse temporalities such practices are tied to have also congealed into a range of media genres enabling different forms of witnessing and belonging.

In a comparable manner, Hindus in Mauritius often look back in pride at what they regard as the "rise" of the Hindus from a position of poor and abused indentured laborers during colonial times to respected citizens who have experienced remarkable socio-economic mobility in the past 40 years and whose elite now dominate the Mauritian government and state apparatus. In the narratives of conservative Hindu activists, the steadfast "preservation" of Hindu moral values under the adverse circumstances of diaspora has made possible such enormous progress, hereby also linking religious and ritual life to linear notions of being in time. In this example, ritual practices not only instantiate but also mediate between multiple temporalities that shape the relationship between Hindu Mauritians and a diasporic homeland portrayed as the world of their ancestors. Similar to the Mumbai Shi'ite example, Hindu Mauritian engagements with their Indian ancestors illustrate how the multiple political uses of the ancestors rest on the latter's facilitating role in enabling their descendants to shift and balance between contrasting modes of positioning in time.

In this context, it is useful to remember Benjamin's aversion to political uses of the ancestors for the present politics of ruling groups as "tool(s) for the ruling classes" (1968:255). He warns that "in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it" (1968:255). For him, the redemptive power of messianic moments has the potential to overcome the deadening power of conformist narratives of the past that serve to support the political status quo. This raises the question of how far alternative visions that result from messianic instances to "blast open the continuum of history" (1968:262) can resist being reintegrated into dominant narratives. The two examples I address in this article illustrate contrasting possibilities in this respect. While the convergence of messianic and linear, progressivist temporalities appears to undercut established hierarchies of community and wealth among Twelver Shi'ites in Mumbai, the same interplay in Hindu Mauritian ritual and language ideology results in a powerful appropriation of the ancestors in the interest of the Hindu state bourgeoisie (precisely displaying the sort of conformist treatment of the past that Benjamin feared).

Ancestral Language and Pilgrimage in Hindu Mauritius

Hindus of Indian background make up 52 percent of the population of Mauritius, which in total is almost 70 percent of Indian origin. Since independence from Britain in 1968, Hindu middle classes have dominated government and state institutions. One important consequence of this is that their dominant role in the state has enabled the institutionalization of a politics of "ancestral cultures," (*cultures ancestrales* in French, *ban kiltir ban anset* in Mauritian Creole) according to which Mauritian citizens are conceived as people with cultural and religious origins in other parts of the world. These origins receive not only recognition and support, but have become central to a cultural politics suggesting that membership in the Mauritian nation is achieved through the cultivation and celebration of such diasporic traditions. For both Hindus and Muslims, who together comprise nearly 70 percent of the population, the "ancestral cultures" they claim ownership over and whose cultivation is actively encouraged by the state almost exclusively consist of Hindu and Islamic religious traditions. One important dimension of this cultural politics that makes diasporic allegiances crucial to membership in the nation is the promotion of so-called "ancestral languages." My field research among Hindu Mauritians, which I have conducted since 1997, was initially focused on issues of ancestral language and diaspora. For Hindus of north Indian origin, modern standard Hindi is the recognized ancestral language. Hindi is taught at state schools to Hindu students on an ethno-religious basis, while Hindu religious bodies and organizations who are also involved in the teaching and promotion of Hindi receive state subsidies to support their activities. However, standard Hindi, which is also the national language of India, actually did not exist in its present form when the migration of indentured labor from India to Mauritius began in 1834,[3] and most immigrating ancestors of present day Hindu Mauritians used varieties of Bhojpuri as their first language (a specifically Mauritian variety of Bhojpuri is still widely used in Indo-Mauritian villages).

In everyday life, Hindu Mauritians use Mauritian Creole as their primary vernacular language, sometimes alongside Bhojpuri; and conduct their educational and work lives in English and French, while consuming overwhelmingly francophone print and electronic media. Nevertheless, many Hindus strongly identify with Hindi as the language of their ancestors. They regard the language as deeply connected to the religious traditions their ancestors brought from India, which in turn define the legitimate place of

Hindus in Mauritius as "ancestral culture." Like other recognized "ancestral languages" in Mauritius, Hindi is firmly linked to religious contexts. In a number of ritual contexts, Hindi functions performatively as a medium establishing a connection between present-day Hindu Mauritians and their Indian ancestors. The most prominent of these rituals is associated with the national holiday of Shivratri, and includes an annual pilgrimage to the mountain lake Grand Bassin, known to Mauritian Hindus as "*Ganga Talao*" (Bhojpuri for Ganges Pond). Out of a population of 1.2 million, about 400,000 make the pilgrimage to Grand Bassin, many of them on foot and covering considerable distances. The Mauritian government has built an infrastructure of roads and utilities at the site, and in cooperation with the Indian government has supported the building of temples and *ghat* (steps leading to sacred bodies of water at Hindu pilgrimage sites) around the lake (that, according to legend, features a subterranean link to the sacred Ganges River in India). In addition, in 1974, the Indian government had a vessel of holy Ganges water (*ganga jal*) flown in to be ritually discharged into the Grand Bassin, consecrating it as *Ganga Talab* (talab meaning pond or lake in Hindi), underlining the consubstantiality of the two sacred bodies of water. As I have described in greater detail elsewhere (Eisenlohr 2006), Hindu organizations (with support from the Mauritian and Indian governments) have thus worked to replicate a sacred Hindu ritual geography in India, and they regularly portray the Shivratri pilgrimage and its site as honoring the efforts and sacrifices of immigrating ancestors in having "preserved" Hindu traditions in highly adverse conditions of indenture. As such, the annual Shivratri pilgrimage performs a repetition of similar pilgrimages to sacred bodies of water (*tirth yatra*) in India, the land of the forefathers.

Both the movement of pilgrims and the sacred site itself exhibit a layering of iconic relationships between ritual performance of present day Hindu Mauritians and their Indian ancestors, and this replication of ancestral ways is in turn embedded into a Mauritian politics of citizenship that privileges the performance of diasporic origins elsewhere. Hindi is a key part of these practices, as is evident at the Shivratri pilgrimage. The pilgrims sing and listen to *bhajan* (devotional songs in Hindi), and the names of pilgrims' home villages or towns and their local Hindu associations are often displayed in Hindi written in Devanagari script on *kanvar* (colorfully decorated bamboo structures carried on the pilgrimage). Other such graphic artifacts in Hindi can be seen on the tents of Hindu organizations catering to the pilgrims at Grand Bassin, or in the names of the main

temples—*Kashi Vishwanath Mandir* or *Mauritiuswarnath Mandir* are in Hindi. As mentioned earlier, the lake itself has been officially consecrated and renamed with a Hindi term or descriptor.[4] As a site for an annual ritual holiday that also honors the ancestors and provides a special setting for linguistic and other ritual practices establishing a link with their world in India, Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao resembles the kind of counter-sites that Foucault (1986) famously referred to as heterotopias.[5] "[T]he heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (1986:25) (as Grand Bassin does in its combination of contemporary Mauritius and the world of 19th century north Indian ancestors), but it also brings together different "slices of time." That is, "they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies" (Foucault 1986:26); here, collapsing the time of the ancestors and of present-day Hindu Mauritians.

The performative and graphic-artifactual presence of Hindi blends into the overall replication of a sacred Hindu geography in Mauritius. But it also has other important political dimensions in which its heterochronic potential becomes fully manifest. As Hindu pilgrims set off ritual times and contexts by switching from vernacular Mauritian Creole to Hindi, religious dignitaries give speeches in Hindi on pious values and the valor of the ancestors that enabled their reproduction in Mauritius in Hindi. These events—graced by the presence of senior politicians, among them the Prime Minister, who (with a single two-year exception in 2003–2005) is always a Hindu of north Indian vaish caste background—are broadcast by the government-controlled Mauritian Broadcasting Cooperation (MBC). Such publicized ritual celebration of the diasporic link to India through Hindu heritage supports the dominance of a Hindu state bourgeoisie, who have come to secure a dominant position in the government and state apparatus. The staging of being one with the ancestors as well as the progressivist notion of the "rise" of the Hindu community under adverse circumstances are important in legitimizing leadership roles, as they are associated with contrasting temporalities. These combined strategies of temporalization not only sideline vernacular linguistic practice, but also ethnic and regional divisions among Hindus—who by no means all regard Hindi as their ancestral language, Mauritians of Tamil background being the most notable example.

Confined to particular ritual contexts and as part of religious performances officially recognized as manifestations of Hindu "ancestral

culture," the use of Hindi is a way to be one with the ancestors. During my field research, one particularly striking occasion foregrounding the link between the Shivratri pilgrimage and the ancestors was the pilgrimage's 100th anniversary in 1998, where the sacrifices of virtuous Hindu pioneers, who "discovered" the remote Grand Bassin and initiated worship there under great hardship, were officially extolled and commemorated (Eisenlohr 2006:248, 260-261). In this context, that year's pilgrimage was framed to be a reenactment of the ways of the immigrating ancestors from India. The Shivratri pilgrimage, with its performative invocation of the ancestors and the ritualized use of Hindi, brings about a sense of momentary suspension of the temporal lag and distance between present-day Hindu Mauritians and their Indian ancestors, collapsing the distinctions between past, present, and future. In this example, ritual and linguistic performance regiments a temporality that brings about a momentary sense of oneness with ancestors. The official linguistic ideology of Hindi as language of the north Indian ancestors of Hindu Mauritians plays a key role in enabling such performances and their effects in shaping senses of being in time.

Devotional Media Among Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai

In my research conducted among Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai between 2005 and 2013, I came across a similar ritual suspension of the distinctions between past, present, and future; here, this is driven by audiovisual media practices and media ideologies rather than linguistic ideology. Twelver (*ithna ashari*) Shi'ite Muslims constitute roughly one-fifth of Mumbai's Muslim population, the latter comprising around 19 percent of India's current total population of 20 million. Two Twelver communities are among the long-established inhabitants of the city (Green 2011), and feature many middle class and a few wealthy members. These are the Ithna Ashari Khojas, a Gujarati trading community that originated as a 19th century split off from the larger and wealthier Nizari Ismaeli Khojas (Masselos 1978:115), and the "Mughals," a community of Iranian origin whose ancestors migrated to Bombay as traders from Qajar Persia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The great majority of Twelver Shi'ite Muslims, however, are of north Indian migrant background, from the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar; although there is also a sizable group that originates from the Deccan. With the exception of a few families who have attained considerable wealth—such as the Rizvi builder

family—more recent migrants tend to be overwhelmingly poor. However, the Islamic charities and other institutions that cater to the poor (in the context of overall neglect by government institutions and lack of infrastructure in Muslim-dominated areas) are run or dominated by members of the longer-established trader communities.

In Mumbai and elsewhere, Twelver Shi'ite Muslims are well-known for their rich ritual and performative life surrounding the commemoration of the tragic events of the battle of Karbala in 680 AD. At Karbala, Hussain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, and several other members of the Prophet's family (the *ahl al-bayt*) were slain. Especially in the Islamic month of Muharram—the month when the pivotal events at Karbala took place—Shi'ite Muslim devotional life is at its most intense. Particularly on the 10th of the month (*ashura*), there are processions to commemorate (*julus*) Imam Hussain's murder by his powerful adversaries (Masselos 1982), as well as many devotional gatherings (*majlis*) where accomplished preachers and poetry reciters retell the sacrifice and death of the victims of Karbala in heart-rending detail, provoking outpourings of grief and filial attachment for members of the ahl-al bayt (Qureshi 1981). In Mumbai, as among most Indian Shi'ites more generally, apart from sermons, majlis center on the performance of the Urdu poetic genres of lament, *marsiya* and *noha*. Since the 1980s, listening to recordings of such performances (first circulated on audiocassettes, and now on audio- and video CDs, as well as through MP3 and video files on the Internet) has become very popular. These practices are very much in line with expanding uses of electronic religious media throughout the Muslim world (Buggenhagen 2010, Hirschkind 2006, Schulz 2006, Moll 2010, Jouilli and Moors 2014). One consequence of the circulation of such devotional genres through technologies of sound reproduction and audiovisual technologies is that they now regularly transcend their traditional ritual contexts. As many listen attentively to such recordings, their performative effects are felt at many different times and places throughout the year. These effects include a honing of piety through experiencing intense attachment to members of the ahl al-bayt, who many Shi'ite Muslims claim as their ancestors, a community of north Indian *sayyid* (descendants of the Prophet) being numerically the most prominent among them. In particular, the intense listening to and participation in poetic laments mourning the members of the ahl al-bayt positions those participating as witnesses, transported to the scene of the tragic events at Karbala (Pinault 2001, Schubel 1993).

This performative effect is also underlined by the ritual restaging and reen-acting of the battle that, for centuries, has played an important part of the Muharram commemorations among Muslims in the Middle East, South Asia, and even the Caribbean (Korom 2002).

While the passion-play is a long-established technique employed to minimize the temporal distance between present day Shi'ite Muslims and the pivotal events at Karbala in 680 AD, contemporary media practices have also begun to play a similar role. Here, an understanding of digital audio and audiovisual media technologies as faithful (even supposedly vanishing) mediators of a "live and direct" experience of recorded devo-tional events also contributes to a transporting of pious Shi'ite Muslims into the emotionally charged position of witness. For example, some of my interlocutors in Mumbai reported that watching and listening to such recordings made them cry. The felt immediacy of such witnessing—with its experience of both painful and overwhelming attachment to Hussain and other members of the ahl al-bayt revolves around a minimizing, if not collapsing, of the temporal gap between the events of Karbala and the life-worlds of those attentive listeners. I often heard Shi'ites in Mumbai draw links between the injustice and violence at Karbala and the injustice and sorrow that they sometimes experienced in their own lives.[6] In a discus-sion with Akbarali, an elderly businessman, about differences in practices of mourning in the Shi'ite world, I mentioned that the Iranian government (and also Hizbullah in Lebanon) encouraged Shi'ites to donate blood as a way to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, and have issued a ban against expressions of mourning during the month of Muharram that involve bloodletting—which, in contrast, is a common practice in Mumbai. Defending such practices, Akbarali remarked that "if you see an innocent man here on the street, and he is beaten and attacked by *goondas*, what do you do? They are very dangerous goondas, and you can't do anything. You feel with that person, you feel the pain of that person." On one hand, this was a reply against what he suspected to be my implicit criticism of local customs on ashura, such as *zanjiri matam*, that is hitting one's back with chains that have razor blades attached. For him, justifying such ritual practice was a matter of emotional intensity and empathy with victims that called for such dramatic displays of mourning. But his remark also showed that incidences of gross injustice experienced in one's own life could be interpreted similarly to the pivotal events at Karbala; this gesture closing the temporal disjuncture between the two events.

The Mediality of Chronotopes

In these two examples, the shaping of temporality towards what Benjamin called messianic time is linked to language and media ideologies, respectively. This sense of a momentary suspension of past, present, and future could not come about without the assumption that Hindi is the language of the ancestors of the Hindu Mauritians, nor without the underlying notion that sound reproduction technologies work as vanishing mediators giving seemingly immediate access to recorded events. But semiotic ideologies in the broader sense—focusing on language and media technology, respectively, and achieving similar results as far as temporality is concerned—are not the only dimension my two examples share. I argue that similarities in the medial status of Hindi as ancestral language and audio- and video CDs of marsiya and noha recitations ultimately account for the temporality produced.

Here, I understand the performance of Hindi in Mauritius and sound reproduction and audiovisual technologies in Shi'ite Mumbai as particular media of socio-cultural processes, bringing about relationships to immigrating ancestors or members of the ahl al-bayt, respectively. By media, I refer to objects and processes that connect people, concepts, or social formations standing in relations of difference (Boyer 2007, Eisenlohr 2011). Spatial, temporal, or qualitative disjunctures characterize such differences, and media provide links across such gaps. In my examples, the gaps between, on the one hand, the world of the Indian ancestors of Hindu Mauritians or the tragic events at Karbala in 680 AD, and on the other hand the worlds of present-day Hindu Mauritians or Twelver Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai exhibit all three sorts of gaps simultaneously. While concentrating on the mediation of temporal difference, it is also clear that this issue cannot be treated in isolation from the profound spatial dislocation and qualitative differences at hand.

One intriguing paradox that seems to be a defining characteristic of media—perhaps, the only one shared in the enormous diversity of processes and objects that have been described as media—is their oscillation between relative perceptibility and disappearance. As long as media work in expected ways for their habitual users, they recede into the background (Bolter and Grusin 1999, Krämer 2008). While, for example, watching a TV show or a movie, or making a phone call, as long as the technical apparatuses with their networks and knowledge work in expected ways, their users do not spend time reflecting on it, being entirely absorbed by

what is being mediated through the apparatuses. Only when such functioning is disrupted, such as by a dropped call or a computer problem, the users' attention redirects to the medium and its material and formal dimensions. That is, a properly functioning medium has a propensity to phenomenologically disappear (compare Hoffmann 2002:30-35), but this is a condition that can be reversed at any time.

Returning to my examples, as long as Hindi as the ancestral language is cultivated in presupposed ways, and as long as during the Shivratri pilgrimage its performance unfolds successfully, the latter brings about the rapprochement between present-day Hindu Mauritians and their Indian ancestors, with its resulting temporal effects. A performative misfire, however, will draw attention to Hindi as a medium of the ancestors, suddenly revealing itself to be an obstacle for the sought communion. For example, by no means do all Hindus of north Indian origin find the ideology of Hindi as ancestral language convincing. During my field research, I repeatedly heard interlocutors comment on what, to them, seemed to be the artificial and contrived character of promoting Hindi as the ancestral language of Creole-speaking Hindus whose ancestors actually used varieties of Bhojpuri. Also, the obvious political dimensions of the state-sponsored promotion of Hindi by a Hindu state bourgeoisie provoked suspicions among many about the motives of performing oneness with the ancestors in this way.

Likewise, the rituals commemorating the suffering and martyrdom of members of the ahl al-bayt play a key role for establishing the kind of connection between Mumbai Shi'ite Muslims and the events at Karbala. This connection is such that it situates them as a witness, and a sense of felt immediacy minimizes the temporal lag between the events and the lifeworlds of present-day Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai. The rituals' settings, styles, and poetic text all have to meet widespread expectations that are part of their respective generic forms, such as in the case of marsiya and noha. Any marked departure from these formations of presupposed indexicality would impede the sought-for religious interaction with its messianic melting of past, present, and future. However, since contemporary media technologies have become integral to these established processes of religious mediation, their functioning are now also foundational to the sense of closeness to the pivotal events of Karbala that pious Shi'ite Muslims seek when listening to and watching audio and video of such performances. Newer media technologies—such as the circulation

of audio and video—change modalities of access to such performative events, and also facilitate the transcending of the established temporal and spatial settings to which commemorative and highly participatory poetry performatives have traditionally been tied. In the eyes of users, however, such media safeguards a certain emotional intensity and a "live and direct" quality of witnessing (Engelke 2004) that are key features of devotional events. These qualities in turn transform temporality. In this way, the perceived smooth functioning of media technology enhances such effects that result in a messianic temporality; while a scratch on a disk, the freezing, blurring, or pixilation problems of digital images, or an electricity cut will redirect attention from the events of Karbala to the failing or underperforming technical medium (compare Larkin 2008), thereby also ending the experience of being present at the events.

The messianic collapsing of past, present, and future thus very much depends on a particular "vanishing" status of the medium connecting present-day Hindu Mauritians or Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai to an "ancestral" past. These are pasts that are crucially important for Hindu Mauritians' and Mumbai Shi'ites' religious and political self-understanding in the present as well as for their envisioned futures. Since media do not work in expected ways at all times, and because the "vanishing" effect of the medium also depends on a broad array of presupposed contextual conditions and layers of presupposed indexicality (Silverstein 1976) that are not always met during performances of the Shivratri pilgrimage or the poetic genres of the Shi'ite majlis, the perceived "live and direct" immediacy is often a fleeting state subject to reversal. The characteristic oscillation of the medium between phenomenological disappearance and states of great perceptibility also applies to my examples. But more to the point of this article, such oscillation between different states of perceptibility and salience also implies that the temporalities media bring about are also always plural. If media are dynamic in this specific way, it follows that one particular encoding of temporality is potentially unstable and prone to shifting towards different temporal modes. Some of the media I discuss here minimize the temporal distance between present day Hindus in Mauritius and Shi'ite Muslims and faraway ancestral worlds when functioning in expected ways while their salience as media, such as in their perceived failure to operate correctly, maximizes such temporal remove. There is thus an inner link between shifts of particular states of mediation resulting in the oscillation between relative perceptibility and disappearance proper to the operating of media,

and shifts of temporalities. This link also undercuts the preeminence of one single dominant mode of being in time.

In my two examples, alternative temporalities connected to Hindi as ancestral language and audiovisual technologies, respectively, have even coalesced into established, generic forms of expression. In Mauritius, the memory of immigrating ancestors that the cultivation of Hindi supports also involves narratives of the resilience and eventual rise of Hindus here. Descending in their great majority from impoverished and frequently mis-treated indentured laborers, Hindus now represent the political elite of Mauritius and many of them have achieved considerable social mobility (especially in the last two generations). In particular, the discourses of of-ficials of the Hindu-dominated government and Hindu religious activists connect this narrative of progress to "ancestral" Hindu values that encour-aged the tenacity and strength to succeed in adverse circumstances. In the eyes of many of these Hindus activists, the "preservation" and perfor-mance of Hindi as an "ancestral language" is part of the process of mor-al strengthening that made socioeconomic ascent possible. This proud narrative of progress and eventual triumph certainly contains a switch to a very different mode of temporality. It draws on the familiar modernist notion of linear progressive time, akin to what Benjamin called "empty, homogenous time." But Hindu activism in Mauritius also demonstrates how the two temporalities at issues here are as much interconnected as they are opposed. Hindu activists connect the narrative of Hindu prog-ress and empowerment with the theme of a tenacious diasporic "pres-ervation" of ancestral values (see Eisenlohr 2006:52, 260-262). From this perspective, the purifying proximity to the ancestors' world as brought about by the Shivratri pilgrimage and cultivation of Hindi ancestral lan-guage becomes an enabling condition for progress and empowerment. The oscillation between ancestral and linear, empty homogeneous time is therefore part of a process of producing authentic Hindus in the diaspora. This process seeks to combine both co-presence with the ancestors and modernist progress towards empowerment and socio-economic achieve-ment. Therefore, ritual practice and ancestral language mediate not only Hindu Mauritians and the worlds of their Indian ancestors, but also provide practical ways to deal with the heterochronies produced by the two con-trasting modalities of time I discuss here.

A parallel contrast between messianic temporalities enabled by the not always guaranteed smooth functioning of digital audiovisual media and

more progressive, linear notions of time can also be found in the media worlds of Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai. The activities of the "World Islamic Network" (WIN) serve as a good example. This Shi'ite media center in the south central Muslim neighborhood of Dongri started with the free distribution of Islamic books and pamphlets, as well as tuition-free evening classes for high school students. WIN now manages a website, the production of a multitude of lectures and majlis performances on audio- and video CDs, and a complete studio for a cable TV channel (that not only has growing numbers of subscribers beyond the Mumbai metro area, but has recently launched its own satellite channel as well).

In conversations with me, the head of WIN pointed out how younger viewers of the cable TV channel demanded more "rational" programs that approached social issues and world political events from a more deliberative, Islamic perspective. He contrasted this with the "emotional" commemorative programs—such as broadcasts featuring the performance of the poetic genres of the majlis that are geared towards provoking feelings of profound grief and attachment for members of the ahl al-bayt among participants—which he considered to be mainly favored by the older generation. His reasoning for variation in taste was that "the young people are more educated. They are asking, why are you saying this, where is your reference. They want to be given reasons. They do not think that Shiism is about crying and about being a victim." An example of such a "modern, rational" media format is the WIN-TV "question and answer" program "*hadees-e zindagi*," where a young woman interviews a young *mawlana* (a respected Muslim religious leader, especially a graduate of an Islamic educational institution), posing viewer questions (submitted via telephone or e-mail) about practical life situations and social problems. Certainly, this trend has to be viewed in the context of a more activist bent in Twelver Shiism worldwide after the Iranian Revolution, where commitment to Shi'ite traditions is now recast in terms of a new sense of agency and mastery over one's own fate, working for social and political improvement in the present with the means that contemporary state institutions, education, and science make available (see Deeb 2009 for a comparable "progressivist" reading of the memory of Karbala among Lebanese Shi'ites). Indeed, for WIN, the issue of modern education is especially important, the lists and photographs of laureates and winners of school competitions and achievers of top exam scores feature prominently in the entrance to the "WIN Academy" after school study rooms. As an

activist working for a local Shi'ite charity pointed out, "modern education is now our highest priority. Young people have to realize that if they succeed in education, they are not only doing good for themselves, but also for the entire community and our religion. This is our only hope if we are not to be left behind in India." This remark aimed at the status of Shi'ite Muslims as part of the larger Muslim minority in India, which for a long time has been subject to severe political and economic marginalization (a state of affairs that has only become more obvious during the recent economic boom in India, and is especially visible in metropolitan areas such as Mumbai). But at the same time, just as in the contrast the head of WIN drew between "traditional" devotional practices favored by the older generation and "modern, rational speeches" preferred by the young, the charity activist considered Indian Shi'ite Muslims to be engaged in a striving for religious merit that coincides with a temporality of progress. WIN-TV programs such as "*hadees-e zindagi*" stand for a media genre in which a sense of linear, progressive time is connected to the striving for greater piety in the contemporary world. As in the example of Hindu purification and progress in Mauritius, the two temporalities I discuss here are deeply intertwined. For younger Shi'ite Muslims the narrative of Karbala calls for progressivist engagement with and betterment of the community's quality of life. Therefore, the piety that the witnessing of Karbala evokes and the piety of such activism converge. The oscillation between messianic and linear times that characterizes Mumbai Shi'ite media practices, therefore, also points at these interconnected aspects of the story of Karbala geared towards turning people into better Shi'ite Muslims.

While many share the aspirations that locating oneself in linear, homogenous time undergirds, the contrast between the two temporalities sketched here also helps to underline emerging hierarchies among Mumbai Twelver Shi'ite Muslims that do not fully converge with older distinctions between long-established trading communities and the much larger population of Shi'ite Muslims of mainly north Indian migrant background. The latter tend to be much poorer than those belonging to either the Khoja Ithna Ashari or Iranian origin trader communities, who have since diversified into other fields of business and the academic professions, and who control most religious institutions and charities. Mapping piety on dichotomies of young versus old, educated versus uneducated, and empowering agency versus immersion in mournful ritual aligns leadership roles among Shi'ite Muslims and claims to represent the latter in wider Indian society

with particular positions in time. These newer sets of distinctions increasingly destabilize the established hierarchy between members of trader communities of Gujarati or Iranian origin and the greater number of Shi'ite Muslims of mostly north Indian migrant origin. While the skillful balancing and alternation between linear and messianic temporalities of belonging supports the dominance of the Hindu state bourgeoisie in Mauritius, and therefore the status quo, a similar alternation between these temporalities in mediatized religious ritual and debates among Twelver Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai actually has the potential to transform established hierarchies and leadership roles.

To sum up, these examples demonstrate the complexity and instability of temporal regimes, as the oscillation between messianic and linear, progressive temporalities illustrates. Shifts between these two modes of time can be better understood once they are related to the question of media linking events and lifeworlds across time. The quality and functioning of these media—Hindi as ancestral language and audiovisual technologies, in my two examples—largely account for the shape and relative perceptibility of the links between present day Hindu Mauritians and Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai and their ancestral worlds.

Conclusion

In this article, I have approached the issue of temporality as a medial question. The performance of media genres plays an important role in instantiating chronotopes. Moreover, there are inner relationships between the successful performance of particular genres and certain modes of temporality. I have drawn on a deliberately broad notion of media and mediality, going well beyond the practices and technologies that are designated "media" by their users, which enables me to compare the performance of Hindi as "ancestral language" with uses of contemporary sound reproduction and audiovisual technologies in interactions with remote but highly important worlds of kinship and religious attachment. An important issue that emerges from such comparison is the perceived functioning of the medium, especially when it results in a particular mode of mediality in which the perceptibility of whatever works as a medium is minimal. The seeming disappearance of the medium enables experiences of a more "immediate" connection with the removed worlds of ancestors and religious authorities while also inducing a temporality that collapses the distinctions between

past, present, and future. However, such a state of temporality enabled by the smooth functioning of the medium is unstable, as media oscillate between conditions of high perceptibility and disappearance. The former re-accentuates experiences of temporal multi-layeredness and difference. Therefore, there can never be a definite link between particular forms of media and particular temporalities. Media theory approaches that suggest a definite link between electronic media and specific forms of temporality (Kittler 1993:200-201, Sandbothe 1999, Stiegler 1998:276) need to be reconsidered in light of this particular dynamic of perceptibility and disappearance inherent in media practices.

While shifting or oscillating modes of mediality play a key role in producing contrasting chronotopes, media practices also provide a means to engage and cope with the heterochronies that are the result of the encounter between different temporalities. Both Hindu Mauritians and Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai are confronted with a plurality of temporalities not always of their own making. Media practices—as evident in the Shivratri pilgrimage, the cultivation of Hindi in Mauritius, as well as in the religious lives of Shi'ite Muslims in Mumbai—have a double character. They generate temporalities, but also make it possible to engage with multiple temporalities already circulating in social space. Since temporalities exist in the plural, media practices enable the navigation of time's disjunctures. ∎

Endnotes:

[1]This also applies to the familiar notion of linear, progressive time, which in our age has acquired a quasi-natural appearance. According to Reinhart Koselleck (1985), this mode of time emerged in the aftermath of the devastating religious wars following the Reformation in 16th and 17th century Europe, which were widely considered to herald the end of the world. In early modern Europe, the shift away from a sense of time shaped by the certainty of an impending doomsday towards a time openly and endlessly progressing into the future was a consequence of these wars failing to bring about the end of the world (1985:241-242). In contrast, Jacques Derrida (1976:72) has traced back the prevalence of a "linearist concept of time" in Western intellectual traditions to the concept of writing modeled on the primacy of the spoken word articulated by Plato. Both authors thus locate the origins and spread of linear, progressive time considerably further in the past than E. P. Thompson (1967), who draws a link between this mode of time and the rise of industrial capitalism.

[2]See Loimeier (2012) for an account of the spread of modernist, linear time in Zanzibar and the resulting pluralities of time.

[3]Standard Hindi in its present sanskritized form can be regarded as a product of emerging Hindu nationalist mobilization among elites in the second half of the 19th century (Dalmia 1997, King 1994).

[4]Kashi Vishwanath Mandir is actually the name of the most prominent temple in the Hindu piligrimage city of Banaras on the Ganges in north India, while a table in the Mauritiuswarnath Mandir, which houses a *lingam* (or manifestation of the deity Shiva) claims that the lingam is on a par with 12 other *trayodash jyotir lingam* in prominent sites of Hindu pilgrimage in India such as Haridwar, Somnath, Ujjain, and Nasik, with number 13 listed as: "Mauritiuswarnath ji: On the bank of Ganga Talab, Mauritius."

[5]Foucault (1986) distinguished between "crisis heterotopias" found especially in "primitive society," sacred or forbidden places for individuals that are in a position of liminal crisis in relation to society. Vestiges could still be found in 19th century boarding schools and military service, but such heterotopias are increasingly replaced by "heterotopias of deviation" such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons (1986:24-25). Grand Bassin/Ganga Talao obviously does not belong to any of the two categories, but resembles other examples of heterotopic sites mentioned by Foucault, such as the garden and the fair grounds, exemplifying the "heterotopias of the festival" (1986:26). Grand Bassin, however, also clearly shares in the "ancestral themes" (1986:24) that Foucault saw as characteristic of "crisis heterotopias." I am indebted to Birgit Abels for this reference.

[6]Scholars of Shi'ism have referred to the great versatility of the story of Karbala as a medium to express outrage against oppression and injustice as the "Karbala paradigm" (Fischer 1980, Aghaie 2004).

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Foreign Language Translations:

Mediating Disjunctures of Time: Ancestral Chronotopes in Ritual and Media Practices
[**Keywords:** Media, time, temporality, Shi'ism, Hindu pilgrimage, Hindi]

La Médiation des Disjonctions du Temps: Chronotopes Ancestrales dans les Pratiques
Rituelles et Médiatiques
[**Mots clés**: Médias, temps, temporalité, chiisme, pèlerinage hindou, Hindi]

居中斡旋时间的断裂：宗教仪式中的祖先时空体性以及媒体操作
[**关键词**：媒体，时间，时间性，什叶派，印度朝圣，印地语]

Mediando Disjunções do Tempo: Cronotopos Ancestrais em Práticas Rituais e dos Media
[**Palavras-Chave:** Media, tempo, temporalidade, Xiismo, peregrinação Hindu, Hindi]

Разбор разрыва во времени: Наследственные хронотипы в ритуальной и медийной практике
[**Ключевые слова:** медиа, время, временность, шиизм, паломничество индусов, хинди]

توسط انفصالات الوقت: الوقت-المكان السلفي في شعائر وممارسات وسائل الإعلام
كلمات البحث: الإعلام، الوقت، التوقيت، الشيعة، حج الهنود، الهندي